

A Historical Re-reading of Taengni-ji 擇里志: A Comparison of Written Texts

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The Joseon era and mainly its latter half was a time when numerous books on geography of the Kingdom were published. At that time *minchan* 民撰 works based on their authors' own experience and knowledge, written to reflect their own interests, became much more popular than *gwanchan* 官撰 ordered by the government. One of the most famous *minchan* written during a renaissance period of the Joseon dynasty is Taengni-ji 擇里志 (1751) by Yi Chung-hwan 李重煥 (1690-1756?), considered to be the first book on human geography.

Since the 18th century Taengni-ji had been widely read in hand-copied versions until the beginning of the 20th century when it was first edited and printed (1912) by Choe Nam-seon 崔南善. Nowadays more than 80 different hand-copied manuscripts are preserved in public and university libraries, such as the Kyujanggak Archives, Seoul National University Library, Korea University Library and etc. Moreover, half of the copies are known under different names rather than Taengni-ji, though Taengni-ji's content is still clearly visible in each of them. The question is how much the hand-copied manuscripts differ from each other and what is the right order of the writings.

There are many ways to read Taengni-ji. Most of the authors prefer to concentrate on Choe Nam-seon's printed version of the book. Bae Woo-sung, on the contrary, is one of those authors who have thoroughly explored the written manuscripts in the Archives. In the article "A Historical Re-reading of Taengni-ji: A Comparison of Written Texts" Bae presents a close look at different Taengni-ji manuscripts, arguing that Choe Nam-seon's printed version differs slightly from the writing that Bae expects to be one of the earliest.

The article consists of three main parts, Introduction and Conclusion. In the Introduction, Bae Woo-sung compares Choe Nam-seon's edited version and different Taengni-ji manuscripts, eliciting clear textual mismatches. For example, he has discovered that Yi Chung-hwan writes "the imperial court" 皇朝 in the same phrase where Choe Nam-seon uses "Ming dynasty" 明朝¹; likewise, the history of *sadae* 事大 also underwent some changes. Additionally, some phrases written by Yi Chung-hwan are simply omitted in the Choe Nam-seon's book if they contradict with Choe's point of view.

In the first part of the article Bae Woo-sung suggests a standardized form 標準型 of Taengni-ji's chapters based on Choe Nam-seon's version. This form includes four chapters: 1) Discourse on the Four Classes of People 四民總論; 2) Discourse on the Eight Provinces 八道總論; 3) Discourse on the Selection of Habitable Places 居總論; 4) Conclusion 總論. The Discourse on the Eight Provinces consists of eight parts named after each Korean province and the Discourse on the Selection of Habitable Places consists of four parts (Geography 地理, Livelihood 生利, Social Characteristics 人心, Mountains and Rivers (Scenery) 山水). Also, Bae accurately examines the inner structure of the standardized form, offers reasons for the particular ordering of the chapters and lists the main differences in Taengni-ji manuscripts.

In the second part of the article Bae Woo-sung employs the deductive method to determine which of the Taengni-ji was among the first ones. Most of the manuscripts do not have either a date or a name of the copyist; consequently, the researcher should possess a deep knowledge not only of history, but also of geographical literature. Bae Woo-sung appeals to Yi Chung-hwan's contemporaries such as Yi Ik 李穡, Yi Eun-mo 李殷模, Hwang Yun-seok 黃胤錫 or An Jeon-bok 安鼎福 and concludes that at the same time several similar writings were widely read and copied. Also, Bae adds that Yi Chung-hwan's attitude towards the present political regime did not help to preserve the author's name and the original name of the manuscript. Taengni-ji contains information not only on Korean geography, but also on its people, history, culture, *phungsu chiri seol* 風水地理說, desperate search for habitable space, etc. That is why every copyist could make a new name for the manuscript, emphasizing the particular idea they wanted to preserve. In the second part of the article Bae points out the connection between the name of the manuscript and its structure, suggesting a specific order for the manuscripts and their names. Thus, Bae

¹ Bae Woo-sung, *A Historical Re-reading of Taengni-ji 擇里志: A Comparison of Written Texts* (Seoul National University, Institute of Korean Studies, July 2004), 214.

assumes that the Bokkeoseol 卜居說 manuscript could be one of the earliest and, contrary to the standardized form based on Choe Nam-seon's book, offers a form of the Bokkeoseol writing.

In the third part of the article the author focuses on differences of geographic descriptions in the standardized form, the Bokkeoseol form, Dongkuk Sansurok 東國山水錄 manuscript, Dongkuk Sansuji 東國山水誌 manuscript and others. As a result, Bae detects that some manuscripts follow neither the standardized form nor the Bokkeoseol form and should be described separately, while most of the other writings can still be classified.

The research is detailed, accurate and thorough, although if the reader has not seen the mentioned manuscripts, it will probably be hard for him/her to comprehend every comparison at first glance. Every manuscript is unique and even if it can be classified, it still needs to be read separately, by itself.

In the conclusion Bae summarizes the results of the research and once again recommends paying attention not only to Choe Nam-seon's Taengniji version but also to the manuscripts. This piece of advice seems to be absolutely correct, judging by the amount of mismatches Bae points out in the article. As the author states, there are different ways of reading Taengniji and they depend on the aim of the researcher. This article was not made to analyze the meaning of Taengniji. The main aim of the author was to depict the similarities and differences between Yi Chung-hwan's and Choe Nam-seon's Taengnijis, the historical meaning of Taengniji, the structure of Taengniji in the context of Yi Chung-hwan's political and social views. Each of these aims was achieved; for this reason, the article truly presents an innovative, refreshing approach to reading Taengniji. Even if the article was written 10 years ago, it still seems accurate and useful for the modern reader.

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