



Fig 8. Portrait of Chae Jegong (蔡濟恭, 1720-1799) (Portrait in Official Robe), by Yi Myeonggi (李命基, b. 1756). Joseon Dynasty, 1791. Ink and color on silk, 120.0 x 79.8 cm. (Suwon Hwaseong Museum).

# Literati Portraiture of the Joseon Dynasty

Kang Kwanshik  
Professor, Hansung University

## Introduction: Joseon Dynasty Literati Portraiture and Neo-Confucian Ritual Culture

When Neo-Confucianism was established as the official state ideology of the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910), the religious principles of the previous Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392) were abandoned and suppressed in favor of a government structure that centered on Neo-Confucian rituals and civil official administration. Coveted government positions were typically awarded to the yangban (literati) class through the civil service examination system. The dynasty established a bureaucracy in which the royal house worked in alliance with the administration of civil officials, who thus had a voice and authority in governance. Literati who obtained a classical education and became versed in the literary arts were the foundation of the system, which in turn emphasized Neo-Confucianism and the flourishing of literati culture. Because rites play such a central role in Neo-Confucian thought, a strong ritual culture developed to visualize the ideals of Neo-Confucianism. The strong material characteristics of these rituals influenced and inspired the rise of visual and material culture. In the 500-year span of the dynasty, all of these factors led to the development of portraiture that emphasized Neo-Confucian characteristics, particularly literati portraiture.

Literati portraiture of the Joseon Dynasty reflects the ideological and political changes in Neo-Confucianism. The development of ritual culture

was inherently intertwined with Neo-Confucianism, and it took a varied and diverse course through the era. Portraits were made to be enshrined and used as commemorative images in ancestral rites, so their ritualistic functions were of utmost importance. Yet the portraits were not merely ritual objects; they also reflected the political context in which they were created and the idea of self-cultivation. Therefore, examining literati portraiture in terms of these various factors, rather than within a broad historical context, can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the portraits and the socio-cultural environment in which they were created.

## Political Portraits of Early-Mid Joseon Dynasty Meritorious Subjects

During the Goryeo Dynasty, Buddhism was the state ideology, so people commonly held Buddhist funerary rituals and preserved portraits of the deceased in Buddhist temples. Therefore, in addition to royal portraits and portraits of meritorious subjects, many ordinary officials had their portraits preserved in temples near their gravesites. Yet with the founding of the Joseon Dynasty and the implementation of Neo-Confucianism, the use of portraits for funerary rituals was forsaken as a Buddhist custom (*songnye*, 俗禮). Instead, as the standard funerary custom (*jeongnye*, 正禮), the dynasty implemented the use of mortuary tablets (*honbaek*, 魂帛 and *sinju*, 神主) and rituals that followed the principles of the Neo-

Confucian scholar Zhu Xi (朱熹, 1130-1200) from the Song Dynasty (960-1279). During the early-mid Joseon Dynasty, as Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism spread and became further substantiated, the ritualistic context of portraiture that had developed within Buddhist funerary rites began to wane. Then, during the late 15th-century reign of King Seongjong (成宗, r. 1469-94), a literati (*sarim*, 士林) contingent who emphasized Neo-Confucian ideology began to flourish. The ideals of this group strengthened and spread throughout the 16th century, and by the early 17th century, their influence was so great that, after King Seonjo (宣祖, r. 1567-1608), the practice of creating royal portraits (*eojin*, 御眞) was entirely halted. The representative Neo-Confucian literati of the early-mid Joseon Dynasty did not paint portraits, and no ceremonial royal portraits were created to be housed in the royal portrait halls until after the reign of King Hyeonjong (顯宗, r. 1659-1674).

While the ritualistic elements of the portraits declined during the early-mid Joseon Dynasty, more political characteristics began to emerge. After Neo-Confucianism was established as the state ideology, many political conflicts arose, from both within Joseon and from abroad (Japan and Qing China), during the early-mid Joseon Dynasty. From these conflicts, many heroic and loyal figures emerged, who assisted in establishing and maintaining the royal house and dynasty. Thus, from the beginning of the dynasty to the 17th century of mid-Joseon, many meritorious subjects (*gongsin*, 功臣) were recognized for particular acts of service. This practice started with the meritorious subjects who played key roles in the founding of the dynasty (*gaeguk gongsin*, 開國功臣) and developed over time until more than twenty different *gongsin*-related titles were given to over 900 individuals. The concept of loyalty (*chung*, 忠) was central to Neo-Confucian political thought, and the meritorious subjects were the physical embodiment of this concept. Hence, their names were documented in special records (*gongsin nokgwon*, 功臣錄券) and they were granted special *gongsin* titles, official posts, and wealth. Another way to visually acknowledge and commemorate the meritorious subjects and their loyalty was to reward them with a portrait.

To exemplify the importance of these individuals and their contributions, particularly *gaeguk gongsin* who assisted in the founding of Joseon in 1392, their portraits were enshrined in special portrait halls

called *Gongsingak* (功臣閣, Hall of Merit Subjects), including one hall in the capital named Jangsaengjeon (長生殿) Hall. In fact, during the chaotic early days of founding the dynasty, with numerous urgent issues demanding attention, the portraits of *gaeguk gongsin* sometimes had to be hung right alongside the portrait of King Taejo (太祖, r. 1392-98), which was a violation of ceremonial protocols regarding royal portraits (*Taejong sillok* 1411 and 1418). Notably, however, many *gaeguk gongsin* who were initially honored were later deemed to be traitors, because of internal conflicts within the royal house. Due to such instability and inconsistency, naming meritorious subjects and creating their portraits remained a sporadic practice until the mid-15th century, at which time the Merit Subject Halls (where the portraits were hung) were entirely eliminated. Beginning in 1466, all tasks related to meritorious subjects were consolidated and supervised by Chungmunbu Office (忠勳府, the office of loyalty and meritorious deeds). Portraits of meritorious subjects were still painted, but, in a significant policy change, the portraits were given to the honoree, while the office merely recorded and kept records of their names. But the decision to eliminate the Merit Subject Halls and present the portraits directly to the individuals had unexpected results. Because the portraits were now distributed and enshrined all over the country, instead of being kept only in the special halls, this change actually served to further promote and reinforce the portraits' political function, as well as the Neo-Confucian idea of exemplary citizenship.

Since portraits of meritorious subjects are essentially political images symbolizing loyalty and allegiance, the figures are usually depicted in their most formal official robes (*sangbok*, 常服), displaying their bureaucratic rank and authority. They are typically attired in official dress (*dallyeong*, 團領) and black official's hat (*osamo*, 烏紗帽), with their ranks depicted by a large rank-badge (*hyungbae*, 胸背) and belt (*gakdae*, 角帶). The format and style of the portraits largely followed Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) portraiture, with some modifications to befit Joseon society. Ming bureaucrats were painted facing forward, seated on a splendidly decorated chair that was usually covered with either a tiger pelt or silk. Their hands are visible, with one hand placed on a knee and the other holding a belt. The Joseon officials, on the other hand, sit upright with their arms

crossed, their hands concealed inside their sleeves, and their feet placed on a footrest. Their posture, attire, and surroundings all contribute to the solemn and reverent tone of the painting. Compared to the more naturalistic pose of Ming bureaucrats, the Joseon portraits of meritorious subjects emphasize and symbolize the importance of loyalty to the king, as well as Neo-Confucian political and ritual pedagogy.

The portraits of meritorious subjects were created by the best court painters, so they are usually of the highest quality. What's more, they also have definitive dates of production, making them important archival objects that allow us to investigate the production process and stylistic development of early-mid Joseon Dynasty portraiture. Unfortunately, since many of the 15th and 16th century portraits were lost during the Japanese invasions of Korea (壬辰倭亂, 1592-1598), it is difficult to know the exact forms of the portraits from this early period. Thus, extant portraits of meritorious subjects from this early period, such as *Portrait of Shin Sukju* (申叔舟, 1417-1475) (Fig. 1) and *Portrait of O Jachi* (吳自治, late 15th century), are especially important. Shin is depicted in a green robe with a rank-badge of two silver pheasants, indicating a post of the third-rank. From the attire, this portrait was created when Shin received *jwaik gongsin* (佐翼功臣) in 1453 for his service in assisting King Sejo (世祖, r. 1455-1468) obtain the throne. O Jachi is portrayed in a dark blue (lapis lazuli) robe with a tiger-and-leopard rank-badge, denoting a second-rank military officer. He received *jeokgae gongsin* (敵愾功臣) in 1476 for his role in suppressing a revolt. Both figures are wearing robes with no decoration or design and large rank-badges embroidered with gold thread, and their elaborate, brightly colored inner robes of purple, green, and red can also be seen. A pattern is featured even on the lining and inner robe of O Jachi, and such delicate elaboration brilliantly conveys a modest sense of grandeur. The portraits emphasize the official rank and stature of the individuals and effectively visualize their solemnity and dignity.

The artists used color washes and fine lines to create and subtly shade their subjects' face and features. The robes are simply depicted with flat coloring, contour outlines, and slight shading. Their bodies are hidden within voluminous robes that billow above and below a narrow, belted waist. All of these features combine to convey a martial feeling of strength, similar to the portrait of King Taejo.



Fig 1. *Portrait of Shin Sukju* (申叔舟, 1417-1475). Joseon Dynasty, c.1453. Ink and color on silk, 167.0 x 109.5 cm. (Private collection).

Such characteristics mark the aesthetics of the time, reflecting the militarism and dynamism behind the establishment of the new dynasty and the quelling of early conflicts.

In comparison, the portraits of meritorious subjects from the first half of the 17th century emphasize more abstract, stylized, and flatter forms. Also, these portraits become more decorative and elaborate, as *chaejeon* (彩氈, colorful Chinese wool carpet) with a colorful geometric design covers the entire floor below the sitter and the rank-badges on the robes and hats are replaced by five-colored embroidery and a cloud or flower design. The new style of portraiture is well illustrated by *Portrait of Song Eonsin* (宋言慎, 1542-1612), who was named a *seonmu gongsin* (宣武功臣) in 1604 for his service during the Japanese inva-



Fig 2. *Portrait of Yi Sibang* (李時昉, 1594-1660). Joseon Dynasty, c.1625. Ink and color on silk, 169.0 x 93.0 cm. (Daejeon Prehistoric Museum, entrusted by private collector).

sions, and *Portrait of Yi Sibang* (李時昉, 1594-1660) (Fig. 2), who was named a *jeongsa gongsin* (靖社功臣) in 1624 for helping King Injo (仁祖, r. 1623-1649) gain the throne.

The first half of the 17th century was marked by foreign invasions, sweeping political change, and an intensification of Neo-Confucianism. The portraiture style evolved to emphasize the strict values of moral upstanding and loyalty, values which pertained to Neo-Confucian thought. The depiction of *chaejeon* is a significant change, as it had only been featured in imperial portraits in Ming China, and was never included in portraits of officials. In 15th-century Joseon, *chaejeon* was only painted in portraits of the king, but it began to appear in Joseon portraiture of officials in the early 16th century, as seen in *Portrait of Yu Sun-*



Fig 3. *Portrait of Yu Sunjeong* (柳順汀, 1459-1512). Joseon Dynasty, copied in early 18th century. Ink and color on silk, 172.0 x 110.0 cm. (Seoul Museum of History).

*jeong* (柳順汀, 1459-1512) (Fig. 3), which signifies the elevated status of officials. This phenomenon demonstrates the deepening influence of Neo-Confucian thought and the growing power and authority of *yangban* bureaucrats during the mid-Joseon period.

Since portraits of meritorious subjects are essentially political, they were greatly affected by power shifts between political factions. For instance, the *Seoin* faction (西人, Western faction) held power in 1623 (*Injo banjeong*, 仁祖反正), but they were overtaken by the *Namin* faction (南人, Southern faction) in 1689 (*Gisa hwanguk*, 己巳換局), followed by the rise of the *Noron* faction (老論, "The Old Faction") in 1694 (*Gapsul hwanguk*, 甲戌換局). With each transfer of power, the meritorious honors of officials from the previous faction were revoked and their portraits

were collected and publicly incinerated in front of the palace. Still, portraits honoring the loyalty and service of certain past individuals continued to be held in high regard, and in the later periods, the political and aesthetic aspects of the portraits were very influential. For example, when the portrait of King Taejo was copied in 1688, the 14th year of King Sukjong's reign (肅宗, r. 1674-1720), the *Portrait of Yu Sunjeong* (Fig. 3), was summoned to the palace so that the king and officials could study it. Then, to select four royal portraitists, a competition was held among the court painters, to see who could do the best job copying the painting. The copies of *Portrait of Yu Sunjeong* that were painted by the selected royal portraitists were then granted to the descendants of Yu Sunjeong. This process later became the tradition when painting royal portraits and portraits of meritorious subjects. Kings Yeongjo (英祖, r. 1724-1776) and Jeongjo (正祖, r. 1776-1800) also requisitioned portraits of meritorious subjects to be brought to the palace so that they could be studied and copied, including portraits of Yi Hangbok (李恒福, 1556-1618), Yi Sibaek (李時白, 1581-1660), Yi Huwon (李厚源, 1598-1660) and Kim Seokju (金錫胄, 1634-1684). The descendants of the meritorious subjects not only received the new copies of the portraits, but they were also sometimes promoted or given official positions, if they did not already have one. For example, Kim Seokju's descendant Kim Gijang (金基長, 1741-1786) was promoted to a higher official position.

### Self-Cultivation Portraits of Mid-Late Joseon Dynasty Literati Scholars

As a Neo-Confucian state, Joseon was greatly influenced by literati in politics and academia, so portraits of scholars were very important. During the early part of the dynasty, Neo-Confucian scholars believed that the usage of portraits of the deceased in funerary ceremonies was heretical, since it was a representative Buddhist custom. Accordingly, in early-mid Joseon, literati were reluctant to have their portraits made.

But in the 17th century, Neo-Confucianism became more pervasive, and absorbed into Joseon Society. The use of mortuary tablets was firmly established, and attitudes shifted back toward portraiture. Song Siyeol (宋時烈, 1607-1689), a leading Neo-Confucian scholar and politician, had his portrait

made, emulating Zhu Xi. Following Zhu's example, Song used portraiture to emphasize the significance of self-cultivation and self-reflection. At this time, a more realistic stance on rituals took hold and the convention of enshrining both mortuary tablets and portraits was practiced. Thus, the ritualistic and self-cultivation characteristics of portraiture were again stressed and cherished. Consequently, in the late 17th century, a new phenomenon arose: literati portraiture. The aspects of ritual and self-reflection related to literati portraiture became a fundamental feature of Neo-Confucian ritual culture.

A literati portrait generally depicts a man in a scholar's robe (*simui*, 深衣) and hat (*bokgeon*, 幅巾). Such portraits were typically hung either in a portrait hall (*yeongdang*, 影堂) or in the memorial hall of the subject's academy (*seowon*, 書院), so that he could be commemorated and honored by other scholars and students. Two good examples of literati portraiture are the 1683 portrait of Song Siyeol by court painter Han Sigak (韓時覺, b. 1621) and the 18th-century copy now in the collection of the National Museum of Korea. In creating his own portraits, Song Siyeol adhered to the tenets described in the *Books of Rites* (禮記) and *The Family Rituals of Zhu Xi* (朱子家禮), and also studied the *Portrait of Zhu Xi*, in order to insure that the image embodied Neo-Confucian ideals and portrayed his Neo-Confucian identity. In the portrait (Fig. 4), Song is portrayed wearing a black hat, a white hemp robe with black trim, and a long black-and-white belt. He stands in a reverential pose, with his hands placed one over the other. The relatively simple style, with the palette largely confined to black and white, allows the portrait to emphasize the particular Neo-Confucian principles of reflection and self-possession.

After seeing his portrait, Song adorned it with some "self-cautionary comments" (*jagyongmun*, 自警文). The remarks highlight the virtues of self-examination and introspection, which are fundamental aspects of "portraits of Neo-Confucian notables" (*yuhyeonsang*, 儒賢像).

*I have meager knowledge and qualities, living a rustic existence in a humble woodland hut.*

*The window is lit and all is quiet, but reading continues despite hunger.*

*My appearance is haggard and pale, and my learning is incomplete.*



Fig 4. *Portrait of Song Siyeol* (宋時烈, 1607-1689). Copied in late 18th century. Ink and color on silk, 89.7 × 67.6 cm. (National Museum of Korea).

*I have turned away from the King's truth and have not followed the words of the wise.*

*I am thus nothing but a bookworm.*

Song's words are sharply critical, embodying the self-cultivating characteristics of literati portraiture. Song's portrait was frequently copied by successive generations of disciples and displayed in academies and shrine halls throughout the country, further propagating the ritualistic, academic, and political aspects of the image. Song, who was respectfully called Songja (宋子, "Master Song"), was venerated as a preeminent scholar, and the 18th-century portrait of him in the National Museum of Korea (Fig. 4) was created within this context, to reflect the ideology and idealism that he represented. King Jeongjo wrote a funerary ode (*chijemun*, 致祭文) on the portrait, which fully addressed the ritualistic, reflective, and political contexts of the image and accentuated the



Fig 5. *Portrait of Bak Sedang* (朴世堂, 1629-1703), attributed to Jo Segeol (曹世傑, 1628-1705). Joseon Dynasty, c.1690. Ink and color on silk, 85.0 × 58.6 cm. (Academy of Korean Studies, Jangseogak, entrusted by Bak family).

importance of self-cultivation.

*His integrity and loyalty have been respected for ages [cheonchu, 千秋].*

*I have esteemed and revered him my entire life.*

*He was also admired by past kings [seonwang, 先王].*

*There is no scholar who would not respect him.*

*His words were reasonable and logical.*

*He became highly proficient [jongjang, 宗匠] in learning the principle [ihak, 理學].*

*Unable to complete all his affairs [gyeongnyun, 經綸] and services [saep, 事業], lamentably he entered his final days.*

*He has a shrine [sadang, 祠堂] in Seoul.*

*His portrait is lofty and solemn.*

*Scholars fill the entire courtyard.*

*I have sent for the Royal Secretary [seungji, 承旨] and raise a wine glass.*

After Song Siyeol, during the 18th century, the traditional Neo-Confucianists were supplanted by the descendents of the rustic literati (*sallim hakja*, 山林學者), who gained academic and political control. This movement believed that portraits were important, and the production of portraits increased. Most of the literati were fond of Zhu Xi and Song Siyeol, and adhered to their precedent of wearing the white scholars' robes. However, due to some ideological distinctions between the schools of thought, some literati now wore a new style of robe and hat. In addition to reflecting the generational changes within academia, the portraits also display a greater variety of decorative and realistic characteristics. Literati portraiture of the late Joseon Dynasty was diverse in both style and form.

The portrait of Yun Jeung (尹拯, 1629-1714) is an example of such diversity. Yun Jeung was a former student of Song Siyeol who made a political and ideological split from Song's group *Noron* (老論, "The Old Faction") to form his own group *Soron* (少論, "The Young Faction"). Yun's portrait accentuates introspection, as well as the psychological and ideological burden of failing to be loyal (*siljeol*, 失節). Thus, instead of the usual scholar's hat and white robe, Yun wears a straight-collared robe (*jingnyeong*, 直領) and a rectangular hat (*banggeon*, 方巾), the garb of an ordinary civil official and literatus. Bak Sedang (朴世堂, 1629-1703) (Fig. 5), another leader of the *Soron* faction, also wore a white robe and hat, but he insisted on adhering quite literally to the "angular shape" (*bang*, 方) of clothing described in the *Books of Rites* by wearing a collar molded into the shape of a quadrilateral. These differences reflect a conscious movement away from Zhu Xi Neo-Confucianism.

Notably, the portraits of *Noron* literati who upheld the teachings of Song Siyeol, such as Kwon Sangha (權尙夏, 1641-1721), Han Wonjin (韓元震, 1682-1751), Kim Wonhaeng (金元行, 1702-1772), and Kim Yian (金履安, 1722-1791) (Fig. 6), exemplify the same elements as Song's portrait. However, the late 18th-century portraits are more realistically painted. In addition, another change in the aesthetic style of late Joseon Dynasty portraiture is the inclusion of blue robes with black collars, hemlines, and edges (*nansam*, 欄衫), along with pointed, pyramidal hats (程子冠, named after the famous Chinese scholar, *Chengzi* (程子, 1033-1107) of the Song Dynasty). These changes can be seen in the portraits of Yun Bonggu (尹鳳九,



Fig 6. *Portrait of Kim Yian* (金履安, 1722-1791). Joseon Dynasty, late 18th century. Ink and color on silk, 170.0 x 79.7 cm. (Ewha Womans University Museum).

1681-1767) and Yi Chae (李采, 1745-1820) (Fig. 7).

### Commemorative Portraits of Late Joseon Dynasty Scholar-Officials

The legacy of Song Siyeol was quite strong, so the strict suppression of portraiture became significantly weaker by the late 17th century. Consequently, in the 18th century, more portraits were made emphasizing self-cultivation and ritual. In addition to the usual portraits of the king and preeminent Neo-Confucian literati, portraits of ordinary bureaucrats began to be created. As portraiture became a fundamental component of aristocratic ritual culture, a significant development arose: commemorative portraiture.

Also in the 18th century, foreign styles from



Fig 7. Portrait of Yi Chae (李采, 1745-1820). Joseon Dynasty, 1802. Ink and color on silk, 99.2 x 58.0 cm. (National Museum of Korea).

Qing China and the West were incorporated into paintings. Traditional principles were enhanced with linear perspective and chiaroscuro techniques, thereby helping to develop a realistic painting style that concretely and vividly depicted popular life. With these new techniques, various types of portraits were produced depending on the appearance, rank, and status of the literati, as well as their ideological, political and aesthetic inclinations. In the newer, more realistic portraits, the differences and inclinations of the subjects became even more striking and natural.

The portraits of Chae Jegong (蔡濟恭, 1720-1799) reflect the particular aspects of 18th-century commemorative portraits of scholar-officials. After enduring a period of political alienation, Chae was allowed to return to officialdom thanks to King Jeongjo's "policy of impartiality" (*tangpyeong jeongchi*, 蕩平政治), and he even rose to become prime minister. Because he preferred portraits that reflected his political success, he is depicted in his official robes. In three different portraits, he is painted wearing the three types of official dress of the late Joseon Dynasty. In his court dress portrait (*jobokbon*, 朝服本), Chae wears a grand, vivid red court robe, accessorized with a jade sash (*paeok*, 佩玉) and gold headpiece (*geumgwan*, 金冠), and he holds an ivory tablet (*sanga hol*, 象牙笏). In his bureaucrat portrait (*sangbokbon*, 常服本), Chae is depicted in the representative black official robe (*heukdallyeong*, 黑團領). Lastly, in his ordinary official image (*sibokbon*, 時服本), Chae wears the rouge-tinted everyday robe (*hongdallyeong*, 紅團領) (Fig. 8). Together, the three portraits in official garb allow Chae to effortlessly display and celebrate his political accomplishments.

Upon seeing the three portraits, Chae composed the following complimentary remarks (*chanmun*, 贊文), which clearly express his thoughts:

*Wearing the sash of a high official [gogwan, 高官]  
and holding a tablet (hol, 笏),*

*What policies did I approve as a prime minister?*

*Hair is white and face is wrinkled,*

*What activities became accomplishments?*

*Living in peace from birth to death,*

*Are you as happy as me?*

*-Portrait in Court Dress*

*In all eternity, only King Yeongjo understood my  
heart,*

*King Jeongjo granted me a new life [jaesaeng, 再生] with his grace.*

*Though I was not avoided or hated by the wicked,  
Who will believe that I served the King with virtue?*

*-Portrait in Black Official Dress*

*Your appearance and your heart, grace of your parents*

*Your head and your legs, grace of your King.*

*The fan is due to the King's grace, as is the incense pouch [hyangnang, 香囊].*

*Which of your adornments is not due to his kindness?*

*After I withdraw from my post, my shame is in not being able to repay such kindness.*

*-Portrait in Official Robe*

After seeing himself wearing such noble and luxurious court attire in his commemorative portrait, Chae expressed his gratitude for the royal favor he received from Kings Yeongjo and Jeongjo, and his satisfaction and confidence in his bureaucratic persona. Like his predecessors Song Siyeol and Kwon Sangha, Chae held the high office of prime minister. Yet, his portraits in court and official dress differ significantly from the aforementioned literati portraits, wherein the sitter embodies a scholar's identity in literati robe, emphasizing introspection. Chae's portraits, on the other hand, superbly display the sumptuous and varied court attire of the late Joseon Dynasty. Also, the portraits demonstrate the importance of realism through the artists' use of linear perspective and chiaroscuro.

Just as the portraits of Prime Minister Chae Jeong-gong clearly illustrate the style of scholar-official portraiture of the late Joseon Dynasty, the portrait of Police Commander Yi Changun (李昌運, 1713-1791) is a representative example of military-official portraiture. Similar to scholar-officials, military officials are depicted wearing black official robes, but they have different rank-badges. While the rank-badges of scholar-officials have winged animals, such as cranes and geese, the badges of military officials have four-legged animals, such as tigers, leopards, and lions. Since scholar-officials had a superior social status, many military officials preferred to be painted wearing a crane-and-cloud (*unhak*, 雲鶴) rank-badge, but this pervasive practice was often prohibited by law. Few extant portraits depict military officials in their military uniforms.

Yi Changun came from an important family of military officials, and his family held several high-ranking military positions, including Police Commander, Commander of the Capital Guards, and Commander of the Northern Approaches. Being very proud of his military status, Yi is portrayed wearing the uniform of a military commander (*gugunbok*, 具軍服) (Fig. 9). He is attired in a violet military robe (*jeonbok*, 戰服) over a narrow-sleeved blue inner robe with red cuffs, along with a soldier's felt hat (*jeollip*, 戰笠) with a peacock feather and a beaded hat string (*paeyeong*, 貝纓). His accessories include an indigo soldier's belt (*jeonda*, 戰帶), a sword (*paedo*, 佩刀), a military amulet (*byeongbu*, 兵符), and the wisteria rod (*deungchae*, 藤策) in his right hand. The portrait is an excellent example of the grand attire of military com-



Fig 9. *Portrait of Yi Changun* (李昌運, 1713-1791). Joseon Dynasty, 1782. Ink and color on silk, 153.0 x 86.0 cm. (Private Collection)

manders.

Meanwhile, lower-ranking bureaucrats who were not considered prominent scholars preferred to be portrayed in simple, unadorned habitual dress (*yaboksang*, 野服像), as exemplified by the portrait of Im Mae (任邁, 1711-1799) (Fig. 10). Im, a virtuous low-ranking official, interacted with calligraphers and painters who favored Qing trends. Wearing a jade-colored robe and black hat, he sits behind a small desk that holds books and a scroll from China, and a pair of glasses. The portrait embodies the character of a scholar who enjoys poetry and painting. Im's complimentary comments further stress the aesthete literati persona: "Clumsy, but apparently proud; limited, but with loyalty; indolent and unfocused, instead it is close to reality."

Similar to Im's portrait is that of Seo Jiksu (徐直修, 1735-1811) (Fig. 11). Seo, a county magistrate (*gunsu*, 郡守) who appreciated calligraphy and painting, is portrayed standing in socks (*beoseon*) on a mat, wearing the plain robe and hat of the literati. The simple attire, as well as his posture with hands clasped inside

his robes, conveys a sense of honesty and straightforwardness. In 1790, the two most prominent court painters—portrait specialist Yi Myeonggi (李命基, b. 1756) and Kim Hongdo (金弘道, 1745-after 1805)—were asked by King Jeongjo to paint the altar portrait (*hubultaeng*, 後佛幀) for Yongjusa Temple (龍珠寺). At that time, the artists became acquainted with Seo Jiksu, who was assisting on the Hyeollyungwon (顯隆園) tomb project. Yi and Kim collaborated on the portrait



Fig 10. *Portrait of Im Mae* (任邁, 1711-1799), by Han Jeongrae (韓廷來, ?). Joseon Dynasty, 1777. Ink and color on silk, 64.8 x 46.4 cm. (National Museum of Korea).



Fig 11. *Portrait of Seo Jiksu* (徐直修, 1735-1811), by Yi Myeonggi (李命基, b. 1756) and Kim Hongdo (金弘道, 1745-after 1806). Joseon Dynasty, 1796. Ink and color on silk, 148.8 x 72.4 cm. (National Museum of Korea).



Fig 12. *Self-Portrait of Yun Duseo* (尹斗緒, 1668-1715). Joseon Dynasty, early 18th century. Ink and color on paper, 38.5 x 20.5 cm. (Haenam Nogudang).

of Seo, with Yi painting the face and Kim the body. Though the portrait was of the highest caliber, Seo surprisingly found it to be deficient; he wrote that it did not portray the mental and spiritual characteristics of the “dignified” self. It shows that, regardless of the painter’s skill, it is very difficult to accurately grasp the private complexities of a person’s inner life, and even more challenging to visually illustrate those aspects. But this disparity can perhaps be reconciled by painting one’s own portrait, which makes self-portraits inherently idealistic. Self-portraits focus on expressing the self, and, as the most introspective of images, are thus categorized as commemorative portraits.

The self-portraits of Yun Duseo (尹斗緒, 1668-1715) and Kang Sehwang (姜世晃, 1713-1791), two of the finest painters among the literati of the late Joseon Dynasty, precisely illustrate these aspects. Yun Duseo was fully capable of serving as a high-ranking official, but he chose to retreat from public service in order to avoid political strife. He was a man of the



Fig 13. *Self-Portrait of Kang Sehwang* (姜世晃, 1713-1791). Joseon Dynasty, 1782. Ink and color on silk, 88.7 × 51.0 cm. (National Museum of Korea, entrusted by private collector).

arts who enjoyed poetry and painting. For his self-portrait, he first used a mirror to draw his head, face, and torso with willow charcoal (*yutan*, 柳炭), and then used ink and paint to complete the face, which gazes directly out at the viewer (Fig. 12). Since portions of the image are unfinished, the portrait can be considered a sketch (*chobon*, 草本) on paper. But the traces of charcoal were almost removed over time, and thus it makes the portrait look as if the portrait only depicted the face. As a result, the close-up view of Yun’s face draws the entire focus. By eliminating all extraneous aspects, with the exception of a skull-cap (*tanggeon*, 宕巾), Yun highlights the introspective, psychological features of the self in what is rightly considered the finest self-portrait of the late Joseon Dynasty.

Meanwhile, Kang Sehwang painted a self-portrait which includes some external elements, including an unusual choice of attire: ordinary literati robes combined with a black official’s hat (*osamo*, 烏紗帽) (Fig. 13). His inscription explains the odd combination:

*Who is that man? His beard and brows are white.*

*He wears a black official’s hat on his head and a non-official’s robe [yabok, 野服] on his body.*

*Hereby his heart is in the mountains [sallim, 山林], though his name is in the court [jojeong, 朝廷].*

*He hides thousands of books from Iyu [二酉, two famous libraries in ancient China] in his heart, and shakes the Five Mountains [五嶽] with his brush.*

*How will people know? It is only to please himself.*

Due to political conflict, Kang was initially excluded from government (*yain*, 野人), and so enjoyed the life of a literati. But after the “impartiality policy,” he entered government at an advanced age and served in high-ranking positions. The portrait symbolizes his “performative roles.” While it would likely have been difficult for ordinary court painters to understand and describe the scholar-official persona, Kang effectively represents his own dual identity as a scholar-official: “half-bureaucrat” (*bangwan*, 半官) and “half-outsider” (*banya*, 半野). His self-portrait is creative and distinctive for his clever melding of the two identities. The process of becoming a scholar-official was long and arduous: first, studying the principles of nature and society in order to cultivate Neo-Confucian knowledge and refinement, and then passing the civil-service examination to receive a government

post. Thus, many who achieved such positions chose to have a set of portraits: one in official attire and the other in non-bureaucratic dress. Kang, however, portrayed the binary self-identity of bureaucrat and outsider in a single image. His self-portrait can be seen as symbolically manifesting the fundamental aspects of Joseon Dynasty literati.

### Conclusion: The Significance and Distinction of Joseon Dynasty Literati

The establishment of Neo-Confucianism as the state ideology of the Joseon Dynasty led to the development of literati rites and culture, which in turn led to the development of literati portraiture. Within the Neo-Confucian system of beliefs and behavior, literati portraiture carried political, ritualistic, and philosophical meaning, and these various traits are reflected in the changing form and style of the images.

Portraits of meritorious subjects, which were particularly popular during the early-mid Joseon Dynasty, depict individuals in their official court robes, emphasizing their official rank and political authority. The subjects are depicted in courteous, civil postures, signifying their loyalty to the court and state. But as the Neo-Confucian political order and ritual culture became more pervasive by the mid-late Joseon, there was a rise in portraits of Confucian notables. Emphasizing the notions of self-cultivation and reflection, these austere portraits show literati in scholars' robes and hats, with dark and light contrasts. Finally, in late Joseon, commemorative portraits of bureaucrats proliferated. High-ranking officials are depicted in grand, ornate court dress to emphasize their political accomplishments. Conversely, ordinary literati are shown in simple, undecorated attire, portraying their humanity and virtue. In contrast with the style of court painters, painters from the literati created aestheticized self-portraits that envisaged the subtle and manifold facets of the inner self.

By examining the overall circumstances and reality of the Joseon era, we can accurately grasp the significance and meaning of literati portraiture within their historical context. Additionally, since the particularities of Neo-Confucian rites and culture were fundamentally internalized, many facets of portraiture were extrinsically concise, conventional,

and strictly formalized. Furthermore, the portraits intrinsically reveal the aesthetics of simplicity and refinement. ㄸ

TRANSLATED BY ELEANOR S. HYUN

#### Selected Bibliography

- Cho, Insoo ( ). 2007. "Chosanghwareul boneun tto hanau sigak" ( , New Perspective on Portraiture). *Misulshakbo* (美術史學報, *Journal of Art History*) 29: 115-136.
- Cho, Sunmie ( ). 1983. *Hanguk chosanghwa yeongu* (韓國肖像畫研究, *Study of Korean Portraiture*). Seoul: Yealhwadang.
- . 2005. "Joseon Dynasty Portrait of Meritorious Subjects: Styles and Social Function." *Korea Journal* 45-2: 151-181.
- . 2007. *Chosanghwa yeongu* (肖像畫研究, *Study of Portraiture*). Seoul: Moonye Publishing Co., Ltd.
- . 2009. *Hanguk ui chosanghwa, hyeong gwa yeong ui yesul* (韓國肖像畫, 形影藝術, *Korean Portraits: the Art of Forms and Spirits*). Paju: Dolbegae.
- Cultural Heritage Administration Korea. 2007. *Hanguk ui chosanghwa: Yeoksa sog ui inmul gwa jouhada* (韓國肖像畫: 歷史人物遭遇, *Korean Portraits: Encountering with People in History*). Seoul: Nulwa.
- Kang, Kwansik ( ). 2001. "Joseon sidae chosanghwa ui dosang gwa simsang" (韓國肖像畫의 圖像 心像, iconography and imagery of Joseon portraits). *Misulshak* (美術史學, *Art History*). 15: 7-55.
- . 2005a. "Self-Cultivation in the Portraits of Joseon Literati Scholars." *Korea Journal* 45-2: 182-215.
- . 2005b. "Teol gwa nun: joseon sidae chosanghwa ui jeuijeok myeongje wa johyeongjeok gwaje" (韓國肖像畫의 祭儀的 命題 造形的 課題, Hairs and eyes: ritualistic thesis and artistic issues of Joseon portraits). *Misulshak yeongu* (美術史學研究, *Study of Art History*) 248: 95-129.
- . 2009. "Portraits of Joseon Dynasty." *National Museum of Korea* 9: 4-11.
- Lee, Taeho ( ). 2005. "Portrait Paintings in the Joseon Dynasty: With a Focus on Their Style of Expression and Pursuit of Realism." *Korea Journal* 45-2: 107-150.
- National Museum of Korea. 2007. *Joseon sidae chosanghwa I* ( Joseon Portraits I). Seoul: National Museum of Korea.
- . 2008. *Joseon sidae chosanghwa II* ( Joseon Portraits II). Seoul: National Museum of Korea.
- . 2009. *Joseon sidae chosanghwa III* ( Joseon Portraits III). Seoul: National Museum of Korea.
- Taejong Sillok, Joseon wangjo sillok* (朝鮮王朝實錄, *Digitalized Annals of the Joseon Dynasty*), edited by Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe. <http://sillok.history.go.kr/main/main.jsp>
- Yi, Gangchil ( ) et al. 2003. *Yeoksa inmul chosanghwa daesajeon* ( , *Encyclopedia of Portraits of Historic Figures*). Seoul: Hyeonamsa.