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Subversive Eyes: Relocating Korean Du Fu in the Network of Exeges

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Canonicity and Textuality: Du Fu in the Literary History of Joseon

Does a great canon provide an inspirational platform for writers? History shows that canonical conventions often cause psychological challenges, as writers struggle to overcome the anxiety and discomfort posed by their literary antecedents. *Jibong yuseol* 芝峰類說, an encyclopedic collection from seventeenth-century Korea, vividly demonstrates how the author Yi Sugwang 李睟光 (1563–1628) attempted to subvert the transcendental position of Du Fu, which has been hailed as a “sage of poetry” in Joseon. By contextualizing the text and the author in the networks of exegesis, Yi challenged the notion of canon as a perfect and fixed entity. Du Fu was re-positioned in historical contexts through Yi’s interpretative performance of tracing how this particular body of text became the most influential part of the canon in Joseon. Through his reading practices, the poems revealed a great range of fluctuations in meaning, and the preeminent position of complete perfection became secularized. Highlighting the “textuality” of literary canons, which is considered fluid and flexible, this paper aims to unravel the networks of interpretation drawn from the thousands of references found in *Jibong yuseol*.

What makes a canon a canon? The concept often comes with the image of something that embodies universal, unchanging, or absolute value (Altieri 1983; Guillory 1983; Kenner 1984). The key question this paper raises here is how, by whom, and for what purposes this “value” is generated, maintained, and transmitted. A text that has been designated as a canonical text often functions as the perfect model or style for composition. The author of the text is revered as a heroic genius who has discovered unequivocal and moral truth. Throughout the Joseon dynasty, for example, the civil service exam, *gwageo* 科擧, presented the academic standards that reflected the ideological cultural value. In other words, the texts selected by the governmental bureau would represent the authenticity and imposition of power granted by institutional fiat.

It is important to note that a canon combines the meaning of institutional rule with the designation of a body of received texts. In other words, the value

of the texts in a canon does not lie in the texts themselves but in the “process” of making them. In this respect, canonization works as a “system,” with a fresh body of texts or a brilliant author always admissible by approved social institutional procedures (Smith 1988; Barthes 1990). The reception of Du Fu in Joseon demonstrates how the literary value-judgments functioned as projections of social ones. *Chanju bullyu dusi* 纂註分類杜詩 (hereafter *Chanju*), compiled under the superintendence of King Sejong 世宗 (1397–1450), enjoyed its exclusionary and hierarchical position as a perfect model to emulate throughout Joseon; however, the compilation process of canon-making discloses that the literary canon was a set of texts that constituted their cultural heritage. The standard neo-Confucian interpretation of Zhu Xi 朱熹 from Song China was carefully reviewed by Buddhist monks who carried their intellectual cultural legacy from Goryeo to Joseon Korea.

Focusing on the fluidity of the canon as an open system, this paper looks into how Du Fu gained his prominent status in Joseon, and how this status was subsequently challenged through being analyzed and dismantled into an intertextual network of reference. This research will also place special emphasis on the changing “material conditions” of Joseon, such as print culture and the reception of foreign books, particularly after the Imjin waeran 壬辰倭亂 (1592–1598), the war that broke between Korea and Japan. The post-war intellectual environment witnessed the influx of a large number of books on Ming and Qing scholarship and prompted a significant shift in the perspective of the Joseon literati. Yi’s encyclopedic writing style, which was rarely found in Joseon literary history, can be understood in these active transnational interactions, through which Yi advocated Ming literary criticism, both of the contents and the ways of organizing knowledge.

Canon as a Collaborative System: Institutionalizing Du Fu in Joseon

Many literary histories say that the canonizing of Du Fu in Joseon was executed mainly by the central governments. For example, the compilation of *Chanju*, one of the most comprehensive collections of Du Fu, was conducted by Anpyeong daegun 安平大君 (1418–1453), a son of King Sejong, and the scholars from the Hall of Worthies (Jipyeonjeon 集賢殿). Under the supervision

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of King Sejong, *Chanju* was printed using metal movable types and then distributed to local printing bureaus for reproduction in woodblocks. In line with the print culture in pre-modern Korea, the central government played a leading role in publishing and distributing books. Zhu Xi's commentaries on Du Fu and the state ideology of neo-Confucianism provided the interpretive standards for the compilers.

A close examination of the reality of the book-making process, however, reveals that there was a diversity of agencies that has been overlooked by our traditional understanding of pre-modern publishing. The most remarkable is the collaborative production with Buddhist monks. The anecdote from the *Veritable Records of Joseon* (*Joseon wangjo sillok* 朝鮮王朝實錄) shows how the neo-Confucian interpretations of *Chanju* were built on the practices of poetry reading transmitted from Goryeo Buddhism:

The king had Manu, the abbot of the Hoeam temple, to move to the Heungcheon temple, and then endowed him with new robes. Yebinsi, the bureau of ritual, was given the command to treat him as a third-ranking official of the government. Previously, Manu had been associated with Yi Saek and Yi Sungin, [eminent scholars during the Goryeo dynasty], and learned about poetry from them. Therefore, he knew something about poetry and poetics. Nowadays, the government is executing the project of commenting on Du Fu, [and the king] wants to ask him about any uncertain things while proceeding with it.

命檜巖住持僧卍雨, 移住興天寺, 仍賜衣, 令禮賓供三品之廩. 卍雨及見李穡, 李崇仁, 得聞論詩, 稍知詩學, 今註杜詩, 欲以質疑也. (Sillok, vol 4, 475)

Carrying his intellectual legacy to Joseon, Manu 卍雨 (b. 1357), a Buddhist monk famous for his scholarly and literary achievements during late Goryeo, participated in the reading of Du Fu ordered by the Joseon government. King Sejong was aware that Manu had actively interacted with Yi Saek 李穡 (1328–1396) and Yi Sungin 李崇仁 (1347–1392), renowned scholar-officials in late Goryeo, and showed his respect for Manu's judgment and interpretation of Du Fu's poems. Considering that Buddhism was subject to suppression by the state policy in Joseon and given that the political and social status of Buddhist practitioners were also ranked very low, the king's invitation and the Manu's active engagement in the state project are both intriguing. This would suggest that the scholars from the Hall of Worthies and the king himself encountered

difficulties in proceeding with the compilation project. The mainstream of poetry studies in early Joseon—roughly until the Imjin waeran—were unilaterally dominated by Song 宋 poetry, which elucidated neo-Confucian orthodoxy. Studies of Tang poetry 唐詩, including the canonical works by Du Fu, had been halted in many state-sanctioned institutions since the establishment of Joseon.¹ From the record cited above, however, we can imagine that Buddhist monasteries continued the tradition of Tang poetry unabated.

Another Buddhist monk who influenced the compilation of *Chanju* was Uichim 義砮 (15th C). In his *Somun swaerok* 謏聞瑣錄, Jo Sin 曹伸 (1488–1544), a scholar official during King Jungjong's 中宗 reign, left an interesting note showing how the Buddhist tradition of Du Fu's poetry was transmitted to the neo-Confucian scholars in the Hall of Worthies: "Yu Bangseon studied Du Fu's poetry under the guidance of Uichim, whose courtesy name is Moonlight Window. Yu Yungyeom, the prime minister, learned about it from his father, Bangseon. People praised Yungyeom for being versed in Du Fu's poetry. The king Seongjong ordered him to translate Du Fu's poems into vernacular Korean."² According to this record, Uichim maintained a close association with many Goryeo elites but secluded himself for a while as the Joseon dynasty became established. From 1399, he served as the chief abbot of the Yeongtong 靈通 temple and taught poetry composition there. Yu Bangseon 柳方善 (1388–1443), a renowned official during King Sejong's reign, learned about Du Fu's poetry from Uichim. Later, Yu's disciples and his own son, Yu Yungyeom 柳允謙 (b. 1420), took charge of major government publication projects. Jo Sin's note above clearly shows that the first government-led publication of Du Fu poetry, *Chanju*, came into being through the collaborative work of Buddhist monks and the neo-Confucian scholars in the Hall of Worthies.³

1. In early Joseon, the majority of literati favored Song-style poetry, roughly until the Imjin waeran. The emergence of Samdangpa 三唐派, three major poets who advocated Tang-style poetry in the mid-Joseon, was a reaction against the early Joseon academia, which was dominated by Song-style poetry (An 1989).

2. The original text is as follows: "僧義砮號月窓, 泰齋所從學杜詩者. 柳參議允謙, 傳於父泰齋, 世稱能通杜詩. 成廟嘗令以諺文注解杜詩" (Jo 1993, 214).

3. In publishing Du Fu's poems, the tradition of Du Fu studies that had been cultivated in Buddhist monasteries contributed greatly to the government project. Originally, Buddhist monasteries had their own publishing system highly-developed from as early as the eighth century. The printing of Buddhist sutras had been uninterruptedly developed inside Buddhist circles. By the time of the Joseon dynasty, Buddhist printing technology facilitated the development of book printing. Before moving onto

The dominant neo-Confucian interpretation of Du Fu in Joseon was also built on “intertextual networks of references.” It is known that the final version of *Chanju* was mainly based on two Chinese versions: Xu Zhai’s 徐宅 *Ji qian jia zhu fen lei Du Gongbu shi* 集千家註分類杜工部詩 and Kao Chung-Lan’s 高崇蘭 *Ji qian jia zhu pi dian Du Gongbu shi ji* 集千家註批點分類杜工部詩集. The overall physical format and the order of poems in *Chanju* were followed by Xu Zhai’s version, and the “side dots” 批點 were added based on the examples of Kao Chung-Lan’s version. Looking inside the actual practices of making the book, however, the underlying procedure involves many human agencies, as well as textual references. The anecdotes below describe how the final version of *Chanju* was collated through a collaboration between government officials and many other outside agencies:

The king ordered the purchase of various editions of commentaries on Du Fu’s poetry conducted by a number of different scholars. Previously, he had made scholars in the Hall of Worthies compare and collate Du Fu’s commentaries and gather them together in a standard edition. His mass purchase of commentaries is related to this project.

命購杜詩諸家註于中外. 時, 令集賢殿參校杜詩諸家註釋, 會粹爲一故, 求購之.

(*Sillok*, vol 4, 474)

In 1443, King Sejong commanded the scholars in the Hall of Worthies to collect various editions of commentaries on Du Fu to create a standard collected edition. He had the bureau purchase all the existing versions and study the different interpretations that could be found in the books. Despite the effort, however, even in three decades, it seems there were not many neo-Confucian scholars at the court who had a thorough knowledge of Du Fu. In 1481, King Seongjong 成宗 (1457–1494) summoned Yu Yungyeom again. Seongjong

intended review the previous version of *Chanju* and then made a vernacular translation of it, later titled *Bullyu dugongbusi eonhae* 分類杜工部詩諺解 (hereafter *Eonhae*), and Yungyeom who had learned about Du Fu’s poetry from Uichim, a Buddhist monk from Goryeo, took a major role in the project.⁴ These records manifest that the scholarly traditions of the Buddhist monasteries of Goryeo were passed on Joseon and provided the final editorial judgment for the state project.

King Sejong and King Seongjong were both clearly aware of the Buddhist lineage of the study of Du Fu. Once the Joseon version of Du Fu and its Korean translations were completed, ironically however, the official interpretations entirely conformed to the neo-Confucian ones, primarily those of Zhu Xi. It was a reconciliation of the ideological proclivities of Tang poetry with their own ideology. The Joseon versions of Du Fu provided the educational standards for literature, whose practical purpose was primarily diplomacy: “Although literature is not essential in governing the country, if Chinese envoys, such as Zhang Ning 張寧 and Qi Shun 祈順, come, we have to compose poems in response to theirs. We should not regard literature as a secondary matter and ignore it. Du Fu is the master of poetry.”⁵ The government agreed that Du Fu’s poetry was the best model for contemporary poetic composition. Even though they thought that literature was less important than other matters in governing the country, they needed to study how to compose poetry for demonstrable diplomatic reasons. Exchanging poetry with Chinese envoys was an important part of diplomacy,

4. The original text is as follows: “In the year of Sinchuk when cultural edification was successfully completed, the king ordered Yu Yungyeom, who was a civil minister of Hongmungwan, and others as follows: ‘Various existing commentaries on Du Fu’s poetry are quite circumstantial. Commentaries in *Hui jian* are comprehensive but have many errors; those in Xu xi are succinct but too simple. Many opinions are divided and contradict one another. Therefore, we have to carefully examine them and unify them into a standard edition. You certainly have to publish it.’ Thereupon, [Yu and other scholars] exhausted every commentary, removed redundancies, and put them in order. When they encountered parts that were difficult to explicate, such as geography, persons, and the meaning of words, they singled them out and added additional exegeses for future reference. Then, they translated the main idea of each poem into vernacular Korean. Poems that had previously been hard to make out became clear, even at a glance. Once the book was complete, it was beautifully transcribed and presented to the king. The king ordered me to write a preface for it” 成化辛丑, 上命弘文館典翰臣柳允謙等, 若曰, “杜詩諸家之注詳矣, 然會箋繁而失之謬, 須溪簡而失之略. 衆說紛紜, 互相抵牾, 不可不研覈而一. 爾基纂之.” 於是廣摭諸註, 芟繁釐正. 地理人物字義之難解者, 遂節略疏, 以便考閱. 又以諺語, 譯其意旨. 向之所謂難誼者, 一覽瞭然. 書成, 繕寫以進. 命臣序 (Cho 1998, 338a).

5. The original text is as follows: “詞章, 雖若不關於治國, 中朝使臣, 如張寧、祈順輩出來, 則必與唱和, 詞章不可視爲餘事, 而不習之也. 杜詩, 詩家之祖” (*Sillok*, vol 10, 169).

specific aspects of the government’s publication project, this paper also would briefly examine the conditions that made it possible for the government to almost monopolize the publishing and distribution, particularly of Du Fu’s poetry collections. The print culture of Joseon probably made government monopolization necessary. Traditionally, the central government selected certain items and printed them using movable type in metal or wood. The clean copies were subsequently distributed to several local governments. Local officials then reprinted these clean copies, frequently in woodblocks, which individuals might copy by hand in manuscript form. This system of printing also effectively disseminated the state’s ideology to local governments. The government’s canonization of Du Fu’s poetry collection was attributable to this well-organized system.

alongside composing official diplomatic documents. Therefore, the government needed to “educate” court officials to cultivate an excellent ability to compose poetry.⁶ Inarguably, Du Fu and the neo-Confucian interpretations of this poetry referred to a major literary canon throughout Joseon. However, the canonizing process worked as an open system that constituted their cultural heritage.

Deconstruction of the Canon: Reading Du Fu in an Intertextual Network of Exegeses

Yiyuan Zhiyan writes, “Du Fu says, ‘for King Huai, there are many guests, so he is not ashamed of Sun Deng.’ These two lines do not have any relationship, except for matching rhymes forcibly.” I think that some people in the world cannot recognize what is good and what is harmful. They just blindly believe that all ancient works are great. As a result, they misunderstand faults as virtues and then follow them as their models. Even if anyone today criticizes this fault, there would be no one to believe them. 藝苑卮言曰, “杜詩淮王門有客, 終不愧孫登. 頗無關涉, 爲韻所強耳.” 余謂世間一種人, 不解利病, 概謂古作皆善, 并其不好處好之, 率以爲法惑矣. 此等疵病, 今人指摘之, 則必無信之者矣. (Yi 1970, 265)

In this miscellaneous essay, *Jibong yuseol*, Yi Sugwang seldom mentions the neo-Confucian interpretations conducted by his predecessors or contemporaries. He never defended a universal standard of literary quality and even argued

6. It is remarkable that Du Fu’s poetry was popular among literati as a primer for poetic composition even before it was officially approved by the government. In 1471, at Cheongju 淸州, a city in the mid-east of Korea, a short version of Du Fu’s poetry, *Wuju Tuyul* 虞注杜律, was reprinted in woodblock. This edition contains examples only of seven-syllable poetry 七言律詩 by Du Fu—often simply called *Seven Syllable Poems by Du Fu* 杜工部七言律詩. It is said that the original version was compiled by Yu Ji 虞集 (1272–1348) of Yuan 元: “Composing recent-style poetry is more difficult than composing old-style poetry. Therefore, when we read someone’s poetry, if we read his recent style poems, then we can fathom his capacity to write poetry and characteristics. Why do we need to peruse every single work in his entire collection for several years in order to understand his poetry? Now, although this book consists of very small volumes, it contains all the merits and poetic rules of Du Fu. It will truly be a compass for those who are learning poetry” 律詩難於古詩, 故觀人之詩者, 觀乎律詩, 足以知規模氣格矣. 何必經年勤苦, 僅一遍閱, 然後爲得哉? 今是集也, 卷帙甚簡, 而子美氣律, 舉不出於此, 眞學詩者之指南也. Even though it is widely known that the Song style was popular in the mid-Joseon period, many literati espoused Du Fu’s poetry because of its excellence in poetic form. For them, Du Fu would be a good text from which to learn the rules of recent style poetry and technique.

that the standards should be always relative, local, and literary. Rather than treating Du Fu’s work as a sacred canon or a vehicle for conveying ideology, he weighs Du Fu’s poems against other poems in Korea and China and even finds weaknesses and technical faults in Du Fu’s artistry. For Yi Sugwang, Du Fu was no longer a “perfect” or “transcendental” poetic model; it was something that could be subjected to criticism. The note cited above points out that Du Fu’s couplet connects two otherwise unrelated lines, claiming that the poet forced the rhymes without considering the objective validity of matching the contents. Yi Sugwang denounced those who blindly worshipped Du Fu as an impeccable poet and imitated him in contemporary academia in Joseon. In the eyes of Yi Sugwang, the studies on Du Fu were too dogmatic and did not accept any analytical readings of Du’s poetry.

The “Munjangbu” 文章部, a chapter for writings, of his *Jibong yuseol* contains more than 130 sections related to Du Fu’s poetry. Yi introduced various interpretations of Du Fu suggested by other Chinese and Korean scholars and added his own commentaries. Yi consulted 348 references, including the names of 2,265 people in total, such as Wang Shizhen’s 王世貞 1526–1590 *Yi yuan zhi yan* 藝苑卮言, Jiang Yikui’s 蔣一葵 (1578–1598) *Yao shan tang wai ji* 堯山堂外紀, Hong Mai’s 洪邁 (1123–1202) *Rongzhai sui bi* 容齋隨筆, Ruo Dajing’s 羅大經 (13th C) *He lin yu lu* 鶴林玉露, Gao Bing’s 高棅 (1350–1423) *Tang shi pin hui* 唐詩品彙, and Hui Hong’s 惠洪 (1071–1128) *Leng zhai ye hua* 冷齋夜話, to name a few. By consulting many other references and comparing Du Fu with other poets, Yi proved that Du Fu’s poetry is a “text” that is fluid and flexible in its interpretation. Yi defied the canonicity that had been imposed on Du Fu by other commentators and suggested a fresh and subversive way to look at the canon. The “inter-textual network of references” he brings up resituates Du Fu’s poetry in the context of other literary works that are also available for praise or criticism.

The note below is about the poem “Early Morning Court at Daming Palace” 早朝大明宮. Originally, this poem was composed by Jia Zhi 賈至, followed by three responding poems by Cen Shen 岑參, Wang Wei 王維, and Du Fu:

As for the “Early Court at Daming Palace,” ancient people thought that Cen Shen’s was the best, Wang Wei’s the second best, Du Fu’s the third best, and Jia Zhi the worst. I think that the four poems are all beautiful,

so it is not easy to discuss their merits and demerits. If I were to mention some of their minor defects, then as for the poem of Cen Shen, the line “orioles chirp in the imperial city and spring color is matured” 鶯囀皇州春色闌 could look weak, but he put the two characters of *seo* 曙 and *hyo* 曉 in succession. And the couplet starting with “flowers greet the pendants hanging in the swords” 花迎劍佩 is good, but the three characters in the next, “stars begin to fall” 星初落, do not seem harmonious. Wang Wei’s poem uses many characters to refer to the colors of clothes. Also, words such as “kingfisher cloud cape,” “mitered crown,” and “dragon robes” 翠雲裘冕旒袞龍 seem redundant. Du Fu says, “In the fifth watch of night, the waterclock’s sound expedites its morning marker” 五夜漏聲催曉箭. He already says the fifth watch of night, so it seems that he does not have to say “morning.” He also says, “on the pennons and streamers under the warm sunlight, dragons and serpents are moving. By palace halls breeze light, swallows and sparrows fly high” 旌旗日暖龍蛇動, 宮殿風微燕雀高. It is really beautifully done. Nevertheless, when describing an early morning, it looks too banal. Jia Zhi’s lines are the most beautiful, but the couplet starting with “tinkling of the pendants of sword follows steps ascending the jade stairways” 劍佩聲隨玉墀步 seems a little bit rough. The ending lines of the four poems all mention the “phoenix lake” and its so-called “harmony.” Only Du Fu closes the poem using “phoenix feather,” and it is really marvelous. I dare to discuss the poems but cannot directly evaluate them. So, I put six of “seem to be” and wait for a connoisseur.”

早朝大明宮詩，古人以岑參爲第一，王維爲第二，杜甫爲第三，賈至爲第四。余謂四詩俱絕佳，未易優劣。若言其微瑕，則岑參鶯囀皇州春色闌，似餒而連用曙曉二字。且花迎劍佩一聯好矣，而星初落三字，似不襯矣。王維詩疊使衣色字，且翠雲裘冕旒袞龍等語似疊矣。杜甫詩五夜漏聲催曉箭，既曰五夜則似不當言曉。且旌旗日暖龍蛇動，宮殿風微燕雀高，工則工矣。但於早朝似泛矣。賈至詩首句甚佳，而劍佩聲隨玉墀步一聯似鬆矣。大抵四詩結句，皆用鳳池，所謂和也。杜作乃用鳳毛以結之最妙。余僭論至此，不敢質言，故着六似字，以俟知者。

(Yi 1970, 262)

Until Yi’s essay, this kind of textual analysis was rarely seen in the literary history of Korea. He examined how characters and words function in the structure of a poem and discussed by what standards each poet had selected particular words. The most remarkable is that he expressed his own opinion—that Jia Zhi was the best—following the introduction of a conventional

evaluation judging that Cen Shen was generally regarded as the best and that Du Fu earned third place. In this note, he does not mention any particular critics he consulted; however, his style of analysis bears a resemblance to those of Ming scholars in *Tangshi huiping* 唐詩彙評. The critics included in the *Tangshi huiping* analyzed the language and formal structure of the four poems and subsequently evaluated them according to their own standards. Hu Yinglin 胡應麟 (1551–1602), for example, praised Cen Shen in his *Shisou* 詩藪: “All through the eight lines of Cen Shen, every line is finely worked and every word is naturally formed. The third couplet is glorious and great, as if it were right before my eyes. As for the second couplet, even though it is just gorgeous, the breath energy is too fast, and consequently, the musical quality is just off. Even though it has such a defect, it is close to being perfect for seven-syllable poetry.”⁷ Hu Yinglin praised Cen Shen’s poem on the grounds that the structure was finely designed and each word was placed such that the verse was smooth and natural.⁸ In particular, the third couplet is splendid, delivering vivid imagery, as if the scene of the dawn court is right before the reader’s eyes. The only flaw in Hu’s eyes is that the second couplet runs too fast and damages the overall musical balance. It is not certain whether the “ancient people” 古人 Yi mentioned in his note refer to Hu Yinglin. Whereas Hu praised the third couplet of Cen Shen’s poem, Yi disapproved of it, pointing out that the first four characters and the following three characters are not musically tuned. Despite the differences in judging the poems, however, both critics share a lot in common in their analytical interests. Both focused on the poem’s language and structure and tried to determine how individual words contribute to the poetic effects and how the images were constructed and transformed in the given structure. Highly interesting is that until Yi’s *Jibong yuseol*, the series of poems on the topic “Early Morning Court at Daming Palace” had never been mentioned as a major literary canon in Joseon.

7. The original text is as follows: “岑通章八句，皆精工整密，字字天成。頸聯純爛鮮明，早朝意宛然在目。獨領聯雖絕壯麗，而氣勢迫促，遂至全篇音韻微乖。不爾，當爲七言律冠矣” (Chen 1995, 819).

8. The original poem might be translated as follows: “Rooster-man informs of dawn on the scarlet roads and lights at dawn are chilly, orioles chirp in the imperial city and the spring color is matured. At the sound of a dawn bell from the palace, ten thousand gates open, imperial guards surround the immortals’ stick on the jade step embraces the thousand bureaus. Flowers greet the pendants hanging from swords, stars begin to fall, willows touch pennons and streamers, the dew has not yet dried. Only there is a guest by the phoenix pool, it is difficult to respond to the song of late spring” 雞鳴紫陌曙光寒，鶯囀皇州春色闌。金闕曉鐘開萬戶，玉階仙仗擁千官。花迎劍佩星初落，柳拂旌旗露未干。獨有鳳皇池上客，陽春一曲和皆難。

This is in stark contrast with the vibrant debates on the poems in China, among Ming's academics in particular. In this regard, it is highly plausible that Yi had access to read the commentaries of Ming critics. Their interpretations of the works of Du Fu and the other three poets would have motivated Yi to look at the canon in different ways than his critical forebears.⁹

Instead of concentrating on the moral or ideological connotation overshadowed by neo-Confucian thought, Yi's notes on poetry are much more focused on the aesthetics of the poetic form as a pure literary piece. Referring to an analytical model of languages and the formal structures of poetry, he mentioned Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526–1590) the most among many other Ming scholars. According to Wang, Du Fu was not always the best, an opinion that agreed with Yi:

Wang Shizhen says, "Seven syllable *pailu* originated with Du Fu. However, his *pailu* poems are not beautiful. He made a line with seven characters and then again restricted them with tonal regulations and parallelism. Consequently, the momentum and vitality of the poems are completely exhausted. Moreover, he linked lines only to make his poems longer. If a poem needs high and difficult tones, then it is difficult to connect each line. As a result, it damages the entire poem. If a poem has plane tones, then it easily becomes banal. So it hurts each line." I concur that this opinion is

9. While Yi often referred to Ming scholars in his work, such as Wang Shizhen, Jiang Yikui, Hong Mai, Ruo Dajing, Gao Bing, and Hui Hong, he did not have the chance to consult Qing scholarship: "A poem of Du Fu reads, 'He, Zhizhang, rides his horse as if sailing on a boat.' I think it alludes to the story of Ruan Xian of Jin. He got drunk and swayed his body on his horse, then people laughed at him, saying, 'he is riding a horse as if sailing on a boat in the high waves.' The next line of Du Fu's poem goes, 'having flowers in his eyes, he fell in the well. Even underwater, he dozes.' I think this line alludes to Wang Xiang of Jin, who got drunk and could not lift his head leaning against the wall. His parents teased him, saying 'flowers in your eyes are in the bottom of the well, and your body is in the water. Even if you slept there, you could not sober up.' Du Fu's poem uses these stories." The poem by Du Fu cited here is "The Songs of Eight Drinking Immortals" 飲中八仙歌. Among commentaries in *Tangshi huiping*, Tang Ruxun 唐汝詢, the author of *Tangshi jie* 唐詩解, says that the eight immortals felt disgusted by the mundane world and got tipsy to avoid it. Other commentators in *Tangshi huiping* did not mention any particular allusion present in this poem. In *Dushi xiangzhu* 杜詩詳註, however, Qiu Zhaoao 仇兆鰲 says that the anecdotes regarding Ruan Xian and Wang Xiang have been recorded only in *Weisuzhu* 偽蘇註, the book that had been falsely attributed to Su Shi 蘇軾. According to Qiu, interpreting this poem by relying on those stories is inappropriate because the source of the allusion is not reliable. Then, why did Yi Sugwang introduce this allusion during his analysis of this poem? Yi did have a chance to consult many editions written by Ming scholars, but probably could not read Qing scholars' interpretations, which provide detailed bibliographical references.

correct.

王世貞曰, "七言排律, 創自老杜, 然亦不得佳. 蓋七字爲句, 束以聲偶, 氣力已盡矣. 又衍之使長, 調高則難續而傷篇, 調卑則易冗而傷句." 信哉斯言也.

(Yi 1970, 268)

Wang Shizhen disapproved of Du Fu for several reasons: for example, he criticized Du Fu for creating *pailu* 排律, a new poetic form which restricted the momentum and vitality of a poem due to its rigid tonal regulations. By citing Wang, Yi Sugwang discredited those who followed Du Fu as a perfect canon in Joseon and opened a new possibility to read from fresh eyes.

Shaping New Meaning: Reading by Another Texts

Intertextual references were adopted when Yi practiced his critical reading of Du Fu. After consulting many other references based on his empirical research, he re-read Du Fu's poems from his own perspective. His bold question of whether Du Fu should be considered a "transcendental" poet was, in fact, raised from his extensive and critical reading. The fresh methods for his own textual analysis of the semantic differences of poetic languages also came into being from his reading experiences: "Du Fu says, 'I hate the willow floss which is whiter than cotton fluff.' And it also says, 'Willow flowers, scattered on the road, as white as fur cushions are spreading out.' I found out that Yang Yan from the Song said, 'Willow flosses and willow flowers are not the same. Things that come out among leaves and have a light yellow color are willow flowers. After bearers are ripened, the things that blow away like cotton are willow flosses.' If this is the case, many poets in the ancient days, or even these days, have called flosses flowers and flowers flosses. Du Fu's poem cited below was not able to avoid this kind of mistake."¹⁰ Yi read Yang Yan, a scholar in the Song dynasty, compared him to Du Fu, and pointed out that Du Fu failed to recognize the difference between "willow flosses" and "willow flowers." Although the semantic misapprehension of dictions would not have caused any differences in the

10. The original text is as follows: "杜詩, 生憎柳絮白於綿. 又, 糝徑楊花鋪白氈. 按, 宋楊巖曰, 柳花與柳絮不同. 生於葉間, 作鵝黃色者花也. 結實已熟, 亂飛如綿者絮也. 然則, 古今詩人以絮爲花, 以花爲絮者多矣. 杜詩下句, 亦未免誤耳" (Yi 1970, 268).

overall meaning of the poem, for Yi Sugwang, the correct use of words was as important as illuminating any ideological connotation of the poem.

A poem by Yin Gen says, “The big river is quiet but still has waves,” and one of Du Fu’s poems says, “The river flows, and it is quiet but still surges.” Yin Gen says, “Light clouds come from the edge of the rocks, and the new moon rises up from the waves,” and Du Fu says, “Light clouds stay in between the rocks, and the slanting moon is trembling in the waves.” Yin Gen says, “In the middle of the river, I hear the fisherman’s song,” and Du Fu says, “In the stream, I heard the fisherman’s song.” Yin Gen says, “Flowers follow the wind blowing under the mountain,” and Du Fu says, “Clouds chase the winds crossing the river.” Du Fu imitated his predecessor’s pieces, as seen above.

陰鏗詩大江靜猶浪，杜詩曰江流靜猶湧。鏗詩薄雲岩際出，初月波中上，杜云薄雲岩際宿，殘月浪中翻。鏗詩中川聞棹謳，杜云中流聞棹謳。鏗詩花逐山下風，杜云雲逐度溪風。老杜祖襲前作如此。

(Yi 1970, 270)

Yi examined Du Fu’s poetry in the context of a literary tradition and asserted that Du Fu was not always “original.” By comparing Du Fu’s poems with Yin Gen’s, Yi revealed that Du Fu adopted many of Yin Gen’s lines and imitated them. By putting Du Fu’s lines in a literary context, Yi acquired new significations that could be subversive of canonical hierarchy. Yi’s empirical research brings to light that the “textuality” of Du Fu would stand its ground on the networks, linking particular wordings to others in the same poem or in other poems. This intertextual linkage enables readers to reduce the strength of its connection to the canonical author and, consequently, gives them the freedom to establish connections among many texts at many levels. Through his intertextual research, Yi Sugwang came to the radical conclusion that the canonicity of Du Fu was culturally imposed and should be reappraised by situating him in literary history.

New Topography and Encyclopedic Knowledge: Revisited Du Fu, the Great Canon

After Imjin waeran, the post-war landscape in Joseon witnessed a great

number of books and woodblocks destroyed and plundered. As part of its rehabilitation plan, the government collected books scattered throughout the Korean peninsula, printed new copies using wooden movable types, and urged emissaries to purchase books mainly from China. As a result, a large number of books from the Ming and Qing periods began to be introduced to Joseon, and the massive influx of books ushered in a new phase in intellectual circles. The list of imported books included classic literary texts, historiographies, and translations of Western books that contained scientific information on topics such as astronomy and technology. Yi Sugwang himself survived the war and traveled to China three times—in 1590, 1597, and 1611—as a government envoy. His *Jibong yuseol* vividly illustrates the intellectual shift experienced during the post-war Joseon. As a way of questioning the canonicity of Du Fu in mid-Joseon, Yi Sugwang’s understanding of Du Fu can be understood in the context of changing material conditions. Exposure to the newly encountered printed words affected the reshaping of his thought. Freshly drawn literary topography empowered him to reconsider his relationships with literary tradition and influenced the subversion of the canon.

“Now I understand that the so-called ‘four seas’ were defined from the perspective of the Chinese. They are not in between heaven and earth. If you see *Sancai tubui* 三才圖會, then you can understand it” (Yi 1970, 23). The world seen through his eyes was an indescribable space, much wider than the China-centric square between heaven and earth. In China, which he visited as an envoy, he not only interacted with Chinese officials but was also closely associated with emissaries from many other places around the world. In the “foreign countries” section of his *Jibong yuseol*, Yi mentioned envoys from Vietnam, Laos, Turfan, Arabia, England, Italy, and Baghdad, among others. He learned about and discussed differences in customs, weather, and geography with them. Yi was also deeply interested in maps of the world, such as *Tianxingtu* 天形圖 and *Ouluobaguo yuditu* 歐羅巴國輿地圖 (Yi 1970, 29). In the new map of the world, freshly discovered through his mind’s eye, China was only a part of it, not the center, and the inherited literary canons had been invented by someone in history.

The encyclopedic format of *Jibong yuseol* was perfect to box in his excitement and pleasures risen from the influx of unsorted new knowledge. The collection contains 3,435 titles of small topics. They were originally jotted down as Yi’s personal memoranda and later compiled under 25 categories. Yi said

that he consulted 348 book titles and listed the names of 2,265 persons from antiquity to his era. Whenever he cited someone else's work, Yi clearly recorded the original sources of the references.¹¹

Jibong yuseol is his own history of reading and intellectual peregrinations. Yi's encyclopedic style was an unprecedented way of collecting and categorizing knowledge in Joseon. By placing Du Fu in the new system of categorization, Yi challenged the position of the traditionally accepted "canon" and consequently attempted to weaken the authority of canonicity.

The Pleasure of the Text: Subversive Reading of Du Fu

Roland Barthes once said, "the pleasure of text emerges only when the writer's impulse toward heroism is in abeyance, when valor and courage are overcome." (Barthes 1990, 30) A reader would truly enjoy freedom of reading only if they were able to fight the anxiety imposed by the canonical "saint" and subvert any worshipful attitude. In his *Jibong yuseol*, Yi Sugwang is enjoying the pleasure of reading Du Fu, savoring each and every one of his lines. For him, Du Fu was a great poet, but not the greatest poet who ever lived. He evaluated the poet's weak points and good points by comparing his poems with other his contemporaries. Yi's audacious subversion of Du Fu's canonicity suggests important aspects of the formation of canons in literary history. The changing print culture and the new practice of reading and reception were powerful factors in shaping literary thought and definitions of poetic ideas. Those material conditions of literary production provided more concrete sense of the agencies that had been forming the literary tradition. By looking into the vitality canonization, this paper emphasized that the value of the texts in a canon lies in the process of "making it"; canonization works as a system that constitutes its own cultural heritage.

11. Although the encyclopedic writing style is hardly seen in the literary history of Joseon, it is remarkable that it was widely popular in China, particularly during the Ming dynasty. Focusing on the formal features of Yi's writing collection, another study of the close relationship between the fresh ideas and the exploration of new style will be conducted in my separate future paper. About the encyclopedic writings in China, see Chow 2004; De Weerd 2007.

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Abstract

This study aims to revisit the reception of Du Fu in the literary history of Korea, focusing on its canonicity and textuality. *Jibong yuseol*, an encyclopedic collection from 17th-century Joseon, Korea, vividly demonstrates how the author Yi Sugwang (1563–1628) attempted to subvert the transcendental positions of literary canons by positioning them in the networks of textual exegesis. Challenging the notion of canon as a perfect and fixed entity, Yi historicized the reception of Du Fu in Joseon and traced how this particular body of text became the most influential part of the canon and could be also deconstructed through interpretative performances. Highlighting the textuality of literary canons, which was considered fluid and flexible, this paper unravels the networks of interpretation drawn from the thousands of references found in *Jibong yuseol*. Special emphasis of this research also will be placed on the changing “material conditions” of the day, particularly after the Imjin waeran (1592–1598) war between Korea and Japan. The post-war intellectual environment witnessed the influx of a large number of books on Ming and Qing scholarship and prompted a significant shift in the perspective of the Joseon literati.

Keywords: Du Fu, Yi Sugwang, *Jibong yuseol*, canonicity, textuality