

ABSTRACTS

Archives, Archival Practice, and the Writing of History in Premodern Korea

Vernacular Itineraries: Korean Letters in Family and National Archives

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Vernacular Korean letters were exchanged routinely in the royal and elite families of Chosŏn Korea (1392-1910). While literary Chinese writing was cultivated by educated men, vernacular letters were exchanged when women were at least on one side of the letter's itinerary. For the patriarchal families of the time vernacular letters constituted a precious private archive, as sentimental mementoes, testaments of women's literacy, and status symbols when affinal ties with the royal family brought in vernacular epistles from the palace. The transition of vernacular letters from the familial archive into museums and departments of national literature in South Korea's extensive project of postcolonial cultural reconstruction spans different cultural systems: the modern vernacular and the postcolonial vernacular. The project of constructing national literature and tradition, the markers of modernity and authenticity, becomes especially urgent after Korea's colonization by Japan in 1910. Among competing definitions, Yi Pyŏnggi (1891-1968), a famed collector, writer, and editor throughout the 1930s-40s, names vernacular epistolary style (*naeganch'e*) as the essence of the aesthetic and emotional authenticity of the Chosŏn tradition, and the best template for modern authors. But writing in the 1950s Kim Ilgŭn, the single-handed collector and anthologist of elite vernacular letters through the 1950s-80s, laments that the silk binding rather than contents of letter anthologies are valued on the market. The anti-colonial and anti-feudal current of the post-1945 South Korean scholarship has no interest in the elite tradition and this explains the continued invisibility of women-centered elite vernacular culture in the contemporary scholarship of Chosŏn Korea. Developing the notion of itinerary—the transition, appropriation, and recoding of elite vernacular letters—this paper ponders the implication of archival practices upon the study of the past, and highlights the knowledge systems that determined the visibility and meaning of elite vernacular culture in Korea's modern era.

Keywords: elite vernacular culture of Chosŏn (1392-1910), women's writing, vernacular letter anthologies, modern vernacular, postcolonial vernacular.

Silencing Joseon Buddhist Culture: The Excluded Poems of Buddhist-Confucian Poetry
Exchanges

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The history of Joseon Buddhism and its culture has been marginalized in the collective memories of the Joseon period. This tendency has continued in the modern historiography of the Joseon period. Due to the inclination of contemporary research to depend on “official” archival records and thus official histories of the Joseon period, the patterns of Confucian bias have persisted. This is despite the abundance of extant Buddhist records and personal writings that include epigraphical materials, collected works of eminent monks, temple records, and Buddhist ritual texts of the Joseon period.

By examining even a small portion in the history of Joseon Buddhism we can evince a glance of the richness of Buddhist culture that existed during that time. In particular, the literary culture of poetry exchanges reveals the extent of the involvement of the Joseon Confucian elites in what can be called a Buddhist-Confucian culture. Though there are traces of the exchanges of poetry between scholar-officials and literary monks in the collected works of eminent Buddhist monks, such records are absent in the collected works of the Confucian scholar-officials with whom the exchanges took place.

Through this discussion, this paper will examine the Confucian bias and its historiographical significance that has been prevalent in the Joseon archival sources on which modern scholars have depended. Furthermore, this paper will attempt to reveal the significance of an integrative effort in using diverse Buddhist sources for overcoming the Confucian bias in the historiography of the Joseon period.

On the Margins of the Margins: The Late Chosŏn Korean Catholic Archive

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Despite being a tiny community, the 18th and 19th-century Korean Catholic Church has received a significant amount of attention. One reason is because the role it plays in historical narratives of modernization in which Chosŏn-era Korean scholars’ interest in Catholicism is presented as resulting from a desire for political and social reform and scientific knowledge. It is then held that if these reformers would have been given the opportunity to implement their ideas they would have put Korea on a path towards modernity, making for a strong nation-state that would have been able to escape colonial domination and national division. Moreover, this narrative also challenges idea of Korean “stagnation” used by Japan to justify the colonization of the peninsula. In contrast, some Christians (both Catholics and Protestants), have told a rather different story that emphasizes the glorious martyrs triumphing over persecution and the providential victory of the Gospel. At the same time, these narratives can be combined by patriotic Korean Christians to tell a story of how Christianity can bring both spiritual salvation to the individual soul while modernizing the nation. And yet, these diverse narratives are constructed on an archival

foundation that is relatively limited, consisting mostly of government interrogation records, the *Sillok*, the writings of French missionaries, and a limited number of works produced in China and by Korean Catholics themselves. This paper will take this apparent paradox as a starting point from which to explore the characteristics of Catholic archives, how they were produced, and the narratives that shaped their construction in the first place. In addition, through this exploration, this paper will discuss new ways to utilize these archives and construct narratives that would be more inclusive of groups marginalized in premodern Korea, particularly women, the lower classes, and foreigners.

The Curation of Archives and History in the Early Chosŏn

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Writing and printing histories consumed a considerable amount of the attention of the Chosŏn court during its first century, and court historians engaged in a wide variety of historical scholarship. This raises questions about what constituted the legitimate sources, correct utilization, and proper storage of historical information; in order to understand early Chosŏn history writing it is necessary to consider what archives there were to draw upon and which were considered legitimate for the writing of history, and how contemporary historians accessed these archives as well as what they understood the relationship of history and the “archive” to be. As such, this paper seeks to illuminate the creation, maintenance, and utilization of government archives and their role in the writing and transmission of history in the early Chosŏn dynasty. To do so, it will examine the Chosŏn government’s curation of books as well as its document culture and practices of information management. The early Chosŏn bureaucracy’s numerous offices had their own collections of documents, books, and even woodblocks. Some offices were officially designated by the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn* (Great Code of Administration) to house books printed at court or collect documents produced by various government organs; others curated texts related to their functions. By contextualizing historiographical traditions within this larger matrix of the knowledge production and archival practices of the Chosŏn government, we can reveal the kind of knowledge that was filtered into historical writing vis-à-vis the total sum of information produced and held by the Chosŏn government, broadening our understanding of the knowledge culture of the Chosŏn government, its archival practices, and the production of court histories in premodern Korea.

How Relevant is the Term “Archive” for Understanding Premodern Korean Traditions of Recordkeeping?

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When Xu Jing visited Koryŏ as part of an official Chinese Embassy in 1123, he noted that “the governing system is still rudimentary. ... [After officials have heard a case and delivered a verdict], [all documents] are discarded, there being no archiving facility. Only for imperial edicts and diplomatic correspondence is there a storage place” As with most of his testimony, it is

not clear where he got the information or how reliable it is. Yet for anyone who has worked on the history of premodern Korea, it is a statement that sounds as if it might well be true. Although documents that are traditionally seen to belong in an archive (appointment certificates, land registers, household registers, etc.) have been transmitted—some dating back nearly a thousand years—they are nearly all unique samples. In other words, they do not form part of an organic collection, they are just random examples that somehow have been preserved. The term “archive” has become the staple of European history writing since the nineteenth century, when Leopold von Ranke turned to archives as the prime hunting ground for historical research. Yet in a sense he only discovered and used systematically what was there—vast collections of documents hoarded by institutions. By contrast, in Korea history writing had always been monopolized by the state, and while a vast amount of written documents must have been produced to keep the bureaucracy running, barely any of them have survived. Rather than being kept, they were simply reflected in the vast collections of what I would call “processed” records, such as the *sillok* or *uigwe*. Thus we are dealing with a different attitude to the keeping of records, and in this paper I will try to formulate some of the fundamental principles of this “recording culture” that obviated the need for “archives” in the sense of (more or less) organized collections of functional documents.

An archive of empire: the production of diplomatic knowledge in Chosŏn Korea

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The Chosŏn court kept meticulous records of its interactions with their Ming, and later, their Qing neighbors. These materials, especially those which predate the nineteenth century do not survive in the form of original materials, but rather as entries in court sponsored compilations. These include the collections of diplomatic correspondence in the *Kwewŏn tŭngnok* 槐院騰錄 and the *Sadae munkwe* 事大文軌 for Chosŏn-Ming relations and various other *Tŭngnok* 騰錄 for relations with the Qing. But these collections were unlikely to have been the primary source of consultation for Chosŏn envoys and interpreters. Instead, they turned to a series of what may be seen best as institutional reference books or almanacs, namely the *Kosa chwaryŏ* 攷事撮要 for the early Chosŏn, the *T’ongmungwan chi* 通文館志 for the middle period, and finally the monumental *Tongmun hwigo* 同文彙考 for the late Chosŏn. These texts, in particular the *Tongmun hwigo*, categorizes diplomatic activity according to areas of policy concern, making them accessible reference tools for an official searching for relevant precedents. Their convenient organizational schemes have also proved handy for historians in search of ready material for case studies. What has been less appreciated, however, are the epistemic strategies informing the creation of such compilations. Hardly transparent or neutral records, these compilations are both the product and the main instrument of Chosŏn’s negotiation with imperial China. It was an archive of empire that made legible both its institutional logics and fractures to its users on the one hand, while also retaining commensurability with the abstract rhetoric of imperial ideology on the other. These Chosŏn handbooks helped its users negotiate this double-bind of remaining “grounded” in situated realities while remaining firmly embedded in the

abstraction of tributary relations, as they moved between these two registers of discourse in the practice of diplomacy.

The Righteous Man and the Unvirtuous Woman: The Making of "The Story of Geng Zhi" and Its Korean Translation

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The present study is close examination of the late Ming (1368-1644) vernacular short story anthology Xingshiyan 型世言 (Words to shape the world, c.a.1632) and its Korean translation, focusing on "The Story of Geng Zhi 耿埴." It first traces the textual transition of "The Story of Geng Zhi" from the Tang dynasty (618-907) marvelous tale "The Tale of Feng Yan 馮燕" and discusses how the Xingshiyan rewrote the Feng Yan tale into Geng Zhi story to suit its didactic motive.

This study, then, analyses the Geng Zhi story and its Korean translation produced in Chosŏn period (1392-1897). Through careful comparison of the Chinese and Korean editions, the present study points out how the Korean translation further shapes the story to suit it for the intended, or claimed, gentry women readers. Emphasizing the terms in the Korean translation that are illegible without knowing the original Chinese terms, this study also shows a highly possible involvement of male scholars in translating Xingshiyan despite the flagged female nature of the vernacular Korean writing.