

A Role of the Gāthā in Classical Korean Literature

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I

The word 'Gāthā' is a noun form of the Sanscrit root "Gai" which means "to sing," and one of its important meanings is that of sacred song. The Gāthā is found within the body of a prose work, where it frequently serves a didactic purpose; or, it is found at the end of a prose work, where the Gāthā functions as a summary of the preceding story.

It is widely known that Buddhism had a great deal of influence on Oriental literature as well as on the spiritual aspects of Oriental culture. It is especially remarkable that the Gāthā, a form of verse, appeared *within* ordinary prose, thus producing a "mixed" or "hybrid" style of "verse-and-prose" in classical Oriental literature. Classical Chinese Literature, which had a great deal of influence on Classical Korean Literature, also was evidently much influenced by the Buddhist Scriptures, and above all, verse and prose are found to be mixed and used together where the Gāthā appears within Classical Chinese Literature.¹ In addition, in Classical Japanese Literature which has long existed within the cultural sphere of China, a series of narrative collections such as *Nihonshoki* (日本書記), *futoki* (風土記) are said to be made out of the mixed use of verse and prose by the influence of the Gāthā.²

Dr. Hu Shih (胡適) has made reference to the relationship between the Gāthā and Chinese Literature:

Indian literature has a kind of unique verse-prose form, in which prose narration is interspersed with verse. The verse-portions within the narration are called "Gāthās." It was imported into China, and greatly influenced Classical Chinese Literature so that K'epai (科白) and Ch'angwen (唱文) in Tantz'u (彈詞) were mixed and used together.³

In addition to the above quoted passage, Dr. Hu Shih regarded it as very important for verse (i.e., by means of the *Gāthā*) and prose to be mixed and used together in Chinese literature. He would have been even more surprised if he had known that this phenomenon could be applied to Classical Korean Literature as well as to Classical Japanese Literature.

II

Now, I will examine how the *Gāthā* has had an effect on Classical Korean Literature. I begin by examining the development during the period when Buddhism entered into Korea, and from which period the *Gāthā* began to influence Classical Korean Literature; and next, how it operated on the literature of the Koryŏ Dynasty and subsequently on that of the Yi Dynasty.

Buddhism was introduced into the Korean Peninsula from China during the Three Kingdoms Period (i.e., during the Period of the reign of the kingdoms of Kokuryŏ, Baekje, and Silla), as may be seen from documents of this Period. King Fu Chien (苻堅) of Ch'ien Ch'in (前秦), in one instance, sent a Buddhist monk, Shun Tao (順道) with Buddhist Statutes and Scriptures into Kokuryŏ in the second regnal year (A.D. 372) of King Sosurim (小獸林王); and a Buddhist monk of Tung Chin (東晉), Marananta, entered into Baekje to propagate Buddhism in the first regnal year (A.D. 384) of King Chimryu (枕流王); and finally, it was not until in the fifth regnal year (A.D. 528) of King Beopheung (法興王) that the Buddhist Commandments were fully propagated throughout Silla (the last of the Three Kingdoms to receive the Buddhist doctrine).⁴ In view of these facts, we can see that the time when Buddhism was introduced into the Korean Peninsula, was from the mid-4th century (A.D.) to the early 6th century (A.D.), which was some 300 years later than its introduction into China, and that Buddhism was not directly introduced into the Korean Peninsula from India, but came by way of China; and moreover, the Buddhist Scriptures had already been translated into the Chinese language.

Because of the scarcity of literary documents, it is almost impossible to study the literature during the Three Kingdoms Period, but, nonetheless, we may conjecture that Classical Korean Literature was heavily influenced by Classical Chinese Literature, since the Silla Kingdom began to come in contact with T'ang Dynasty China on a full-scale basis after it had unified the Three Kingdoms. Kang Shu (強首, d. 692), who had been much influenced by Classical Chinese Literature at that time, did not leave any document.

According to *Samkuksaki* (三國史記) by Kim Bu-Sik, Kim Dae-Mun (金大問, d. 704) wrote *Hwarangseki* (花郎世紀), *Kyerimjapchun* (雞林雜傳), *The Great Buddhist Monk Story* (高僧傳), *Hahnsangi* (漢山記), etc., but his works have not been handed down to the present. Choi Chi-Won (崔致遠, b. 857), who was called "the Progenitor of Korean Chinese-Classics, earlier went to study abroad in T'ang Dynasty China and passed the Government Service Examination. Moreover, upon the occasion of the Whang Ch'ao (黃巢) Revolt, he, as Kao Pin's (高駢) officer, wrote *The Proclamations of Warning to Whang Ch'ao* (檄黃巢書) to defeat Whang Ch'ao's mob. So his literary fame became widely known and according to the *Samkuksaki* there were three collections of his works, but only the *Kyewonpilkyung* has been handed down.

However, we cannot find the influence of the Gāthā in the only extant literary document handed down from the Three Kingdoms Period, namely, the *Kyewonpilkyung*, although Buddhism was prosperous during that period, as also during the Unified Silla Dynasty. Nevertheless, the following statement has been preserved in the *Lyangt'ang Shu-chuan* (兩唐書傳):

Silla and Japan are Eastern Barbarians who made much of *Yushan Chū* (遊仙窟). So each time they dispatched the envoy to our Court, to buy his works — no matter what the price.⁵

In view of this fact, we can be certain that the *Chuan-ch'i* (傳記), which had already come under the influence of Buddhist literature, would be transmitted to Korea in course of time, eventually becoming prevalent in Classical Korean Literature. So it seems that the Gāthā has had influence on the above-mentioned lost literary documents.

The commentary on the Buddhist Scriptures, *The Commentary on Mahāyāna-Prasāda-Pradhāvana* (大乘起信論疏), *On Vajra-Samādhi-Sūtra* (金剛三昧經論) by one of the great Buddhist monks, Won Hyo (元曉, 617-686) and *Essays Written in Graph Style on Avatamsa-Yānā-Dharmadhāta* (華嚴一乘圖記叢隨錄) by one of the great monks, too, Eu Sang (義湘, 625-702) have the mixed use of verse and prose. It is of deep significance in the history of the style of the verse-prose mixed usage that the Gāthā of the Buddhist Scriptures is included in *The Commentary on Mahāyāna-Prasāda-Pradhāvana* and *Essays Written in Graph Style on Avatamsa-Yānā-Dharmadhāta* as it is, whereas all the content is narrated in the form of prose and after that, the whole ends in the form of a quatrain with seven characters to a line in the

On Vajra-Samādhi-Sūtra as follows:

Now, I believe, respect, and shall describe shortly
 The teaching of the most profound and deep Diamond Sūtra.
 I hope this charitable deed will spread throughout the
 realm of Buddhism.
 So all living things may profit greatly therefrom.⁶

In the Koryŏ Dynasty, Hyok Lyun-Chung (赫連挺, c. 1075) edited the biography of the great Buddhist monk, Kyun Yeo (均如, 923-973), *Kyunyeo-chun* (均如傳), by means of prose interspersed with verse.⁷ Perhaps this is the earliest extant work in which prose and verse are interspersed in Korean literary history. Kim Bu-Sik (金富植, 1075-1151) wrote the first history book, *Samkuksaki* (三國史記), in Korea. He was a flunkey, longing for the Confucian culture of China. He imitated the pattern of Ssu Ma-ch'ien's (司馬遷) *Shih Chi* (史記) to write the *Samkuksaki* which included the history of the Three Kingdoms, i.e., Silla, Kokuryŏ, and Baekje. It is not definitely known that the Buddhist Scriptures influenced Kim Bu-Sik, but the mixed use of prose and verse very remarkably appears here and there, as though he had imitated the *Shih Chi*. Concretely speaking, the Hwangjo-Ka (黃鳥歌), one of the most important lyrics in the history of Korean literature, is included in the story of King Yuri (琉璃王) of the Kokuryŏ Dynasty. King Yuri, when his wife, Mrs. Song, had died, took charge of both Wa Hee (禾姬), a Korean, and Chih Shi (雉姬), a Chinese, who were both members of his herem, and fought love quarrels over the king. One day when the king went hunting, his Chinese wife returned to her home, being unable to endure the severity of Wa Hee's ill-treatment. When he returned home upon hearing this news, he was very sad. So he ran after her, but she had already left his kingdom's furthest boundary, never to return. Whereupon the king composed the following poem:

The golden orioles fly, fly,
 They, both male and female, flirt intimately.
 I think only of my solitude —
 With whom shall I go home?⁸

Here we cannot definitely verify whether it was due to the Buddhist Scriptures or to Classical Chinese Literature that Kim Bu-Sik mixed and used

together prose and verse under the influence of the contemporary literary style, as he wrote *Samkuksaki* according to the pattern of Ssŭ Ma-Ch'ien's *Shih Chi*. That fact becomes an issue now.

Il Yeon (一然, 1206-1287) was dissatisfied with the *Samkuksaki* which Kim Bu-Sik had composed on the basis of rationalism of the Confucianism, so that he collected the absurd folk-tales excluded from the authentic history to write the *Samkukyusa* (三國遺事). Il Yeon, a great Buddhist monk, wrote it by including Buddhist folk-tales. Moreover it is considered fortunate for Korean literary history that he narrated the prose tales first, and next inserted some old Korean poems. Besides, he not only mixed and used together prose and verse here and there in the *Samkukyusa*, but also did so by using the form of Ch'an (讚).⁹ In other words, the *Samkukyusa* can both be regarded as a treasure, and as the first work in which prose and verse are widely mixed and used together in a history.

Then it becomes a subject of discussion whether the mixed use of prose and verse in the *Samkukyusa* resulted from the Buddhist Scriptures or from Classical Chinese Literature. As for this subject, it seems that neither the Gāthā nor Classical Chinese Literature operated singly, but both did together at the same time, in view of the fact that Il Yeon, as a great contemporary Buddhist monk, had composed some works about Buddhism,¹⁰ being well acquainted with the Buddhist Scriptures, and the influence of Chinese Literature was reflected in the *Samkukyusa*.

In addition to this, prose and verse are widely mixed and used together in such essays on poetry as *P'ahan-chip* (破閑集) by Lee In-No (李仁考, 1168-1241), *Bohan-chip* (補閑集) by Choi Ja (崔滋, 1188-1260), and *Leukong-P'aisol* (櫟翁禪說) by Lee Jae-Hyun (李齊賢, 1287-1367), etc. As with priority given to poetry, its origin, history, and interpretation are narrated through the prose form in these essays on poetry, the mixed use of prose and verse appears everywhere. Since these essays on poetry developed into a form akin to literary criticism of the Yi Dynasty, they are of deep significance for the history of Korean Literature.

III

In the Yi Dynasty, prose and verse were mixed together more deliberately in literary works. In the Early Yi Dynasty, the genre of the Short Story was established, as Kim Shi-Seup's *Keumo-Shinwha* (金鰲新話) was born into the world. While living a roaming life passing from temple to temple as a

result of refusing to serve as a government official due to his discontent with King Sejo's rule of usurpation, Kim Shi-Seup wrote the *Keumo-Shinwha* in his later years. The central ideas of the *Keumo-Shinwha* are Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, which resulted from his comprehensive knowledge of these. He had not only read a lot of Buddhist Scriptures during his roaming life in temples, but also had worked at adding notes and commentaries to the Buddhist Scriptures.¹¹ During his vagabond life, Kim Shi-Seup had an opportunity to read the *Chiendeung-Shinwha* (剪燈新話) by Ch'u Yu (瞿佑 , 1341-1427) in the Ming Dynasty, on which the *Keumo-Shinwha* was based. In this *Keumo-Shinwha*, prose and verse were more mixed together than in any other previous works.

Of the currently remaining five volumes of *Keumo-Shinwha*, all the volumes, except for the *Namyonbuchuchi* (南炎浮洲志), which are based on Confucianism, show that prose and verse were mixed together more deliberately. Moreover, verse was adopted so frequently that some scholars of Korean Literature have regarded the *Keumo-Shinwha* as a story with a form of verse. Then what is the reason that prose and verse were mixed more deliberately in the *Keumo-Shinwha*? The answer can be found in the influence of the Buddhist Scriptures and Chinese literature: Kim Shi-Seup had been good at the Buddhist Scriptures, as well as the *Chiendeung-Shinwha*, by which the *Keumo-Shinwha* had been much influenced, and was also written by using a mixture of prose and verse.

It goes without saying that Kim Man-Jung's *Ku-Un-Mong* (九雲夢) is the representative work of the Mid-Yi Dynasty. *Ku-Un-Mong* is the first long story in the history of the Classical Korean Story. It should be noted that prose and verse were also used and mixed in *Ku-Un-Mong*. Like Kim Shi-Seup, Kim Man-Jung also had a comprehensive knowledge of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Through his knowledge he could write *Ku-Un-Mong*, which has been recognized as a masterpiece of Buddhist stories in the history of Korean stories. In addition, *Ku-Un-Mong* reflects fully Kim Man-Jung's knowledge of Chinese tales and his encyclopedic knowledge. Therefore, Kim Man-Jung's *Ku-Un-Mong* is thought to be written with the mixed use of prose and verse under the influence of both Buddhist Scriptures and Chinese Literature.

Park Ji-Won's *Yeonam-Sosul* (Collection of Short Stories, 燕岩小說), *Choonhyang-Chun* (春香傳) and *Chaebongkamyulgok* (彩鳳感別曲) are representative works of the Late Yi Dynasty. Park Ji-Won was opposed to Neo-Confucianism's transformation into an idealism, so that he accepted the

Practical Learning (Shilhak, 實學) which was influenced by *Kaocheung-Hseuh* (考證學) of the Ch'ing Dynasty. His *Yeonam-Sosul* was based on the Practical Learning. *Choonhyang-Chun* and *Chaebongkambyulgok*, which are anonymous, break away from conventions and speak of the freedom of love. In other words, the stories of the Late Yi Dynasty express implicitly the modern spirit. Though even in the stories of the Late Yi Dynasty where prose and verse were also mixed, the extent of mixed usage is lower than in the preceding stories. And the common characteristic of these stories of the Late Yi Dynasty is that they are on the whole based on practical Confucianism, not on Buddhism, though they were influenced by Chinese Literature. In other words, the writers of the stories of the Late Yi Dynasty were all anti-Buddhistic pragmatists — for it is not true that they had no experience of Buddhism.

How then should it be understood that prose and verse were also mixed in the stories of the Late Yi Dynasty? It may be said that in the stories of the Late Yi Dynasty the ideas of Buddhism were excluded, and that prose and verse were mixed unconsciously by writers under the influence of Chinese Literature. It should also be noted here that the mixed use of prose and verse, which had appeared in the classics of Korean Literature, was eliminated from the New-Style Stories which were influenced by modern Western thought.

IV

As mentioned above, Buddhism was introduced from China into Korea during the two centuries from the mid-4th Century to the early 6th Century in the Three Kingdoms Period, and, moreover, as Chinese Literature was imported to Korea like a flood in the early days of the United Silla Period, the influence of the Gāthā had presumably already been established. But it cannot be verified owing to the scarcity of documents. Only in the commentaries on the Buddhist Scriptures were prose and verse mixed and used together. So it is very meaningful that in the *On Vajra-Samādhi-Sūtra* they are mixed and used together.

But in Hyok Lyun-Chung's *Kyunyeo-Chun*, considered as a literary work, and in Kim Bu-Sik's *Samkuksaki*, prose and verse began to be mixed and used together for the first time under the influence of the Gāthā in the Koryŏ Dynasty.

Hereafter, in Il Yeon's *Samkukyusa*, Lee In-No's *P'ahan-chip*, Choi Ja's

Bohan-chip, and Lee Jae-Hyun's *Leukong-P'aisol*, prose and verse were more widely mixed and used.

The mixed use of prose and verse appeared to be more deliberately employed in Kim Shi-Seup's *Keumo Shinwha* and Kim Man-Jung's *Ku-Un-Mong*, which were written in the Early Period and in the Middle Period of the Yi Dynasty respectively. But in the Later Period of Yi Dynasty the mixed use of prose and verse was diminished as in *Yeonam Sosul*, *Choonhyang-Chun* and *Chaebongambyulgok*, which were written by writers who believed in practical Confucianism. And it can be confirmed that the trace of the use of mixed prose and verse disappeared completely in the New-Style Stories which were based on modern Western thought. At last we know that when Classical Korean Literature came under the influence of Chinese Literature, prose and verse were mixed and used together.

The problem is to decide whether the mixed use of prose and verse was caused by the influence of the Buddhist Scriptures or by the influence of Chinese Literature. It should be considered that the time in which Chinese Literature came into Korea on a full-scale was during the Three Kingdoms Period and during the United Silla Period, though it cannot be verified exactly. According to the above assumption, it should be known that the Chinese Literature which came into Korea was standardized under the influence of Buddhism. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the mixed use of prose and verse which was reflected in Korean Literature, should be primarily attributed to the influence of Chinese culture.

Since the writers of these works had wide experience in Buddhism, the mixed use of prose and verse, which was reflected in Il Yeon's *Samkukyusa*, in the *Shihwa* (詩話) a collection of poems and stories, and in *Ku-Un-Mong* of the Yi Dynasty, should be regarded as the products of both the Buddhist Scriptures and Chinese Literature. The process of the mixed use of prose and verse which appeared in Classical Korean Literature, is found oddly enough to be classifiable into two classes: One is that in the works of writers who are familiar with Buddhism, the mixed use of prose and verse occurred widely, and in the works of Confucianism, it appeared only sporadically or did not work at all. This perhaps implies that the origin of the Gāthā which appeared in Classical Korean Literature is ultimately Buddhistic.

Notes

1. Hu Shih 胡適, *The History of Chinese Colloquial Literature* 白話文學史, (Ch'iming Shuchu Publishing Co.), pp. 157-87.
Liu Ta Chie 劉大杰, *A History of Chinese Literary Development* 中國文學發展史 (Kuwon Shuchui Publishing Co.), p. 35.
2. Ganda Hideo 神田秀夫, *The Comparative Literature*, The Society of Comparative Literature in Japan, 1953, pp. 30-50.
3. Hu Shih, *op. cit.*, p. 178.
4. Lee Ki-Yeong, *The Korean Buddhism* (Samsung Publishing Co., 1977), p. 11.
5. *Collection of Chuanch'i in T'ang Dynasty* (Shihchie Shuchū Publishing Co.), p. 34.
6. Lee Ki-Yeong, *op. cit.*, p. 487.
7. Il Yeon, *Samkukyusa* 三口遺事, ed. Choi Nam-Sun 崔南善 (Jung Eum Publishing Co.), pp. 55-68.
8. Kim Bu-Sik, *Samkuksaki* 三國史記, Vol. 13.
9. Ch'an 讚 which appears here and there in *Samkukyusa*, composed of the pattern in which the story is narrated in prose form and ends with the summary of the preceding story. Therefore, Ch'an in *Samkukyusa* seems to result from the form of the Gāthā.
10. Il Yeon, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-6.
11. Kim Shi-Seup, *Keumoshinwha*, trans. Lee Ka-Won, (Tong Mun Kwan Publishing Co., 1973), p. 20.

