

Gender Equality and the Practice of Virtue in the *Samguk sagi* (*History of the Three Kingdoms*) in Comparison with the *Lienü zhuan* (*Biographies of Virtuous Women*)*

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The earliest extant record of Korean women in Korean historiography traces back to the *Samguk sagi* (*History of the Three Kingdoms* 三國史記, 1145).¹ Sporadically included in sections of chronicles and biographies in this official history, Korean women indirectly testified to their existence through their roles and virtues in relation to maximizing the profits of men, family, and society at large. The relatively low social position of women in traditional Korea has prompted scholars to eschew the historical significance of Korean women, thereby adding yet another example of male-centered historical writing prevalently found throughout the world. Women's history is a necessary and rich subject that, when questioned and probed, nourishes and completes our understanding of Korean history by providing a more comprehensive history of Korean people as a whole.

Academic discussion of women in Korean history seems to reflect their overall underrepresentation in historical texts. Given the *Samguk*

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¹ Kim Pusik (1075-1151) was the supervisor and representative of a team of scholars who compiled the *Samguk sagi*. For the sake of convenience, however, I refer to him as the author or compiler of the historiography. For this article, I used the original text of the *Samguk sagi* (Oksansŏwŏn edition) provided by the Korean history database (db.history.go.kr), and mainly consulted Yi Kangnae's translation (Seoul: Han'gilsa, 1998).

sagi's significance to Korean history and culture, it is surprising that the existence of women in this historiography was left unexplored for so long.² Luckily, scholars such as Yi Hyesun, Jung Jaeseo, and Yi Hyöngu have begun to show their ardent interest in the representation of women in historiographies, including the *Samguk sagi*, in recent decades.³ Yet the critical discussion of the diverse aspects related to the women in the *Samguk sagi* remains far from sufficient, especially in comparison to the growing body of scholarship on women of Chosön Korea (1392-1910).⁴

Discussion of the women in the *Samguk sagi* is critical to understanding the role of gender in Korean culture and to restoring the history of Korean women. Though the lack of historical sources hinders us from perfectly sketching women's status and roles, a close examination of women in the text will at least promote our understanding of the changing perceptions and expectations of women and their roles in family and society. For example, the discussion of women in the *Samguk sagi* helps us to reconsider the dominant view that Korean women enjoyed relatively more freedom during the Three Kingdoms period (first century B.C.E-668 C.E.) and the Koryö era (918-1392), a period dominated by Buddhism and

² Although Korean scholarship began to show some interest in the topic of women in traditional historiography in the 1970s, as expressed in "Forward" in Ihwa yöja taehakkyo Han'guk yösöngsa p'yönch'an wiwönhoe's *Women in Korean History* (Seoul: Ewha Woman's University Press, 1977), little attention was paid to the women in the *Samguk sagi* until the late 1990s when scholars started producing a significant number of works concerning the development of female biography, representations of female heroism or virtuous women (*yölyö*) in literature and history, and the ways in which changing notions of so-called womanly virtues reflected the social position of Korean women throughout history.

³ See, for example, Yi Hyesun, "Kim Pusik üi yösönggwan kwa Yugyojuüi: *Samguk sagi* yösöng yölchön üi punsöckchök koch'al," *Kochön munhak yön'gu* 11 (1996): 3-28; Jung Jaeseo, "Tong'asia munhwa tamnon kwa söng: hyonyö sösa rül chungsim üro," *Chungguk ömun nonch'ong* 23 (2002): 281-306; Yi Hyöng'u, "*Samguk sagi* yölchön üi t'onghae pon Silla üi yösöng," *Silla munhwaje haksul nonmunjip* 25, no. 2 (2004): 97-127.

⁴ In the English-language scholarship, Jahyun Kim Haboush, Martina Deuchler, Youngmin Kim, and Michael Pettid have contributed to thinking about the broad subject matter of women in Korea, especially in the field of history and religious traditions such as Confucianism and Shamanism.

Shamanism rather than Confucianism, the dominant ideology during the following Chosŏn period.⁵ This view supposes that Korean women's status became restricted in proportion to the increasing influence of neo-Confucianism, which began in the 13th and 14th centuries and permeated every corner of society during the late Chosŏn period (17th-19th centuries). Though this view is complicated and further nuanced by recent studies,⁶ the dominant role played by neo-Confucianism in controlling and oppressing women during the Chosŏn dynasty cannot be denied.⁷ The view has drawn attention to the instrumentality of Confucian scholars of the Koryŏ period in promoting the rise of the neo-Confucian elites of the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910), who featured a pro-Chinese or China-centered worldview and a stricter prescription of the practice of moral cultivation and Confucian virtues such as loyalty, filial piety, and chastity.

Due to its putative Confucian perspective, the *Samguk sagi* has often been considered contributory to the construction of Confucian

⁵ See, for example, Sarah Nelson, "Gender Hierarchy and the Queens of Silla," in *Sex and Gender Hierarchies*, ed. Barbara Diane Miller (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 297-315; Martina Deuchler, "The Pre-Confucian Past: A Reconstruction of Koryŏ Society," in *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992), 29-87.

⁶ In recent years, a number of studies have reconsidered the view that the Confucian attitude toward women in Chosŏn society was degrading and oppressive and that women remained pitiful victims. For example, in *Women and Confucianism in Chosŏn Korea: New Perspectives* (Albany: State University of New York, 2011), Youngmin Kim and Michael Pettid reject a monolithic view that women were suppressed in Chosŏn society and instead provide a pluralistic and more nuanced understanding of Chosŏn society by bringing to light some cases in which women contributed to Korean history as active agents.

⁷ This view of neo-Confucianism as the enemy of women in history is widely accepted not only by feminist scholars but in the scholarship on East Asian women in general. Yet, a more pluralistic approach to and comprehensive understanding of Confucianism would enhance the study of a woman's reality and the influence of other cultural and religious influences imposed on her. In so doing, the seemingly uncomfortable relationship between Confucianism and feminism in the contemporary era will find a path to come to terms with each other, as presented by Chenyang Li in his "Introduction: Can Confucianism Come to Term with Feminism?," in *The Sage and the Second Sex: Confucianism, Ethics, and Gender*, ed. Chenyang Li (Chicago: Open Court, 2000), 1-21.

society in Korea. In the nationalistic sociopolitical milieu of twentieth-century Korea, the *Samguk sagi* was criticized for its negative impact.⁸ To the eyes of modern Koreans, the Confucian scholars of Chosŏn society were guilty of sinocentrism, female-oppression, and class and gender discrimination. Frequent comparison of the *Samguk sagi* and the *Samguk yusa* (*Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms*, 1281) among the Korean populace placed blame on the side of the *Samguk sagi*. While the *Samguk yusa*, written by Buddhist monk Iryŏn (1206-1289), gained more favor from modern Koreans due to its focus on indigenous, local sources of Korean antiquity, Kim Pusik, the chief compiler of the *Samguk sagi*, suffered from the fallacy of anachronism on the part of later audiences.⁹ Conflated by readers with the much-criticized neo-Confucian scholars of the Chosŏn dynasty, Kim was retroactively viewed as the first major Confucian scholar to subjugate Koreans in order to project or fulfill his Confucian ideology.

Throughout Korean history, women and their lives have been considered an important channel for embodying and communicating Confucian ideology. Therefore, by examining the representations of women in the *Samguk sagi* we can explore the ways in which Confucianism developed in Korea. Kim's close identification with Confucianism has made it impossible for him to escape the criticism of class hierarchy and gender discrimination on the part of readers and scholars in the later time.¹⁰ Kim is frequently decried as a stereotype of the

⁸ See, for example, Seo, Eui-sik, "Samguk sagi ūi sasil insik kwa yŏksa yŏn'guja ūi chase," *Yŏksa kyoyuk* 92 (2004): 225-248.

⁹ In fact, the stories in the *Samguk yusa* also embody Confucian virtues, particularly filial piety. This demonstrates the interdependence of Buddhist and Confucian virtues in the context of the promulgation and popularization of Buddhist teaching in Korean society; see Kim Yŏngha, "Samguk sagi hyosŏn pyŏn ūi ihae," *Silla munhwaje haksul palp'yo nonmunjip* (2009): 239-264.

¹⁰ It is not an overstatement to say that the *Samguk sagi* has elicited the most controversy of all the official historiographies of Korea. As the first official history, it has been respected by later Koreans as a model, but at the same time, it has been continuously blamed by many scholars for its focus on the Silla among three Kingdoms, its fallacies and inaccuracies in the usage of materials, and finally, its China-centered and Confucian

patriarchal Korean man who believes in the inferiority of women even to this day. How this public image of Kim has been constituted is not the main concern here; however, it can be attributed to the general perception of Kim Pusik as a mere promulgator of Confucianism, indistinguishable from the neo-Confucians of the Chosŏn period. The discussion of the women in the *Samguk sagi* has been dominated by this view quite exclusively. Recently, however, scholars have called for a reconsideration of such charges. Yi Hyesun, for example, demonstrates that the portrayals of women in the *Samguk sagi*, though they played a key role in presenting a Confucian world as envisioned by Kim Pusik, do not show an overt intention to subjugate Korean women in order to propagate Confucian thought.¹¹ Yi's view suggests that the Confucian view embedded by Kim Pusik in the *Samguk sagi* is different from that of Confucian scholars from later periods.

In light of the standard discourse on the *Samguk sagi* and Kim Pusik, and inspired by Yi Hyesun's discussion of the Confucianism represented in the *Samguk sagi*, this article examines the ways in which women were portrayed in the *Samguk sagi* to further investigate how and to what extent Confucian thought shaped the construction of the female characters in the text. I will also analyze what this text tells us about Kim Pusik, other historians' perception of Korean women and their lives, and what overall message the text conveys regarding the practice of female virtues represented in the book. For this purpose, my discussion will focus on the authorial role and gendered perspective of Kim Pusik, the characteristics of the biographies, and the female virtues represented in

perspective. In particular, such criticism has led to a simple notion among the public that the *Samguk sagi* is a Confucian and anti-national history, while the *Samguk yusa*, written by Iryŏn, is considered a Buddhist and nationalist one. For brief and general information on this controversy in English, see Edward J. Shultz, "An Introduction to the *Samguk Sagi*," *Korean Studies* 28 (2004): 1-13.

¹¹ See Yi Hyesun, "Kim Pusik ūi yŏsŏnggwān"; for a slightly modified English version of this article, see "Representation of Females in Twelfth-Century Historiography," in *Women and Confucian Culture in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan*, eds. Dorothy Ko, Jahyun Kim Haboush, and Joan R. Piggot (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 75-96.

those biographies. To further explore how the broader Confucianization of Korean society can be seen in the *Samguk sagi*, I will also compare the major examples of the *Samguk sagi* to those found in the most representative model of Chinese female biographies, the *Lienü zhuan* (*Biographies of Virtuous Women* 烈女傳) compiled by Han Dynasty scholar Liu Xiang (c.79-8 B.C.E.).¹² The *Lienü zhuan* is one of the most viable texts for comparison because it exposes the strong influence of Confucianism, addresses and establishes models of women's proper roles and virtues (e.g. fidelity and filial piety),¹³ and, most importantly, was known to Koryŏ scholars such as Kim Pusik.

Based on comparative analysis, I suggest that the portrayals of women in the *Samguk sagi*, unlike in the *Lienü zhuan*, do not stereotype or manipulate the female characters with the objective of constructing archetypes of specific Confucian female virtues. While the *Samguk sagi* does represent women in terms of their adherence to Confucian values and proper relationships, such as the five relationships between human beings (*samgang oryun* 三綱五倫), it does not go so far as to appropriate and objectify women to fulfill specific virtues, a tendency seen in the *Lienü zhuan*. The interpretation of women's roles and lives in the *Samguk sagi* seems to remain within the general scope of the essential principles of

¹² There has been much debate on Liu Xiang's authorship of the *Lienü zhuan*; see Lisa Raphals, *Sharing the Light: Representations of Women and Virtue in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 109-112.

¹³ Both Dorothy Ko and Jung Jaeseo mention that the didactic texts to instruct women to meet the Confucian demands started with Liu Xiang's *Lienü zhuan*. Ko says that due to the inferior position of women under Confucianism, they were forced to focus more on their moral education rather than a cultural one. Jung highlights the social and political milieu during the Han dynasty, in which the patriarchal and hierarchical perspective in Confucianism was favored by the ruling class to build strong government and rule, which led to the emergence of such moral primers as *Lienü zhuan*. See Jung, "Dong'a si munhwa tamnon kwa söng: hyonyŏ sösa rül chungsim ũro," 283-286; Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 53-54. For a comprehensive overview of the historical context of *Lienü zhuan*, see Kinney, Anne Behnke, trans. and ed. "Introduction," in *Exemplary Women of Early China: The Lienü zhuan of Liu Xiang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), xv-xxxi.

Confucianism, which acknowledges the importance of women's roles in family and society, regardless of class. Such a treatment of women in the *Samguk sagi* represents a shift from the simply invisible, less important, and often neglected status of women in Korean history toward a critical and instrumental role for women as historical agents.

Kim Pusik, Women, and the “Biographies” in the *Samguk sagi*

Kim Pusik and the Biographies (Yŏlchŏn)

The most important reason for the compilation of the *Samguk sagi* is said to have been the desire to convey lessons that would be profitable to the contemporary politics of the time.¹⁴ The *Samguk sagi* is for the most part divided into four sections: the annals of Silla, Koguryŏ, and Paekche; the chronologies; the monographs (also known as treatises) on such subjects as sacrifice, music, dress, and geography; and finally the biographies of distinguished persons. According to Yi Kangnae, the *Samguk sagi* is largely constructed along two different narrative schemes. One is the strictly historical approach found in the annals, which relies on earlier Korean and Chinese written sources to secure objectivity and accuracy. The other is the more literary approach taken in the biographies, which makes use of myths, legends, or other orally transmitted sources to fill the gaps between historical facts.¹⁵

Such a use of non-historical sources in history is not, in fact, unusual, but rather conventional. In early Chinese historiographies such as the *Shiji* 史記 (*Records of the Grand Historian*), written by Sima Qian (c. 145-c. 90 B.C.E.), we often find ample use of myths, legendary tales, and religious accounts. Although they may appear unreliable and strange to the

¹⁴ See Shultz, “An Introduction to the *Samguk sagi*,” 7. Other reasons include reforming literary styles, such as restoring the *guwen* (ancient prose) literature of the Tang dynasty, and supplementing the historical records of Korea. See Yi Kangnae, “*Samguk sagi* ūi sŏnggyŏk,” *Chŏngsin munhwa yŏn'gu* 24 no.1 (2001): 33.

¹⁵ These two different narrative schemes are used due to the monographic style of the *Samguk sagi* and the lack of the sources in the biography. See Yi Kangnae, “*Samguk sagi* yŏlchŏn ūi charyŏ kyet'ong,” *Han'guk kodaesa yŏn'gu* 42 (2006): 138-46.

later historians of Confucian rationalism, such materials were widely used and tolerated in historiographies to justify the sacred origin of the rulers or embellish the moral values of heroic figures. This narrative tradition places historians in the additional roles of fiction writer, narrator, or critic. Sima Qian exhibited his great talent for arranging and telling stories to support his historical accounts and to convey moral lessons. He at times performed the role of a comedian as a way of masking his sharp criticism of the ruling class.¹⁶ Thus, it is not a coincidence that his historiography, especially the biography, has become appreciated as a great literary work.

In the Koryŏ period, this early Chinese tradition of historical narrative was very influential, and Kim Pusik modeled his own compilation on the *Shiji*.¹⁷ Apart from the commentaries in which he addressed his opinions in a direct manner, Kim could also have given himself room to deploy his own insights and imagination in the process of editing the historical records. In this sense, regardless of Kim's conscious awareness of his role as a writer more than as a historian, he ended up performing this role in compiling the historiography. In so doing, he turned it into a collection of short stories, i.e. historical "literature." For this reason, just as the biography of the *Shiji* has been regarded as an early form of Chinese prose literature (a "seed of fiction"),¹⁸ so the biographies of the *Samguk sagi* have been in the field of Korean classical prose literature.¹⁹ Im Hyŏngt'aek goes so far as to claim Kim Pusik's biography

¹⁶ André Lévy, *Chinese Literature, Ancient and Classical*, trans. William H. Nienhauser (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 34-35.

¹⁷ As seen in Kim's adoption of Sima Qian's monographic style, the Chinese dynastic history format, and the title "*shiji*" (*sagi* in Korean).

¹⁸ Joseph Roe Allen, "An Introductory Study of Narrative Structure in the *Shiji*," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 3, no. 1 (1981): 31.

¹⁹ Sŏng Wŏngyŏng mentions that Kim Pusik, in his biographies, fully developed the form of *sŏrhwa munhak* (literature of tales and anecdotes). In this aspect, he suggests that Kim should be appreciated more as a writer than as a historian; see Sŏng, "Kungmunhaksang ũro pon Kim Pusik yŏn'gu," *Kyŏre ōmunhak* 3 (1964): 87.

of Ondal as the representative literary work of early Korean literature.²⁰ Viewed from the historical narrative tradition, Kim's inclusion of unverifiable sources and his multiple roles as writer, storyteller, and critic were not incompatible with his role as a historian.

Kim's role as a writer does not necessarily mean that his presentation of the historical records was arbitrary or intentionally distorted. Though the influence of Kim's personal and political background may have affected his interpretation and arrangement of the facts, it would be reasonable to assume that Kim respected all the records and that his primary role as a historian to provide an accurate, objective truth would have taken precedence over, instead of being compromised by, his other roles.²¹ This is also true of the *Samguk yusa* in which myths, legends, and other supernatural accounts are registered to constitute a version of history.²²

It is quite obvious that Kim compiled the *Samguk sagi* to serve the current political and societal needs outlined in ancient Confucian thought. Such a view is entrenched in the inserted stories and commentaries as well as in the manner in which Kim organized the biographies section (*yŏlchŏn*). In the biography of Chang Pogo,²³ for example, Kim did not include the negative phase of Chang's life (as Chang was accused of being a traitor and executed) but focused on Chang's trustworthiness as shown in

²⁰ Im Hyŏngt'aek, "Samguk sagi yŏlchŏn ūi munhaksŏng yŏn'gu: Kim Yu-sin chŏn ūi chungsim ūro," *Han'guk hanmunhak yŏn'gu* 12 (1989): 24-28.

²¹ Ō Kangsŏk, in his discussion of the biographies in the *Samguk sagi*, demonstrates that Kim hardly modified earlier records. See his "Samguk sagi yŏlchŏn ūi sŏsul kwa Kim Pusik munchang ūi chaejomyŏng," *Chŏngsin munhwa yŏn'gu* 36, no.1 (2012): 255-277.

²² Due to the considerable amount of uncanny and supernatural elements, there have been some doubts about the reliability of the records the *Samguk yusa*. Richard D. McBride II, however, emphasizes the reliability of the accounts of the *Samguk yusa* by redefining the concept of reliability in historical texts and pointing out the sincere and careful attitude of the compiler Iryŏn as a historian in his treatments of tales and anecdotes. See his "Is the Samgukyusa Reliable? Case Studies from Chinese and Korean Sources," *The Journal of Korean Studies* 11, no.1 (2006): 163-189.

²³ *Yŏlchŏn* 3.

his relationship with his friend and rival, Chǒngnyǒn.²⁴ This treatment of Chang's life gives a hint that Kim's treatment of women might be subject to similar choices on Kim's part.

Placing Women in History: Class vs. Gender

The women described in the *Samguk sagi* come from different classes and backgrounds. If defined based on their roles, they are filial daughters such as Chiün and Sölssinyǒ (a woman from the Söl family); wives such as those of Tomi, Ondal (Princess P'yǒnggang), Sök Uro, P'ipsil, Sona, Mulgyeja, and Pak Chesang; mothers such as those of Chiün, Ondal, and Wönsullang; and Queens of Silla, such as Söndök (r. 632-647), Chindök (r. 647-654), and Chinsöng (r. 887-897). Except for the queens who are also included in the chronological annals of the Silla Kingdom, these women appear only in the biographies. The relatively large number of wives may serve to show that Kim Pusik prioritized the horizontal relationship between husband and wife over vertical relationships, such as those between king and subject, or the old and the young, as the most important wheel in life.

The entry of women into the historiography seen in the *Samguk sagi* is a modest one, reflecting the vestiges of female invisibility and silence in history.²⁵ Among the women mentioned in the *Samguk sagi*, only two, Chiün and Sölssinyǒ, have separate biographical sections named after them. The reason for this is not that they are special but only that they have no men to represent or speak for them. This male-centered practice of naming is common in the Chinese narrative tradition, in which women are evaluated and presented only in relation to the men to which they belong. Most women in the *Samguk sagi* are named as mother, wife,

²⁴ Ö Kangsök, "Samguk sagi yǒlchǒn," 263 and 268-269; also see his "Samguk sagi yǒlchǒn e poinün Chang Pogo sang," *Silla munhwaje haksul nonmunjip* 25 (2004): 239-264.

²⁵ This is a remarkably small number compared to that of the *Lienü zhuan*, which includes 104 women's stories (125 if one counts the women included in the sequel). This small number is partially due to the small portion of the *Samguk sagi* that was devoted to biography (ten volumes out of fifty).

or daughter, in combination with the titles of their husbands, sons, or fathers, as is also the case in the *Lienü zhuan*.²⁶ As Rubie Watson has pointed out, this naming echoes women's marginalized status in the narrative tradition just as it illustrates women's lack of full personhood in their lives.²⁷ This adoption of the Chinese narrative convention predetermines the nature of the *Samguk sagi*'s literary representation of women to some extent.

The titles used in the *Samguk sagi*, however, complicate the question of to what extent Kim followed the earlier Chinese tradition. The *Samguk sagi* does not, for example, employ gender-coded categorization, but rather places the biographies of women in the same categories as those of men. In other words, it does not relegate all women to a separate category of "exemplary women," as is common in the *Lienü zhuan* and later Chinese standard histories.²⁸ This lack of categorical separation for female figures seems to indicate that the *Samguk sagi* placed greater emphasis on class rather than gender distinctions. It does not differentiate, for example, the Silla queens from the kings in the records of their accomplishments. The titles of the queens are used in the same way as those of kings; there is no sense of obligation to add words such as "great"

²⁶ See Liu Xiang, the *Lienü zhuan*: 2. *Xianming* (Sage intelligence): 10. Liuxia Hui qi (the wife of Liuxia Hui); 3. *Renzhi* (Benevolent women): 1. Mikang Gongmu (the mother of Duke Kang of Mi); 6. *Biantong* (Skill in Argument): 4. Qi Shuanghuai nü (the daughter of Shanghuai of Qi). All translations of the terms and titles of the *Lienü zhuan* are from Raphals, *Sharing the light*.

²⁷ Rubie Watson, "The Named and the Nameless: Gender and Person in Chinese Society," *American Ethnologist* 13, no. 4 (1986): 619.

²⁸ For example, see the *Xin Tangshu* (*A New History of the Tang Dynasty*), compiled by Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072), and the *Zizhi Tongjian* (*Comprehensive Mirror Providing Material for Government*), written by Sima Guang (1019-1086). Kim Pusik must have been familiar with the narrative model of female biographies included in these two Chinese standard histories. These historiographies actually served as useful sources and references for Kim's compilation, and Kim's personal liaison with Sima Guang has been a popular topic in the study of the *Samguk sagi*. For more information, see Hwang Hyŏngju, "*Samguk sagi yŏlchŏn ch'ansul kwajŏng ũi yŏn'gu*" (PhD diss., Sungkyunkwan University, 2002); also see Yi Kangnae, "Kim Pusik ũn wae *Samguk sagi rŭl p'yŏnch'an haenna*," *Naeil ũl yŏnŭn yŏksa* 16 (2004): 138-140.

or “woman” to their titles in order to differentiate female leaders.²⁹

However, such a seemingly equal treatment is more often than not interpreted as a reflection of Kim’s Confucian prejudice against women or his neglect of women, in conjunction with his following comments on Queen Söndök:

Speaking from a perspective of the principle of heaven and earth, “yang” is strong and “üm” is weak. Speaking from a perspective of human beings, men are high and women are low. Then, how could they let the old woman come out of her inner quarter and be in charge of political affairs? The fact that Silla took a woman to the throne really can be found in times of chaos. It is fortune, therefore, that Silla was not ruined for this.³⁰

The *yin-yang*-based concept of the dominance of male over female in this passage shows that Kim’s notions of gender are the same as those found in the Confucian classic *Liji (Book of Rites)*.³¹ In the *Liji*, women are described as being inferior to men in both their talents and power. Being confined to inner quarters, they are not supposed to participate in public affairs, which are perceived as men’s work. Based on this principle, Kim Pusik expresses his disapproving attitude toward the practice of permitting women to accede to the throne in the Silla kingdom.³²

Kim’s attitude can, however, be justified in the historical context of Koryö society. According to Sarah Nelson, the *Samguk sagi* “would have preferred to suppress the fact of women rulers in earlier times,” for Koryö society had already become more hierarchically gender-based than Silla

²⁹ Such a case is found in the *Samguk yusa*. For example, Söndök Wang 善德王 is recorded as Söndök Yöwang 善德女王; Chinsöng Wang 眞聖王 is recorded as Chinsöng Yödaewang 眞聖女大王.

³⁰ *Silla P’ongi* 5, “Söndök wang.”

³¹ For further information and a translation of the relevant sections of this text, see Serinity Young, ed., *An Anthology of Sacred Texts By and About Women* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 349-50.

³² Yi Hyöng’u, “*Samguk sagi* yölichön,” 102.

had been.³³ Thus, Kim's attitude is not only a reflection of his own Confucian philosophy but also an example of his need to balance historical fact and the socio-political ideals and expectations of his own time. Nevertheless, Kim's divergence from the traditional Chinese gender-based categorization of biographies reveals a certain independence from Chinese tradition while reflecting his adherence to the Confucian notion of a "woman's place."

The Samguk sagi and the Lienü zhuan

While no female biographies had been reported in Korea prior to the *Samguk sagi*, it is frequently assumed that the Chinese narrative tradition of female biographies, in particular the *Lienü zhuan*, greatly influenced Kim Pusik's biographies of Korean women. We do not know exactly when the *Lienü zhuan* was introduced into Korea, but some scholars suppose that the Jiayou edition of the text (1063) must have arrived Korea no later than the end of the 11th century.³⁴ The claim is based on the *Koryōsa* (*The History of Koryō*) which recorded that the Song dynasty emperor Zhezong gave Koryō envoys a list of Chinese books to take back from Korea in 1091 during the King Sōnjong's era.³⁵ Thus, it is quite possible that Liu Xiang's *Lienü zhuan*, along with his other works, was in circulation in Korea during Kim Pusik's lifetime. Even if it was not, the stories and characters of the book were drawn from earlier historical narratives as well as from Liu's other texts. It is not unreasonable to think, then, that the Koryō elite, including Kim Pusik, was

³³ Sarah Nelson, "Gender Hierarchy and the Queens of Silla," 311.

³⁴ For example, U K'waeje, quoting Chōng Chudong's earlier remarks on this, has insisted on this early introduction in his several articles on Korean women and the reception of *Lienü zhuan*. See U K'waeje, "Tong'asia yöllyō ideollogi sirhyōn yangsang koch'al," *Tong'asia kodaehak* 14 (2006): 681.

³⁵ Included in this list were most of Liu Xiang's works, such as the *Xinxu* 新序, the *Shuoyuan* 說苑, and the *Bielu* 別錄. See "Sōnjong palnyōn," in *Koryōsa sega* 10 (Seoul: Yōndae Tongbanghak yōn'guso, 1981), 212; also see the online database: [http://db.history.go.kr/KOREA/item/level.do?itemId=kr&bookId=%E4%B8%96%E5%AE%B6#articleList/kr_010_0100_0060](http://db.history.go.kr/KOREA/item/level.do?itemId=kr&bookId=%E4%B8%96%E5%A E%B6#articleList/kr_010_0100_0060)

familiar with the form and the content of the *Lienü zhuan* and other educational texts for women such as the *Nü jie* (*The Admonitions for Women*) by Ban Zhao (45-116).³⁶ We may assume, therefore, that this earlier Chinese tradition of female biography writing must have directly or indirectly affected Kim's perception of women and their virtues. Kim's multiple travels to Northern Song China and his relationships with Song intellectuals further support this notion of Kim's familiarity with this tradition and the discourse on female virtues and exemplary women which had become quite popular under the growing emphasis on Confucian ethical education in the Northern Song.³⁷

The *Lienü zhuan* is divided into different chapters which present six types of specific female virtues: maternal rectitude, sage intelligence, benevolent wisdom, purity and obedience, chastity and righteousness, and skill in argument. Each biography illustrates one of these particular virtues and shows that a woman's desire to fulfill the requirements of virtue unequivocally results in a high level of sacrifice, including self-mutilation or suicide. There is no room left for women to negotiate in this. Interestingly, despite the strong possibility of Kim having been influenced by the *Lienü zhuan* and other moral primers targeted at women, there is barely a trace of this influence in the narrative structure of the representations of women in the *Samguk sagi*. Although Kim Pusik

³⁶ Different editions of the book continued to be imported into Korea. In Chosŏn Korea, the Ming edition of the book was introduced during the 4th year of the first King T'aejong (the second year of the Ming Yongle's reign in 1404). The text was subsequently circulated among the lower classes with its native Korean translation to train Korean women. It was the first native translation of the Chinese book. According to Kim T'aejun, it contributed to the development of native Korean literature in late Chosŏn. See his "Chŭngbo Chosŏn sosŏlsa," in *Kim T'aejun munhaksaron sŏnjip* (Seoul: Hyŏndae Sirhaksa, 1997), 53-54.

³⁷ According to Jian Zang, in the Northern Song, Confucian ethical culture was promulgated throughout society as the means by which social relations could be maintained and regulated. This Confucian ethical culture essentially put priority on the establishment and improvement of human character and thus placed its special emphasis on moral education. See Jian Zang, "Women and the Transmission of Confucian Culture in Song China," in *Women and Confucian Culture in Premodern China, Korea, and Japan*, 123-124.

described exemplary virtues, such as trust and filial piety, he neither emphasized any one particular feminine virtue nor created a separate section on women. While Liu had included an example of a “bad” woman (vicious and depraved) for his purpose of moral exhortation in his text, Kim did not present any such negative model. This absence of the stereotyped gender-specific virtue or evil in the *Samguk sagi* may suggest that Kim regarded the virtues of men and women as fundamentally the same based on proper basic human relations and values such as trust, righteousness, and respect.³⁸ Kim tended to present these virtues as harmoniously working together through reasonable interaction and negotiation.³⁹ This is why Kim’s biographies of women do not recount extreme actions like suicide or contain harsh criticism on figures like Sök’s wife who took an excessive measure to help her husband.⁴⁰

Another interesting difference that appears in the biographies in the *Samguk sagi* as opposed to the *Lienü zhuan* is that the former hardly makes any attempt to control the meaning of the stories using the kind of devices that the latter employed. For example, in the *Lienü zhuan*, Liu used two devices in order to render his authoritative voice: a commentary section prefaced by the phrase “the gentlemen says (*junzi yue*)” and a rhymed summary (*song*) at the end of each story.⁴¹ In contrast, only very occasionally does Kim intervene in his biographies with the commentator voice: Kim’s commentaries appear only eight times in his entire biographies, and, in the case of women’s biographies, only once

³⁸ Yi Hyöng’u, “*Samguk sagi yölchön*.”

³⁹ Yi Hyesun states that Kim Pusik’s attitude follows the Confucian emphasis on avoiding extremes; see her “Kim Pusik üi yösönggwan,” 14-22.

⁴⁰ See *Yölchön* 5. In the biography of Sök Uro, Sök’s wife avenges her husband’s death who has been killed by Japanese soldiers. Kim Pusik comments that her act is not a proper way (*chöngdo*) but an expedient way (*byöndo*).

⁴¹ Jung Jaeseo argues that these two devices played a significant role in reinforcing a Confucian male-centered interpretation of womanly virtues in the *Lienü zhuan*. See his “Dong’asia munhwa tamnon kwa söng,” 289.

concerning the story of Sök's wife.⁴² The lack of explicit commentaries by the author leaves room for multiple interpretations of the stories and, for this reason, Kim's voice remains largely obscured in the text leaving the meaning of each story indeterminate.

A partial explanation of the differences between Kim and Liu can be found by looking at each author's intention in their respective political contexts. In Liu's times, the emperor's mother and her kin were exerting considerable power, and one of the primary purposes for compiling the *Lienü zhuan* was to warn and educate the emperor about the dangers of allowing women such power.⁴³ Like Liu, Kim had also experienced the problems caused by the political power of the maternal relatives of the royal families, which probably also caused him to become concerned with the proper position of women.⁴⁴ If both Kim and Liu had the political impetus and practical need to educate women through their writings, why did their responses appear so different in their texts? In part, Kim adhered to the Chinese narrative tradition as seen from his adoption of the Chinese historiography style. But he diverged from the Chinese tradition when it came to his own treatment of the topic of female virtues. One immediate explanation may be found in Kim's lack of source material or attention to women as historical agents. However, a more plausible explanation can be found in the context of Kim's adherence to and interpretation of the Confucian tenets as well as his gender-neutral attitude in dealing with social realities which will be elaborated further below.

Trust, Wisdom, and Filial Piety: Virtues of Early Korean Women

Most of the women who were described in the biographies tend to have two significant events and obligations during their lifetime: first, marriage, and then providing for their parents or parents-in-law. Their character and womanly virtues are revealed through their management of

⁴² *Yölchön* 5.

⁴³ Raphals, *Sharing the Light*, 6, 76- 86.

⁴⁴ Shultz, "An Introduction to the *Samguk Sagi*," 7.

various situations that arise in their relationships with their husbands and parents.⁴⁵ Conflicts between obligations, deriving from women's different roles and positions, frequently occur. But they are resolved by the female characters' wisdom and virtues such as trust and filial piety eventually. The detailed accounts of how these virtues were practiced, however, reveal that the *Samguk sagi* did not necessarily acknowledge women's power and ability in social and political affairs, as most of those virtues were acted out indirectly and mainly through their relationships.

Trust between Husband and Wife: Tomi's Wife

In the section of biography on Tomi in the *Samguk sagi*, the story focuses more on his wife than Tomi himself. She is widely known as a woman who preserved her chastity under the most serious threats and trials. The popularity of Tomi's wife among Koreans often overshadows the fact that the story actually begins by praising the righteous character of Tomi. The story of Tomi and his wife presents two honorable characters as a paragon of an ideal couple:

Tomi was a man of Paekche. Although he was a commoner with the obligation to engage in compulsory labor, he was well aware of the principles of righteousness. His wife was beautiful as well as faithful. For this reason, she was admired by the people of the time.⁴⁶

The above passage reveals that personal cultivation and reputation were considered more important than one's social or economic status. In this sense, Kim Pusik's view of class and virtue seems to resonate with Kang Su's remarks on the biography section of the *Samguk sagi*: poverty and low status are not to be ashamed of, but what is shameful is to have access to education but not accomplish anything after having received it.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ For example, although there are several biographies that depict a mother figure they do so only in passing. And, in most cases, the mothers that do appear in the stories were mentioned only to illustrate the filial piety of their children. Due to space limitations, specific examples of this aspect of female characters have been omitted.

⁴⁶ *Yölchön* 8.

Despite their low status, Tomi and his wife were remembered through their biography story mainly due to the trustworthiness in their relationship. In this biography, however, Tomi's faith in his wife and his wife's stunning beauty become the cause of the misfortune that is brought upon them. King Kaeru, intrigued and provoked by Tomi's trust for his wife, attempts to seduce her to test whether Tomi's trust is grounded. The king is confident that, in the end, all women are inclined to succumb to temptation, no matter how hard they try to resist it. Tomi, however, remains confident of his wife's fidelity. King Kaeru then has Tomi blinded and sent into exile after which Tomi's wife manages to escape. Coming to a river, she cries and prays to Heaven to send a boat so that she can cross. Heaven responds to her prayer, and Tomi and his wife are reunited and live together in exile.

In this story, Kim Pusik writes with admiration of the mutual trust between Tomi and his wife. Tomi's confidence in his wife's faithfulness is validated through her effort to maintain her chastity against the odds. Tomi's trust seems to play a pivotal role in making his wife virtuous, and her chastity becomes meaningful only when she is connected to a trusting man like Tomi. In this sense, Kim's representation of female virtue differs from that of Liu Xiang who describes women's chastity as an absolute value, irrespective of the character or disposition of the men to whom they belong. Mutual trust, regardless of the gender of the possessor, allows the man and woman to become equally moral and worthy of its eventual reward.

A gender-neutral approach to the virtue of chastity in Kim's *Samguk sagi* is revealed in the biography of Kang Su as well. In it, Kang resists abandoning his first love even when pressured to marry a woman with a more prestigious family background.⁴⁸ That Tomi and his wife suffer hardship precisely due to their mutual trust and that Kang does so due to his faithfulness reveal the cold and cruel aspect of reality. Nonetheless, the ultimate, miraculous reunion of the two in these stories

⁴⁷ *Yölchön* 6.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

symbolizes the value of pursuing a mutually faithful relationship. In the Confucian mindset, mutual trust in all human relationships would be the very basic foundation of an ideal society.

Also, the fact that Tomi's wife moves even Heaven with her sincere, tearful prayer points to the notion of a human, especially a woman's, spiritual connection with Heaven, an idea elaborated by a famous Han dynasty Confucian, Dong Zhongshu (179-104 B.C.E.). Such a belief in Heaven's response to human appeals often plays a key role in inspiring people to do good and seek justice, as shown in the biographical story of Chiün in the *Samguk sagi*.⁴⁹ In it, Chiün chooses to become a slave in order to feed her mother, but then ends up falling into despair when her mother discovers the truth and decides to kill herself.⁵⁰ In the end, Chiün's heart-wrenching crying over the situation brings unexpected fortune when the authorities quite miraculously come to acknowledge the daughter's filial piety and reward her. The belief in the existence as well as the key role of a Heaven that hears human appeals in Kim's stories demonstrates the Confucian notion of Heaven as the invisible principle which governs the human world.

The fact that Tomi and his wife were able to reunite presents a comparative aspect between the *Samguk sagi* and *Lienü zhuan*. In the *Lienü zhuan*, nine women in the chapters of *zheshun* and *jièyi* commit suicide in defense of their purity, chastity, and righteousness. A common way of recognizing these virtuous women was to hold great funerals for them, and most of them get praise or public recognition only after their

⁴⁹ The women's crying seen in the biographies also resonates with the custom of female lamentations in ancient Chinese and Korean society where women's religious power and shamanism earned more recognition and agency; see Anne McLauren and Chen Qinjian, "The Oral and Ritual Culture of Chinese Women: Bridal Lamentations of Nanhui," *Asian Folklore* 59, no.2 (2000): 205-238. Though Kim Pusik is often criticized for not including supernatural elements as much as he should due to his Confucian standard, the miraculous aspects that appear from time to time in the biographies actually show that the seemingly non-Confucian aspects to the modern eyes were actually well digested by the Confucian mind of Kim as well as the people of his time.

⁵⁰ *Yölchön* 8.

deaths.⁵¹ However, the *Samguk sagi*'s shift toward women's receipt of rewards in this life suggests that Kim's concern for people and society leans more toward the practical reward and the tangible reality of the present world.

Sölssinyō's Initiative in Catching Two Birds: Filial Piety and Chastity

Women's roles as daughters and wives could sometimes come into conflict. The biography of Sölssinyō, the longest female biography in the *Samguk sagi*, provides an example of a woman who fulfills both her filial piety to her parents and faithfulness to her husband in a conflicting situation. Sölssinyō's intelligence, wisdom, persistence, and perseverance are revealed through a series of events that center around the demands of two men. The biography makes a clear statement that such a character as Sölssinyō is not of high social and cultural status, nor does she need to be in order to be considered virtuous:

Sölssinyō was from a commoner family of Yulli. Despite the fact that she was from a poor, humble, and lonely family, she had a decent appearance, highly-cultivated will, and upright behavior. There was no one who did not admire her attractiveness after seeing her but no one dared to assault her.⁵²

Sölssinyō's lowly family background is presented as somewhat antithetical to her being both beautiful and upright. Her prowess and dignity, deriving from her cultured and upright character, seem to make her appear in such a way that none dares to commit any indecent act against her. It is also interesting to note that her beauty seems to have something to do with the ethical power that appears to control the behavior of others. While Kim's use of the word "despite" supposes that beauty and integrity are most

⁵¹ For more information on suicide in the *Lienü zhuan*, see Cho Sookja, "Gudai nüxing de siwang de yingzi," in *Dongya nüxing de qi yuan-cong nü xing zhu yi jiao du jie xi "Lienü zhuan,"* ed. Jung Jaeseo and trans. Cui Lihong (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2005), 210-242.

⁵² *Yölchön* 8.

commonly seen in those from the upper class, Sölssinyō's character serves as a direct challenge to this assumption.⁵³ It manifests not only Sölssinyō's outstanding disposition but also Kim's unbiased selection of exemplary virtuous women regardless of their social status.

Sölssinyō's beauty is the very force that compels action on the part of Kasil, a secret admirer of her. Their relationship starts when Sölssinyō's father is conscripted. She is very concerned about her father because he is old and sick, and Kasil offers to help her by enlisting in her father's place. He does this out of his love for her, and when her father learns of Kasil's action, he wants to marry his daughter off to Kasil immediately. Delighted, Kasil asks Sölssinyō to set a date for the wedding. When urged by both to marry Kasil without hesitation, Sölssinyō surprisingly refuses to do so. The following remarks indicate that she is unwilling to follow the will of her father or even that of the man to whom she is grateful when it is against her own will and judgment:

Marriage, being a matter of great concern in human affairs, should not be embarked upon impatiently. Since I have already promised myself to you wholeheartedly, I will not change my mind even if out of fear of death. I expect you to leave for the battle, complete your duty, and come back. After that, we will set an auspicious date and conduct our wedding, and it still will not be late.⁵⁴

Although Sölssinyō goes against her father's will, which is a clear act of disobedience, her reasoning is accepted both by her father and Kasil. By highlighting the significance of proper marriage preparation, Sölssinyō manages to mediate and turn the situation when men's judgment is clouded by their feelings or desire for immediate gratification. While the father's judgment is neither condemnable nor ideal, her decision to resist

⁵³ In the *Samguk sagi*, there is no ugly woman who becomes an emblem of morality and sagacity while the *Lienü zhuan* presents several stories of ugly but prescient women such as Zhongli Chun and the wife of King Xuan. These women become the wives of kings or high officials by providing their wisdom and clairvoyance to the rulers. See Raphals, *Sharing the Light*, 49-50.

⁵⁴ *Yölchön* 8.

his will in spite of his authority in the family suggests a subtle caution against blind obedience to the will of one's parents.⁵⁵ In the end, both her father and Kasil agree to postpone the wedding for three years until after Kasil has fulfilled his military duty.

As to the reasons why she rejected the immediate wedding proposal, one can imagine that Sölssinyō might have had some other concerns, such as the fear of losing Kasil in the war (and thus becoming a widow). However, when Kasil does not come back after the three years, it is her father who changes his mind and considers marrying his daughter off to another man. This time, again, she adamantly refuses to follow her father's will and eventually makes a plan to run away insisting that a woman cannot have two husbands. At this moment, it becomes clear what Sölssinyō really cares about: following the path of appropriate behavior and fulfilling the role of a proper woman. Such determination to uphold Confucian virtue stops her father once again with the power of her righteous words. Fortunately, it turns out that Kasil is not dead and returns home in time before she runs away, thus bringing a happy ending to the story. Her story shows that obeying one's parent, especially when the parent is not morally and properly guided, is not necessarily always a virtuous thing to do.

Interestingly, Sölssinyō's prioritized adherence to moral principles and proper behavior is quite different from the well-known stories of filial piety such as Hua Mulan or Tiyng in the *Lienü zhuan*. In these stories, both women decide to transgress gender and social norms in order to fulfill their duty as daughters: Mulan takes her father's place in the army by disguising herself as a man,⁵⁶ and Tiyng appeals to the Han emperor to

⁵⁵ According to Yi Hyesun, her attitude toward her morally inferior and less wise father, in fact, exemplifies a proper role for a daughter in Confucian teaching: she is to prevent her father from committing wrongdoings through persuasion or other appropriate measures to help him achieve his moral perfection. See Yi, *Ibid.*, 15-16.

⁵⁶ This first record of the tale of Mulan is found in "Mulan shi," or the "Poem of Mulan," in the *Gujin yuelu* (sixth century); for more information and an English translation of major versions, see Shiamin Kwa and Wilt Idema, *Mulan: Five Versions of a Classic Chinese Legend, with Related Text* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2010).

clear her father's name from false charges against him.⁵⁷ The actions of these two brave daughters involve a great deal of severity and hardship, which are hardly seen in Sölssinyō's experiences.⁵⁸ The fact that Sölssinyō does not go as far as these two Chinese models illuminates that filial piety, in Kim's view, was not considered the most important value to uphold. Based on Sölssinyō's ways of reasoning, it seems that the hierarchical chart of female virtue places filial piety below chastity. However, perhaps an even more plausible explanation of Sölssinyō's decisions would be her desire to keep her word to Kasil, which she considers to be even more righteous conduct than maintaining her chastity or simply being obedient to her father. If she valued chastity above all else, she should have committed suicide as is frequently seen in the biographies of women in a similar situation in the *Lienü zhuan*. It is obvious that Kim Pusik was not interested in, or may not have approved of, promoting the kind of "feminine virtues" that were achieved by transgressing proper gender roles.

The fact that Sölssinyō marries Kasil in the end, and thus makes everyone happy, demonstrates the importance of a woman's role in guiding and deciding a matter, as well as the possibility of achieving the two virtues at the same time. The sagacious and righteous conduct of Sölssinyō offers a viable lesson concerning how to catch the two birds of preserving chastity and filial piety simultaneously through proper actions as outlined in Confucianism. When it comes to this aim to accomplish both kinds of female virtues, class or social background seem to be of little importance.

The Ideal Assistant: Princess P'yōnggang

While the above stories depict how women responded to external, inevitable forces with their righteous, faithful, and tactful minds, the story

⁵⁷ *Lienü zhuan*, 6:15: "Daughter of Taicang of Qi"; See Raphals, *Sharing the Light*, 47-48; Kinney, *Exemplary Women of Early China*, 133-134.

⁵⁸ Jung Jaeseo examines these types of sacrificial acts of daughters for filial piety in terms of practicing cultural violence against women. See Jung, 289-290.

of Princess P'yōnggang presents a case in which a woman voluntarily acts as the helper of an inferior man in order to ensure that her father remains true to his word. The story of Princess P'yōnggang is similar to that of Sōlssinyō in that both women are concerned for their fathers' integrity, and yet, in the end they prioritize the men who become their husbands. But the two stories differ in that the couple in Sōlssinyō's story come from a similar family background while Princess P'yōnggang and her husband come from drastically different status groups. The latter story of successful marriage between a royal princess and a village idiot seems quite unrealistic.

Princess P'yōnggang in this fairy tale-like story is better known as the wife of Ondal. Her story is so popular even today that the term "Princess P'yōnggang complex" was coined and used widely referring to a woman with the desire to make an (inferior/incapable) man succeed by using her own capital and capacity. What is often remembered from the story, therefore, is not that she married Ondal to help her father keep his word but that she guides her husband to become successful. Nonetheless, while this popular notion concerning Ondal holds some truth, it is not accurate to portray him as wholly inferior. In fact, it was only his appearance and poverty that rendered Ondal "inferior":

Ondal lived during the reign of King P'yōnggang of Koguryō. His countenance was so unappealing and looked miserable that he became a laughingstock. But he was cheerful and bright in heart. Since his family was extremely poor, he supported his mother by begging for food all the time. As he came and went about the market street with his tattered clothes and worn-out shoes, people pointed at him with their fingers and called him Ondal the Fool.⁵⁹

Ondal is depicted as a potentially good man with filial piety and a kind heart. It conveys a didactic message that one with a good heart will have fortune enough to get a good wife and succeed in the end.

After describing Ondal, Kim Pusik introduces his future wife, a

⁵⁹ *Yōlchōn* 5.

princess who cried so often as a child that her father, King P'yōnggang, threatened her by saying that he would marry her off to Ondal the Fool if she did not stop. When she reached adulthood, King P'yōnggang wanted to find a noble husband from a good family, but his daughter insisted on marrying Ondal. She explained to her father why as following:

Your majesty [Great King] always said, “You will, for sure, become the wife of Ondal.” So why now do you change your word? Even a man of lowly birth does not change his words. How is it possible for a highly admired person [like you] to do so? For this reason, it is said that “A king doesn't joke.” The Great King's command now is definitely wrong and your servant dare not follow.⁶⁰

Intended to instruct her father, Princess P'yōnggang's remark reveals that she values her father's integrity above her marriage. Nevertheless, the king does not listen to her, and finally she leaves the palace taking all of her jewelry with her. She goes to the home of Ondal and his mother, and, although unwelcomed at first, she is accepted as Ondal's wife and devotes herself to turning Ondal into a successful man in the end.

Although Princess P'yōnggang gives her father's words as the reason for her unconventional marriage, her determination seems to imply that she may have other reasons for her decision as well: perhaps she saw great potential in Ondal or sought a life outside that of the nobility.⁶¹ No matter what the factors were, one thing is clear: she has no fear of leaving the palace and approaching Ondal's family with full confidence in her intentions. Although upward social mobility was not a motivating factor in the story, mobility across social strata did occur in this biography through the princess's voluntary descent to the bottom rung of the social strata, and then the ascension of Ondal's social position. The fact that she brings her jewelry to Ondal's home shows her practical mindset, keen insight, prediction, and judgment.

⁶⁰ *Yōlchōn* 5.

⁶¹ In fact, “a fool (愚)” does not necessary mean an idiot. It could also mean a person with uncompromising principle or stubbornness in all circumstances.

The family life she embodies might resonate with the patriarchal marriage system favored by the Confucian scholars who keep the power of the maternal family line in check. Princess P'yōnggang does not ask any help from her natal family to support Ondal's family. Her running away supposes that she is far away mentally and physically from her original home. Furthermore, the story presents the case of an ideal role for woman in Confucianism: Princess P'yōnggang, as an advisor, supporter, and manager of Ondal and his family, becomes a perfect model to show the significance of a woman's influence in the family she moves into. She transforms Ondal into a great general in the end, and the whole family becomes wealthy thanks to her management skills. We can imagine how busy and painful Princess P'yōnggang's daily life must have been although the author does not mention that aspect in his narrative. Kim instead concludes the story by praising her virtues and talents which brought the reward of Ondal's love for her:

At last, he [Ondal] left and fought against the Silla soldiers under the Adan castle. There, he was struck and pierced by a flying arrow, collapsed, and died. When people were about to bury him, however, his coffin would not budge. Only when [his wife] arrived and touched the inside of the coffin saying "Life and death have been determined now; please go your way," the coffin could be lifted up and moved for burial. When the Great King heard this, he was filled with deep sorrow.⁶²

The ending of the story clearly demonstrates that the womanly virtues of Princess P'yōnggang were rewarded with her husband's affection for her. The mutual affection between the couple presents this biography as a story of romance, which seems to valorize the notion of marriage based on one's choice and even between individuals from different class backgrounds.⁶³

⁶² *Yōlchōn* 5.

⁶³ The expression that one's coffin does not budge until one's beloved arrives is a frequently used literary trope in China and Korea; for example, the story of a spiritual woman of the "Huanshan ji" 華山畿, and Chosŏn *kisaeng* Hwang Chini. Such a scene at

Arguably, Princess P'yōnggang's choice to marry Ondal originated from her desire to help her father to keep his word. Nevertheless, the story's focus is on the growth of an annoyingly weepy young girl into a successful woman whose achievement is manifested in the men around her. She can be compared to Sōlssinyō in a sense that she helps her father to become a more upright man. But Princess P'yōnggang is even more strategic and concrete in the planning and practice of her choices. Also, the biography of Princess P'yōnggang puts emphasis on a woman's role as an assistant to men (*naejo*). The fact that kindhearted and parent-honoring Ondal eventually becomes a loyal and courageous warrior brings about two lessons: it encourages people to cultivate good character like Ondal, and it also admonishes kings and others in positions of authority to pay more attention to the potential of people of low birth. Both of these lessons are fleshed out by a woman, thus highlighting women's crucial role in society. Although Ondal is the main figure of the narrative, in the end, the focus of the story falls on Ondal's wife and her role in guiding her father and husband toward righteousness.

Although Princess P'yōnggang's story is perhaps the best example, it is not the only biography of a woman in the *Samguk sagi* which emphasizes the virtue of women who assist their husbands in a number of ways. The wives of Sona, Mulgyeja, and P'ipsil, for example, recognize the abilities of their husbands, and do their best to make them known. These women know the importance of their husbands' public duties, and actively publicize their spouses' accomplishments. These cases all illustrate that the wife's role as a helpmate to her husband could also contribute to the public good. No wonder, then, the text of the *Lienü zhuan* is packed with such talented women who support men well.⁶⁴

one's death in the story highlights the aspect of love and companionship in the narrative, rather than the prowess of General Ondal.

⁶⁴ Chapters 1 through 3, and 6 in the *Lienü zhuan* discuss exemplary women whose wisdom, talents, and sacrifice were beneficial for their men. This shows that both biographies in the *Lienü zhuan* and the *Samguk sagi* acknowledge and emphasize a woman's role as an important factor for the success of a family and society at large.

Conclusion

The *Samguk sagi* addresses virtues such as trust, chastity, filial piety, wisdom, sacrifice, courage, and insightfulness. These qualities, in fact, are typical Confucian virtues expected of both men and women. In the *Samguk sagi* biographies, both men and women are portrayed as equally virtuous. Their virtues are rooted in fundamentally gender-neutral values such as trust, righteousness, and respect. Rather than highlighting one particular virtue, Kim Pusik emphasizes the proper roles of women in their relationships to others, which result in the ultimate social good.

As shown above, in the female biographies of the *Samguk sagi*, there are no cases of women who commit suicide or seriously violate gender norms in defense of their virtues. In this sense, the stories of the *Samguk sagi* contrast with those in the *Lienü zhuan* as the latter gives the impression that women's sacrifice, even to their death, is being manipulated by the author for the purpose of presenting Confucian social ideals. In contrast, the *Samguk sagi* is relatively free from such manipulation and glorification of extreme sacrifice by women. Rather, while adhering to mainstream Confucian social ideology, Kim clearly rejects the value of extreme behavior such as suicide. It should be noted, for example, that nowhere does Kim praise "serving one's parents the flesh cut out of one's thigh," a practice conducted with a superstitious belief in the medical effect of using human flesh and blood to cure serious diseases.⁶⁵ Instead, Kim believed that such extreme behavior was excessive and came at the expense of the public good. In other words, while Kim appreciated and valued Confucian virtues, he was also both realistic and practical as attested by the stories of Sölssinyō and Princess P'yōnggang. It was unrealistic for Kim to expect women to make such an extreme sacrifice since women enjoyed a great deal of relative social and economic freedom in Koryō Korea. In my view, the wisdom, strong adaptability, courage, and persistence these women exhibit are the most important values Kim could highlight. The chastity, loyalty, and filial piety

⁶⁵ See the biography of Hyangdōk in *Yōlchōn* 8. Kim Pusik explicitly disagrees with this practice and explains that the reason he included the story was to praise her filial piety.

that developed as the signifiers of Confucian virtue are simply the byproducts of these women's acts.

While the lack of historical sources on early Korean women, or perhaps Kim Pusik's insufficient attention to women, might have led him to approach women's biographies with a more lenient standard compared to that of the *Lienü zhuan*, I argue the fact that Kim did not change, elaborate, or embellish his descriptions of women to make them equal to the Chinese models, especially the cases of women's extreme behavior for the sake of virtues, indicates that Kim relied on his own understanding of foundational Confucian values. In this light, one could even argue that Kim was more authentically Confucian than the author of the *Lienü zhuan*, for he did not seek to limit the original meaning of Confucian virtue to one that was extreme or overly narrow. Thus, while Kim can certainly be criticized for promulgating inherent Confucian gender perspectives, the representation of women in the biographies in the *Samguk sagi* reveals that, regardless of his true intention, he tried to avoid the trap of using women's images as mere stand-ins for Confucian ideals.

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