

Yuhwajeon by Sin Chaeho

Some Apects of the Sin Chaeho's version of the foundation myth of Koguryeo

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Tanjae Sin Chaeho(1880-1936), historian, great patriotic enlightenment thinker and anti-Japanese fighter contributed greatly to the development of the modern Korean literature. Apart from numerous articles, historical treatises and critical essays he also wrote novels. After publishing in the Korean daily the biographies of Yi Sunsin and Eulji Mundeok, he wrote other twelve novels. Among them only two or three gained attention of literary critics of South and North Korea and for instance of Russian koreanologist (V. I. Ivanova) too, namely "The Dream Sky", "The War of the Dragons, and The Tale of A Beautiful Woman by the Hundred Year Old Monk. Ivanova classified these novels as a 'Sin-Soseol'(new prose) in romantic mood. But for scholars interested in Korean mythology and history of ancient Korean states other novel by Sin Chaeho, namely The Biography of Yuhwa ('Yuhwajeon') is of special interest. Yuhwajeon retells the first part of the founding myth of Koguryeo. Though in the Revised Complete Collection of Tanjae Sin Chaeho's Works vol. III, pp.225-279 Yuhwajeon was published in abbreviated form one can perceive the method of approaching this legend by Sin Chaeho which is really worthy of attention. Yuhwajeon by Sin Chaeho consists of three parts under the following titles

1. The Short Story of the Founding of Koguryeo and the Great Undertaking of Its Founder Jumong,
2. Yuhwa, the Holy Mother Celebrates Giving Birth to Chumo, King Keumwa Dismisses His Royal Concubine and Confines Her in a Separate Place.
3. The Holy Mother Yuhwa Gives Birth to the Holy King in the Separate Place, Immortal Paekak Tells a Secret to the Woman. But the titles are not adequate to the contents of these parts of the legend.

The Biography of Yuhwa by Sin Chaeho differs greatly in details from the version of the same myth in the Samguk Sagi and in the Samguk Yusa. In the part of the founding myth of Koguryeo concerned with Yuhwa (in the Samguk Sagi) we read as

follows: " ...he (Golden Frog) discovered a girl to the south of Taebaeksan (The Great White Mountain), by the side of the Ubalsu. When he asked her who she was, she said, I am the daughter of a River God, my name is Yuhwa (Willow Catkin). I went out to play with all my younger sisters and I came upon a young man, who called himself Haemosu, Son of the Emperor of Heaven. He enticed me to follow him under Ungsimsan (Bear's Heart Mountain) and in a room beside the Yalu River I gave myself to him. But then he went away and has never returned. My father and my mother blamed me for going with a man when I had no match-maker, and they banished me to the Ubalsu. (translation by Kenneth H. J. Gardiner, Korea Journal vol 22 No.1)

In Samguk Yusa we read as follows: on a mountain called Taebaek he saw a beautiful woman by the stream known as Ubalsu. When he asked who she was. She replied: I am the daughter of Habaek, the dragon king in West River and Yuhwa (Willow Flower) is my name. When I was out with my sister on a picnic a strong man came up to me and said: I am a heavenly prince and Haemosu is my name. He took me into a cottage on the bank of the Yalu River near Ungsimsan (Bear God Mountain). There he enjoyed me and then left me, never to return. When my father and mother learned what had happened they were angry, and sent me into exile in this lonely place (translated by Tae-Hung Ha "Legends and History of the Three Kingdoms of ancient Korea" Yonsei University Press 1972)

Sin Chaeho states that Yuhwa's father was a wealthy farmer Chang Taegil (not Habaek as in the Samguk Sagi and in the Samguk Yusa). Kim Busik and Iryeon wrote that Keumwa, the king of Eastern Puyeo found Yuhwa on the bank of Ubalsu River, but Sin Chaeho tells us that she arrived to the palace of the king Keumwa as his concubine selected for this purpose by the governor of Seobusari and by the recommendation of the Immortal Paekak. Sin Chaeho describing king Keumwa's passion for women stresses that Keumwa having already wife, two concubines and three hundred court ladies ordered his subordinates to hunt for new beauties in his country.

According to the Samguk Sagi and to the Samguk Yusa, Yuhwa was locked by king Keumwa in a room and when the sunshine reached her she became pregnant and gave birth to a great egg. In Yuhwajeon by Sin Chaeho, Yuhwa, beloved concubine of the king Keumwa, was already pregnant at the moment of her arrival at the king palace and later gave birth to a boy (not an egg).

According to Yuhwajeon by Sin Chaeho, Yuhwa's beauty enchanted Haemosu, the king of the Northern Puyeo while he was hunting near the Ubalsu River. He possessed her but could not neither marry her nor bring her to his palace as his concubine. Yuhwa's father expelled her from home and forced his daughter to commit suicide. She threw herself into the river but was saved by an old fisherman (in fact - the Immortal Paekak), who afterwards took her safely to the Eastern Puyeo. He told her that in the future she will be the mother of a great king and that she should follow his advices. Thus she could not speak frankly to her master, king Keumwa and lied to him. She

told her master that in the early childhood she lost her parents and lived in her mother's family. When she was ten years old her grandparents (that is her mother's parents) died and she lived in the mountains with monk in a monastery. She stayed there for eight~nine years. Afterwards she arrived to the king Keumwa's court.

After Yuhwa's staying at the court of king Keumwa for six months her pregnancy became visible. The king was worried about it and was very anxious about the state of her health. So she explained her pregnancy to the king Keumwa as follows : "A few days before my departure from the mountains and according to my master Paekak's ill I went to the heavenly altar and performed sacrificial rituals. After finishing these religious ceremonies I was so tired that I rested for a while under the altar and then a ray of light appeared on my breast and strange things dropped on my head. Half dreaming, half awake I was so frightened that I awoke suddenly. The sunshine disappeared and I took these strange things - they were a blue pearl and a jade ring. I could not understand what it meant and I returned with these things to my master. He explained the event in such a way : It was your precious dream, they are the treasures for self-protection, keep these things for future use, have them always on your body. Though it is wrong to reveal in advance the hidden plans of Providence but as you got pregnant by the sunshine, if you will give birth to a son you will be very happy. But you should remember, that in future you will suffer from misfortune too. In fact, from this time I felt uneasy and after arriving at king's court my belly became larger and larger". Of course such explanation did not satisfy king Keumwa.

Though Sin Chaeho's version of the first part of the myth of Jumong differs in many aspects from the versions presented in the Samguk Sagi or in the Samguk Yusa by Kim Busik or Iryeon it consists of the main parts which were connected with the sun-worship and which proved the divine origin of the founder of Koguryeo.

If one tries to depict the main features of the worship there were such things as - fertilization of the woman by the sunshine and the indication that Jumong's father was Haemosu - the God of the Heaven or God's Son(Hae - means sun). Besides there were described also some mysterious events connected with the birth of Yuhwa(Yuhwa's mother while pregnant received from a fairy a bunch of divine flowers, and afterwards, when she was giving birth to Yuhwa, the same fairy came on a crane playing the flute to watch over the process) and with the salvation of Yuhwa by an old Immortal(who disguised himself as an old fisherman), with her recovering from the tiresome state on her way to Eastern Puyo by taking an elixir of life(keumnosu - seonyak from the Heavenly Palace) offered by a fairy etc. A young Immortal entered her room and gave her two pieces of good fruit to strengthen her body before delivery and talked kindly with her and encouraged Yuhwa to overcome difficulties. Just after this dream Yuhwa left her rooms in the court and went to the servants room to send a letter to the king with explanation of her decision.

In spite of the abundance of such supernatural and mysterious elements in the novel

Sin Chaeho tries to describe the Yuhwa's story in the more human dimension. He described in details other concubines intrigues and the life of court maidens, so through his novel one can see social customs of Northern and Eastern Puyo, an organization of these early states and some details of the ruling system. For instance in the page 232 one can see the description of the administrative structure of the Eastern Puyo. His novel may be classified as an attempt to reconstruct that old society. Of course his literary vision of Puyo's society was based on his studies and on his deep knowledge of the ancient history of Korea. For instance he describes in details matrimonial customs of Puyo's people indicating that marriages can be arranged only among people of equal social status. He stresses also that before wedding ceremony man to be son-in-law should three times ask for permission to marry a girl and after receiving permission he was obliged to stay and work in parents-in-law home for three years.

As an author of such highly appreciated books on Korean history as *New Reader of Korean history*, *Ancient Korea*, Sin Chaeho presented a new approach to and developed a new methodology of studying the history of Ancient Korea. Sin Chaeho emphasized social function of literature and tried to use his historical novels as a tool of enriching the Korean people's knowledge of their own history. He was very interested in exploring remnants from ancient history scattered in many places of Manchuria and insisted that Manchuria should be recognized as a major part of Korean territory in the past.

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