Special Feature

Metaphorical Figurations of Transcendence in 16th Century Literati *Gasa*

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"Religion is about finding a place and moving across space."
Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 59

Introduction

The poetic long form *gasa* is one of the richest pre-modern literary genres in vernacular Korean. Ranging in object and style from mnemotechnic verse with religious messages to book-length travel records, from the lyrical to the narrative and exhortative, and in authorship from high-ranking officials to anonymous women, it offers a wide range of insights into Joseon era life practices, ideas, and imaginations. In relation to its importance in pre-modern Korean literary history, *gasa* have remained severely understudied in Western language scholarship on Korea. In those cases when they have caught the attention of Western-language scholars, they are studied as sub-genres covering the experiences of certain areas of life, such as women's exhortative songs (*gyubang gasa*) or exile *gasa*,[1] not usually as *literary* texts. Thus, the two lyrical *gasa* of the 16th century we treat in this essay, Song Sun's (1493–1583) "Myeonangjeongga" (Song of Myeonang Pavilion) and Jeong Cheol's (1537–1594) "Gwandong byeolgok" (Song of Gwandong), while undisputedly counting among the most highly rated creative works of this genre and finding due mention in any literary history, have seen little interpretive efforts in English.[2]

Similarly, the use of metaphors in pre-modern Korean literature has not been much explored. An intense debate on the *if* and *how* of metaphor use in traditional literary forms has taken place in Western language Sinology in the 1980s and 1990s, much of it based on the assumption that the Chinese literary

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1 For major contributions to Western studies of *gasa*, see Häußler 2004; Walraven 2012, 2015.

2 Peter H. Lee (2003, 192–95) in his *History of Korean Literature* devotes four pages of his chapter on *gasa* to "Gwandong byeolgok," vividly illustrating the poem's literary skill but refraining from any in-depth interpretation. His earlier article on Jeong Cheol's vernacular poetry mainly consists of a translation of *Songgang gasa*, with a biographical and bibliographical introduction but without attempts at interpretation (Lee 1961).

tradition does not (much) use or appreciate metaphor—i.e., simile involving a domain switch—but is rather bound to metonymy, highlighting unity in the comparison rather than analogy (Yeh 1987). This view of Chinese literary aesthetics is tightly aligned with a view of Chinese traditions of thought that ascribes to them (especially to Confucianism, but also to Daoism) a fixation on "consubstantialism" (Kao 2000, 8) and thus a purely holistic worldview, unable or unwilling to conceptualize difference and gaps between subject and object, self and world, and past and present—in short, an absence of transcendence.[3] Powerful counter-arguments have been made, but mainly concerning philosophical texts.[4] Without having come to a satisfactory conclusion concerning literary texts, this debate was partly extended, partly superseded from the 2000s onwards by scholarship on conceptual metaphor (most conspicuously, the contributions by Edward Slingerland). This latter discussion has also entered English language scholarship on the Joseon; the former discussion, however, seems to have hardly been led. Instead, scholars tend to either use the term "metaphor" for any kind of simile without further reflection,[5] or if they reflect on the problem to follow the lead of the earlier Sinologists' in regarding pre-modern poetic metaphoricity as largely metonymic in character. Thus, Peter H. Lee (2003, 47) and Ho-Min Sohn in their general observations on "figurative language" in Korean pre-modern literature state, drawing examples from *gasa* literature, that both direct and indirect comparisons "seem to be based more on metonymic contiguity than true metaphoric substitution."[6]

The present article sets out from the observation that, firstly, Lee/Sohn's remarks on figurative language in *gasa* are not easily refuted even in regard to the two masterpieces under our scrutiny: They do not abound in similes without

3 It seems not coincidental that one of the rare interventions of that time acknowledging metaphoricity in pre-modern Chinese texts came from a scholar dealing with Daoist links to the Buddhist tradition, thus to the one religion informing Chinese thought undisputedly based on transcendentalism (Bokenkamp 1989).

4 E.g., Zhang Longxi's *Allegoresis* is devoted to refuting this claim but focused on the reading of "canonical literature"; for his engagement with the Chinese literature scholar Stephen Owen's denial of metaphoricity to Chinese poetry, see Zhang 2005, 20–30.

5 As one recent example, one may cite Maurizio Riotto's (2023) synonymous use of "metaphor" and "symbol" in his discussion of the motif of crossing the sea in three *Suijeon* stories.

6 See also Kevin O'Rourke's "Introduction" to his *sijo* translation anthology *The Book of Korean Shijo* where he acknowledges the metaphoric richness of the genre yet characterizes the language of *sijo* as "simple" and "direct."

an emblematic or symbolic tinge or metonymic grounding.[7] Yet, secondly, both *gasa* impress with their literary figurations of a sense of transcendence—which, as the theoretical argument goes, is tied to the metaphoric potential of language. How do these two observations go together? In order to solve the riddle, we scrutinize figurative language in the two *gasa* not with a view to examine the relative degree of metonymity or metaphoricity in each single case, but with special attention to intra-textual dynamic developments of the imagery used. We thereby arrive at the argument that true metaphoricity does take place in these literary works, but more conspicuously and effectively at the level of extended metaphor than on the level of individual similes. By demonstrating this metaphoricity, we at the same time emphasize the important place of the expression of transcendence as a liberating force in both poems and thereby make an implicit argument concerning the religious dimension of Confucianism, namely that it does contain or at least allow the distinction between immanence and transcendence which constitutes the code of religious language. From this theoretical perspective, the transcendence-evoking power of literary expression of experiences of "crossing over" is not diminished but rather strengthened in its religious function by the combination and mediation of such "crossing over" with return and "dwelling."

For this paper, we use the term "simile" for any kind of literary comparison, both direct and indirect, while "metaphor" is reserved for non-explicit comparisons—i.e., comparisons that are not flagged as such through vocabulary like "as if." "Metaphor" is distinguished from "symbol" in that the former consists in an open mapping of a source domain onto a target domain, while "symbol" is used for figurative vocabulary with a culturally fixed meaning. Whether or not meaning is fixed depends not on the word but on the context: In some contexts, "dragon" can function as symbol for "king," while in others, it can be used as metaphor open to interpretation within a certain (again culturally circumscribed) range of meanings. "Extended metaphor" means a series of signifiers throughout a stretch of text that contribute to and develop a metaphor. The elusive term *sinseon* 神仙, whose broad range of denotation covers celestial beings as well as humans who have transcended earthly life, is

7 It should be noted, however, that the distinction between metonymy and metaphor is always one of degrees rather than of kind, since at higher levels of abstraction one always arrives at a form of "contiguity" between concepts.

translated alternately as "transcendent" or as "immortal," the latter often for the sake of avoiding confusion with the adjective.

"Myeonangjeongga": From Dwelling to Crossing
Introductory Reflections

"Myeonangjeongga" 俛仰亭歌, at its core, is about situating oneself in time and space, on the one hand, and on the other, about crossing the boundaries that separate two connected realms, sketching the relation between them. It portrays the narrator's life at his pavilion, bearing his own pen name Myeonang (lit. "looking down below and up above"), located at what is described as an ideal natural setting. Here, the narrator, identifiable with the author Song Sun who constructed the pavilion for himself, enjoys the surrounding nature while tending to his place of dwelling. The described life amidst nature, far from the burdensome connections of the human world, indulging in wandering, wine, music, and dance are reminiscent of the resolutions encountered in Literary Sinitic *seonchwi* 仙趣 poetry that envisions a life spent in withdrawal among the transcendents (*sinseon*) (Jeong 2002, 42; 48).

Myeonang Pavilion functions as a home embedded in the universe, situating the narrator within the latter and providing orientation in a chaotic world. With the narrator living withdrawn from political engagement, the poem can be read as a response to the author's personal tribulations, including the political unrest that brought about his prior exile, the persecution of political associates of the Westerners' (*seoin* 西人) faction, as well as the loss of his spouse (Kim 2021).

The composition appears to express the mitigating effect that the time spent in the natural environment, as an idealized realm and cosmos (Ko 2015, 322), had on the author—a period of temporary detachment from societal and political involvements while deeply engaged in the tasks and enjoyments of the "simple life." Indeed, life at the pavilion, rather than settled and idle, is characterized by constant motion and transformations, analogous to the patterns the narrator observes in nature, and his ongoing actions continuously reaffirm his connection to the place (Ko 2015, 319). Myeonang Pavilion, a place of retreat from society, simultaneously serves as a starting point for departures into further distance. In other words, the narrator's secure place of dwelling opens up

the possibility for crossings of various kinds.

Despite the depicted agreeableness of life at the pavilion, the poem sustains an undercurrent of the contingencies intrinsic to the human experience, invoked, for example, through the pressure and constraints inflicted by time, and explicated in the verse "Will worries abound and anguish prevail?" This facet escapes analyses that mainly view the song as a praise of a contented life in the countryside, celebrating leisure and amusement (e.g., Kim 2014), or as an expression of the author's absolute harmony with nature (e.g., Kim 2015).[8] Notably, Baek's (2020) study of emotional communication in "Myeonangjeongga" uncovers within the poem a tension between the desire for a utopian state and transcendence and the inescapable realities of life. This yearning for transcendence is depicted as the emotional self-awareness of the self (*a* 我) emphasizing the unity of nature and the individual.[9]

And yet, as far as the narrator's immediate surroundings and state of being are concerned, in the end they are described, via metaphor, as surpassing the ordinary, which marks a conceptional horizon that transcends the immanence of human experience.

While the narrator compares his existence at the pavilion to that of a transcendent (*sinseon* 神仙), and his time to an idealized ancient past, this perfected state remains perpetually elusive. His immersion in the secluded life amidst nature instead hints at a sense of transcendence and, by doing so, transmits a conception of what this ideal yet unattainable state, the "ultimate horizon" (Tweed 2006, 76), entails.

Thematically, the poem can be divided in five to six segments.[10] The first segment spans eight verses,[11] and introduces Myeonang Pavilion by

8 However, in his analysis of "Myeonangjeongga," Kim (2021) highlights precisely this aspect. Taking into account Song Sun's personal and political challenges prior to withdrawing to Myeonang Pavilion, the author points it out as problematic to view "Myeonangjeongga" as a song of an official's contented retirement in his hometown (Kim 2021, 139).

9 Baek (2020, 126) locates this ideal or transcendent state in the concept of *mul-a-ilche* (unity of the self and the outside world 物我一體), the yearning for which, the paper argues, is contained in the emotional self-awareness of the narrator emphasizing unity with the natural world. We counter that the transcendence/immanence distinction cannot be allocated to an opposition of "reality" (*hyeonsil*), characterized by political involvement, and the natural world (Baek 2020, 122); instead, the natural world is conceptualized as a pathway to approach an implied ultimate horizon of human experience.

10 For a more detailed structuring of the poem, see Lee 1992, 622–25.

11 The number depends on verse segmentation.

panoramically portraying its locale. The second segment zooms in on several features of the nature surrounding the pavilion, highlighting its capricious and animated character across twenty-five verses. The third segment spans eleven verses and depicts the seasonal transformations of the landscape in the course of a year. The fourth segment zooms in on how the narrator spends his time at the pavilion and how the qualities of nature reflect in his everyday life, depicted across twelve verses. The penultimate segment introduces the aspect of culture into the narrative via the themes of music, intoxication, and the (desired) company of friends. With six verses, this is the shortest segment. It is followed by a final segment, spanning seven verses, which presents an appraisal of the narrator's own life within this world and, within the last verse, gives thanks to the king for bestowing on him this agreeable life.

Analysis

The possibility for departure

Early on, in the opening segment of the poem, which offers a panoramic, dynamic view (cf. Choe 2015, 91) of the pavilion's locale, two elaborate similes are developed to describe the place:

> From Mount Mudeung, one mountain range stretches to the East
> It tears away far into the distance to form Jewol Peak,
> Lost in thought amid the great boundless wilderness.
> Seven bends meet, as if strewn together.
> The center hillock: an old dragon lying in a den,
> Just awakened from a nap, stretching its head.
> Atop a broad rock, pushing through pines and bamboo, a pavilion is set,
> Like a blue crane poised to go on a thousand-mile journey among the clouds, its wings outstretched. (1–5[12]; emphasis ours)

The poem draws a comparison between the hillock on which Myeonang Pavilion is located and an old dragon rousing from a nap, imbuing the place with an enigmatic aura. The dragon, often a symbolic indicator of peace and prosperity, is a powerful mythical creature associated with water, a being of

12 Verse references are based on Im (2005), although our translation may divert from the verse division of this edition due to differing interpretations.

infinite transformation that can ascend into the skies or submerge in water at will (Lee et al. 2020, 390). That the dragon comparison drawn between hillock and creature exceeds a mere likeness in shape is apparent in the elaboration of the dragon's demeanor. The metaphor rather characterizes the pavilion's location as auspicious and powerful, ordained by a higher force. At the same time, the dragon's awakening from sleep marks a release from static and the onset of arousal and motion, while implying a transition from clouded dream to clear awareness.

The dragon simile is complemented by the adjacent blue crane comparison. Like the dragon, the crane indicates a mystical and spiritual presence, symbolizing purity, longevity, and a breaking away from worldly concerns. As one out of four types of cranes, the blue crane is believed to be the second oldest that will turn into an immortal black crane after a further couple hundred years (Lee et al. 2020, 611). Depicted as a blue crane about to cross the heavens on a journey of a thousand *ri*, Myeonang Pavilion is situated at the very boundary to transcendence: a physical dwelling in *this* world that materializes the potential for an existence *beyond*. In effect, the two similes of the awakening dragon and the blue crane ready for lift-off insinuate the possibility for departure.[13]

Anthropomorphization of the natural world

The first half of the poem meticulously portrays nature as capricious, heterogenous, and chaotic, emphasized with the use of repeated parallelism and anthropomorphizing metaphors. Nature is shown to be in constant flux, subject to abrupt transformations that may seem arbitrary to the human eye, eluding prediction and control. This aspect is further underlined through the use of indefinitive pronouns and rhetorical questions that challenge the patterns behind natural phenomena: For one, Jewol Peak is anthropomorphically depicted as "contemplating *something*," the cascading water is attributed with purposeful motion, as it is "going *somewhere*, preoccupied with *something*," and the wild geese are described as "cajoling for *something* or other." The narrator muses about the meaning of the wild geese's calls and whether the cooling

13 Jin (2010, 118) further suggests that from a *pungsu* 風水 (C. *feng shui*) perspective, the geographical layout of Myeonang Pavilion's surroundings constitutes an ideal location, providing opportunity for both restfulness and transcendence through an intersection of snugness and expanse.

breeze over the water's surface will ever stop. He later questions how the sudden transformation of fields into a golden hue at the transition from summer to autumn came to be.

What emanates from these rhetorical questions is the notion that nature, as observed by the narrator, follows inscrutable patterns that defy human rationality. It is not coincidental in this regard that in articulating the chaotic attribute of natural phenomena, the majority of expressions make use of anthropomorphization, a type of metaphorical figuration that is found throughout the poem. It appears that in the attempt to approximate and convey nature's inscrutable patterns, the latter become the target of metaphorical expressions derived from the domain of human existence. Thus, Jewol Peak, instead of simply "being there" serendipitously, is ascribed with cognitive faculties, with an intention. Exceeding mere flow, the motion of the water is construed as being purposefully and actively directed towards a destination. The clouds and mists, in turn, are not only drifting and traversing the mountains; rather, they are depicted as "making the countless crevices and valleys their home" in an almost metareflective way considering the narrator's homemaking at Myeonang Pavilion. Such anthropomorphization functions as a vehicle to blend the abstract notion of patterns that drive or direct natural phenomena with more concrete, human-centric concepts. This puts the former into the confines of a more familiar and easily conceivable frame of reference. To put it more plainly, metaphors involving anthropomorphization help to imagine the never fully apprehensible patterns of nature by comparing them to those by which human society operates.

The human patterns that function as metaphorical source in the depiction of nature are, in turn, characterized by hectic frenzy, a "criss-crossing" incessantly accentuated by parallelisms in syntax and lexis. A range of evocative images that vividly depict the "criss-crossing" disarray of nature is employed in the poem's second segment after the locale of Myeonang Pavilion has been introduced[14]:

> Water cascades from Mount Okjeon and Mount Yongcheon:
> See it pour straight into the wide field ahead of the pavilion.
> Now wide, now slender; now blue, now white. [P]

14. Abbreviated annotations at the right margin indicate comparison (C), metaphor (M), anthropomorphizing metaphor (M^A), and parallelism (P).

Like a pair of dragons coiling around each other, like stretched sheets of silk [C]
It's going somewhere, busy with something [M^{A}]
See it running, see it chasing, flowing day and night. [P]
Sandbanks along the water spread [smooth] like snow.
In disarray, the wild geese are cajoling for something. [M^{A}]
Now they rest, now they soar; now they gather, now disperse. [P]
The honks amid the reed flowers; is it that they're luring each other?
Off the broad road and beneath the tall sky,
Is it the mountains that surround me or a folding screen? Is it a painting or is it not? [M]
See them up high, see them down low; see them break off, see them connect. [P]
They are hiding, they are showing; they are going, they are stopping. [P]
Amid the disarray, among those pretending to be famous, [M^{A}]
Not even afraid of the sky, standing tall, Mount Chuweol takes the lead.
Mount Yonggwi and Bongseon, Mount Daesan and Eodeung,
Mount Yongjin and Geumseong, all shoot into the air, [P]
And how many more there are at the blue cliffs near and far!
White clouds, faint mists, rosy glows, blue hues—such are the mountain hazes,
Making a thousand cliffs and crevices their home, [M^{A}]
Going in and going out, enchanting like a painting. [C]
They rise, they fall; they leave into the doming sky, traverse across vast fields. [P]
Blue and red; light and dark, [P]
Combining with the evening sun, sprinkling misty rain. (5–18)

In fact, the capricious character of nature is made explicit twice with the use of the word *eojeureoeun* ("chaotic," "disorderly," or "dizzying"), once in the phrase *eojeureoeun gireogi* ("disordered wild geese") and once in relation to the topography of the mountains: *eojeureoun gaunde* ("amid the chaos"). Within this segment, the natural disarray is elaborated in four images, namely the cascading mountain streams, the comportment of wild geese along the sandbanks, the diverse topographical features of the surrounding mountains, and the transformations of fog and clouds. Dense not only with anthropomorphization, but also parallelisms, the segment creates a rhythmic pattern that contributes to conveying the observed alternations within nature. For example, the verses

"See them [i.e., the mountains] up high, see them down low; see them break off, see them connect. / They are hiding, they are showing; they are going, they are stopping" employ the construction *-eun deut* ("appear to"; expressing a semblance or an impression on the speaker) and the assertative paratactical conjunctive suffix, *-geoni,* four times each.

After the elaborate portrayal of streams, wild geese, mountains, and clouds—each fragment of the natural environment—the ensuing segment passes through the landscape over the course of the seasons. This marks a transition to the macro-level not only with regard to space, but also to time. The brisk run-through of spring, summer, autumn, and winter creates a time-lapse effect that further underlines the transformative, perpetually changing character of nature:

When I hurry to ride in the open sedan, back and forth beneath the pines along the winding paths,
How alluring are the orioles, singing in green willows!
When trees and grass grow dense, and their shadows condense,
A long drowsiness unfolds at the balustrade of a hundred feet.
The cooling breeze on the water, I wonder if it knows how to stop?
After heavy frosts have fallen, the mountains are like silk embroidery!
Why is it that yellow clouds are spread across such vast expanse again?
The fisherman's flute is driven by joy, blowing along in accord with the moon.
After grass and trees have dropped [their leaves], the rivers and mountains are buried,
And, in grand display, the Creative Force adorns it all with ice and snow
Jade towers of an amber palace, silver mountains in a sea of jade extend before my eyes! (18–24)

What is more, this passage introduces the narrator for the first time whose coming and going along the winding paths mirrors the criss-crossing, zig-zagging attribute of the natural disarray.[15] As he witnesses the perpetual transformations in nature, the narrator attributes them to the "Creative Force" (*jomul* 造物)[16]

15 Ko (2015) further notes that the implied cyclical concept of time, conveyed through the seasonal time-lapse, sustains a sense of place and establishes a relationship between the narrator and his environment.

16 The concept of the Creative Force (alternatively called *jomulja* 造物者, *jomulju* 造物主, or *johwa* 造

who adorns the hiemal landscape with ice and snow, transfiguring the terrain into "jade towers of an amber palace, silver mountains in a sea of jade." By utilizing the concept of the Creative Force who creates and manipulates at will, the forces responsible for the natural transformations are now more concretely personified than is the case with the prior anthropomorphization of streams, mountains, and wind.[17]

In resonance with the natural world

The following two verses connect the time-lapse-like depiction of Myeonang Pavilion across the four seasons to the latter half of the poem which turns to the narrator's life at the pavilion and, thus, his place and role on this site and in the natural space at large: "Heaven and earth are abundant and rich, and every corner I go is filled with wonder."

This phrase explains the narrator's bustling engagement in his natural surroundings that are described in the ensuing lines. The verse "Though I have left the realm of humans, my body is kept busy" accentuates the conceptual separation of the "human realm," representative of a life involved in societal engagements and what are perceived as "mundane matters," from a purer, immaculate, and ultimately superior realm connected to mountains and rivers that is unpolluted by human fuss and desires.

The phrase "leaving the realm of humans" thus directly articulates a crossing of a terrestrial as well as a cosmic dimension. This is because the narrator not only has traversed physical space to be immersed in nature but, by doing so, is further traversing toward "the ultimate horizon of human life" (Tweed 2006, 123). In this verse is condensed the connectedness of conceptions of the transcendent and the geographical: the word *ingan* 人間, literally translating as "[space] between humans," refers to a physical part of the world

化) appears in the framework of Daoism as the cosmic force that is responsible for creating and maintaining all things and beings through constant transformation. It is comparable to the concepts of *dao* (the Way 道) and heaven (*cheon* 天) which it is sometimes used interchangeably with. Though not necessarily an anthropomorphic deity in the strict sense, the Creative Force is often ascribed attributes and actions that are typically performed by humans, like the act of decorating as seen in "Myeonangjeongga." This is reflected in English translations that render the term "the creator."

17 The Creative Force is already anthropomorphized metaphorically in Zhuangzi: "When we once understand that heaven and earth are a great melting-pot, and the Creative Force the great metal caster, where can we have to go to [when we die] that shall not be right for us?" (ICS Zhuangzi: 6/18/7; adapted from James Legge's translation).

inhabited by humans and regulated by society. While the term is conventional, within the context of the pavilion and its surrounding nature, the expression of "leaving *ingan*" points to an entanglement of the natural space with a transcendent dimension. To be more precise, the narrator's "terrestrial" transition from a place of societal involvement to a realm free from that and within nature constitutes a crossing over from the "human realm" to one closer to the "ultimate horizon"[18]: "the most distant, not the proximate or penultimate, limit of life. It is the imagined beginning and end, or […] the cyclic process that constitutes existence. It is the end or aim that participants take as most important" (Tweed 2006, 76).

The ensuing description of the narrator's activities then mirrors the erratic aspect earlier attributed to nature via anthropomorphizing metaphors. Again, parallelisms propel the notion of erraticity:

> I want to see this and listen to that,
> Want to feel the breeze and welcome the moon.
> [But] when will I gather chestnuts, when will I fish?
> Who will close my gate of twigs, who will sweep the fallen blossoms?
> I am busy in the morning; will I, perhaps, grow weary in the evening?
> Today is insufficient; will, perhaps, tomorrow hold spare time?
> I take a seat on this hill, take a walk over to that one. (25–28)

On the one hand, this passage conveys the narrator's enthusiasm for the range of simple yet engaging activities and tasks open to him as he is released from the social ties of the "human realm." Simultaneously, the limiting factor of time is brought to the stage with the rhetorical questions, especially "Today is insufficient; will, perhaps, tomorrow hold spare time?" which based on the narrator's busy engagement, it clearly will not.

Rather than relishing repose and tranquility, the narrator is driven by a hunger for experiences. His apparent inability to realize all of them imparts a sense of fervor that seems to tie back to the dynamics of nature. Like the streams

18 The interpretative duality of "leaving *ingan*" has also been noted by Choe (2015, 187) who suggests that it can denote either the author's spatial-temporal departure from his political past or a transition from the common human space into an idyllic, utopian one. Baek (2020, 122), on the other hand, finds the duality in an opposition between political reality and the natural world, which the narrator purportedly seeks to melt with.

next to Myeonang Pavilion, the narrator is always "going somewhere, busy with something / […] running, […] chasing, flowing day and night."[19] Instead of becoming one, nature and narrator again mirror each other by sharing the property of perpetual transformation. Therefore, rather than dissolving into nature, the narrator remains at a distance, never fully reaching what seems to lie beyond: "I take a seat on this hill, take a walk over to that one."

Toward its end, the poem addresses wine, music, and blissful intoxication. Once again, syntactic parallelisms contribute to the conveyed message, now reflecting the rhythm of song and the narrator's shifting comportment.

> The wine is ripe—won't there be friends?
> Sing a song, pluck and bow the strings, jangle the bells
> With every sound, my drunken joy grows on
> Will worries abound and anguish prevail?
> Lay low, sit up, bend [to look] down, lean back [to look up],
> Recite and whistle; I ramble on freely. (30–33)

From a cross-cultural perspective, the elements of ecstatic intoxication and music are associated with ritual practices as means to reach altered states of consciousness and pursue ceremonial and spiritual goals (cf. James 1902; Geertz [1973] 2016).[20] Against this background, it is interesting to note that the narrator's described engagement at Myeonang Pavilion culminates in his indulging in music and alcohol and that this ecstatic state leads to the realization that the whole cosmos is keeping him company: "Heaven and earth are vast and wide; sun and moon, too, take leisure and breaks." Humans and the natural world, which up to this point have been likened via anthropomorphization of the latter on the basis of a shared capriciousness and continuous transformation, are again compared through the metaphor of sun and moon "taking leisure and breaks" from said bustle, just like the narrator at his pavilion, drinking wine and enjoying music.

19 We thus do not concur with Baek's (2020, 125) interpretation that the narrator's restless bustling about contains a sense of solitude and loneliness.

20 In the Korean Confucian context, music and ritual were said to harmonize heaven and earth, thus contributing to the proper hierarchization of social order. In pre-modern Korea, music and alcohol were present during Confucian rites as well as the continuously conducted folk rites and festivities (Deuchler 1992; Haboush and Deuchler 1999).

Toward an ultimate horizon

The following and final verses hint at the notion of the narrator crossing the boundaries of his existence tied to immediate space, time, and the human form, all through his exposure to and engagement in the locale of Myeonang Pavilion.

> Though I knew not Fú Xī, this moment is just like his time.
> No matter what transcendents may be, my own self is just the same.
> With rivers, hills, the wind, and moon as my fellows, if I live my hundred years like this,
> Could Li Bai atop Yueyang Tower
> Ever surpass these profound sentiments of mine? (33–35)

This passage juxtaposes the narrator's immediate existence with an idealized, transcendent state. More so, it merges the two dimensions by mapping transcendent entities (i.e., Fú Xī 伏羲,[21] the transcendents [*sinseon*], and the life of the revered Tang poet Li Bai[22]) onto immanent elements, explicated through "this moment" and "this body."[23] It may not be entirely coincidental that the linguistic realization of this mapping, employing the proximal demonstrative "this" (*i*) to refer to the immanent elements and the distal demonstrative "that" (*geu*) to refer to the transcendent ones iconically reflects a distinction of immanence (i.e., that which is close, or *diesseits*) and transcendence (i.e., that which is beyond, or *jenseits*). The comparison of the narrator's immediate existence to an idealized state elevates the former, as it dissolves the temporal and physiological human limitations.

The narrator does admit his ignorance of what Fú Xī's era was really like, as well as of the true nature of the transcendents. This ignorance is rooted in the human limitations he is bound by in opposition to the suprahuman character

21 Referred to in the poem as Huihwang 羲皇, Fú Xī is a legendary emperor from Chinese mythology, regarded as a key figure in the early development of civilization who introduced social and moral order. The reference to Fú Xī in "Myeonanjeongga" thus alludes to an ancient past of peace and stability.

22 The text alludes to Li Bai's (701–762) poem "On Climbing Yueyang Tower with Xia Shi'er" in which the narrator, after gazing into the distant landscape, gets drunk atop Yueyang Tower. It ends as follows: "In heaven above I receive the passing wine cup. / After I have gotten drunk a cool wind rises, / Blowing on me, sending my sleeves dancing and fluttering" (Cai 2008).

23 "This body" (*i mom*), a common self-reference (compare Literary Sinitic *chasin* 此身, "this body"), has been rendered in the above translation as "my own self."

of the named entities. In the consequent equation of his existence with the transcendent state, however, lies the insight that his being at the pavilion, surrounded by nature, has given him an *idea* of what that transcendent state is like. This can be read as an acknowledgement that, although there remains the transcendent unknown, in this very moment and place, the narrator is as close to transcendence as is humanly possible.

Findings

The extended metaphor "natural patterns are like human sociality" that pervades the poem imbues nature with meaning. Anthropomorphization turns nature into a social space, opening up the possibility of communication with it, as well as finding a place for oneself within it that corresponds to the human realm. Similar to, yet different and separate from the domain of human experience, this place is conceptualized with the help of extended metaphor as familiar and tangible, while ultimately remaining out of reach, lying beyond. Through this metaphorical process, "'remoteness' is preserved within 'proximity.' To see *the like* is to see the same in spite of, and through, the different" (Ricoeur 1978, 148).

The extended metaphor of anthropomorphization thus helps to communicate—by language referring to immanent entities and concepts—an otherwise ineffable transcendent dimension. This dimension is not nature per se. However, the natural world, as an environment which expands the narrator's world horizon, pushing it further outside the boundaries of the human realm, is presented as a pathway to move closer to an "ultimate horizon" of human experience. By investing the natural world with human characteristics, traits, and capacities, it becomes imbued with meaning. This goes beyond merely symbolizing meaning; instead, it portrays nature as a source of profound significance by blending together the realms of the human world and the natural world. The natural world, despite its patterns escaping full human comprehension, becomes a realm of heightened meaning and profound sense. It turns the immanent world into a sociable counterpart capable of correspondence that humans can address, as well as distance themselves from. Hence, the natural world and the authorial self do not fuse with one another; instead, the possibility arises for both to engage in communication with one another.

It has been shown that the closing verses of the poem establish via comparison a connection between the narrator's own immediate human existence, i.e., the immanent "here and now," and a utopian time and suprahuman state. By doing so, the poem explicitly points to a transcendent dimension which the lyrical self appears to have approximated through his immersion in the natural world.

"Gwandong byeolgok": From Crossing to Dwelling

Introductory Reflections

Jeong Cheol's (1536–1593) "Gwandong byeolgok" 關東別曲 (1580) is widely regarded as the single most outstanding work among Joseon *gasa* literature. Accordingly, studies (in Korean) abound. For our purposes, most important are those works that deal with the question of the main theme of the poem, and with its metaphoricity.

Much interpretive labor has been devoted to the stance that the author—or the text—takes between political commitment and search for personal freedom and fulfilment, between avowing loyalty to the king and inscribing the lyrical self into the world of the immortals (*sinseon*). Kim Byung Kook (1972) who understood the poem as expressing a tension between both tendencies set in motion a lively discussion on which of the two sides should be seen as the poet's main preoccupation. Arguments are available for either of these interpretations, given that the poem thematizes both worlds, the political world and nature in its most elevating aspects (albeit arguably with greater emphasis on the latter) and that the circumstances of its composition provide rationales for both stances: It was authored when Jeong Cheol was sent as governor to the beautiful but remote province of Gwandong during a period when he had been forced to retreat to his country-side home in Changpyeon (Damyang) due to political pressure. This new post entailed an ambiguous political position: While becoming provincial governor was of course a promotion in comparison to being forced into country-side reclusion, it also meant being physically removed even farther away from court. Protesting his loyalty to king and court and emphasizing his own partaking in a world beyond politics would thus appear equally plausible as auctorial intention. One of the recent contributions to this discussion, Yim Ju-Tak (2012), brings forward the valuable

argument that both sides, devotion to politics and invocation of the alternative world of the immortals, should be regarded not as being in tension but as adding up to a single message—in his view, the author's perfect fulfilment of his task as governor of Gwandong. To seek unity rather than tension in the ideas underlying a work of as seamless poetic flow as "Gwandong byeolgok" is most commendable; however, Yim's (2012, 27) efforts seem to lead in a less convincing direction when he ends up describing the poem as a "report" (*bogoseo*) to the king. Such an interpretation not only trivializes the poem, it also once again ties it down unilaterally to court politics. As related by Yim himself, the poem's earliest readers, such as Jo U-in (1561–1625), saw in Jeong Cheol a "wanderer" who sung of his "sauntering with the transcendents" (*seonyu* 仙遊) (Yim 2012, 7). It might be considered that when later scholars of the same factional lineage, such as Yi Seon (1632–1692) and Kim Manjung (1637–1692), felt obliged to emphasize the expression of loyalty in Jeong's poem (id.), this could have been for political reasons of their own—i.e., meant to ward off accusations of their faction's lack of devotion to the monarchy—rather than for the sake of the rectification of literary interpretation. Within the scope of this paper, no efforts can be made to further substantiate this hypothesis on its pre-modern reception; suffice it to say that in our reading of "Gwandong byeolgok," we start from the observation that it was the "transcendent wandering," not the literary nods towards court and king, that was the poem's most conspicuous feature for its contemporaneous readers.[24]

Hardly does any study of "Gwandong byeolgok" fail to mention Jeong Cheol's exquisite use of language, including the use of similes. However, studies focusing on metaphor are comparatively rare and of recent origin. Among these, two articles using conceptual metaphor theory are of most interest here. Cho Hyunill, making use of Fauconnier's theory of conceptual blending, describes the poem's climactic dream passage as a mental space in which the conceptual layer "a new transcendent existence" is reinforced by the layer of "physical power beyond human capacity." These important observations are, however, not probed for their deeper significance; rather, the poem becomes reduced to a simple expression of "happiness" (Cho 2017, 289–90). Lim Taeseung (2020, 123), basing himself on similar theoretical concepts and methodology, develops a more intricate scheme of the poem's shifting mental spaces, yet the conclusion he draws from it, namely that the poem's main concern is with "love of sovereign" (*yeon'gun ji jeong*) appears not well corroborated, and the conceptual metaphors he relies on, such as THINKING IS MOVING, appear as hardly relevant for a deeper understanding of the poem's meaning.

24 As much of existent secondary literature shows, the "transcendent" (in the sense of creating and inhabiting an alternative space) aspect of the poem is the most conspicuous one for contemporary readers as well.

Rather than following the recent trend of applying conceptual metaphor theory to "Gwandong byeolgok," the results of which have so far less been than convincing, we therefore return to the more traditional methods of literary metaphor analysis as used for interpreting "Myeongangjeongga." Not surprisingly, given the influence Song Sun's composition had on Jeong Cheol,[25] many of the findings concerning the former also apply to the latter and will not have to be illustrated in detail. Different from the case of "Myeonangjeongga" for which no English version exists, we also refrain from providing a fine-grained synopsis of "Gwandong byeolgok"; for full comprehension of the text, we refer the reader to the four English translations available (Lee 1961, 161–68; 1981, 105–09; O'Rourke 2005, 71–81; Lee 2023, 33–39).[26] For our analysis, we focus on two metaphorical complexes: metaphorized space as a political vision and the narrator's relations with historical personages and birds. An analysis of the poem's final scene, the dream, will knit these motifs together.

Analysis

Metaphorized space

If "Myeonangjeongga" moves from dwelling to crossing, establishing crossing as the potential inherent in dwelling, the poetical movement of "Gwandong byeolgok" develops in the opposite direction: the crossing of continuously expanding space finally leads to an, albeit temporary and airborne, dwelling place. The poem starts with the narrator, sick of the world,[27] "lying" in a "bamboo

25 Both belonged to the *seoin* faction. The direct influence of "Myeonangjeongga" on Jeong Cheol's "Seongsan byeolgok" (presumably written in 1560) is tangible. See Im 1979, 27.

26 Since in his later translation Peter H. Lee sometimes arrived at very different decisions, both translations can be usefully compared. Conversely, Lee Sung-Il's translation in 2023 is identical with the one in his earlier, less readily available publication (2009). The translations offered in this article are our own unless otherwise noted. Matches with previous translations in the rendering of single words or phrases are not marked.

27 The meaning of the first words of the poem, *gangho e byeong i gipeo*, deserves treatment of its own which will be delivered at another place. In modern scholarship, *byeong* (sickness 病) is often

grove" (1)[28]—a secluded, even constricted space from which he is released by the king's ordering him to Gwandong. The haste with which his travel to Seoul to receive his insignia and from there to the border of Gwandong province is narrated—taking just six lines of the 146 lines poem—makes the space traversed appear extremely contracted. Only when he climbs the "Broad North Arbor" (Bukwangjeong) in Cheolwon, the border town, vision is widened. His gaze having turned backwards towards the West for the last time at this point (11), searching for the (of course invisible) peaks of Samgak Mountain which stands in metonymically for the capital and metaphorically for the king, from here onwards the traveler is consistently oriented towards the East: up the Diamond Mountains, and further on to the East Coast. From the highest peak, Birobong, onwards, this is naturally a downward route; also, human habitation and society come into view again when approaching the coast-side, so that the descent can be easily construed as a returning from the otherworldly realm of the mountains to the mundane realm of duty and strife, a reading that is facilitated by the line with which the turn downward in face of the unsurmountable mountain is marked: "Since I cannot climb up, I will gently go down" (51). However, the ways in which configurations of space develop conveys a different message: The lyrical self's mental ascension, his opening up of alternative spaces is a far more complex literary process than a one-dimensional correlation to physical elevation above sea level.

In the just over 30 lines between the narrator's departure from Hoeyang, his place of office, and the spot under Birobong from which descent begins, height is gained very quickly, with eyes turned increasingly upwards. In line 20, the "silver rainbows" and "jade-like dragon's tails" (similes for the waterfalls of Manpokdong), in their coiling movements, start to gently lift up vision from the ground towards sky; in so doing, they present water as a bridge and a third space between earth and sky. This upward eye movement is continued in lines 23–25 when the "immortal cranes" nesting on "the uppermost story of Geumgang Terrace" fly up into "mid-air" (*bangong* 半空) and then arrives at the

understood in its secondary meaning of "extreme fascination" and the phrase thus read as signifying the narrator's love of nature. We do not follow this interpretation. *Gangho* ("rivers and lakes" 江湖), an ambiguous term with a complex semantic history, often means more than just "nature."

28 Numbers in parentheses behind quotes from or references to "Gwandong byeolgok" indicate the number of the line. Line count follows the *Songgang gasa*, Yi-Seon edition, as contained in Kim 1999, 13–23.

"true vista of the mountain," the multitude of high peaks, from Daehyangno to Hyeolmangbong to finally Birobong. Yet as soon as this field of vision is opened, even higher and wider dimensions come into play: The peaks stand "as if planting lotus, bundling white jade, sifting the Eastern Sea from its bed, and heaving up the North Pole" (32–33; Lee 1981, 104). In close connection with the peaks, yet beyond them, both the sea and the sky come into view, and when the peaks are left behind, ocean and sky remain the direction towards which the narrator is drawn on his way. In the lines immediately following the beginning of descent, both sea and sky are alluded to in the image of the "thousand-year old dragon" which coils downwards towards the "open sea" and is at the same time responsible for "gaining winds and clouds" (54–56); and clouds and dragon reappear in majestic images when the narrator watches the sun-rise on Uisangdae (86–87). Both clouds as water in the air and the dragon as a being dwelling in the sea and drifting through the sky represent the blending of ocean-space and sky-space. Contrast with the vertical watery connection to the sky witnessed earlier at the waterfalls makes palpable the enormous spatial expansion of the poem's imagery. The traveler's route finally ends where ocean and sky meet, and the vastness of space thus created becomes the place where to seek relief for his "wanderer's melancholy" (*gaeksu* 客愁):

> Official's journeys have limits, but I have not yet seen enough.
> My heart is full of thoughts; nowhere to deliver the wanderer's melancholy.
> Should I board the celestial raft to the Dipper and Herdboy?
> Or shall I search for immortals in the Danhyeol cave?[29]
> Unable to pluck out heaven's root, I climb Ocean-Watching Pavilion:
> Beyond the ocean, there lies heaven; but what lies beyond heaven? (108–13)

These few examples—more would be possible—suffice to illustrate the traveler's unending quest for ever widening space, ever new horizons, a longing for a "beyond" that clearly carries traits of aiming at a state of transcendence. But such an interpretation that would render the "wanderer" in this poem either a discoverer, or else a Daoist adept seeking to disappear into the void, falls short of the actual complexity of the text which, as scholarship emphasizing its expressions of "love for the sovereign" has amply shown, is strewn with

29 A cave where, according to legend, four immortals roamed during Silla times.

references to (good) government, heroes of old, and imperfect officials of the present.[30] The meaning of the poem's configuration of ever-widening space becomes clearer when taking into account its metaphorical layer.

Not coincidentally, the core passages that together configurate the widening of space described above all have—by context or by vocabulary—a metaphorical layer alluding to power relationships. The first "vision" of a peak happens, as mentioned, at the border between the province around the capital, Gyeonggi, and Gangwon, the region over which the royal emissary is to rule: the gaze back towards Samgaksan as metaphor for royal power. Samgaksan, however, cannot possibly be seen from Bukwangjeong; the poetic line describing the backwards gaze (11), even while doing obeisance to royal power, makes tangible the limits of the latter's extent. Just like the visual presence of Samgaksan here at the provincial border hinges on the imagination of the traveler, the efficacy of royal power hinges on his subjects' readiness to accept it, especially at the margins of the realm to which physical state power hardly extends.

With the metaphoric relation of "Samgaksan = royal power" in mind, the following passage on the towering peaks of Geumgangsan "sifting the Eastern Sea from its bed and heaving up the North Pole" (33) attains a different tinge: Obviously, in this natural realm powers are at work that far surpass those of the human realm. The latter, however, is brought in again in the succeeding lines:

> So high, the Terrace of Gazing into Heights (Manggodae); so lonely, Vista-Cave-Peak (Hyeolmangbong)
> Surging up into Heaven, what will he tell him
> For ten thousand kalpas he has no intention to bend (34–36)

The metaphorical figuration of the relationship between king (heaven) and subject (mountain peak) is easily recognizable. The peaks, about whose own power as well as their quality of being pillars of heaven ("heaving up the North Pole") the reader had just learned, now unmistakably become an image of officials oriented ("surging up") towards their lord. Yet the natural configuration is not a replica of the human one, but an idealized version, even a template

30 The line "I wish this pure vital energy (*giun*) [of Geumgang mountain] could be used to form able people" (42) is widely understood as a gibe towards the impure, incapable officials at court.

on which the human relation should be modeled. In this version the "lonely" official is in conversation with his sovereign but has "no intention to bend." This may refer to steadfastness vis-a-vis the enemies among his peers, but the metaphorical situation,[31] with the peaks facing the sky, suggests a greater emphasis on an unbending attitude towards the king himself.[32]

The political metaphor in descriptions of celestial phenomena is even more obvious in the next passage we have adduced above as evidence for the continuous widening of space, the sunrise at the East Coast:

> To see the sun rise I got up in the middle of the night
> Auspicious clouds as if billowing around it; six dragons as if propping it up
> When it rose above the sea, the ten thousand dynasties (*manguk* 萬國) were shaken
> When it shone amidst the sky, fine hairs could be told apart
> It seemed that the drifting clouds would stop when they came near it. (85–89)

Easily detectable as second layer of meaning of the natural scenery is the image of kingly authority (the sun) which is protected and brought forward to shine by benevolent powers (auspicious clouds, dragons), whose light illuminates and enlightens the world, and who keeps evil powers (drifting clouds) at a distance. Yet, this is not a vision of King Seonjo at his court but, again, the idealized image of an immensely greater power whose appearance shakes not just one but "ten thousand dynasties," a power which reigns not just over a country but over ocean (represented by the dragons) and sky/heaven. And in the final step of the journey, this ocean and heaven are, as we have seen, again questioned about the limits of their power: Just as sky/heaven is beyond and above the sea, yet another entity is assumed to be reigning beyond heaven. Nature in its vastness and

31 One might argue that we deal here with a symbolic rather than a metaphoric relation between the signifiers "heaven" and "king," since the equation "sovereign = heaven" is well established in East Asian cultures. However, the fact that the meaning of *haneul* in the poetic line under scrutiny oscillates between "sky" and "heaven," between the natural phenomenon and the figurative meaning, renders this a metaphoric usage.

32 This is, of course, not an idiosyncrasy of Jeong Cheol but part of the ideal of the righteous Confucian man, the *gunja*. Yet, this ideal stood in potential tension to the equally relevant ideal of absolute loyalty. Thus, the Confucian literatus had the choice to privilege one over the other in modeling his behavior.

splendor serves as a point of comparison and as an ideal image of ruling power, but even more so as a reminder of the latter's ultimately limited authority.

Birds and role models

While inanimate nature is constantly anthropomorphized in "Gwandong byeolgok," in similar ways and often to similar effects as in "Myeonangjeongga," no living persons appear in the text. The entourage which must have accompanied the real traveler is not mentioned in the poem except by way of metonymic objects or actions, such as a jade tally (5) or flags (69) carried or raised in front of his sedan chair,[33] nor does any resident or lower official of the province make an appearance. "Gwandong byeolgok" would be devoid of people were it not for the historical personages mention of whom is scattered throughout the text and who serve as a foil or object of identification. The only other animate beings with which the lyrical self enters into a dialogical relationship are birds. Interestingly and, as we will show, not fortuitously, these two motifs tend to appear in conjunction.

The first such instance occurs right after the imagined view of Samgaksan in Cheolwon:

> At Gungye's palace site: the chirping of magpies and crows.
> Do they know the reasons for the rise and fall of the ages?
> The name of Hoeyang seems to match [the Chinese town of the same name, Huaiyang];
> Shall not the manners of Ji Changru be seen again? (12–15)

Cheolwon had been the capital of Gungye's (r. 901–918) short-lived kingdom Later Goguryeo; Hoeyang, farther to the north-east, was the commandery for Gwandong, thus the place of office for Jeong Cheol. Gungye is remembered in history as a deluded, despotic ruler. Ji Changru[34] (?–108 BCE), in contrast, was an able official who was sidelined by his king by being appointed to a post in insignificant Huaiyang where he, however, used the opportunity to demonstrate his excellent governmental skills. The two names may stand in for standard

33 The jade tally was the symbol of office received from the king at his investiture. Lee (1981, 105) adds a "man holding" the jade tally, but the original text speaks only of the tally "standing in front."

34 His real name was Ji An 汲黯; in the poem, his style Changru is used.

"reasons for the rise and fall of the ages" in Confucian understanding, and Jeong Cheol's identification with Ji Changru is obvious. The lines can thus be read as a bitter commentary on a deluded king who sends off his best minister for meaningless service in the countryside. More intricate is the role of the birds. On the surface level, the chirping magpies and crows signify the desertedness of the palace site—only commonplace birds sojourn where once the castles of an arrogant ruler had exuded their splendor. However, the next line imparts the birds with greater meaning when their chatter is interpreted as (potentially) a message: "Do they know the reasons...?" Magpies and crows, known as intelligent birds and often appearing in folklore as conveyors of messages, here function as an echo of history, as the half intelligible voice of the site itself.

Similar effects are created by the next depiction of birds, the "immortal cranes" (*seonhak* 仙鶴) soaring above Geumgang Terrace:

> Just awakened by the flute-like voice of the spring breeze
> Clad in white and black silk, they soar in mid-air
> As if frolicking for joy of seeing the ancient master of the West Lake (24–26)

The "ancient master of the West Lake" refers to Lin Bu (976–1028), a famed Chinese recluse who had declared that he regarded his plum trees and cranes as his family. Again, the birds appropriate to the place enter communication with the traveler, who, in turn, finds a historical precedent as persona for himself, equally appropriate to the place.

The next conjuncture of historical identification and communion with birds is less obvious, but still valid. The next personage we encounter by name in the poem is the brilliant Tang poet Li Bai whose historical image is defined by political failure and a propensity for drink and play. This image is strongly referred to by the name under which he first appears in the poem, "the banished immortal Li" (64), as imagined partner in dispute about the aesthetic excellence of the mountain-scape (65) at the very end of the poet's mountain itinerary; the very next line starts the descent towards the East Coast, while "the birds warble a sorrowful good-bye" (68). However, Li Bai's persona remains with the lyrical self on his way to the sea:

> The horse, familiar with the sandy road, carries the drunken poet obliquely
> As he goes along the coastline, entering a stretch of wild roses:

Seagulls, don't fly away! How come you don't know I'm your friend? (71–74)

"Drunken poet" (*chwiseon* 醉仙), yet another nickname for Li Bai, here unequivocally refers to the narrator himself, who again enters into conversation and asserts a close bond with birds typical for the local setting. A variation of the combination of images can be witnessed when the poet, after searching in vain for the Four Immortals (*saseon* 四仙) of Silla at Samilpo, is bidding farewell to the cuckoo among withering flowers (7883); and a further one when, a few lines later, Li Bai appears for the last time:

The poet-immortal, where did he go? He only left his poems.
Telling in detail about the splendor of the world.
Treading on the azaleas of Hyeonsan in Sayang
My feathered roof and mushroom-shaped wheels go down to Gyeongpo.
(90–93)

Of birds, only a faint trace is left here, but an important one, in that a "bird" characteristic— feathers—is set in metonymical relationship with "self." The communicative relationship in which the poet has so far stood with birds now inclines towards identification. Also, in describing his chariot in terms of mushrooms as eaten by the immortals, the poet illustrates his own proximity to the latter—who, not coincidentally, are often imagined as riding on birds. Birds, the transcendents, natural scenery and poetic faculty begin to merge with the self.

Denouement: The dream

This merger comes to completion in the final, climactic passage (129 onward) where the journey, having come to its end in space, continues in dream. Reclining on a pine root, the traveler dreams of "a person," an emissary from the world of transcendents, who tells him that he, the lyrical self, is a "real transcendent (*jinseon* 眞仙) from the world above" who was banished to the earth for having misread one character in the *Classic of the Yellow Court*[35] and

35 A Daoist meditation classic from around the 3rd century CE. This specific text was probably chosen here because of the "court" in its title which may evoke the connotation of "royal court," even though the educated reader would have been aware of the term's actual reference to Daoist meditation practices.

then serves him wine by "lowering the Great Dipper and filling it from the ocean" (135). After a few cups, "a soft breeze rose and lifted my armpits, letting me almost fly over 90 000 *ri* of wide sky" (137–38). After having agreed with the transcendent that he, the dreamer, would "take this wine and share it with [the people within] the Four Seas, so as to let the myriad people partake in this drunkenness" (139–40), he awakes and looks down at the sea, pondering its inscrutable depth and width (144–45).

All layers of the poem we have seen to have been built up by extended metaphor are united here. If the journey has led stepwise towards ever widening horizons, the dream represents the ultimate widening of space to include a "heaven beyond heaven," the "world above" (*sanggye* 上界). The conjunction of water and air, sky-space and ocean space elaborated in the course of the poem is here dramatically enacted with the star-dipper's scooping from the ocean. In an analogous way, the Self is widened to attain what was only projected so far: Identification with the poet among poets, Li Bai, is completed (the narrator himself is now a "banished immortal"); and from a companion of birds he transforms into a bird roc traversing the universe. From the dream's vantage point, power relations are turned upside-down: Banished the traveler is, but not so much from the court of Seonjo as from a higher, indeed transcendent court; and the task to which he is appointed is not governing a province but bringing back to the world an elixir "scooped" by immortal hands.

What exactly is this elixir? A first answer is that what the poet brings back from his self-transformative excursion is nothing else than the poem itself. Such a reading is made plausible not only by the entanglement of his persona with Li Bai, including the imagined competition for excellence (of "their" respective mountains and, by extension, their poems about them) referred to above. It should also be noted that the lyrical self's oneiric transformation starts by the attainment of an actual interlocutor: Prior to the dream scene, all communication in the poem had been one-sided or indirect, all questions had remained unanswered. Only within the dream does true dialogue occur.[36] The dream-world can thus be understood to refer to the world of meaning-making through linguistic creation, and the elixir gained there as its poetic essence. However, given the political undertones we have witnessed, the message may be

36 For important observations on the theme of dialogue, see Jo 2008, 71–95.

more pointed. What the traveler finds in the final expansion of his roaming is a stance from where to hold to his own in the face of worldly authority. Having experienced the "heaven beyond heaven," he can let the world know about the limits of royal power. The gaze that beheld the unfathomable expanses of sky and sea does, in the last verse, turn back to see "the bright moon shining over a thousand mountains and myriad valleys" (146). This acknowledgement of the king's rule over the country is certainly a poetic bow to the king. In the light of the perspectives gained, however, this bow expresses not submissive obeisance but voluntary subordination of the empowered subject.

Findings

"Gwandong byeolgok" is characterized by the lead metaphor of widening space. From the contracted space of the homestead of gentry and court, the poem leads towards the heights of the Geumgang mountains, the vastness of the sea, and finally to the transcendent realm revealed to the lyrical self in a dream. This space-related metaphorical strand is complemented by a second one that relates to the lyrical self: The natural space through which the narrator passes is animated by the recurrent images of birds which the narrator encounters along the way and with which he enters into varying forms of indirect communication. The birds thus appear as embodiments of the *genius* or vital energy (*gi* 氣) of the respective *places*. Invariably, in conjunction with the birds, historical personages come onto the stage who add the dimension of time and of *cultural sites* of moral choice. The sequence of their appearance might imply a stepladder of their relevance for the narrator: first Ji An, the good governor to which the narrator confidently declares himself equal; then Lin Bu, the recluse, with whom the cranes seem to identify the traveler; then Li Bai, the poet and "banished immortal," identification with whom is reached in the dream; and finally the "Four Immortals" of Silla times who remain elusive.[37] These connections of the lyrical self with traversed space and with remembered time prepare the transformation of the lyrical self into a literal "transcendent" (*sinseon*) in the dream. The dream can thus be seen as the place

37 The Four Immortals, supposed to have cultivated their moral, literary, and martial skills in conjunction and also known as *gukseon* ("state transcendents" 國仙), may indeed serve the function of the ultimate role model in the poem.

of "arrival" for the traveler; in the *world beyond* which at last opens up to him, he comes into his *own*. The lyrical self, compressed into a bamboo grove and chased around by royal command at the beginning of the poem, now makes his home in vast expanses through which he leisurely roams. The transcendence-seeking movement of "crossing" crosses over into an ephemeral yet empowering "dwelling."

As a result of the systematic exploration of these two strains of metaphor building in "Gwandong byeolgok," a new proposition can be offered concerning the position the narrator/author takes between his roles as "wanderer" and as "governor," between escapism and sense of political obligation. While we follow the suggestion by Yim (2012) that these two roles are aligned rather than pitted against each other in the poem, we see their point of merger not in splendid governing of an out-lying province, but in a more fundamental message about the limits of royal authority, the extent of which shrinks in view of the "heavens beyond heaven," and implicitly about the moral autonomy of the subject voluntarily offering his service for the greater good.

Conclusion

In contemporary scholarship, the two *gasa* under scrutiny here are usually allocated to different categories of *gasa* literature. While for obvious reasons "Gwandong byeolgok" is counted as travel song (*gihaeng gasa*), "Myeonangjeongga" is subsumed under a *gasa* category centered on praise of nature at a given place, a category variously dubbed *gangho* ("escape to nature") (Yun 1996), *gangho hanjeong* ("leisurely escape to nature") (Ryu 1994, 116 f.), *seogyeong* ("description of scenery") (Kim 1989), or simply *nujeong* ("pavilion") (S. Choe 2015). Yet not only in their depictions of natural scenery the two poems also have much in common; they even share the theme of "movement" versus "rest" and of "crossing" versus "dwelling" to a much greater extent than might be expected in the light of their respective topics, and than is visible at first sight. Through imbuing the space traversed—visually of physically—with communicative functions and thus with significance, both poems develop a sense of a "world beyond" from which their existence derives meaning, allowing them to positively re-imagine their social position.

In this literary process, extended metaphor plays a crucial role.

Anthropomorphization, while certainly counting among figurative speech, in itself appears as a kind of metaphorization that diminishes the gap between the natural and the human world, rather than using the gap for the creation of additional meaning. However, as could be shown in our analysis, precisely this meaning-building, distance-creating function of metaphor is discernible if we look at the build-up of layers of meaning through extended metaphor. Similarly, in "Gwandong byeolgok" the birds in themselves would hardly count as metaphor; they might be interpreted either as conventional staffing of a place with expectable wildlife, or as cultural symbols with fixed significance. Their metaphorical dimension comes into view only when we look at them conjointly; then it becomes apparent that together they refer to the same target domain, the bird-like inner nature of the lyrical self. When literary scholarship feels forced (or invited) to deny East Asian literatures metaphoricity, the reason may sometimes lie in insufficient attention to the literary techniques employed.

The conceptualizations of transcendence we have witnessed in both poems may not be regarded as religious—they do not presuppose belief in anything, not even in immortals, and the only practice that is definitely tied to them is literary practice. Yet, they make discernable a religious—or quasi-religious—dimension in Confucianism that comes very close to what Thomas A. Tweed has described as core functions of religion and that exhibits a trait often ascribed to (especially monotheistic) religion: the creation of an inner space that allows some degree of autonomy from societal demands and judgments. For their projection of a counter-space to court politics and *yangban* intrigues, both poets—as many others of their times—make much use of Daoist imagery. This does not mean, however, that Confucian literati needed to borrow their sense of transcendence from Daoism; rather, they subjugated Daoist imagery to their own, very Confucian interpretation of transcendence which was not oblivious to society. As Heiner Roetz (2016, 196) states, "[t]urning away from the world and turning inside the self is something that the early Confucians have in common with the Daoists. What separates both is the impulse of responsibility that the typical Confucian feels in himself and that leads him back to society" in an exemplary "movement of withdrawal and return" which, according to Toynbee, is the basis of human creativity. If nothing else, our reading of the two *gasa* masterpieces should have demonstrated their stature as exquisite examples of this creativity.

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Abstract

Does the Sinitic literati tradition operate with real metaphor, or only with metonymy? Does Confucianism lack transcendence in the sense of (a set of) ideas that allow a distancing of self from world and society, beyond politically motivated reclusion, or is it entirely bound to the normative power of the factual? As a contribution to tackling these conjoined questions, this article discusses the use of metaphor in two long songs (*gasa*) by 16th century Korean literati who certainly self-identified as Confucians: Song Sun's "Myeonangjeongga" and Jeong Cheol's "Gwandong byeolgok." Through a study of figurative language in these two works, it is shown that true metaphoricity does take place, but more conspicuously and effectively at the level of extended metaphor than on the level of individual similes; and that a major effect of this metaphoricity is the creation of a sense of transcendence. By emphasizing the important place of the expression of transcendence as a liberating force in both poems, the paper makes an implicit argument concerning the religious dimension of Confucianism that an immanence-transcendence distinction, the code of religious language, is at work in Confucian texts, serving Confucian aims.

Keywords: extended metaphor, Confucian transcendence, "Myeonangjeongga," "Gwandong byeolgok"

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