INTRODUCTION

THIS BOOK EXPLORES the social, cultural, and material changes in Korea's late Chosŏn dynasty (1700–1910) through the lens of art and art history. From what had been an austere and constrained Confucian society, under a surge of enticing new imports from China in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Korea moved, ambivalently but inexorably, toward widespread consumerism and even conspicuous consumption. While the transition was not as rapid or overwhelming as in contemporaneous Western cultures or in China or Japan, Korea's move toward a consumer culture is all the more interesting and poignant because it entails a persistent struggle with the Chosŏn Confucian conscience.

These changes are manifest in the painting of the period, which flourished with power and imagination. Of the diverse kinds of paintings from the period, two genres—a new type of painting called *ch'aekkŏri* (paintings of "books and things," sometimes called "Korean still life") and a reinvented expression of the traditional plum blossom subject matter—are presented here to exemplify these developments. *Ch'aekkŏri* painting was a direct consequence and visual manifestation of the expanding consumer culture of the late Chosŏn period. Plum blossom painting was a more conventional and long-favored genre, but in the period under consideration, driven by new social and market forces, it flourished with a major reimagining of style and meaning. Both *ch'aekkŏri* and plum blossom painting encapsulate the advancement taking place in the social and material culture of the period, and they introduce visually intriguing, sensuous, and compelling art works that would change the widely conveyed view of traditional Korean painting.

Along with the appearance of and developments in these two prominent genres, another major change in the Korean art world was the commodification of painting and the creation of an art market. The late Chosŏn was a critical period in Korean art history in that the arts—mainly painting and calligraphy—were no longer exclusively possessions of the

privileged aristocracy, but could be bought and appreciated by anyone with financial means. In fact, markets in Seoul bustled with people and offered commodities ranging from trinkets to luxurious imports. This phenomenon reflects the dismantling of the long-established Confucian belief that "dallying too much with objects kills one's will" (*wanmul sangji*; Ch: *wanwu sangzhi*).[1]

At the center of these changes were the *chungin*, or "middle people," who were technical specialists. In the early Chosŏn, there were three social classes: the ruling elite, or *yangban*; the commoners, or *sangmin*; and the base people, or *ch'ŏnmin*. The *yangban* were hereditary aristocrats who held public office and governed based on Confucian doctrine. The *sangmin* consisted of peasants, artisans, and merchants. The *ch'ŏnmin* included slaves and workers in despised occupations such as shamans, courtesans, butchers, and leather workers. However, in the mid-Chosŏn period there emerged another social class consisting of five distinctive "secondary status groups"[2]—the *chungin* (technical specialists), the *hyangni* (administrative clerks in local government), the *sŏŏl* (descendants of *yangban* men and their concubines), the local elites of the northern provinces who were socially and politically disfavored due to their regional origin, and the *muban* (military officials who had originally belonged to the *yangban* but, by the seventeenth century, had fallen to secondary status). These five groups occupied hereditary tiers of government and society between the *yangban* and the commoners. Of the secondary status groups, the *chungin* were the leading force in the development of art and material culture. By the eighteenth century, they formed a cohesive and exclusive group characterized by endogamous marriage, cultural cultivation, collective and collaborative activities, and great economic power. Because the *chungin* were instrumental in the creation and consumption of art and material culture, their ascent and its correlation with the rise of the art market are the focus of this volume.

As Korea entered the twentieth century, the country was suddenly and grudgingly annexed to the Japanese empire. The Japanese colonial government (1910–45) took over with its own set of scholar-officials, and writing about the history of Korean art became more complicated and more overtly bound to political and ideological agendas. In support of Japan's colonial interests, Japanese scholar-officials wrote their interpretative history of Korean art, which overlooked or demeaned the role of the *chungin* and the emergence of the new art movement at the end of the Chosŏn dynasty. Simultaneously, Korean patriots, many of whom were *chungin* themselves, produced a reactionary interpretation of Korean art history heavily charged with nationalist objectives. The noted calligrapher, art connoisseur, and independence leader O Sech'ang (1864–1953) tried to

remedy both the Japanese and Korean nationalist biases by "objectively" compiling the biographies of Korean artists into a foundational biographical encyclopedia, *Evidence on the Biographies of Korean Painters and Calligraphers* (Kŭnyŏk sŏhwa ching; hereafter, *The Biographies*), which has been relied on ever since—but without critical analysis. As usual, we must ask what assumptions and biases are inherent in *his* "history."

The *chungin* have been a significant topic of study in the fields of Korean history and literature since the 1970s. Using as their main resources the official rosters of those who passed the Miscellaneous Examination (Chapkwa pangmok) and *chungin* genealogies, historians have been interested in the political participation of the *chungin* (especially focusing on official foreign-language interpreters),[3] their roles as intermediaries in trade between China and Japan,[4] and their lineages.[5] Cultural activities, especially *chungin* poetry societies[6] and various other *chungin* contributions to Chosŏn society, have also been studied,[7] as have the connections between the *chungin* and the rise of Korea's modern era.[8]

Chungin studies in Korean literature have been active and productive in the last few decades. Literary scholar Ku Chagyun initiated research on *chungin* literature with his 1948 book *History of Korean Literature of the Non-Yangban* (Chosŏn p'yŏngmin munhaksa), which reviews three poetry anthologies, the first of which was published in 1737, followed by the other two at sixty-year intervals. These indispensable resources encouraged scholars of Korean literature to pursue *chungin*-literature research. Intensive study began in the 1980s, with twofold interest in the characteristics of *chungin* literature that distinguish it from *yangban* literature and in its harbingers of modern literature and progressive thought. Some scholars of literature, including Yun Chaemin, have concluded that *chungin* literary production was so embedded in the prevailing mores, attitudes, and social structure that it shows the *chungin* were neither especially forward-looking nor prepared to become a leading social force.[9] But other scholars have given the *chungin* credit for paving the way in many different arenas of modern Korea.[10] They even have been called "Chosŏn's Renaissance men."[11]

In any case, the invaluable research by scholars of literature in recent decades has inspired academics in other fields to broaden and deepen their own inquiries on the *chungin*'s diverse cultural activities, such as collecting books, art, and antiques, and sponsoring music, theater, and other forms of popular culture, as well as their commercial enterprises in Seoul.[12] Beginning in the 2010s, for example, much in-depth research has focused on cultural and literary exchanges, through both meetings and letters, between Chosŏn scholar-officials and *chungin* and their Chinese and Japanese counterparts.[13] Additional study of *chungin*

roles in the circulation of books among Korea, Japan, and China has revealed how knowledge was spread, transmitted, and appropriated in each culture.

Compared to the fields of Korean history and literature, art historical studies focused on the *chungin* started a bit later, in the 1990s. The tardiness of academic interest in *chungin* art, and its relative paucity, may have been caused by two prejudices: first, the long-lasting view of the late Chosŏn, especially the nineteenth century, as a period of decline in Korean art, a perspective initiated by Japanese colonialist scholars and continued by anticolonialist scholars; and second, the idealization of the renowned *yangban* scholar and calligrapher Kim Chŏnghŭi (1786–1856).

Regardless of the period's realities, to help legitimize Japan's takeover of Korea it was necessary for Japanese colonialist scholars to construct a narrative that emphasized the negative features of late Chosŏn society. Japanese and even some Western observers pointed out that, in the nineteenth century, the ruling class of Chosŏn Korea—both the royalty and the *yangban*—was factionalized and corrupt, and argued that the country had stagnated and did not have the ability to transition from feudalism to capitalism.[14] A similar interpretation was applied to the history of Chosŏn art;[15] late Chosŏn painting, especially that by the *yangban* literati, was seen by Japanese art historians to be in decline as copycat or second-rate Chinese painting.[16] A countermovement by Korean nationalists did not directly contradict the colonialist art critics, because they, too, thought the late Chosŏn literati had exhausted their energy and creativity, leading to Korea's decline in art as well as in politics. They especially considered Chosŏn Confucian statecraft to be the "great enemy" of the Korean people.[17] Turning away from the Chosŏn dynasty, they concentrated on uncovering Korea's unique and original art history, for example, the work dating from the Three Kingdoms period (57 BCE–668).[18] In the postliberation era after 1945, Korean art historians' conscious search for the most "Korean" expression in painting continued.[19] The result was high valuation of eighteenth-century true-view (or true scenery)[20] landscape painting and genre painting, which depicted Korean landscapes and Korean people's everyday lives.

Such appreciation, however, came at the expense of nineteenth-century painting, which was seen to be dominated by the *yangban* scholar and calligrapher Kim Chŏnghŭi, who promoted the Chinese literati Southern School tradition.[21] Postcolonial scholars viewed Kim Chŏnghŭi negatively, as influential and talented, but a conservative Sinophile who reversed the momentum of Korean art at a time when it had been flourishing with true-view landscape painting and other work with "Korean spirit."[22] But in the 1980s, a few art historians began to reassess Kim's artistic contri-

bution in a positive light, and even idealized Kim as an internationally acknowledged cultural hero, primarily for his calligraphy and evidential studies.[23] With this reexamination of Kim Chŏnghŭi, research began on his presumed followers: the *chungin* painters of the nineteenth century. However, the presumption that Kim was at the center of things and the *chungin* painters at the periphery was deeply rooted, and this prevented scholars from examining the *chungin* independently. Thus the *chungin* painters, who had been tagged as Kim's followers, were necessarily under Kim's "influence" and automatically categorized as "literati painters of the Southern School tradition."[24] In addition, the traditional binary system usually applied to Korean artists, categorizing them as either amateur literati painters or court painters, left the *chungin* artists, who were essentially a hybrid—commercial and literati-style painters—no space except to be categorized with their "teacher." For both these reasons, *chungin* artists and their paintings did not receive appropriate or objective evaluations.

In the last three decades, a growing interest in and substantial research on individual *chungin* artists and *chungin* court painters has resulted in important publications and exhibitions.[25] In the study of *chungin* art, Hong Sŏnp'yo was among the first art historians to identify the *chungin* painters as an independent, discrete group that helped construct nineteenth-century Korean painting.[26] However, Hong did not delve into the professional characteristics of the *chungin* painters' lives or into *ch'aekkŏri* and plum painting. In terms of style for traditional subjects such as landscapes, he concluded that the *chungin* did not make a major break from the literati tradition.[27] Meanwhile, other scholars have continued their research on individual *chungin* painters and their paintings[28] and, like some of them, I disagree with Hong's conclusions: I maintain that the *chungin* artists made a major break from the literati tradition, both in new subject matter and in new styles. Furthermore, I explore the overlooked commercial aspects of late Chosŏn Korean art.

Challenging the ingrained view of the *chungin* painters as artists of secondary importance, I argue for revising the conventional top-to-bottom relationship between the supposed *yangban* "teacher" Kim Chŏnghŭi and his supposed *chungin* "followers," as there is little to no evidence that a group of stylistically varied and creative *chungin* painters were members of or adherents to the so-called Kim Chŏnghŭi School. Relationships between the *yangban* and *chungin* were in fact fluid, multifaceted, and most of the time symbiotic. The *chungin* merit placement at center stage of the art world. Exploration of the economic aspects of art reveals how the art market, along with the inflow of foreign objects, books, and painting manuals, were critical forces that created new genres and styles of painting. Despite the *chungin*'s contributions to late Chosŏn culture, society, and

commerce, this group has gone unacknowledged. A key question is: who has controlled the historical record at various points in time? We might also wonder what became of the *chungin*'s artistic activities after the fall of the Chosŏn dynasty.

The pivotal yet unacknowledged role of the *chungin* raises the additional question of why the two genres of painting most identified with the *chungin* class—*ch'aekkŏri* and new interpretations of flowering plum painting—have so long eluded the interest of Korean art historians. For *ch'aekkŏri* there are two reasons. First is its strong departure from traditional Korean art forms. Unlike long-standing East Asian painting subjects like landscapes, portraits, flowers, insects, and birds, these unfamiliar "still lifes" of books and imports done in Western styles were not accepted as authentic Korean art. They had no place in any existing tradition. And second, there are almost no written records from which historians could construct a coherent narrative of *ch'aekkŏri* painting or its place in elite society. What is to be made of this odd anomaly of Korean art? A few Korean scholars who have specialized in Korean folk painting, and a few Western art historians intrigued by a style that seems to have more in common with Western art than Eastern, have assumed the task of researching these paintings, but their approach has been more stylistic than sociological. As for the changes in flowering plum painting in the late Chosŏn, East Asia has a long tradition of plum painting and its association with Confucian scholars, so there is nothing new there. Without connection to any sociological phenomenon, the changes seem no more than simple stylistic evolution. Focus on the economic and sociocultural aspects of both the new flowering plum painting and *ch'aekkŏri*, however, relating both to their primarily *chungin* creators and to consumers should revitalize interest in and appreciation for Korean art of the late Chosŏn period.

Far from being a time of artistic stagnation and decline, the late Chosŏn period teemed with people commissioning, creating, buying, selling, and appreciating paintings as symbols of success, tokens of friendship, and objects of beauty. From this arose exciting new themes and styles in painting, which continue to intrigue us, not only as art objects but as visual representations of their times.

CHAPTER ONE

CHANGING TIMES

The Ascent of the Professional Class

SINCE THE THREE KINGDOMS PERIOD, Korea had been a rigidly classed culture, and during the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910) its hereditary aristocracy, known as the *yangban*, dominated society economically, socially, and politically. Chosŏn Korea was also Asia's most committed Confucian culture. As the dominant state ideology and primary belief system among administrators and *yangban*, Confucianism emphasized loyalty of subject to ruler and filial piety of child for parent, and adamant social hierarchy and distinction. In accordance with the ideology's virtues, the *yangban* were expected to set an example of austerity and restraint within society. However, around 1700, a rising professional class, the *chungin*, began a relentless two-century ascent to economic power and cultural influence. Their economic success was based on their knowledge, skills, and privileges as medical doctors, foreign-language interpreters, lawyers, accountants, astronomers, and artists. Their cultural dominance arose from their passion and energy, which was redirected from frustrated political ambitions—because they could not break into the *yangban*'s monopoly on political power—into material consumption and artistic endeavors. The attempts of these technical professionals of premodern Korea to create a "group identity" through literature, visual art, and conspicuous consumption were, however, sometimes viewed with sarcasm, as in the following poem.

Fat Cat Peddler

There was a fat cat peddler[1] in Seoul
Whose name is Kim Hant'ae.
He was of humble birth,
No more than a pipsqueak.
But the pompous crowd in town
Craftily circles around his largesse.

People crowd around the bounty,
Attracting ever greater crowds.
Who cares now about his humble birth,
When all his associates are bigwigs?
The nobles try to rub elbows with him;
Ministers wait upon his every word.
Official appointments come from his hands;
Carts trundle in tokens of gratitude.
Officials follow every move of his chin,
Barking and biting at wherever it points.
Officials of the Six Ministries
Kowtow in front of him.
Renowned magistrates
Rush forward.
If one rejects him, one falls in the mire,
If one likes him, one comes under his umbrella.
Your thimbleful of talent,
Your pathetic literary skill:
With what ability could you shake the world?
Everything you are comes from your money.
You are as proud as a peacock!
Your arrogance peaks and smothers you in luxury.
How fabulous your décor is—
Clothing too elaborate,
House and food
First in splendor,
An imposing mansion with a hundred rooms
Towers over the street.
But it was not good enough:
You had to triple its size.
You are fearless.
When you howl, a crowd gathers like a sea in front of your door.
The truth cannot hide; there are no secrets.
I haven't seen it, but I have heard everything.
You hired the best carpenters,
Who slaved nobly.
If you saw a scratch on a rafter—
Replace the whole thing!
Because you insisted on the best,
Construction took five years.
Hallway walls carved with fleurettes,
Stone steps engraved with peonies,

Row on row, one after another,
Gates and walls are tall and high.
When entering, one gets bewildered
As if one is lost in a maze.
Even if unpainted,
No less than a palace in its splendor.
A few hundred years before or after
No mansion can compete with yours.
Your splendid house holds
Nothing ordinary:
Rugs from Mongolia,
Mats from Japan,
Bronze antiques from the Yin and Zhou,
Trays studded with jewels,
Cool stools of ivory,
Warm cushions embroidered with phoenixes—
A hundred gold pieces is more than one family owns,
But each of your toys costs a thousand gold pieces.
Just like a Persian marketplace,
Kim's estate is impossible to describe.
He also dresses himself up
And admires himself in the mirror over and over.
Engraved saddles, gem-encrusted carriages,
Gold knife and jade tablet,
White fox-fur overcoat,
Very light and warm,
Jacket and pants made of white silk stitched in green thread,
So delicate and fragile—
He changes clothing morning and evening.
Both inner and outer garments are splendid and luxurious;
He never wears the same clothes twice:
Every day he appears anew;
Even his trousers and socks are silk!
Have you ever worn cotton or hemp clothes?
Kim's everyday food is also fabulously lavish:
Exotic dainties from everywhere,
Wine in jade goblets,
Dining tables decorated with turtle shell,
Oranges on glistening silver trays,
Turtle and crab plucked with golden chopsticks,
Boiled leopard brains,
Squeezed oil from camel's hooves.

You spit out tough food to protect your teeth;
You sip liquids to baby your stomach.
A delightful feast is held every day—
Your pride is lifelong,
Wealth and rank are man's ardent desire,
You are the best in this world.
Haven't you heard of this?
One who reaches the top must repent.
Haven't you known this?
Wise men wait patiently.
As an old man contemplating the order of things,
I am anxious for you.
Even though you hold great authority,
How could you not fear a ghost!
Even as you have accumulated so much wealth,
How can you be so wasteful?
Most people are afraid of power and authority;
If it overflows, ghosts will not leave one alone;
They will take away prosperity—
This is an old proverb.
When I think of these times and this old saying,
The heavenly way seems dark nowadays.[2]

Written in the early nineteenth century, this long and contemptuous poem is a diatribe by Yi Chowŏn (1758–1832), a member of the *yangban* class, who sought to uphold the prevailing Confucian order against a successful *chungin* businessman, Kim Hant'ae (b. 1762). The poem not only exemplifies the social and psychological tensions between *yangban* and *chungin* in late Chosŏn society, it also highlights the very features that make the late Chosŏn such a dynamic and interesting period: an assault on the authority of traditional Confucian values favoring austerity and lacking ostentation; a remolding of the economic power and class structures; a rising materialism, including astonishing new imports and unprecedented conspicuous consumption; and a flourishing of commercial opportunities for artists and craftsmen. These are elements that permeated the intersection of cultural, artistic, and material transformations of the late Chosŏn dynasty.

A descendant of a prominent *yangban* family, the poem's author, Yi Chowŏn, was the son of the minister of punishments, Yi Minbo (1720–1799).[3] Yi Chowŏn himself had a prominent career, winning first place in the competitive civil examination in 1792 and serving in various high government posts, including minister of each of the Six Ministries[4] during

the reign of King Sunjo (r. 1800–1834).[5] The object of Yi's scorn, Kim Hant'ae, was a well-known *chungin*. A descendant of the Kims of Ubong,[6] a celebrated *chungin* clan, Kim Hant'ae was a Chinese-language interpreter as well as an important patron of the arts.

Yi's long poem consists of three parts: a critique of Kim and his followers, a critique of Kim's luxurious lifestyle, and a moral warning. From the beginning, Yi identifies Kim Hant'ae by name, contemptuously calling him a "fat cat peddler"; deprecates him as a mere "pipsqueak" of "humble birth"; and criticizes the cozy relations between politics and business. The poem depicts a corrupt society, one with a shaky social hierarchy and social values in which money determines roles that were formerly well defined and controlled by the Confucian state bureaucracy. Yi describes how fawning government officials curry favor with wealth, and asserts that official appointment decisions come de facto from a nouveau riche *chungin* man.

The bulk of the poem describes Kim Hant'ae's extravagant material consumption. Yi admits that he has not personally witnessed all of Kim's day-to-day life, but he describes Kim's ostentatious lifestyle, including food, clothing, and housing, in minute detail based on reports from others. Of special note is the international aspect of Kim's consumption. Yi compares the exotic nature of Kim's household to a "Persian market" with Mongolian rugs, Japanese mats, Chinese antique bronzes, and so on. Likewise, his gourmet dishes of turtles, boiled leopard brains, and oil squeezed from camels' hooves are all delicacies from far away.

Yi wraps up his poem by warning Kim against his impatience, pride, overabundant materialism, and abuse of power, and threatens that ghosts will not leave Kim alone. However, when the "old man" (i.e., a spokesman for the old order) says, "I am anxious for you," it seems more of an impotent scolding, like that of a worn-down mother to an uncontrollable child, or perhaps vain hope, rather than a certain threat. Yi concludes the poem with the line "The heavenly way seems dark nowadays," indicating that Yi did not finger Kim as an exceptional case, but rather as an exemplar of society's ills.

Reading this nineteenth-century poem makes one wonder about the social structure and the material culture of the late Chosŏn period. What had happened to its ruling ideology of Confucianism, which taught that "dallying too much with objects kills one's will" and esteemed a modest lifestyle and rigid social hierarchy? In the early Chosŏn period, this ideology had suppressed the pleasure of Confucian scholar and commoner alike.

Is the poem a satirical exaggeration or a true reflection of expanding material wealth, with its litany of "rugs from Mongolia," "mats from Japan," "bronze antiques from the Yin and Zhou," and "exotic dainties

from everywhere"? Historically Korea was commercially insular, so how could a *chungin*—or anyone in late Chosŏn Korea, for that matter—have had access to this "Persian marketplace" of international material consumption? Who were these upstart *chungin* and how had they achieved such a luxurious lifestyle and economic power?

And what led a *yangban*, an obvious social superior, to obsess about a wealthy but socially inferior individual, a "fat cat peddler," in a tone charged with such anger and resentment? Was Kim an exceptional individual for whom Yi had a personal dislike? Or does this poem more broadly reflect the changing social relationship between *yangban* and *chungin*? The last two lines imply that Yi's grudge is not only toward Kim as an individual but also toward society in general. Yi bitterly describes the political power that accompanies wealth—"all his associates are bigwigs," "the nobles try to rub elbows with him," "ministers wait upon his every word," and "official appointments come from his hands." But what caused socially and politically powerful figures to flatter a wealthy but socially inferior *chungin*? Had material and economic success really come to transcend political and social status?

THE RISE OF THE *CHUNGIN*

Holding Confucianism (or technically, the Neo-Confucianism that had dominated Korean society since the tenth century)[7] as the ruling state ideology, Korea during the Chosŏn dynasty became a society in which Confucian ideas and values shaped all of political, social, and family life. Under this ideology, late Chosŏn society had four major status categories[8]—the aristocracy, secondary status groups,[9] the commoners, and the lowborn—representing classes that quickly came to be mostly hereditary. The aristocracy, or *yangban*—literally meaning "two [*yang*] ranks [*ban*]" of officialdom: civil and military officials—enjoyed access to the highest bureaucratic posts. Although both civil and military officials were called *yangban*, the civil order was more prestigious than the military, and access to civil examinations was more restricted. To become a civil official, one usually had to pass the civil service examination, called *munkwa*, which required mastery of Chinese classical texts, before gaining appointment.[10] (As time went by, the military officials fell from privilege and eventually became part of the secondary status groups.) The *yangban* received numerous special benefits and privileges, including exemptions from the land tax, corvée labor, and military conscription; their primary vocation was public office, governing others based on Confucian doctrine.[11] The commoners consisted of peasants, artisans, and merchants, who supported Chosŏn society with their labor, services, and various taxes. Even though

they were legally eligible for civil service examination and for all offices, in reality they had very limited opportunity and could attain only the most menial posts, if any, in the bureaucracy. The lowborn included official and private slaves, as well as those who had socially despised occupations, and they were legally ineligible for all bureaucratic posts.[12]

Between the *yangban* and the commoners were the five groups of secondary status—*chungin* (technical specialists), *hyangni* (local clerks), *sŏŏl* (offspring of *yangban* and their concubines),[13] *muban* (military officials), and northerners who lived far from Seoul—all of whom were consigned to positions below the *yangban* aristocracy. The *chungin* and *sŏŏl* were often referred to together as *chungsŏ* (a compound word that takes the first character from each of their designations)—indeed the *chungin* and *sŏŏl* appeared alike to casual observers of the time, and they may seem the same to us today, as they worked from the same offices. For example, the mid-eighteenth-century *yangban* writer Yi Chunghwan (b. 1690), in his analysis of the Korean social hierarchy, grouped the *chungin* and *sŏŏl* together as *chungin*. However, the *chungin* and *sŏŏl* themselves considered the two groups as entirely distinct,[14] and their discrete group identities became obvious in their separate political movements of the nineteenth century (which will be discussed below). In this book, the term *chungin* refers to technical specialists, such as foreign-language interpreters, medical officials, astronomers, geomancers, meteorologists, legal experts, mathematicians, court painters, and scribes.

The *chungin* class was the major force behind the cultural and artistic changes in late Chosŏn society. The *chungin* worked in diverse government offices, such as the Office of Interpreters (Sayŏgwŏn), the Bureau of Medicine (Chŏnŭigam), the Bureau of Astronomy (Kwansanggam), the Office of Procurement (Naesusa), the Medical Bureau for People (Hyeminsŏ), and the Bureau of Painters (Tohwasŏ). Within the *chungin* there existed certain hierarchies: the practitioners of law, medicine, foreign languages, and meteorology and geomancy, who took the triennial written Miscellaneous Examination (Chapkwa), were considered higher than other professionals who were tested for their practical skills (*ch'wijae*).[15] However, like all the secondary status groups, the *chungin* confronted restrictions on their career advancement: they could not legally rise to the highest government positions, and although there were no legal restrictions, they were often discriminated against in practice and doomed to stagnate in lower-ranking posts.[16] The *chungin* chafed under these restrictions: their ambitions for political success and social status were blocked even as their wealth and cultural credentials came to rival those of the *yangban*.

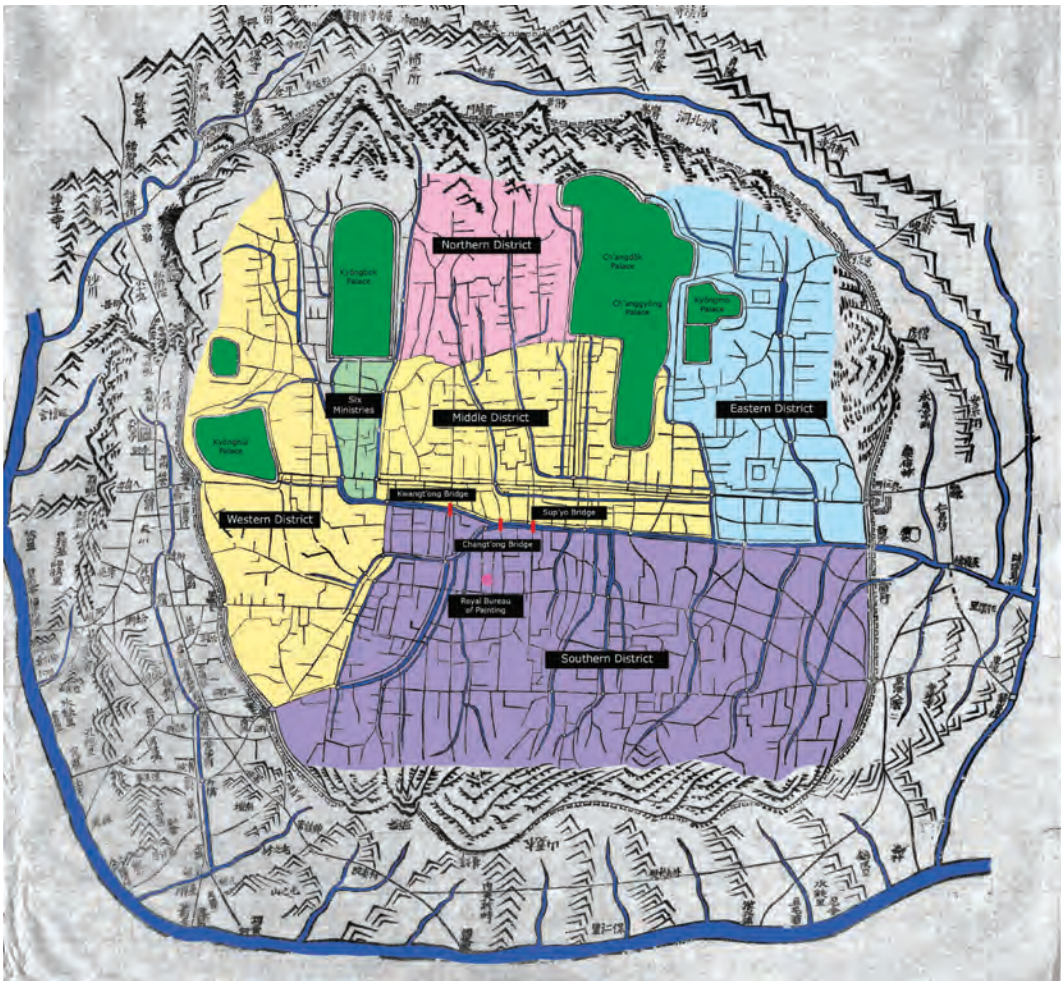
At the beginning of the Chosŏn dynasty, *yangban* who had talent in foreign languages served as interpreters and translators. But later, Chosŏn

yangban literati looked down on these specialized studies, considering them inferior, "miscellaneous learning." The *yangban* increasingly avoided these technical and professional positions; starting around 1600, these professions were occupied by only a few lineages, which became the foundation of the *chungin* class.[17] As time went by, the *chungin* class became a more socially closed group, marrying only within the class and training their offspring at an early age, transmitting their professions from generation to generation. For example, the *chungin* court painters formed "dynasties," passing on their occupations to their family members beginning in the late sixteenth century.[18] This will be discussed further in chapter 3.

The origin of the word *chungin* is unknown; nonetheless the term is apt. The *chungin* lived in their own part of Seoul. The first character of *chungin*—*chung*—means "middle" and reflects the geographical location of the *chungin*'s residential area in the middle of the capital city.[19] Surrounded by four mountains and bisected by Ch'ŏnggye Stream, in the eighteenth century Seoul covered about six square miles and had a population of about two hundred thousand.[20] At that time Seoul was a walled city with four cardinal gates (East, West, North, and South). It was divided into five major areas—the Eastern, Western, Northern, Southern, and Middle Districts—and similar social classes lived together in the same areas.[21] The two royal palaces, Kyŏngbok Palace and Ch'angdŏk Palace, were located in the most auspicious location, facing south toward Ch'ŏnggye Stream and backed by two mountains, following the Chinese feng shui geomantic prescription of "a mountain to the back, a river to the front."[22]

Most *yangban* resided in the Eastern District below T'arak Mountain (present-day Nak-san) and the Western District below Inwang Mountain. However, the Northern District was the prime real estate. Located between the royal palaces, this area was secure from the general public and its residences, situated on a south downslope, and enjoyed many benefits: the drainage was good, it was warm in winter, and it had a fine view of South Mountain.[23] Naturally, the Northern District became the preferred residential area of the most powerful *yangban* families.

The area below Ch'ŏnggye Stream, called the Southern District, was occupied by the commoners, including merchants (who also lived in the western section of the city), military officials, and impoverished *yangban* without any official positions.[24] Even though the social standing of merchants was nominally the lowest among the commoners, their increasing wealth could not be easily ignored. An eighteenth-century poem describes how, in the Southern District, "there reside the merchants and rich men . . . whose horses, vehicles, and residences are all most luxurious and splendid."[25]



1.1. *Map of Seoul* (1840s). Woodblock print, 82.5 × 67.5 cm. Korea University Museum.

The residential area located along Ch'ŏnggye Stream, known as the Middle or Central District, was occupied by the *chungin*. Within this district, the areas around Sup'yo, Changt'ong, and Kwangt'ong Bridges were the residential areas for the *chungin* who worked in the Six Ministries and other government bureaus; as a result, these individuals could walk to their offices from their homes.[26] These areas were also crowded with small shops, including pharmacies and stores selling paper, antiques, and arts and crafts. The cluster of paper and antique shops around Kwangt'ong Bridge was the main place the art and antique markets were established. Located in the center of the city, the Middle District, with all its diverse shops, was a busy and bustling area where many commercial activities took place and different social classes intermingled.

In addition to possibly referring to the Middle District of Seoul, the word *chung* (middle) also describes the *chungin*'s sandwiched social

position between the *yangban* and the commoners. The *chungin* class in Chosŏn society was, to borrow Renée Green's architectural metaphor, like a stairway connecting the higher and the lower.[27] Standing as the "middle people" in the social hierarchy, the *chungin* connected the ruling *yangban* with the ruled commoners, and vice versa. Furthermore, a stairway has the implication of going upward, which the *chungin* constantly aspired to do. The *chungin*'s seemingly contingent position as middle people belies their vital concrete social, political, and economic functions. The professional expertise of the *chungin* was the operational force that carried out the functions of the central government. In contrast to the *yangban*, who constantly transferred from one post to another following their promotions, the *chungin* stayed in their specialized professions and in the same offices, which gave them an excellent understanding of their daily work and a deep grasp of the details of their bureaucratic arenas. Also, some *chungin*, especially official interpreters with their language skills and frequent trips abroad, had access to new ideas, resources, and personal connections with Chinese and Japanese. However, although their professional knowledge and skills were the backbone of the central government, and their access to foreign countries an indispensable asset, the social standing of the *chungin* remained lower than that of the *yangban*, and they could not ascend into the top third of bureaucratic ranks. This limitation and consequent social, psychological, and economic frustration caused conflict among the *chungin* and between them and the *yangban*. The *yangban* remained the political elite, and as the *chungin* class became more established the political discrimination against them became more defined and entrenched.

The relationships between the *yangban* and *chungin* were varied, complex, and intertwined. They lived close together and associated daily; they often shared interests and friendships. Nonetheless, over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the *chungin* became more distinct as a social group, and their rising status flowed from their skills and, later, their wealth. Their lifestyles reflected this. As seen in Yi's poem, the ruling *yangban* often found fault with the *chungin*'s perceived bad taste and lack of cultural refinement. But the primary source of the *yangban*'s discontent and anxiety was the *chungin*'s wealth along with the power and influence that flowed from it, as these were direct threats to their own status and power. Medical officials and official interpreters outnumbered the other *chungin*, and their affluence was far superior to the rest of the group as well. These two classes of *chungin* professionals accumulated their wealth with the help of government-granted privileges, including commercial trading rights at home and abroad. The medical profession in Chosŏn Korea was in great demand by the upper classes, who had the resources to purchase

the best possible health care.[28] After passing the Miscellaneous Medical Examination, *chungin* medical officials worked at the Palace Pharmacy, the Palace Medical Office, and the Office of Public Assistance. Medical officials belonging to the former two offices, located within the palace grounds, served the king, royal family, and high officials, and thus held higher positions and received better treatment than those who served the public. If their treatment of the king or his royal family was effective, they were sometimes appointed county magistrates.[29]

The official remuneration for medical officials, however, was not the primary source or the foundation of their wealth. Most medical officials profited from medical practices outside their government offices. To compensate them for their meager salaries, the government granted *chungin* medical officials exclusive rights to monopolize the sale of medicinal herbs in the area called Copper Ridge (present-day Ŭlchi-ro) in Seoul, where all the apothecaries were gathered.[30] No one except medical officials belonging to government offices could practice medicine or sell medical herbs in Seoul. All pharmaceutical transactions, either importing herbs from the countryside or exporting them to village drugstores, were restricted to the Copper Ridge area. Through this monopoly, medical officials were guaranteed a stable livelihood for over two centuries, until the Kabo Reform of 1894, when their privileged selling rights for medical herbs were abolished. Chŏn Ki (1825–1854), for example, ran a pharmacy in Seoul that became a place for art lovers to appreciate, buy, and sell paintings. Chŏn Ki was also an able painter and calligrapher. Because of his keen eye, his knowledge of painting, and his social network, he played the role of middleman in the buying and selling of paintings among the *chungin*.

In addition to this privilege, medical officials profited handsomely from the import of Chinese medicines when they accompanied tributary missions to China. Every year there were two regular tributary missions to China. The first and the most important was the Winter Solstice Mission, to attend the Imperial Court on New Year's Day, in order to submit annual tribute and to present official birthday greetings to the Chinese emperor. Second was the Fall Mission for receipt of the current calendar from China.[31] In addition, there were missions on special occasions, missions to address political matters, and missions by Chinese request. Between 1637 and 1876 there were 673 official missions, so, on average, nearly three missions per year were sent.[32] For each mission, which took almost five months, the official participants were restricted to between twenty and thirty, including the chief ambassador, deputy ambassador, secretary, and lower-ranking officials or specialists, such as interpreters, physicians, veterinarians, astrologers, clerks, scribes, painters, and military aides.[33] However, there were also a large number of unofficial participants,

including servants, cooks, guides, soldiers, guards, bearers, and sometimes private merchants in the guise of servants and horsemen, so the average delegation consisted of two to three hundred people.

Although tributary missions were officially political and diplomatic trips, in fact they were major venues for international trade, in Beijing and all along the route.[34] The doctors, by taking part in these missions, profited from special trading privileges, but the primary beneficiaries were the official interpreters, who were authorized to conduct trade during diplomatic missions. Due to the official interpreters' language ability, by default they orchestrated all commercial trade. Traditionally, the interpreters had been given special permission to conduct both official and private trade with the Chinese during the missions in order to compensate them for their travel expenses, which were not reimbursed.

Another factor that favored the *chungin* interpreters on these missions was the *yangban*'s Confucian aversion to commercial activity. However, many *yangban* also did not want to do business with the Chinese for political reasons.[35] After the Manchu invasion of 1636, Chosŏn Korea continued to send tributary missions to Qing China until 1876.[36] However, for two hundred years after the invasion, the Korean *yangban* officials remained loyal to the collapsed Ming dynasty and continued to consider the Manchus to be barbarians; they felt it was a betrayal to the Han Chinese, who had aided Korea during the Japanese invasion of 1592, and beneath their dignity to carry out the official tributary missions to the new state. As a gesture of passive resistance, they avoided direct contact with the Qing officials; some *yangban* officials would not look directly at the Manchu officials' faces and did not attempt to carry on conversations. Instead, they entrusted official interpreters with all diplomatic matters, including handing out official documents and discovering the strong and weak points of Qing China.[37] This gave the *chungin* interpreters even more opportunities to get acquainted with Chinese officials and carry out trade with Chinese merchants.

Over generations the language interpreters continuously broadened their personal connections with Qing officials, increased their trading activities, and achieved financial success. For example, Chinese-language interpreters Yi Sangjŏk (1804–1865) and O Kyŏngsŏk (1831–1879) were the language officials who made the most frequent trips to Beijing (thirteen and twelve times, respectively) and who closely interacted with Qing Chinese scholars. Yi Sangjŏk was a close associate and supporter of the *yangban* calligrapher and scholar-official Kim Chŏnghŭi. He brought Kim's painting *Winterscape* (Sehando) to Beijing and received inscriptions from sixteen Qing scholars. He was also a teacher and mentor to

O Kyŏngsŏk, the son of Yi's friend; O Kyŏngsŏk fathered O Sech'ang (1864–1953), the author of *The Biographies.*

For their private trade, each official interpreter was allowed to bring to China eight bundles of ginseng, each holding ten roots.[38] Later, ginseng was replaced by silver coins, or *nyang.*[39] In 1678 one root of ginseng was converted to twenty-five *nyang*, so official interpreters were allowed to bring two thousand *nyang* to China for private trade.[40] In addition, senior interpreters could bring one thousand more *nyang*.[41] Besides this official fixed quantity, other government offices loaned interpreters funds to buy needed items. For example, one year the Bureau of Royal Attire needed silks and other luxurious items consumed in the palace, the Palace Pharmacy asked for ox bezoars and other medicinal materials, the Board of Taxation wanted silks, hats, ivory, and copper for minting coins, and the Office of Military Affairs requested silks and other decorative items for uniforms and banners.[42] With these extra funds to leverage, the interpreters could make even greater profit.

The Korea-Japan diplomatic missions were even more lucrative. There were two types of diplomatic missions to Japan. The first type, *t'ongsinsa*, were goodwill missions sent intermittently at the request of the Japanese authorities. From 1607 to 1811 the Chosŏn government dispatched twelve diplomatic envoys to Japan. *T'ongsinsa* missions were very large; the number of participants varied from around 430 to 500, averaging about 475. The Korean *t'ongsinsa* traveled from Seoul to Pusan, where they sailed on to Tsushima Island, an intermediary stop between the two countries. From there the Koreans arrived at the port of Osaka, then went through Kyoto and Owari, and reached their final destination of Edo. The second type of mission, called *munnwihaeng*, was sent to Tsushima Island every four to five years, for a total of fifty-four missions between 1635 and 1860. This mission was headed by Japanese-language interpreters and comprised two hundred members.

In addition to commerce in association with those two diplomatic missions, there were opportunities for trade at a market in the vicinity of the Japanese consulate, the Waegwan, established in Tongnae (present-day Pusan). Before the 1592 Japanese invasion, Japanese envoys came all the way to Seoul, but after the invasion, the Chosŏn court limited all Japanese diplomatic and commercial activities to the area around the Waegwan, and even there the Japanese were under strict supervision. The market was held six times per month, and both Japanese-language interpreters and thirty government-licensed merchants participated in trades. For all the public and private trades carried out in the markets in the Waegwan and during the diplomatic missions, the interpreters oversaw inspection and negotiation.

After experiencing Japanese and Manchu invasions in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Chosŏn government was keen to improve defenses. Thus, some of Korea's major import items were armor and weapons such as matchlocks and longswords, and materials to manufacture munitions, including sulfur, niter, and water buffalo's horns for arrows. In exchange, Korea exported ginseng and silk. Ginseng was thought to be a panacea for Japanese endemic diseases, so the Japanese considered it as precious as gold. The ginseng trade was very profitable, as the ginseng that was bought for seventy *nyang* at the shops in Seoul was sold for three hundred *nyang* at the markets in Edo. Also profitable were Chinese silk cloth and other silk items in demand in Japan. Direct trade between Japan and China ceased between the mid-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and Korea took advantage of this to become their intermediary, with the official interpreters acting as the dealers.

Luxurious Chinese items purchased during the interpreters' tributary missions were brought to the Waegwan in Tongnae and sold to Japanese merchants and officials there. A 1670 record says, "All the imported Chinese white silk is sold to the Japanese. Official interpreters bought one *kŭn* of white silk for 60 gold pieces and sold it to the Japanese for 160 gold pieces. Because of this large profit, even tens of thousands *kŭn* of Chinese white silk can be easily sold."[43]

This statement indicates that official interpreters made huge profits as intermediaries in the trade between China and Japan. In addition to that source of income, some official interpreters practiced usury and propagated their wealth even further and faster. In the famous eighteenth-century novel *Tale of Hŏ Saeng* (Hŏsaengjŏn) by the *yangban* writer Pak Chiwŏn (1737–1805), an impoverished *yangban* named Hŏ borrows money from the richest man in town, Mr. Pyŏn. The writer modeled the rich Pyŏn on the grandfather of the actual Japanese-language interpreter Pyŏn Sŭngŏp (1623–1709), who was wealthy enough to lend money to the Chosŏn state itself.[44] He also practiced usury and before his death, he checked his account book and more than 500,000 silver *nyang* had been loaned to people. Even though he broke a sumptuary law when he used a lacquered coffin for his wife when it was only allowed for kings, because of his close (monetary) relationships with high officials, Pyŏn Sŭngŏp was able to evade any trouble.[45] In the nineteenth century, another Chinese-language interpreter, Yi Tŏkkyu, was one of the richest men in Korea and the only nineteenth-century Korean known to have purchased private property in China.[46] And numerous men like the interpreter Kim Hant'ae in our poem were well known both for their extravagance and their patronage of the arts.

Most *yangban* owned land and slaves, which provided the basis of their wealth, and they all had significant official positions, which helped sustain

their status and prestige. As noted above, the *yangban* were exempt from the land tax, corvée labor, and military service, and enjoyed great privilege. However, despite (or because of) their wealth and advantage, the *yangban* were expected to model Confucianism through example. The ruling state ideology, Neo-Confucianism, esteemed the humble, austere, and modest lifestyle and warned against personal extravagance. As the repository of Confucian values, the *yangban* voluntarily valued frugality, thrift, hard work, courteousness, and refraining from indulgence or immoderate behavior.

Because commercialism was traditionally looked down upon, merchants were ranked at the bottom of the social hierarchy according to Confucian principles. They were placed even below the farmers and artisans, who at least produced food and artifacts, while merchants merely took advantage of the exchange of others' goods. In addition, the Confucians thought that merchants' commerce stimulated superfluous luxury and diverted farmers from their appointed task: feeding the populace. Thus, conservative *yangban* condemned the trade in luxury items from China. Because the official Chinese-language interpreters played the biggest role in transmitting Chinese goods to Korea, they often became the primary target of blame. The *yangban* belittled the *yŏkkwan* (interpretation officers) by calling them "interpreter-merchants" or *yŏksang*. It is in this context that Yi Chowŏn calls interpreter Kim Hant'ae a "fat cat peddler" or *taego*, which literally means "great merchant" but is frequently delivered in a contemptuous tone. As the *chungin* increased their wealth and power, the *yangban* class often expressed its uneasiness by condemning not only their commerce but also the *chungin* lifestyle as tasteless and self-indulgent.

About the same time Yi was criticizing the fat cat peddler, similar criticism by *yangban* Sin Wi (1769–1845) denounced the ostentatious consumer culture of the *chungin* in his collection titled *Miscellaneous Writing* (Chapsŏ):

> A petty town official's residence is like that of the prime minister:
> Books, paintings, and prized articles fill the rooms.
> How could one confuse [tasteful collecting] with such bad habits?
> This fashion is destroying public morals.[47]

Another *yangban*, Yi Ujun (1801–1867), also criticized the *chungin* for the flow of luxury items from China, writing in 1844:

> Every year forty thousand roots of ginseng from Kaesŏng are steamed and sealed at the Office of Interpreters. Official interpreter-merchants

trade these in Beijing. As the market price goes up, each root earns about ten *nyang* of silver, which turns a large profit. Thus, this trade should have benefited this country and people, but the situation has gone bad as time passes and the country's financial situation has worsened. What has gone wrong?

Earlier on my official trips to China, I observed official interpreters trade with Chinese merchants in Beijing. Their trade items had nothing to do with daily necessities, but instead were luxuries and rare treasures such as precious jades and incense burners. . . . These luxurious items cannot feed the hungry or comfort the cold. . . . All the displayed objects in Chongno Street, which ruin people's eyes and ears, are mostly from Liulichang in Beijing, China. Everyday necessities are avoided, with merchants saying that they yield little profit. It is the same for the trade with Japan. This is really a reprehensible situation![48]

Many such comments reveal the ambivalent coexistence of age-old and still-strong Confucian ideals alongside new, undeniable material realities. The energy put into attacks on the *chungin* and their lavish lifestyles indicates that they posed a profound threat to the status quo and traditional Confucian values. Status, power, and influence, which had previously belonged to the *yangban* by birth and education, increasingly accrued to those with money, of which objects were the tangible representation. The luxurious lifestyles of the eighteenth century can be seen in a painting by Sin Yunbok (b. 1758) of a group of three gentlemen (who may be either *yangban* or *chungin*) consorting with female courtesans in a garden (fig. 1.2). All three men wear what looks like high-quality silk outer jackets, and the beads of their hat strings seem to be made of imported amber and other precious stones.[49] One gentleman and one female courtesan are holding very long smoking pipes, which indicates their high social status (the long pipe suggests that one had a servant who lighted it, as one could not do it alone).[50]

The *chungin*, with their limited social opportunities but formidable economic power, concentrated on using their resources to carve out their own social niche and cultural realm. They emulated the connoisseurship of the *yangban* while vastly exceeding them in conspicuous consumption, aggressively participating in collecting painting, calligraphy, antiquities, and other art objects. Yet the *chungin* remained second-class citizens. Their primary resentment was their hereditary subordination to the *yangban*, and the accompanying legal and customary limitations on their social status and bureaucratic advancement.

The *chungin*'s accumulated bitterness over their political and social discrimination led to an attempted reform movement in the mid-nineteenth

1.2. Sin Yunbok (Korean, b. 1758), *Playing the Zither by Pond* (eighteenth century). Ink and light colors on paper, 28 × 35 cm. Kansong Art and Culture Foundation.

century. This was partially inspired by the success of another discontented status group, the *sŏŏl*.[51] The political limitations were harsher for the *sŏŏl* than for the *chungin*;[52] in fact, they were not even allowed to take civil examinations until later in the Chosŏn dynasty.[53] The *sŏŏl*, increasing greatly in number toward the end of the Chosŏn period, held numerous campaigns to eliminate prohibitions on their bureaucratic advancement. Such efforts finally bore fruit in 1851, when the *sŏŏl*'s petition to be allowed to serve in some high offices was granted, and accordingly several *sŏŏl* were appointed to top-level positions.[54]

Seeing the *sŏŏl*'s achievement, the *chungin* were inspired to petition the king for more privileges. A total of 1,872 *chungin*, who worked in eleven major government offices, participated and contributed the funds for the campaign.[55] The *chungin* planned to seize on King Ch'ŏljong's (r. 1849–63) August 1851 journey to King Chŏngjo's memorial service to plead their case. The *chungin* prepared a written complaint about the customary restrictions on their bureaucratic careers, pointed out their

descent from the same lineages as the ruling officials, and called for the elimination of restrictions on bureaucratic appointments and advancement. The text read as follows:

> [Korea's] Complete Code of Law has been regulated in a way that fails to select good government officers and blocks political advancement. Holding a deep-rooted rancor against the current policy, we [*chungin*] look up and down, but find no place to complain. When dew and rain fall, they do not discriminate by place, and when plum trees grow they do not discriminate in the land on which they grow. We, the *chungin*, are reasonable beings and among those that the king influences by his virtues. How could we not have the loyalty of sunflowers toward the sun, and the hearts of faithful dogs and horses? . . . We, the *chungin*, are humble beings who pursue general affairs and cannot compete with the illustrious *yangban*, but why should we take second place even to receding floods in the countryside? [Abolishing the policy that prohibits the *chungin* from advancing to higher and important offices] cannot be achieved by ourselves alone, even if we gather, beat our breasts, and stamp our feet. . . . Even if we are penalized due to our petition and action, we will submit tamely to punishment. . . . Even if the [usual] order comes out in the morning and our petition falls into a deep hollow, we, the *chungin*, will not bear a grudge forever.[56]

Unfortunately for the *chungin*, their petition apparently *did* "fall into a deep hollow," because it is not recorded in any official documentation and can be found only in the *chungin*'s collection of writings, and the campaign failed to increase their political opportunities. Nevertheless, the extant record of their petition and its preparation reveal two significant factors about the nineteenth-century *chungin*.

First, we understand how the *chungin* perceived their group identity, as the list of the signers shows who was included and excluded in their collective action. Their names, job titles, and offices all reveal that they are *chungin*. Even though they shared some common feelings of social and political limitations with several other secondary status groups of the late Chosŏn period, the *chungin* clearly had a distinctive consciousness and even a feeling of superiority over the other groups. In fact, the *chungin* had more opportunities for advancement than did the other groups, and were second in status only to the *yangban*. By the late Chosŏn period, the *chungin* had become a closed, inherited class who only married other *chungin*.

Second, given the milieu of class distinctions, competition, and rivalry in the late Chosŏn period, we can understand the psychology of the

chungin. Being privileged relative to many others, the *chungin* typically compared themselves with the *yangban*, noting that on the whole they were equally educated, accomplished, successful, and wealthy. Thus, they considered their secondary social status and limited opportunities unjust, and collaborated with one another to improve their situation. This psychology explains the *chungin*'s attempts to form their own identity through collective cultural activities, attachment to material culture and self-expression through peculiar obsessions, and identification with the flowering plum.

CREATING COHESION

A primary concern of the *chungin* was that, unlike the *yangban*, who left many written records of their lineages, lives, and work, they might pass away without leaving any historical trace of their existence.[57] As the technical officials who worked in the fields of document preparation, law, accounting, and interpreting, the *chungin* were fully aware of the importance of documentation and the fact that records would outlast memories.

Knowledge and skill in writing poems and prose had long been a privilege of intellectuals with the means and resources to learn Chinese characters, and had thus been almost entirely limited to the *yangban*. Nonetheless, publication of various writings by some literate *chungin* and other secondary status group members appeared as early as the sixteenth century. One of the most important writings is by Ŏ Sukkwŏn (act. 1525–54). Titled *The Storyteller's Miscellany* (P'aegwan chapki), it is a collection of Ŏ Sukkwŏn's jottings on diverse, almost encyclopedic, subjects, including the stories of people near and far.[58] Born as a *sŏŏl*, Ŏ Sukkwŏn worked at the Office of Diplomatic Correspondence and went to Beijing seven times as an interpreter. A talented writer with critical and ambivalent feelings toward his constrained reality, Ŏ Sukkwŏn presaged many non-*yangban* authors to come. By the seventeenth century many members of the secondary status groups were both literate and cultured, and in the late Chosŏn many individual *chungin* published personal collections (*munjip*) of poems and other writings. Furthermore, some *chungin* even published their writing collections outside Korea. For example, the official interpreter Yi Sangjŏk (1804–1865) published several collections in Korea and China. One of them, published in 1848 in Beijing, called *Letters of the Neighboring Sea* (Haerin ch'ŏkso), consists of the poems he exchanged with thirty-nine Qing Chinese scholar-poets; another collection, *Collection from the Studio of Oratory for Favors* (*Ŭnsongdangjip*), also published in China, comprises twenty-four volumes of poetry.

Among their noteworthy publications were *chungin* "genealogy books" (*chokpo*). Until the seventeenth century, the most critical documentary distinction between the *yangban* and non-*yangban* was the former's genealogy books. These volumes, which emerged with the practice of patrilineal descent, are records of patrilineal clans since the time of the distant ancestors. So, to have a genealogy book indicates that one's hereditary descent, and thus identity, can be traced. As their collective consciousness rose in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many *chungin* began to search for their ancestral origins and published family genealogies.[59] The *chungin* interpreter Yi Ch'anghyŏn (1850–1921), who was O Sech'ang's uncle, compiled a comprehensive genealogical chart of *chungin* lineages, *Record of the Origins of Chungin Surnames* (Sŏngwŏnnok). This work remains one of two basic primary sources for research on the *chungin*, even though its coverage stops in the 1860s. Genealogy books began to appear in great numbers around 1600, and even in the early 1930s they were still one of the most frequently printed publications in Korea.[60] The fad of compiling genealogy books sometimes brought unfortunate consequences, such as the production of fake ones or the fraudulent use of someone else's lineage.[61]

In addition, the mid-nineteenth century saw an effusion of biographies by the *chungin.* They began to compile books of biographical profiles of worthy, but largely ignored, *chungin* and other non-*yangban*. The remarkable biography of *chungin* and other secondary social status individuals, *Chronicles of Forgotten Men* (Hosan oegi; hereafter, *Chronicles*), was written in 1844 by the painter Cho Hŭiryong, who sympathized with the remarkable accomplishments of respectable men whose lower social origins prohibited their recognition and inclusion in traditional compilations.[62] In *Chronicles*, Cho wrote about forty-two contemporary men and a few women. In 1862 a government clerk, Yu Chaegŏn (1793–1880), published biographies of *chungin* and low-status individuals titled *Observations from the Countryside* (Ihyang kyŏnmunnok; hereafter, *Observations*).[63] In 1866 an impoverished *yangban*, Yi Kyŏngmin (1814–1883), wrote a compilation of non-*yangban* biographies called *Those This Age Has Overlooked* (Hŭijo ilsa).[64] A journalist and independence fighter, Chang Chiyŏn (1864–1921) wrote biographies of *chungin* and people of lower social status in six volumes, titled *Stories Left behind by an Untrammeled Scholar* (Ilsa yusa; hereafter, *Stories Left Behind*).[65] In 1862 Cho Hŭiryong clearly expressed the motivation behind these publications in his preface to Yu's *Observations*:

> In the Diamond Mountains, five superb views, including Nine Dragons Waterfall, Ten Thousand Figures, Sumi Peak, and Jade Mirror Peak, are already well known. However, besides these well-known places, name-

less hills and valleys have admirable and sequestered scenes that are no less remarkable than these five superb views. If we name these places, they could take their places among other great scenes, but because they are buried under rough thickets and overgrown weeds, they often do not show their true selves.

Likewise, if we look back at the many people who have passed, there are many cases like that described above. Nowadays, only those who compose poems at the Confucian Academy and those who examine the Six Classics at court are admired. The village people [*chungin* or non-*yangban*] neither studied the classics nor performed meritorious deeds. Or even if there were some whose words and deeds were remarkable, they went unnoticed, like drying grass and decomposing trees by secluded water.

Ah, sorrow! This is why I composed the *Chronicles of Forgotten Men*. My friend Yu [Chaegŏn] collected the records of people from other writing collections, and selected and compiled others who were not recorded, and made a book with 280 anecdotes. He named his book *Observations from the Countryside* and asked me to write a preface. How could I decline?

Our country is broad and also has an abundance of noteworthy figures. We should expand our histories to include those whose words, deeds, poems, and writings are worthwhile but unnoticed. But many of them are buried and we do not know their whereabouts. Yu Chaegŏn's heart, as broad as the ocean, finds pleasure in others' good deeds. He records all the things he has heard and seen. Whoever has any special talent or ability, in addition to poets and writers, is recorded. Who could say Yu's sincere efforts are futile?[66]

These prolific publications were products of the *chungin*'s collective literary activities. Originally, the term *munin* referred solely to learned *yangban* men because in the early days they were the only men of letters. Beginning in the late seventeenth century, the scribes and petty officials or government clerks at court began to organize poetry societies, and in the eighteenth century the *chungin* formed poetry societies as well. By the nineteenth century these became major venues for *chungin* association and cohesion as well as sources of self-esteem. Like their *yangban* counterparts, the *chungin* were competent "men of letters." These societies consolidated their collective identity as men of cultivation and learning, elevated their social standing and cultural prominence, reinforced their pride and consciousness, and allowed expression of their thoughts in writing. And because of the intrinsic association between writing, calligraphy, and painting in East Asian culture, the "poetry" societies were populated

by many painters and painter-poets as well as writers, and therefore were venues for connecting artists and art patrons, as we shall see.

Such societies flourished in the late Chosŏn period in large part because in this arena the *chungin*'s needs met with *yangban* approval. While the *yangban* may have frowned on the *chungin*'s material indulgence and their political campaigns to promote their own social advancement, they welcomed the literati-style cultural activities of the *chungin*, which they thought would be a contained venue for the *chungin* to express their intellectual desires and dissatisfaction with their social limitations. Thus, many prominent *yangban* encouraged the *chungin* poetry societies, showing their support and approval by writing prefaces and inscriptions in *chungin* poetry albums and writing collections.[67]

One incident poignantly demonstrates the aspirations and frustrations of the *chungin* intellectuals. In 1817 the members of the very prominent *chungin* Pine and Rock Garden Poetry Society invited the young *yangban* Kim Chŏnghŭi to inscribe their association's name on a rock. At that time Kim was already an established calligrapher, though only in his thirties. One angry young *chungin* pulled out his sword and cried, "Aren't there any *chungin* who can write our own poetry society's name? What is the use of our own limbs? Let me cut them off!"[68]

Diverse in size, many *chungin* poetry societies were based on residential regions, occupations, and interests. Each had its own bylaws, format, and membership, and the gatherings usually occurred in members' residences or gardens, or other outdoor settings. Each poetry society had a name, usually reflecting the primary gathering place or the sobriquet of the organizer. For example, one such organization, called Sixth Bridge Poetry Society (Yukkyo sisa), was named after the sixth bridge of the Ch'ŏnggye Stream—that is, Kwangt'ong Bridge, known for its active outdoor market (which will be discussed in chapter 3). The neighborhood around Kwangt'ong Bridge was the residential area for the *chungin*, especially official interpreters and medical doctors, and the Sixth Bridge Poetry Society gatherings were held in members' pavilions and libraries around the bridge.

Through these poetry societies, the *chungin* as a group produced collective anthologies. The first such *chungin* poetry anthology, *Poems of Peaceful People* (Sodae p'ungyo), consisting of 162 poems, came out in 1737. Two more *chungin* anthologies, *Further Selection of Poems of Peaceful People* (P'ungyo soksŏn; hereafter, *Further Selection*) and *Third Selection of Poems of Peaceful People* (P'ungyo samsŏn; hereafter, *Third Selection*), were published sixty years apart, in 1797 and 1857. The purpose of these publications was to promote the *chungin*. In the preface of *Poems of Peaceful People*, chief editor Ko Siŏn (1671–1734) noted the *chungin*'s equality to the *yangban* in literary talent: "Dividing men into different social

statuses was an artificial incident, but the voice [i.e., poem] of the men is the same."[69]

In their poetry gatherings, the *chungin* emulated the activities of the *yangban* literati or the ancient Chinese scholars. Calling themselves, for example, "Scholars of the Present Time" (Tangse chi sa) or the "Professional Scholars of the City [Seoul]" (Wihang chŏnmun chi sa), the *chungin* often compared their events to famous classical Chinese literati gatherings—such as Wang Xizhi's Spring Purification at the Orchid Pavilion of the Jin dynasty, the Nine Elders of the Mountain Fragrance of the Tang dynasty, the Five Elders Gathering of the Northern Song dynasty, the Luosha Elders Gathering of the Northern Song dynasty, or the Elegant Gathering in the Western Garden of the Northern Song dynasty—and reenacted them, as we will see below.[70] At their gatherings, the *chungin* engaged in traditional literati-style activities, including composing poems, playing chess and musical instruments, drinking tea, and appreciating paintings and antiques.[71] The Paulownia Wall Society (Pyŏgosa), named after the studio of its founder, Yu Ch'oejin (1791–1869), is the *chungin*-led group whose members are the main characters of this book. The society consisted of painters, connoisseurs, art dealers, and patrons, and exemplifies the interwoven artistic activities of the *chungin*.[72] Initiated one autumn day in 1847 at the garden of Yu Ch'oejin, it lasted for only about twenty years, but had outsized importance due to its notable membership. The bylaws the members laid out in the garden that day reveal their modest goals:

1. Hold a meeting on a leisure day, at least once each season, and as long as there is no unexpected incident, keep one another company.
2. Prepare vegetable dishes for meals, and do not exceed three rounds of [alcoholic] drinks and two kinds of snacks, but drink as much tea as wanted.
3. Read books as wanted, compose poems as inspired, but there is no need to have any rules about them. Hold meetings as often as wanted, stay courteous to one another, and avoid too many rules.[73]

The members of Pyŏgosa were all literate *chungin* who collected paintings and calligraphy and commissioned these from one another; all practiced poetry, calligraphy, and painting. The three important painters in the Society were Cho Hŭiryong, Chŏn Ki, and Yu Suk, and the patrons were Yu Ch'oejin, Yi Kibok, Na Ki, and O Ch'angnyŏl. Chŏn Ki was also an art connoisseur and dealer.

Among the artists, Cho Hŭiryong (1789–1866) led the pack. One of the most prominent members, he was a distinguished painter, calligrapher, art critic, and writer. O Sech'ang, author of *The Biographies*, called him

"the leader of the ink field of that period."[74] As a painter, Cho is known for his love of the flowering plum, and his characteristic paintings are exceptionally important in art history. Furthermore, his prolific writings about painting inscriptions and art theories are invaluable assets for art historians and literary scholars. Cho Hŭiryong, his paintings, and his art theories will be discussed thoroughly in chapter 4.

Chŏn Ki was another important painter of the time. Due to his premature death and lack of documents, his personal background is not well-known, except that he ran a pharmacy that became a center for artists and art patrons.[75] Like Cho Hŭiryong, Chŏn was fond of flowering plums and painted them, as well as plum blossom studios (a studio beneath the plum blossoms). In addition to his painting talent, Chŏn's connoisseurship and his role as an art dealer are intriguing.

Yu Suk (1827–1873) was a versatile *chungin* court painter. His talent was recognized at an early age, and when he was twenty-six, in 1852, Yu participated in the production of the official portrait of King Ch'ŏljong (r. 1849–63).[76] He was good friends with other *chungin*, so whenever important poetry gatherings occurred Yu was invited to paint the scenes. Thus he is responsible for many paintings of elegant *chungin* gatherings, including the 1853 *Spring Purification* handscroll, in which Yu was able to capture the individual physical traits of the thirty participants, with most of whom he was likely already familiar.

The affluent patrons, who made up about half of the Pyŏgosa, were wealthy medical doctors and foreign-language interpreters. Yu Ch'oejin, the founder of the group, came from an illustrious medical family.[77] The family was wealthy enough that by Yu Ch'oejin's time he did not have to work much as a doctor but could enjoy his family fortune. From his youth, Yu had traveled around the scenic sites of Korea, and even went to Beijing and befriended Chinese literati and artists. However, his social status as *chungin* and its limitations frustrated him, leading him to retire early and pursue cultural activities. But his self-proclaimed life of a recluse did not mean he cut off all his social ties. Instead, he held elaborate, literati-style gatherings, sometimes lasting for ten days or more, with his circle of friends. This is why Yu was and is known more as poet, art patron, and art connoisseur than as a doctor. Art collecting began with his father, Yu Ch'ijŏk, who collected old paintings and books and copied old masters' paintings. Like his father, Yu Ch'oejin appreciated paintings, copied paintings, and wrote inscriptions on them.[78] He also enjoyed associating with poets and painters, so it was natural for him to organize the Pyŏgosa and sponsor his *chungin* painter associates.

Yu Ch'oejin's best friend was Yi Kibok (b. 1791); the pair exchanged poems and emotional letters throughout their lives. Yi Kibok was a prom-

inent physician in charge of King Hŏnjong (r. 1834–49), and through his profession he enjoyed good relationships with powerful *yangban*.[79] In his writing collection there are poems from *yangban* and prescriptions for medicine, medical advice, and health records of the *yangban*. Yi painted bamboo and plum blossoms during his leisure time, and he commissioned paintings from other *chungin* painters. Like Yu, he sometimes held literati-style gatherings at his house.

O Ch'angnyŏl was also King Hŏnjong's physician. His medical ability earned him the king's favor, and he was appointed as Kwach'ŏn County magistrate, a substantial achievement for a *chungin* man. He also befriended Qing Chinese scholars during his two trips to Beijing, and his poems received recognition from the Chinese. He was accomplished as both a doctor and a poet, and it was said that "his poetry conceals his medical skill and his medical skill conceals his poetic talent." His three poems to the *yangban* Kim Chŏnghŭi were included in the *chungin* literati collection *Third Selection.*[80]

A young but important art patron was Na Ki. From an affluent family, like Yu Ch'oejin, Na enjoyed a life of leisure, calling himself a poet without a career. Na was not a skilled painter or calligrapher, but he was an enthusiastic art collector. His well-to-do background enabled him to amass a remarkable collection, and he was highly esteemed as a connoisseur of calligraphy, painting, and antiques. He liked to associate with *chungin* poets, calligraphers, and painters; Kim Sŏkchun noted that Na befriended numerous *chungin* intellectuals of the period, and "outside of his house there were always shoes [of his guests]."[81] Na's *Writing Collection of Pyŏgodang* (Pyŏgodang yugo) records his association with distinguished painters of the time and their diverse artistic activities.[82] Na commissioned from Cho Hŭiryong an eight-panel flowering plum screen, *Red and White Flowering Plums* (see fig. 4.14), during Cho's exile period.

The *chungin* intellectuals wanted to leave visual and textual evidence of their group identity as men of letters, and the long handscroll called *Spring Purification* very well represents their passion, pride, and prosperity. Yu Suk's 1852 work depicts a literati-style gathering of thirty *chungin* celebrating the fifteen hundredth anniversary of the famous Chinese Spring Purification Gathering at the Orchid Pavilion.[83] Through this *chungin* gathering and handscroll, the participants reenacted the scene recorded in Wang Xizhi's *Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Gathering* (Lanting ji xu) by the famous Chinese calligrapher Wang Xizhi (303–361). On the occasion of the Spring Purification Festival in 353, Wang Xizhi had invited forty-two scholar-poets to the Orchid Pavilion, near the town of Shaoxing, Zhejiang. Wang's preface tells how guests sat along a meandering watercourse, floated wine-filled cups on flowing water, and composed poems as they

drank wine. This event became a prototype for literati gatherings, for which reason it has been reenacted throughout East Asian history and depicted in numerous paintings.

Emulating the Chinese gathering, the thirty *chungin* participants in 1853 each composed and submitted a poem. The poets included interpreters, legal officials, accountants, astrologers, geomancers, and painters. They ranged in age from twenty to sixty-seven.[84] They are all neatly dressed as scholars, with long, formal outer garments and hats. However, this Korean *chungin* gathering appears to be sober, as there is no wine drinking shown.

The handscroll, thirty centimeters tall and eight hundred centimeters long, consists of three parts: the title, the painting, and a collection

1.3. Yu Suk (Korean, 1827–1873), *Spring Purification* (1853). Ink and light colors on paper, 30 × 800 cm. National Folk Museum of Korea.

1.4. Detail of figure 1.3.

of poems. The title *Spring Purification* (Sugyedo) was inscribed by the organizer of the gathering, Kim Sŏkchun (1831–1915), and he signed the scroll with his sobriquet Little Hawthorn (Sodang) and his seal. Court painter Yu Suk portrayed the thirty *chungin* in a scene replete with cultural references, revealing the *chungin*'s desired public image and historical role. Following the painting are thirty poems, with the last by Pyŏn Chongun (1790–1866) explaining the background of the occasion. Later, three more inscriptions were attached, which were a review by Yi Sangjŏk written after viewing the handscroll in 1857, Kim Sŏkchun's postscript, and a review by Kim Pyŏngsŏn (1830–1891) from 1873. This long handscroll was not merely a record of a *chungin* literati-style gathering, but an ambitious and calculated political work.

The painting begins with four gentlemen entering the gate, while two others are already in the garden. The main group sits around a large table, where scholarly implements—books, a roll of paper, an inkstone, an inkstick on an arm rest, brushes in a brush holder, and an antique bronze—are neatly arranged. The participants sit gracefully, most of them looking down at a bearded man on the left as if he were speaking. Characteristic individual features are clearly captured. Yu portrays different body shapes, postures, facial shapes, ages, body hair, smoking habits, and other personal traits as detailed as smallpox scars. Thus, each participant is entirely individualized.

1.5. Fang Shishu (Chinese, 1693–1751) and Ye Fanglin (Chinese, late 1600–mid-1700s), *The Literary Gathering at a Yangzhou Garden* (1743). Ink and colors on silk, 32.4 × 201.2 cm. Overall 33.5 x 893 cm. Cleveland Museum of Art. Severance and Greta Millikin Purchase Fund 1979.72.

This *Spring Purification* painting is rather paradoxical: although they maintain their individuality with their personal traits, and are celebrating their *chungin* identity, the *chungin* are dressed formally as scholars, so that viewers without knowing the background of the event could not distinguish this from a traditional *yangban* gathering. Thus, the *chungin* were successful in presenting themselves as a group of cultivated and learned men, which is solidly confirmed by the thirty poems composed and submitted by the participants. These writings seek to prove that these *chungin* not only look like literati but are true men of letters.

Like their reenactment of Wang Xizhi's Spring Purification gathering, making this handscroll was also carefully planned by the participants. The purpose was to document their existence and create their own history. As seen in the composition, brushstrokes, and background treatment, Yu Suk painted this handscroll cautiously and laboriously. Yu probably made sketches on the spot but later worked on the handscroll in his studio. Likewise, the poems were gathered, most likely revised and edited several times, and copied by one hand. Written in regular script, the characters are clearly composed on evenly spaced lines, thus emphasizing the rational and intellectual character of these *chungin*. This was a collaborative work that the *chungin* proudly circulated among themselves. The three inscriptions, the final one dating to 1873, indicate that the painting was shown again and again for at least twenty years.

A comparison of this handscroll with a 1743 Chinese handscroll, *The Literary Gathering at a Yangzhou Garden* (Jiuri xingan wenyan tu) by Fang Shishu (1693–1751) and Ye Fanglin (late 1600s–mid 1700s), now in the Cleveland Museum of Art, reveals certain similarities.[85] The handscroll depicts sixteen members of the River Han Poetry Society (Hanjiang Shishe) gathering on the Double Ninth Festival (the ninth day of the ninth month) in honor of recluse-poet Tao Yuanming (365–427), at the

garden of Yangzhou salt merchant Ma Yueguan. The members, consisting of a few retired scholars and educated merchants, were divided into small groups and engaged in cultural activities.

Both paintings depict an elegant gathering of poetry society members in honor of a prominent historical figure, and all participants are individualized in their portraits. But the more significant point is that both represent marginalized groups, sharing the mentality of withdrawal from politics, who deliberately created their public images as cultivated intellectuals and produced these historical documents. In order to emphasize their subjects' public personae as educated men, both handscrolls portray carefully calculated literati accoutrements. Another compelling similarity lies in their deliberateness and self-consciousness. Both works were the products of planning and preparation in both the painting and the writing. Just as the *Yangzhou Garden* handscroll inscriptions were deliberately written and added later, the thirty Korean poems were carefully managed.[86] Both handscrolls were circulated among friends whose colophons were added later.

Despite their common characteristics, the two handscrolls differ in the positions of the figures. While the *Yangzhou Garden* scroll arrays the figures in five small groups, most figures in the *Spring Purification* scroll are gathered in one group in the center, emphasizing their collective identity. This sense of unity and the feelings of self-worth derived therefrom are also revealed in the participants' writings. In the last inscription, for example, Kim Pyŏngsŏn writes that this handscroll is a truly rare masterpiece that cannot be re-created.[87] Like him, all the participants and other *chungin* were very proud of the gathering and poetry compositions, as seen in Kim Sŏkchun's postscript:

> At the Elegant Gathering at the Orchid Pavilion during the [Chinese] Jin dynasty, not everybody composed poems. But these thirty men all

composed poems. They wrote them in casual fashion, not necessarily following the traditional formats of words and phrase. In the early days, [Kim Chŏnghŭi] promised to write an inscription on this scroll, but regretfully, he suddenly passed away and we can no longer request it. Thus, one of his old writings, "Calligraphy and painting share the same heart" and Chŏn Ki's calligraphy, "[Even] the Qing Chinese surrender," were mounted as the preface to this handscroll. Originally, this poetry gathering was planned by me and Chŏn Ki, but Chŏn did not attend because he lives too far away. A handscroll was finally made and we circulated it and appreciated it.[88]

Kim proudly states that "all" the *chungin* participants composed poems (even if their poems might have been written later and edited several times), while in the original Elegant Gathering at the Orchid Pavilion not all the ancient Chinese literati did or could. Chŏn Ki's boast, "[Even] the Qing Chinese surrender,"[89] shows that, by this time, the *chungin*, although socially and politically repressed, did not feel they had any superiors in the cultural arena. With their abilities and literati accomplishments, they were able to surpass, at least in their own estimation, not only the Qing Chinese literati but also, by extension, the *yangban* who were so closely identified with those literati. But the underlying desire of the *chungin* was not simply to show refinement, but to create for themselves a new reality without limitations.

SYMBIOSIS: KIM CHŎNGHŬI AND THE *CHUNGIN*

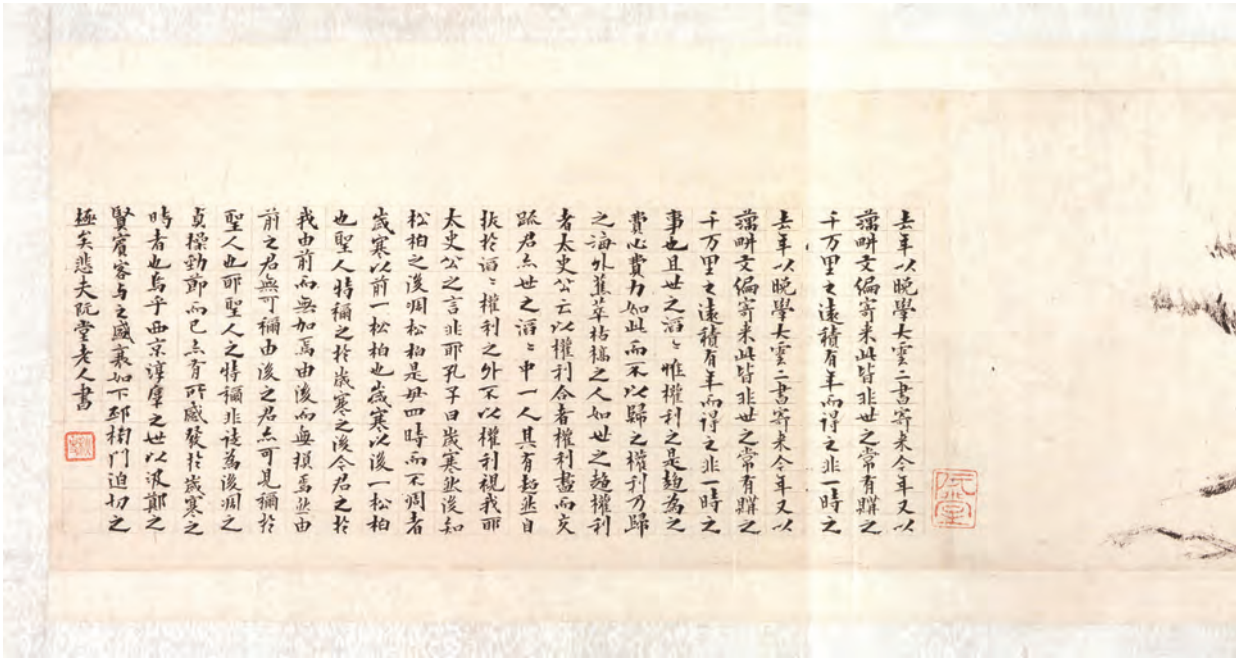
We have seen that some bitter *yangban* denigrated the socially inferior yet well-heeled *chungin* for lacking literary skill and moral virtue, in both the "Fat Cat Peddler" poem and other statements. However, the relationship between the *yangban* and the *chungin* was much more tightly interwoven, interdependent, and complementary than their class rivalry suggests. The *chungin* published writing collections with *yangban* prefaces and inscriptions. The *chungin* functioned as the *yangban*'s spokesmen while serving in their roles as foreign-language interpreters and missionary go-betweens, and as their working hands and feet in their government offices and on personal occasions. In fact, their collaborative and cooperative relationship was ubiquitous. This was noted by foreign observers in the nineteenth century, one of whom, the Catholic missionary Claude Charles Dallet (1829–1878), wrote that the *chungin* enjoyed certain privileges in society and that the *yangban* "treat them with a certain degree of equality in their relations with them."[90] This symbiotic and companionable relationship in the nineteenth century is clearly encapsulated in the case of

the prominent *yangban* scholar-official Kim Chŏnghŭi (1786–1856) and his *chungin* associates.

The illustrious *yangban* calligrapher and art connoisseur Kim Chŏnghŭi was one of the most towering figures in the nineteenth-century Korean art world. Related to Queen Chŏngsun (1745–1805) by blood,[91] Kim rose to high official positions,[92] but his life had enormous ups and downs resulting from the standing of his family and the unstable politics of the late Chosŏn period. Caught up in familial power struggles, he was exiled twice, to lonely Cheju Island off the southern coast of Korea from 1840 to 1848, and to the cold and desolate northern province of Pukch'ŏng from 1851 to 1853. Kim's biography as an honorable man tested by worldly events not of his making reflects a long-standing literati theme, and for this he remains well known, as well as for his profound knowledge in evidential studies[93] and his legacy in calligraphy (Kim invented the Ch'usa style, named after his sobriquet). Kim was also a prominent artist, art critic, and connoisseur—an all-around man of culture who is revered to this day. For many, he symbolizes the "old guard" of *yangban* literati values. Because of his overshadowing presence in this period of Korean art history, we would do well to explore his imprint on his time and his relationship to the *chungin*.

Despite his *yangban* heritage and his standing as an exemplar of his class and its values, Kim associated with numerous *chungin* and was said to have had "three thousand followers."[94] However, for the *chungin*, their association with Kim Chŏnghŭi was both a blessing and curse. It was a blessing because they could learn about Confucian classics, literature, and artistic theories, as well as receive some firsthand art lessons, comments, and evaluations from the top-notch teacher. But it was a curse because regardless of their ages, abilities, and contributions, these *chungin* associates have all been "defined" as Kim's followers and disciples, rather than as his equals and colleagues. This constraint affected them both in their lifetimes and as they have been remembered in art history.

However, modern scholarship demands a more critical evaluation of the teacher/disciple assumption. The "*yangban* teacher" and the "*chungin* follower," even when justified in part, was not a rigid, one-way relationship, but rather a fluid association, mutually dependent and beneficial, with reciprocal exchanges of materials, services, and artistic and monetary rewards. In fact, the connection between Kim Chŏnghŭi and his *chungin* associates was complex and symbiotic. Exploring their relationships without preconceptions, we find that the *chungin* were sometimes friends, sometimes patrons, sometimes middlemen, sometimes consultants, sometimes promoters, sometimes customers, and much more. Without the preconceptions of dominant/subordinate or leader/follower, we see that both parties contributed their skills and resources in bilateral unions. Here,



Kim's relationships with three *chungin*—Yi Sangjŏk, Hong Hyŏnbo, and Cho Hŭiryong—are illustrative.

The young *chungin* Yi Sangjŏk, eighteen years Kim's junior, befriended and later assisted Kim Chŏnghŭi during the time of Kim's first political exile to Cheju Island starting in 1840. Kim was not allowed to go outside a thorny fence around his house, and four years passed without anyone knowing if Kim would ever be released. During Kim's banishment, Yi served as a messenger who delivered Kim's letters and gifts to his Chinese friends, supplied Kim with Chinese scholar's accoutrements, and provided Kim with valuable Chinese books. Kim was particular about his calligraphy materials, especially paper. He constantly requested high-priced Chinese paper, with elegant floral patterns, or gold-flaked or colored features, which Yi was able to procure on his trips to China. Yi's steadfast friendship and thoughtful gifts moved Kim so much that he thanked Yi in the traditional literati fashion, by presenting him with a small painting with a grateful inscription. This painting, *Winterscape* (Sehando), later was designated a National Treasure.[95]

Primarily a calligrapher and painter of orchids, Kim Chŏnghŭi did not leave many paintings behind. Of the few that survive, *Winterscape* is now considered his masterpiece, more for its quintessential "literati fragrance and spirit of books"[96]—that is to say, its simple, soulful message—than

1.6. Kim Chŏnghŭi (Korean, 1786–1856), *Winterscape* (1844). Ink on paper, 22.3 × 108.1 cm. Private collection.

for its artistic virtuosity. The painting depicts two pines, two cypresses, and a house set on level ground. Its execution in sketchy brush strokes in spare monochrome ink creates a dry, lonely, and bleak atmosphere. Its title, inscribed on the painting by Kim, literally translated as "painting of the cold season," along with the desolate scene, is taken to reflect Kim's state of mind. His thoughts are clearly expressed in the elegantly written inscription that includes the Confucian saying "Only when the year grows cold do we see that the pine and cypress do not fade." The evergreen trees symbolize the friendship and loyalty between Kim and Yi Sangjŏk. The esteemed painting at first was merely a rapidly executed gift and message to a close friend.

Now the work and the artist have merged in public consciousness, and *Winterscape* has come to represent the essence of Kim. So how did *Winterscape* become the lasting representation of Kim as a painter? The painting's artistic and historical significance is largely due to its cultural biography and the addition of colophons by sixteen prominent nineteenth-century Chinese intellectuals[97] and three major twentieth-century Korean academic and political figures. The sixteen Chinese literati varied in age from their early thirties to their late sixties; they all were highly educated and well versed in the classics, historical literature, poetry, law, calligraphy, and other fields. They were, in fact, Yi Sangjŏk's close friends and not

Kim Chŏnghŭi's. However, they already knew of Kim because Yi had thoroughly informed them about Kim and his cultural and scholarly achievements.[98]

Yi Sangjŏk knew these Chinese scholars because he was a prominent Chinese-language interpreter and already a veteran of numerous tributary missions to China. Yi Sangjŏk was born in 1803 to an Ubong Yi family from Haeju, Hwanghae Province.[99] The family became one of the most important hereditary *chungin* lineages, producing thirty foreign-language officers through nine generations. Yi's maternal grandfather and uncle were also Chinese-language interpreters who participated in tributary missions to Beijing. Yi Sangjŏk passed the Chinese-language examination in 1825, in first place, and went on to become a well-known poet and author alongside his official duties, which included tributary missions. A trip to Beijing and back, including time spent in that city, usually took about half a year. Such a trip was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for most participants, but Yi traveled to Beijing twelve times,[100] more often than any other official of his time, except for his own protégé, O Kyŏngsŏk (1831–1879), who went thirteen times.[101]

Thanks to his literary talent and language skills, Yi associated with numerous Chinese intellectuals and artists, such as Zhang Yaoxun (b. 1807) and Wang Hong (b. 1806). He maintained many faithful correspondences, exchanging letters with sixty-one Chinese friends and also receiving from them paintings, writing collections, and ink rubbings of inscriptions on stone monuments. Yi published a collection of 279 letters under the title *Letters of Neighboring Sea* (Haerin ch'ŏkso). The letters became models for correspondence that would be copied repeatedly by later generations. Yi's library, called Library of the Neighboring Sea (Haerin sŏsil), was also renowned for its abundant painting and calligraphy; many of Yi's mentees, who would themselves become prominent, such as O Sech'ang and Kim Sŏkchun, studied from its collection.

Also, with the encouragement and assistance of Chinese friends, Yi published two of his poetry and writing collections in Beijing, *Collection of Ŭnsong Studio* (Ŭnsongdang chŏnjip) in 1848 and *Sequel Collection of Ŭnsong Studio* (Ŭnsongdang sokchip) in 1859. The latter two titles refer to the name of his studio. His Chinese friends, poet Wang Hong and scholar-official Wu Zan (act. 1840s), received the manuscripts, selected a publisher, returned the manuscripts to Yi for editing and proofreading, and kept in close contact with Yi by letter until the publication was complete. Yi then distributed his work to friends all over China and Korea. Publishing one's writing collection in Beijing was a very special occasion for the Korean men of letters, reflecting both literary excellence and a social network. In terms of his literati bona fides, cultural standing, and

personal relationships, then, Yi surpassed most *yangban*. It was this long and close relationship that Yi had built with his Chinese friends that enabled him to acquire all the inscriptions that later elevated *Winterscape* to a National Treasure.

When his old friend Wu Zan held a welcoming party for Yi at his manor on January 13, 1845, Yi showed *Winterscape* to seventeen other Chinese literati friends. Although they had never met Kim Chŏnghŭi in person, most already knew of his artistic and scholarly reputation back in Korea through Yi. Yi recognized that the Chinese scholars would relate to Kim Chŏnghŭi, although they had never met him, because they were all Chinese scholar-officials under the Manchu government. Confucian ethics obliged these scholars to serve as officials, but their positions exposed them to imperial caprice, political infighting and intrigue, and potential ruin. Therefore they could identify with Kim Chŏnghŭi as a distinguished Confucian scholar and empathize with his plight as a victim of political conspiracy. Thus, hearing from Yi of Kim's unfortunate exile, and viewing *Winterscape*, sixteen of those present wrote colophons. Their thoughts are expressed in subtle and metaphorical ways, projecting their own situations.[102] In 1845, when these scholars viewed *Winterscape*, the Chinese government was threatened from within and without, and the writers were enduring trying times. Internally, numerous Han Chinese rebellions had erupted against the Manchu Qing government; on the international stage, after its humiliating defeat in the Opium Wars (1839–42), China had been forced to sign the aptly named "unequal treaties" with Great Britain. Thus, many Chinese lives, including theirs, were in turmoil.[103]

In regard to the modest little painting, all these scholars immediately recognized the pine tree in the cold season as a symbol of the steadfastness of the painter. However, they hardly mention *Winterscape*'s artistic aspects, such as composition, brushstrokes, and use of inks.[104] This implies that these Chinese scholars were more concerned about and sympathetic with Kim's current situation, as explained to them by their friend Yi, than with the painting itself. Or rather, the Chinese scholars' main motivation was to support Yi as he tried to ameliorate his friend's misfortune, and they did so by writing kind words to Kim, whom they knew only indirectly.

The colophons more or less follow a common pattern: first they describe Kim's scholarly reputation or praise his integrity and steadfastness; second, they decry political machinations that embroil the innocent; and finally, they encourage Kim to anticipate better times. For example, Cao Maojian lauds Kim's talent in Chinese classics, history, and arithmetic, and Pan Zunqi approves Kim's scholarship and character by saying, "He is a master in Chinese classics, he reaches the apex, and . . . wielding a free brush, he turns out upright trunks; making friends, he increasingly

associates with wise men."[105] All praise Kim's dogged perseverance. After complimenting Kim's scholarship and integrity, the scholars with one voice recognize the pitfalls inherent in political life and acknowledge the inevitability of hardship and suffering. They agree that such was not Kim's fault. Instead, as Pan Zhenghui points out, a great name can be defamed and one can easily be falsely accused. All agree that Kim was caught "in the web of the world."[106] The colophons all conclude by cheering Kim up and sending him supportive words. They maintain that this period of trial will strengthen him further. All the writers believe, or at least hope, that better times will follow adversity, just as the warm spring follows the cold winter. They seek to comfort Kim with this prediction, and ask him to take care of himself physically and to maintain mental harmony.

Gathering the colophons, Yi attached them (or had them attached) to the original *Winterscape*, mounted the whole on fabric in a handscroll format, and asked Zhang Mu to write the title for its cover. The physical addition of the colophons transformed *Winterscape* from Kim's intimate expression of gratitude and metaphorical self-portrait into a vehicle for the exchange of ideas among Kim, Yi, and the Chinese scholars. It became a Confucian didactic work on which many prominent scholars endorsed two of the main moral values of Confucian society: noble men do not compromise their principles, and friends remain loyal in times of trouble. With the addition of the sixteen colophons, *Winterscape* was no longer one individual's work or statement, but a cross-cultural carrier of shared values.

Thus it was neither Kim Chŏnghŭi alone nor even Kim with Chinese scholars who "created" *Winterscape.* Yi was the mastermind or "artistic director," through whose aesthetic and intellectual judgment and international social network *Winterscape* was assembled in its present, revered form. Yi was the one who decided to take the painting to China and to invite his Chinese friends to write colophons. We don't know how the actual writing was originally structured, but it was Yi who put the finished colophons in order and had them mounted. In other words, *Winterscape* was created by Yi from parts made by others, starting with his gift from Kim Chŏnghŭi. One cannot overstate the importance of the *chungin* Yi and his personal connections to the "creation" of *Winterscape* as an important historical artifact.

Yi brought *Winterscape* back to Korea in its new format and sent it to Kim in exile so Kim could read the scholars' colophons. He also showed *Winterscape* to Kim's circle of *yangban* friends and *chungin* associates in Seoul, which inspired some interpretive paintings in response.[107] These paintings can also be seen as a means of supporting and encouraging Kim without words, and they expanded *Winterscape*'s visual, social, and historical impact. In other words, Yi, by circulating Kim's painting, created

a supportive atmosphere around Kim and promoted Kim's Confucian moral identity, which lives on today.

Another of Kim Chŏnghŭi's closest *chungin* associates was Hong Hyŏnbo (1815–ca. 1896),[108] who is also usually described as a disciple and follower of Kim. Hong was from an illustrious *chungin* family. His great-grandfather, grandfather, and father were all official Chinese-language interpreters, and his maternal grandfather was a medical official. Hong passed the medical exam at the age of twenty-six in 1840 and served as a medical official. Thanks to his superb service, he was appointed a provincial government officer, and from 1874 to 1882 he served as magistrate. His son, Hong Sŭnghyŏn (b. 1855), followed the same path; he became a medical officer and served as a doctor for the king, the highest honor for any such officer.

Hong Hyŏnbo, with his medical skill and thirst for literary knowledge, was a close and steadfast young companion to the aging Kim. Hong provided Kim Chŏnghŭi with medicine, fans, and other materials, and often loaned him books. In return, Kim sent Hong calligraphy and taught him how to compose poems and literary writings. One of Hong's poems tells of a time that Kim suffered from insomnia and had Hong read classics aloud to him, the meanings of which they discussed until the dawn broke. So, while Kim taught Hong about the classics, Hong offered medical service, consultation, and medicine, and kept the old Kim company on sleepless nights.

Kim Chŏnghŭi depended on his *chungin* friends financially as well. During and after Kim's two exiles he suffered economic difficulties. Tradition, pride, prestige, and appearance prevented *yangban* from participating in commerce, so it was the assistance of his *chungin* associates that saved Kim from ruin after his banishments and the confiscation of his properties. In theory, *yangban* literati paintings were never sold for money because under Confucian ideology this would be crass and degrading. In reality, however, works by known *yangban* literati were at times marketed like other commodities. While Kim was exiled on Cheju, his *chungin* associates not only delivered gifts and supplies to Kim but also distributed his works to outside sponsors. During his exile Kim wrote in letters that every day he produced small and large paintings and calligraphy for screens and albums, despite his ill eyes and ailing arms.[109] He wrote that these works, which overflowed from a box and a basket, were intended to pay back debts.[110] Similar remarks are found in his collected writings. A sarcastic and self-deprecating remark by Kim in an introduction to a poem indicates that he regarded the sale of his work in the marketplace as unseemly: "Hearing about somebody who purchased my calligraphy on the open market and placed it in his collection, I burst out laughing and the grains of rice in

my mouth popped out like bees coming out [of a hive]. Thus, I take my brush to record my humiliation, and also write this calligraphy in order to admonish myself."[111]

Nonetheless, after his return from exile, perhaps in need of money and despite the humiliation he claimed to feel at doing work for sale, Kim started producing calligraphy for the market. Kim's calligraphy was sold not only to Koreans but to Qing Chinese and Japanese collectors, and his *chungin* associates worked as middlemen in marketing Kim's work. Kim once wrote that the Chinese interpreter Kim Sŏkchŏn took away full boxes of his calligraphic works when he left for the market, and a month later he returned and asked for more.[112]

An example of a very different relationship, and one subject to much post facto historical interpretation, is that between Kim Chŏnghŭi and the painter Cho Hŭiryong, who is generally accepted as a *chungin*.[113] They were contemporaries; Kim was a mere three years older than Cho. Yet, because of Cho's lower (*chungin*) social status, he has been viewed as Kim's disciple/follower. The relationship of these two men further illustrates the cultural presuppositions surrounding *yangban-chungin* relationships during the late Chosŏn period.

Cho Hŭiryong is now considered a revolutionary artist and the preeminent nineteenth-century painter of the plum blossom theme. Cho is known for his original, vibrant, and organic flowering plum paintings, which bear no stylistic relationship to the work of Kim Chŏnghŭi, whose only extant works besides *Winterscape* are a few orchid paintings done in classical literati style. Thus one is puzzled to read art historical analyses such as this:

> In the final years of the Chosŏn dynasty (1850–1910) . . . the Southern School replaced Chŏng Sŏn's true scenery landscape style as the dominant style among such significant painters as Kim Chŏnghŭi (1786–1856) and his followers, including Cho Hŭiryong (1789–1866), Hŏ Ryŏn (1809–1893), Chŏn Ki (1825–1854), Kim Such'ŏl (nineteenth century), and Chang Sŭngŏp (1843–1897). Cho Hŭiryong's *Plum Blossom Studio* demonstrates the artist's innovations within the Southern School tradition. . . . [Cho Hŭiryong] and [Chŏn Ki] were both well-known during their lifetimes but had no significant successors in the twentieth century. . . . Perhaps the only artists whose legacies thrive today are Hŏ Ryŏn and Chang Sŭngŏp.[114]

The passage presents three major assertions: first, that Cho Hŭiryong was a "follower" of Kim Chŏnghŭi; second, that Cho painted in the Southern School tradition; and third, that Cho had no significant

artistic impact. But how did this author and other scholars that echo the same ideas come to these conclusions?[115] Was Kim Chŏnghŭi really Cho Hŭiryong's teacher? How was the teacher-student relationship between Kim Chŏnghŭi and Cho Hŭiryong verified? Cho Hŭiryong had a very different, if not opposing, artistic ideology and painting style from that of Kim. Although he did paint orchids, Cho is known for his flowering plum paintings, which were his passion, and he himself placed his plum paintings in the lineage of Chinese professional painters, not literati painters. Cho Hŭiryong's extant paintings are almost all flowering plum and orchid paintings, with only a few landscape paintings, so why should we consider Cho to be painter in the Southern School style, which was primarily a landscape tradition? Rather, Cho was the undisputed leader of flowering plum painting, so does not the proliferation of flowering plum painting during and after his lifetime, even into the modern era, belie the notion that he had "no significant successors"? As noted above, the twentieth-century *chungin* calligrapher and art historian O Sech'ang called Cho Hŭiryong "the leader of the ink field of that period" (*ildae mukchang yŏngsu*).[116]

So to what extent, if any, Cho was a "follower" of Kim is unclear. Art historians have pointed out that both Cho's calligraphy and orchid paintings are very similar to Kim's. But without written substantiation, on what basis can we say that, given two artists of essentially the same age, one was a "student" of the other? It frequently happens that several artists work side by side, in the same way and at the same time and place. In any case, because of their similarity, some of Cho's works, by mistake or perhaps intentionally (to increase their value), have been attributed to Kim. Likewise, Cho's poems have been compiled and included in Kim's writing collection, and, ironically, some of Kim's orchids are now questioned by some connoisseurs and have been reattributed to Cho.[117] But this confusion merely buttresses the case that Cho has been, for some reason, undervalued relative to Kim.

Rather than being teacher and disciple, Kim Chŏnghŭi and Cho Hŭiryong appear to have diverged and been more rivals than friends or even friendly associates. Cho's writings reveal that his painting philosophy was far different from Kim's, and he took pains to distance himself from Kim and traditional literati beliefs about painting. Kim Chŏnghŭi deeply believed that cultivating the mind through study and calligraphy practice produced better painting, so the fact that Cho Hŭiryong, who was a mere *chungin* with talent, could write calligraphy nearly indistinguishable from his own and paint superbly (perhaps better than Kim himself), must have been unacceptable. During his first exile years Kim sent a letter to his son saying that "Cho Hŭiryong's group [i.e., *chungin* artists] follow my orchid painting, but because they lack the literati spirit, they cannot transcend

what they paint."[118] This statement in a private letter perhaps reveals Kim's unvarnished opinion of *chungin* painting or his uncomfortable attempt to differentiate "true" literati painting from spiritless mimicry. Because the two men were so closely associated, Cho may have sensed this bitter attitude, even if Kim did not express it within Cho's earshot. Kim's explicit criticism of Cho was aimed at Cho's lack of "literati fragrance and spirit of books" (i.e., not enough reading of books). But Cho Hŭiryong did not suffer from any lack of reading. Cho's writing reveals that he had extensive knowledge, especially of painting, which came from wide-ranging scholarship. So Kim's implicit message was that no matter how educated they were, the lower, non-*yangban* class could not reach the lofty literati painting level. Cho Hŭiryong knew that no matter how much or how well he read, studied, or painted, his *chungin* status would prevent his talents from being fully approved and accepted by *yangban* like Kim.

Cho's writings show the frustration of a great artist who could not be fully acknowledged due to the limitations of his *chungin* status. He was neither a *yangban* literati painter nor a court painter, the two types traditionally respected; rather, he worked between the two categories and sought to prove that quality paintings could arrive from talent, passion, and skill as surely as from some inbred predisposition toward "literati spirit." In his writings, Cho Hŭiryong defends himself and his paintings, arguing that he is not a mere craftsman nor facile technician.[119]

The characterization of Kim and Cho's association as that of "teacher-follower" seems, then, to be at best a half-truth, and most likely the result of Kim's and Cho's social status as *yangban* and *chungin*, a relationship in Chosŏn society traditionally understood as hierarchical, in which the *yangban* were teachers and benefactors guiding or influencing *chungin* disciples. Thus, historians have considered the *chungin* to be followers of major *yangban* figures, and critical examination of the contributions of individual *chungin* has been often neglected. While acknowledging the *yangban*'s higher social status, we need to look again at their entangled interconnectedness and presumptions of the *yangban*'s greater artistic importance. Kim Chŏnghŭi was an illustrious master of traditional literati arts, but Cho Hŭiryong was an innovative and unconstrained artist whose pioneering painting style was continued by many later artists. These two great artistic contemporaries, with their profound knowledge, extensive writings, and opposing aesthetic values, may be said to symbolize the late Chosŏn duel between the preservation of traditional culture and the expression of a new culture based on the power of individuality and self-determination.

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