

# The Performance of Virtue and the Loss of Female Individuality in Chosōn Korea: A Feminist Reading of the Tale of Ch'unhyang

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## Abstract

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The *Tale of Ch'unhyang* is perhaps Korea's most well known and oft repeated folk story. Originating in the middle of the Chosōn dynasty, it has persisted in various forms for nearly four hundred years in part because it is replete with moral lessons, including notions of filial devotion, obedience, and faithfulness; but none is as enduring and fundamental to the plot as the concept of womanly virtue. This paper will provide a feminist reading of the story to articulate the mandates of Chosōn Confucian society on women. We argue that the *Tale of Ch'unhyang* reveals that the price of fulfilling the Confucian ideal of womanhood lies in the sublimation of female self and in the loss of individuality. Taking a historical approach, the paper contextualizes the Confucian ideals of female virtue, discusses performative acts of gender, and analyzes the ways in which the traditional narrative art of *p'ansori* continually rearticulates historical norms of those ideals. It concludes with an extended feminist reading of particular *p'ansori* versions of the tale.

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## Key words

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Korean ideals of womanhood, female virtue, the performance of gender, *p'ansori*

In the town of Namwōn, South Chōlla Province, South Korea, stands a shrine where homage is paid to one of the country's most famous citizens.<sup>1</sup> Depictions of the heroine are found not only there, in what

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<sup>1</sup> As is convention in academic writing, the McCune-Reischauer method of transliteration has been adopted for Korean terms. However, special note must be made; in the latter half of the paper, numerous *p'ansori* passages are quoted from a text that uses the 2002 governmental Revised Romanization of Korean, including names of performers. In the first instance the word or name is used in this context, the equivalent McCune-Reischauer version will be provided in brackets, thereafter, the quotes will continue to use the transliteration style of the original text.

is known as her hometown, but throughout the country; she has been portrayed or discussed in nearly every form of media, both ancient and modern.<sup>2</sup> What makes this monument of interest is that there is little substantial proof that the woman enshrined therein ever actually existed. Rather, Korea's most familiar and well-respected female character, Ch'unhyang, is fictitious. Nevertheless, she is far more than a mere mythical legend, as her ubiquitous image and characteristics have come to embody many of the ideals of Korean womanhood, and have done so continuously for nearly four hundred years. This is particularly evident in the performances of the narrative art genre known as *p'ansori*, and thus *p'ansori* will serve as the lens through which the story will be analyzed in this paper.

The *Tale of Ch'unhyang* is replete with moral lessons, including notions of filial devotion, obedience, and faithfulness, but none is perhaps as enduring and fundamental to the plot as the concept of womanly virtue.<sup>3</sup> The theme of virtue is not unique to the *Tale of Ch'unhyang* alone, but is a common underlying strand in several significant stories centered on and for women that were popular during the Chosön (1392-1910) dynasty.<sup>4</sup> The story "deals with the ideal woman, and set its ideal in an aristocratic milieu. Of all the elements that have been blended in the story ... idealized female virtue is the most important" (*Virtuous Women*, 1974, p. xii). This paper will give a feminist reading of the story to articulate the mandates of Chosön Confucian society on women: for Ch'unhyang to perfect her virtue, she must be willing to sacrifice her own sense of individual being. This paper will argue that the *Tale of Ch'unhyang* reveals that the price of fulfilling the Confucian ideal of womanhood lies in the sublimation of female self and in the loss of individuality. Taking a historical approach, this paper will first contextu-

<sup>2</sup> The *Tale of Ch'unhyang* has been depicted in a myriad of ancient and modern forms: poetry, songs, paintings, embroidery, books, television dramas, movies, animated and print cartoon, among others. However, as will be discussed in detail below, only narrative story-telling versions of the story will be analyzed here.

<sup>3</sup> For a retelling of the tale, see Appendix A.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Richard Rutt and Kim Chong-un chose to translate three well-known stories, including *Kuummong* (A Nine Cloud Dream), *The True History of Queen Inhyón*, and the *Tale of Ch'unhyang* under the title of *Virtuous Women* because each story clearly exemplifies various aspects of the Confucian-conceived notion of virtue.

alize the Confucian ideals of womanhood, moving to a discussion of performative acts of gender and the ways in which the narrative art of *p'ansori* continually rearticulates historical norms of those ideals, and will conclude with an extended feminist reading of the *p'ansori* texts.

### **Confucianism and the Construction of Female Virtue**

The founding of the Chosŏn dynasty in 1392 ushered in a new era, not only in terms of politics, but more fundamentally in terms of ideology; whereas the previous dynasty had been rooted in Buddhism, neo-Confucianism came to dominate nearly every aspect of life (at least as it was idealized) beginning in the fifteenth century and increasing in strength and severity for the next four hundred years. The sociopolitical philosophies of neo-Confucianism affected all members of society, but perhaps none so much as women — particularly those of the upper class. Despite the fact that women had relatively powerful and independent positions in society prior to establishment of the Chosŏn era, the founders of the dynasty “introduced into Korean society the principle of agnation: it made men alone the structurally relevant members of society and relegated women to social dependence” (Deuchler, 1983, p. 1). In fact, it was deemed by some administrators of the new dynasty that the loose morals of women had been one of the key factors precipitating the fall of the former kingdom, and thus a problem that needed immediate and strict attention (Kim, 1976; Kim, Y. D., 1986).

Included among many prohibitions for women established during the Chosŏn dynasty was a limiting of women’s public outings, the related injunction that women were to veil their faces when in public, which was ideally only from the hours of 9 pm to 2 am, when men were not present, the banning of women from Buddhist temples (particularly for overnight excursions), the near total seclusion of women within the female quarters of the home, and the insistence that women were not openly to speak with men, even natal relatives, and thus were separated from males at the age of seven. As an example of women’s removal from society, they were not given names in family registries or public records, but rather were called according to their relative position to the significant men in their lives (Kim, 1976, pp. 83-87). It is worth noting, then, that in the *Tale of Ch'unhyang*, as with other *p'ansori* tales, women,

even of the lowest class, are nearly always appropriated personal names. While it cannot be said that *p'ansori* performers were consciously articulating an exalted status for women, “naming the nameless” through poetry, as Reed (2005) claims, is politically powerful in that it enables us to view the contradictory position of Ch'unhyang as both powerful (being named) and relinquishing power (being sublimated), as will be discussed later.

In the era in which Ch'unhyang was said to exist, order in individual households was believed to serve as the foundational order for civil, royal, and national realms. Thus, an inordinate emphasis was placed on the concept of female filiality, obedience, and virtue. Such ideal characteristics were regularly espoused in family biographies of women as well as national records. However, such documents nearly always depicted women only stereotypically, that is as a personification of an ideological mandate (Deuchler, 1992, p. 281), emphasizing not who they were as individuals, but only what they *did* to build the patriarchy of the family (Jager, 1998, p. 123). As has been observed, the discourse of filiality took the form of a hegemonic ideology that was strictly enforced through various means, including legal sanctions, moral persuasions, and other social pressures (Haboush, 1995, pp. 129-130). The hegemonic ideology of filiality, as well as being a means of propagation, can be understood in terms of ideals of obedience and female virtue.

A woman was to obey the dictates of her father in her youth, her husband when married, and her son in widowhood (Palley, 1990, p. 1140). The archetype of virtue, though more ambiguous than obedience to some degree, also allowed for the creation of diverse and far-reaching laws, regulations, suggestions, and ideals. “The life of women ... was that of submission, sorrow, suffering and silence. There were virtues ... women displayed while they were enduring the life of submission and sorrow. ... This corresponded with the three aesthetic factors of harmony, balance, and unity and was the totality of universal virtues for women” (Kim, C. Y., 1986, pp. 235-236). However, despite the obligation that women be virtuous, apparently “[virtuous] conduct did not come naturally to women: it was something that had to be taught. Education in the womanly disciplines was, therefore, imperative” (Deuchler, 1977, p. 5).

The indoctrination of female virtue was most easily found in two forms, namely textbooks providing precise laws and standards, and nov-

els or folklore, which included models of women who exemplified the requisite virtues. Among the classic texts used to educate women were a number of Chinese books (in Korean, *Yǒllyǒ*, *Myǒnggam*, *Yǒkyo* and *Sobak*) and an illustrated collection of stories (*Samgang haengsillo*), but most influential was a guidebook entitled *Naehun* (Instruction for Women) compiled in 1475 by Queen Consort Sohye, mother of King Sǒngjong. Although written records such as these provide a detailed view of how a woman was to act in all circumstances, there is no doubt that they presented an ideological ideal rather than a clear picture of a woman's actual lived experience. Nonetheless, they are instructive in informing us about what was expected in terms of etiquette, conduct, demeanor, filial piety, monetary frugality, marriage, and other relationships, etc (Sohye, 1475; Deuchler, 1977; Kim, C. Y., 1986).

Although women had many ways to demonstrate their virtue, remaining chaste was paramount. Men were free to marry more than one woman (both consecutively and concurrently) as well as to take mistresses; women, however, were encouraged, if not mandated, to remain faithful to only one husband – irrespective of whether he was alive or dead. The marriageable age for women of the day was fifteen and a girl as young as nine or ten could become legally betrothed; if she were to lose her husband early in life, whether or not the marriage was consummated, she would be required still to remain chaste and faithful to him for the remainder of her days. Particularly if she were a woman from the upper class, her chastity was a moral imperative, and there were a number of 'incentives' to ensure her compliance to the standard. On the positive side, for example, for a woman who remained faithful to her husband, government-sponsored recognition might be rewarded including the erection of a monument (*yǒllyǒmun*: gate for chaste women) at her home (Kim, Y. D., 1986, p. 115). In terms of more persuasive, negative reinforcements of standards of virtue, if a woman did remarry, her male offspring would be banned from holding public or governmental posts, which resulted in the end of power, wealth and respect for the family. Her name might also be recorded in the *Chanyǒan* (List of Lustful Women), ensuring that her reputation was ruined and her position in society lowered to no better than that of a servant (p. 113).

## The Performance of Gender and Confucian Virtue

As important as the classic texts were in describing and honoring virtuous women, myths, novels, folklore, and *p'ansori* story telling played – and continue to play – an equally important function in providing role models. As Spivak has noted, “It is the model narratives that give ‘meaning’ to our reading of ourselves and others” (Spivak, 1989, p. 227). In other words, societies often build their identities not only through various forms of formal and informal education, but also through narratives and the role models they present. In Chosōn era Korea, despite the fact that women were for the most part socially invisible, they often played the role of protagonist in works of fiction. According to Mann (2000), in Chinese culture – and by extension Korea culture that followed the Chinese model in this regard – myths were positioned to display Confucian moral agendas (Mann, 2000, p. 842). Yet the narrations of the patriarchal society depended on and celebrated the image of powerful women, and early manifestations of power were dualistic, meaning that a yang figure required a yin counterpart (Mann, 2000, p. 845). Nevertheless, the same Confucian patriarchal orders that supposedly are dependent on powerful women, simultaneously bind women within the strictures of prescribed norms “requiring them to subordinate their will and their desires to goals set by and for the advantage of men. Ideally this is achieved hegemonically, by persuading women that they are inferior and require male guidance” (Sawin, 2002, p. 46). Therefore, despite the prominence of women in Korean narratives, the overarching message that is reiterated through continuous retelling is that no matter how powerful a female character may be, it is imperative that she first be indoctrinated as to her proper mode of conduct, and that only through the reification of her virtue will she be awarded honor in society.

This notion aligns with Simone de Beauvoir’s seminal declaration that “one is not born, but rather, becomes a woman” (de Beauvoir, 1949/1989, p. 267). In the socialized process of becoming, what Judith Butler calls the ‘performance of gender’, an identity is instituted through *stylized repetition of acts* (Butler, 1988, p. 519). Although, in general, Butler is referring to performance as mundane acts in everyday life, as is germane to this discussion, she also states that “the acts by which gender

is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts" (Butler, 1988, p. 521). Thus, we can conclude that gender is *performed* in the figurative sense through mundane acts, but also literally through theater itself. She goes on to explain that the "act that one does, the act that one performs is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again" (Butler, 1988, p. 526). This paper analyzes one way in which gender and female virtue was 'actualized and reproduced as reality' through a performative genre. Specifically, the *Tale of Ch'unhyang*, through the literal and repetitive performances of *p'ansori*, came to embody the very essence of an idealized virtuous woman. Through the performance of *p'ansori*, the construction of gender – and by extension the idealized conception of a woman – was reiterated and the Confucian imperative of virtue was acted out.

The virtue of an ideal woman as espoused in *p'ansori* versions of the *Tale of Ch'unhyang* became even more effectual precisely because the genre is theater, and even more pointedly, a musical theater.<sup>5</sup> Simon Frith speaks of the power of music and its role in building identities – both on a personal and communal level. He states that a piece of music or performance does not necessarily or simply reflect a society's belief system or experience, but rather, like all social discourse, creates and constructs experience. "Music, an aesthetic practice", he writes, "articulates *in itself* an understanding of both group relations and individuality, on the basis of which ethical codes and social ideologies are understood". In other words, he continues, it is not that "social groups agree on values which are then expressed in their cultural activities ... but that they only get to know themselves ... *through* cultural activity, through aesthetic judgment. Making music isn't a way of expressing ideas; it is a way of living them" (Frith, 1996, pp. 110-111). Before proceeding to a feminist reading of the *Tale of Ch'unhyang*, a few further notes about the genre of *p'ansori* in relation to the performance of gender must be made.

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<sup>5</sup> My purpose here is not to debate whether or not *p'ansori* and its dramatic cousin *ch'anggyik* can be considered a type of theater or opera in the Western sense; that topic has been thoroughly covered by Andrew Killick (2010).

## The Tale of Ch'unhyang as Told through P'ansori

As indicated, the story of Ch'unhyang has been depicted in a myriad of ancient and modern forms: poetry, songs, paintings, embroidery, books, television dramas, movies, animated and print cartoon, among others. Who first conceived of the story is unknown; however, long before it found its way into printed and thus more structured and literary forms, the tale flourished in the narrative art genre known as *p'ansori*.<sup>6</sup> The purpose of this paper is to focus solely on various versions of the tale as told and retold through *p'ansori* because the earliest and, until recently, the most popular means of transmission was through the genre; because, as noted above, theater and music are particularly salient means of performing gendered acts of virtue; and because of the role women play in the narratives and as performers.<sup>7</sup>

As noted, *p'ansori* is a narrative genre in which a solo performer sings to the accompaniment of a single drum. *P'ansori* developed first among the lower classes and not the literate aristocratic or noble class (*yangban*), who were, as to be expected, the strongest proponents of Confucian values. Thus, originally, the narratives closely resembled the tastes and sensibilities of the common people with whom the performers lived and associated. They incorporated folk songs, depictions of realistic rural life, and even blatant statements of resentment of the ruling elite. However, in time the *yangban* began to take a keen interest in *p'ansori*, by serving as narrative scribes, historians, and perhaps most importantly, as ardent patrons.

As more interaction took place between the lower-class performers and the *yangban*, performance practices and the very nature of *p'ansori* began to be altered, ushering in an era of gentrification. Because the

<sup>6</sup> The earliest known written version of the *Tale of Ch'unhyang* was penned in 1754. The author, Yu Chin-han, witnessed a *p'ansori* performance of the story and inscribed the lyrics into Chinese verse — the written language of the elite (Pihl, 1994, p. 93).

<sup>7</sup> Additionally, it should be noted that another manuscript will soon be published by one of the authors entitled “Ch'unhyang: The not so ideal, ideal Korean woman” that delves into the remarkably strong aspects of Ch'unhyang's character as well as analyzes the continuing impact of the story into the twenty-first century. In that paper, Ch'unhyang's depiction in media other than *p'ansori*, including film, television dramas and *mamwha* will be analyzed in detail.

elite patrons of *p'ansori* based their moral values on Confucian ethics, they were intolerant of the vulgar language and immoral dealings of some of the characters portrayed in *p'ansori* narratives. Eventually, only narratives that most distinctly embodied Confucian ideals were preserved in writing and permitted to be performed. “Like all art of the Confucian ruling class, [*p'ansori*] had to justify itself not only by elegance and refinement but by some ostensibly didactic or character-molding capacity, which we might designate by a new metaphor, ‘music as teaching’” (Killick, 2003, p. 185). Although today’s five extant *p'ansori* narratives all exemplify at least one Confucian moral, such as filial piety, loyalty, and notably, virtue, the deeper meanings of the narratives are still based on folk ideals, creating an interesting internal duality. For instance, the *Tale of Ch'unhyang* is heralded as a story of chastity, devotion, and loyalty to one’s husband among other virtues, but the triumph of Ch'unhyang, as a lower class citizen, over a lascivious governor who has threatened to have her killed, also speaks of the tenacity of the common people to overcome their own travails (Willoughby, 2002).

During the period encompassing *p'ansori*'s inception through its later development in the mid-eighteenth century, *p'ansori* singers were traditionally men, with only three women known to have been professionally trained before the twentieth century. Although it is possible that women studied *p'ansori* informally before the late 1800s, there is no record of their existence, which can be interpreted either to mean that there literally were no female performers, or that, as in other instances, they were socially invisible, particularly to the literati *yangban* who recorded the history of the genre. As noted by Chan E. Park, a contemporary *p'ansori* performer and scholar, women were absent from the emergence of the genre, and thus not afforded the opportunity to participate in the construction and formation process of the narratives (Park, 1998, p. 66). By the time women entered the act of performing *p'ansori*, the narratives were already relatively fixed and included the Confucian values the elite sanctioned. Therefore, women, even as powerful performers encroaching on a stage previously reigned over exclusively by men, were relegated to the role of voicing a well-established articulation of the ideal Korean woman. Nevertheless, the “fact that male singers constructed *p'ansori* about women also manifests the voyeuristic interest men had for wom-

en with whom they refused to share social partnership” (Park, 2003, p. 216). By the beginning in the mid-twentieth century, the situation for female *p'ansori* singers begun to change; although the five extant *p'ansori* tales and their embedded Confucian mores are still performed, today the majority of singers are women and a number of contemporary *p'ansori* pieces deal directly with the enactment of gender in the contemporary world.<sup>8</sup>

*P'ansori* performances, including the *Tale of Ch'unhyang*, arose as part of an oral tradition that was improvisatory in nature. As noted, until the mid-eighteenth century there were no written texts of *p'ansori* to read, and thus today a proper analysis should be done with the understanding of the concept of orality-literacy (Ong, 2002), and ideally through participating in live performances. Additionally, because of the oral/aural roots of the genre, there is no one authoritative version of the story. Before *p'ansori* began a process of solidification in the twentieth century, there were as many versions as singers, many of which are now lost or absorbed into surviving versions (Willoughby, 2002; Park, 2003). While it is therefore an impossible undertaking to compare all extant versions, this paper analyzes four surviving versions of the *Tale of Ch'unhyang* as translated into English and compiled into a monograph published by Minsokwon in 2005.<sup>9</sup> Although each version adheres to the skeletal foundation of the story, each, too, contains some aspects specific to the singer and the era in which he or she performed. The four singer-narrators include Jeong Jeongryeol [Chöng Chöng-röl] (1876-1938), Kim Yeonsu [Kim Yon-su] (1907-1974), Kim Sejong [Kim Se-chong]

<sup>8</sup> A simple statistical analysis of male to female students at traditional music departments in universities and employment records at government-sponsored institutes of traditional music can validate the predominance of contemporary female performers. However, such a report is not within the scope of this paper, nor is the analysis of newly-created *p'ansori* tales.

<sup>9</sup> It is understood that relying on English versions of the tales, particularly these that translate the works and words of late nineteenth and early twentieth century performer into contemporary vernacular, creates limitations, particularly in terms of interpretation of the text that may contradict the original meaning of the singer as well as the authors' intent. Nevertheless, after consulting the original Korean versions (Chang, M. Y., Yi, T. Y., Yu, J. K., Choi, D. H., & Hwang, Y. J., 2005) and analyzing the complexity of the lyrics, it was deemed necessary to use pre-existent translations for consistency in language and as a means for the English-speaking reader-audience to access the texts in their entirety, if so desired.

(mid to late 19th century), and Kim Soheui [Kim So-hŭi] (1917-1995).<sup>10</sup> The remainder of this paper will create a descriptive analysis as a means to compare and contrast some of the ways in which Ch'unhyang's virtue is manifest and contested within the various *p'ansori* songs.

### **Private and Public Identities: the Marriage of Ch'unhyang and Yi Mongryong and Conflicting Social Realities**

The marriage between Ch'unhyang and Yi Myongryong is mired in ambiguity.

The reality or unreality of this marriage between the daughter of a *kisaeng*,<sup>11</sup> born into the lowest caste of Chosŏn society, and the *yangban* son of Namwŏn's mayor, manifests an irreducible paradox.<sup>12</sup> The heroine of this tale regards the event as an absolute and rejects its polysemy; Ch'unhyang is willing to suffer dearly for her consistent belief in the legitimacy of her marriage not only at the hands of those outside of that relationship but also and most disturbingly at the hands of her own husband. The process of relentless testing and torture she endures seeks to undermine the force of her belief in her identity as a married and virtuous woman, a private identity which contradicts her position in society. The dehumanizing principle behind this testing both fails and succeeds: at the cost of her personhood, Ch'unhyang survives to become the perfection of the Confucian virtue of chastity her husband imagines her to be.

Even before she is married to Yi Mongryong, Ch'unhyang authorizes destiny over her social reality, and the story is complicit in her choice

<sup>10</sup> As noted in the beginning of the paper, since the Minsokwon English translation utilizes the 2002 Revised Romanization of Korean method, the remainder of the paper will follow that text in regards to names of performers and in direct quotes, otherwise the McCune-Reischauer version will be maintained. The authors apologize for the confusion.

<sup>11</sup> *Kisaeng* were professional women who were trained in the arts and served as entertainers, primarily for the noble class, though they themselves were officially consigned to the lowest class of society. Although their lives afforded them certain freedoms the women of the upper class did not enjoy (mingling with men, free public movement, etc.), at times they could still be bought or sold as property.

<sup>12</sup> In most versions Yi Myongryong's father is referred to as a magistrate or governor, however, in the translations analyzed in this paper he, and his replacement Pyōn Hakdo, are titled "mayor", thus for consistency that term is adopted here.

by presenting their union as destined and inevitable. In the birth dream of Ch'unhyang's mother,

A fairy comes down from the heavens. She holds a plum branch with flowers in one hand and a peach branch with flowers in the other. Handing over the peach branch to Chunhyang's mother, she says 'A good thing will happen to you, if you raise this branch with care, and graft it on a plum branch.' (Yu, Pak, Jeong, & Choe, 2005, p. 117 [Jeong])<sup>13</sup>

The symbols of this dream are straightforward: the peach flowers are what give Ch'unhyang her name, meaning "Spring Fragrance", and the plum branch names "Yi", the surname of Ch'unhyang's future husband. To realize this dream, it is necessary not only for Ch'unhyang, but also for Yi to become an agent of destiny. Before seeing Ch'unhyang for the first time and immediately falling in love with her, "Master Yi drinks a couple of cups, and then composes a poem in drunken delight. It is about a precognition of meeting Ch'unhyang" (Yu et al., 2005, p. 22 [Jeong]). Mongryong himself recognizes the role of destiny in their encounter.<sup>14</sup> When he asks to marry Ch'unhyang, he presents destiny as his own advocate, telling her, "We're both of the same age. I am sure this is heaven's destiny for us. We are destined by heaven to be a couple" (p. 38 [Jeong]). Ch'unhyang's denial of the role determined for her by birth enables the possibility, at least in the story, of marriage.

Still, the social conflict of this union is evident in the secrecy of the marriage. In all of the *p'ansori* versions herein analyzed, Mongryong's parents are uninformed of the event beforehand and in some cases are apparently never aware of the union, while in the Kim Yeonsu and

<sup>13</sup> The majority of the remaining references and quotes are taken from the S. Yu et al., translation of *Chunhyangga*. However, it is important to distinguish between the four performers (Jeong Jeongryeol, Kim Yeonsu, Kim Sejong, and Kim Soheui) and their individual renditions of the story. Therefore, henceforth citations will also include the name of the singer-narrators in brackets [ ] to distinguish the various versions of the tale. Because three of the four performers share the surname of Kim, they will be distinguished by their given names.

<sup>14</sup> In the Korean version (Chang et al., 2005) Yi Mongryong is rarely spoken of by his given name, rather he is called by the title Yi Toryöng (Bachelor Yi) and later Ösatto ([Royal] Inspector), as per Confucian/Chosön traditions. Here, unless otherwise quoted in the text, he will be spoken of as Mongryong so as to equalize his status with that of Ch'unhyang, for whom there is not an undisputed/known family name.

Jeong Jeongryeol versions, Ch'unhyang's mother, Wolmae, only discovers her daughter has married after the lovers have consummated their marriage. Rather than rejoicing in the union, Wolmae is initially "overcome with sorrow. When she looks at her daughter vacantly, tears come to her eyes" (p. 42 [Jeong]). Unlike her daughter, Wolmae is rooted in social reality: she is wary of a 'marriage' across established social strata, having had an affair with an aristocrat that resulted in a daughter. Her sorrow transfers to her daughter, causing "The whole house [to be] in deep despair" (p. 43 [Jeong]). In the Kim Soheui and Kim Sejong versions, in which Wolmae is asked beforehand by Mongryong for her consent, she is reluctant to grant it: "Because of my low social status, she can't marry a nobleman. But it is really too much for my daughter to marry a humble man. ... So don't speak so readily of a betrothal-contract. Just enjoy yourself for a little while as you're our guest" (p. 277 [Sejong]). When Wolmae still has a choice over the matter, she recognizes the impossibility of the marriage and requires that Mongryong put his intentions in writing before allowing the union. In the versions in which she does not have this choice, she overcomes her grief to accept the union for what it is. After preparing food for her 'son-in-law', she proposes a drink "to celebrate a happy event. ... After drinking a couple of cups of wine, Ch'unhyang's quick-witted mother prepares the bedroom for them and leaves. ... Ch'unhyang's mother has given her consent" (p. 44 [Jeong]). This meal is the only 'marriage ceremony' afforded Ch'unhyang given the societal prohibitions against marriage between the classes during the Chosön era.

The circumstances of the marriage are secret in the public sphere, but Ch'unhyang and Mongryong openly acknowledge and discuss the challenges of their love, arriving at a mutual understanding in private. In response to Mongryong's proposal, Ch'unhyang realizes she may have to sacrifice all for this union, and thus voices her fear:

As a woman of humble birth, I don't aim high, but I do want to be a faithful woman. ... You are from a noble family, but I am a humble woman. If you abandon me just as a butterfly treats a flower in springtime, the life and death of my mother and I will be at stake. If so, what will become of us? (p. 38 [Jeong])

While Mongryong's answer does not deny the difficulty inherent in their relationship, it gives Ch'unhyang a reason to trust in his love. Mongryong assures her, "You have every reason to say this. But only insincere people will do such things. ... If you really don't trust me, I'll write down my vow as a proof of my promise not to forget you" (pp. 38-39 [Jeong]). Mongryong's wedding vows are a promise to inscribe Ch'unhyang in his memory.

Forgetting the beloved, under these terms, is an act of betrayal. Or it is the non-act, the cessation of active remembering, that severs the marital bond. From the moment Mongryong decides to leave Ch'unhyang behind when he departs with his noble family for Seoul, he begins to forget her. Mongryong corrupts the private language of their marriage, no longer regarding Ch'unhyang as his wife:

If a gentleman's son comes to the provinces with his father and goes out and takes a mistress, he will never be accepted by society when the fact is known to other people. Nor can he participate in the memorial services at the family shrine and take the state examinations. There's nothing we can do. We have no choice but to part for now (pp. 52-53 [Jeong]).

In fear of losing his social respectability, Mongryong adopts a divisive language of privilege: he is the elevated "gentleman's son"; Ch'unhyang is lowered to the position of "mistress." Mongryong's statement is made to refute Ch'unhyang's desire to go with him to Seoul, in which she refers to their marriage: "Are you worried that I may not go with you? The saying is that 'A woman should follow her husband'" (p. 51 [Jeong]). It is evident that Mongryong is not willing to sacrifice his ambitions to honor his promise to Ch'unhyang.

Forgetting this promise, which involves forgetting Ch'unhyang, is far from harmless. Mongryong has not only begun to forget Ch'unhyang as his beloved and as his wife, but he has also begun to efface her identity. When Mongryong argues that it's impossible for Ch'unhyang to join him in Seoul, he tells her:

I can't do as you have suggested. If you come to Seoul with me, we can see each other. But how can I hide you? If the rumors spread widely, the gossipmongers will hear them and

regard you as a *kisaeng*, and mock you. I can't prevent noblemen from visiting you, as is their right. So don't speak this way (p. 52 [Jeong]).

While it has been established from the beginning of the story that Ch'unhyang herself is not a *kisaeng* and has removed her name from the *kisaeng* register, Mongryong claims that she would still be regarded as one. His logic is discredited later in the story when the new mayor of Namwön questions why Ch'unhyang is not present at the *kisaeng* roll call: "The chief official answers: 'Ch'unhyang is not a *gisaeng*. In fact, her mother was a *gisaeng*, but now she's retired. And Ch'unhyang is staying chaste because she is married to the son of the former mayor'" (p. 300 [Sejong]). To protect his selfish interests, Mongryong seeks to erase the identity as a free and common woman that Ch'unhyang chose for herself even before choosing to become his wife. Mongryong presents himself as helpless to prevent other *yangban* men "from visiting [her] as is their right," implying that she is in fact a *kisaeng* — a mere woman for entertainment — and furthermore that because it was his own right to "visit" her, her choice was irrelevant. This is, in fact, the same insidious argument that the lecherous mayor Pyön Hakto recapitulates in his attempt to make Ch'unhyang his concubine in Mongryong's absence.

The secrecy of the marriage in the public eye renders it especially vulnerable to Mongryong's betrayal because he is not held socially responsible for Ch'unhyang's fate. Indeed, even Ch'unhyang's mother forgets her own role in supporting the marriage (whether before or after the union occurred)<sup>15</sup> and cruelly abandons her to her fate when she learns Mongryong is leaving:

She flings the window open and points at her daughter with her fists. 'You little wretch, you'd better die. Then he'll bear your body. I always told you that you would regret it, told you to find someone of your own station to marry. Then you could stay with me and be happy. But you were always too

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<sup>15</sup> In some versions of the story Wolmae is involved in the vows and helps to prepare for consummation of the marriage, whereas in some versions she only learns of the events after they occur.

high-minded, different from the rest of us, and now see what's happened! You deserve it.' (p. 54 [Jeong])

At this point in the tale, Ch'unhyang is not yet left without a voice. Without another witness to their private wedding vows, she herself holds Mongryong accountable.

Did you mention parting when we first met? When you visited my house on the fifteenth day of May, last year, you sitting there and me here, what did you say? Pointing to the shimmering sky and earth, you swore not to leave me and promised we would live together until death parts us. The sun and moon witnessed it. Now you're saying we must part (p. 53 [Jeong]).

Ch'unhyang is the only person who can remind Mongryong of his words and of his promises, of the sanctity of their private marriage.

### **Ch'unhyang's Private Identity as her Defense of Virtue**

With this exchange, Ch'unhyang chooses to remember herself against the collapse of memory in the external world. Perhaps this choice can only come after an acceptance of the separation necessitated by their social difference. When Ch'unhyang observes how a marked change has come over her husband, "Chunhyang releases his hand with shame and sits down on the floor. She says angrily, 'Now I can see through you. While you're a man of noble family, I'm of humble birth. ... You just came here to say goodbye lest you should marry because of me'" (p. 50 [Jeong]). This is the only moment in which Ch'unhyang "forgets" her marriage. It seems significant that at this moment "forgetting" for Ch'unhyang means separation; if Mongryong had not come to say farewell, they would remain together, married. It seems that from her perspective, Mongryong is leaving to escape the marriage; staying would allow its continuation. Because Mongryong has chosen to leave, Ch'unhyang's private identity is no longer dependent on his memory. She tells the new mayor Pyön, "Even if the young master breaks faith with me and forgets me, I'll remain constant" (p. 400 [Soheui]). While Ch'unhyang now recognizes the social reality, the impossibility of following

Mongryong to Seoul, it is too late to overturn the validity of their marriage in her inner life. Ironically, Ch'unhyang is liberated to choose a vision of herself as a virtuous wife, an identity which simultaneously refutes her husband's forgetting and resembles his own imagined projection of who she is.

The gifts that Ch'unhyang and Mongryong exchange on parting are symbols of these overlapping identities, yet they reveal the disparity between the intentions of their givers. Mongryong gives Ch'unhyang a turtle-skin mirror, telling her, "A man's heart is like the color of a mirror. Look in the mirror thinking of me," after which Ch'unhyang takes a jade ring from her finger, telling Mongryong, "Take this. My firm constancy is like the color of this ring so it can't be changed even though it is buried in the mud. Treasure it as if it were me" (p. 292 [Sejong]). Mongryong's imperative to Ch'unhyang is focused on the external; he asks her to look in the mirror and think of him, as his "heart is like the color of a mirror". Ch'unhyang's imperative, in contrast, is an appeal to the internal state, to "treasure" the color-fast ring as a reminder of her in a changeless state of "firm constancy". Unlike the color of the jade ring, which will not "be changed even though it is buried in the mud," the color of the mirror, like any mirror, changes depending on what enters onto the reflective surface. Whereas Ch'unhyang has given with her ring a promise to remain faithful, Mongryong has made no such promise. The work of faithfulness, it would seem, is entirely in her hands, as she is the one who is to "Look into the mirror, thinking of Yi." It is Ch'unhyang's reflection which is to color the mirror's surface, becoming Mongryong's "heart" in his absence.

Mongryong's imperative additionally carries a narcissistic threat to annihilate Ch'unhyang's personal identity. Its subtext is not only "Become my heart", but also "See me in the mirror", both of which entail Ch'unhyang's loss of self. Mongryong, as a symbol of the upper *yangban* class, is asking Ch'unhyang to become like him, to forget her identity as a common woman and to assimilate into his social identity. Ch'unhyang's ideal of being Mongryong's true wife, and upholding the Confucian virtue of chastity and loyalty is indeed one with Mongryong's own desire, as this virtue was perceived as belonging to the *yangban* class. Yet Mongryong believes the means through which she will become his ideal is through change, whereas Ch'unhyang has promised firm constancy —

changelessness. Constancy allows Ch'unhyang to remain who she is, while change entails forgetting who she is.

In order to preserve this inner sense of self, Ch'unhyang is forced to transform physically. When she refuses to relinquish her identity as a virtuous woman and Mongryong's wife, "The mayor is furious. You insolent girl! The daughter of a gisaeng is going to remain faithful? Who can help laughing? If the women of noble families heard you, they would faint. You're not worthy of remaining faithful" (p. 75 [Jeong]). Ch'unhyang is willing to endure torture and incarceration to preserve her intrinsic sense of self-worth; her disfigured body becomes external evidence of her inner constancy. In a narrative parallel to the moment before marriage in which Mongryong wrote his pledge not to forget her, Ch'unhyang extends her husband's pledge when she is forced to "confess" her crime in front of Pyön. Ch'unhyang's written confession consists of the Chinese characters "one mind" (p. 77 [Jeong]; p. 190 [Yeonsu]; p. 308 [Sejong]; p. 402 [Soheui]). While Ch'unhyang is being beaten, she sings, "I'll never betray my husband" and later, "Sleeping or waking, I'll never forget my husband" (pp. 78, 79 [Jeong]). In a re-statement of the terms of Mongryong's promise to her, Ch'unhyang associates "betrayal" with "forgetting". Mongryong's inability to keep his promise only reinforces Ch'unhyang's determination to keep hers. Pyön's corporal punishment, designed to eradicate Mongryong from Ch'unhyang's mind, defeats its purpose: as the punishment for remembering is written in Ch'unhyang's body, her body bears the work of memory.

Ch'unhyang's transformed body serves not only as a site of memory, but also as a form of communication. In prison, Ch'unhyang laments, "Looking at myself in the mirror, I'm not what I used to be. Now the skirt doesn't fit me. I don't think the master will recognize me" (p. 83 [Jeong]). Ch'unhyang's body is a source, initially, of self-dialogue, as she is able to see in her reflection how she has honored Mongryong's request, "Look in the mirror, thinking of me." The poignancy of this moment rests in Ch'unhyang's realization that honoring her husband's wishes has involved the consequence of transforming her body possibly beyond his recognition of it. Through the mirror Mongryong gave her, Ch'unhyang sees how her body remembers him; it is her body in this state of remembering that Mongryong may no longer recognize. Ch'un-

hyang's body then stands as a metaphor for the literal incarceration she is experiencing: her own body, in its changes, "forgets" and "betrays" who she was when Mongryong promised to remember her.

Ch'unhyang uses her forgotten body as an instrument to write a letter to Mongryong, uniting the literal and metaphorical divide. When Mongryong receives the letter which disrupts the silence that has existed between himself and Ch'unhyang since his departure from Namwön, he immediately notices, "She must have written with blood by biting her finger" (p. 93 [Jeong]). Here the narrative echoes the torture Ch'unhyang endured when she received thirty lashes for refusing to serve Pyön, when "Ch'unhyang faint[ed] and her jade-white legs [bled] like flowing water" (p. 79 [Jeong]). Words and ink, Ch'unhyang believes, are not enough: she needs to communicate through the medium of blood to remind Mongryong of the suffering she has endured to keep a promise which has not been reciprocated. When Mongryong meets Ch'unhyang within the confines of the prison, she questions his apparent lack of concern: "Why didn't you come sooner? Have you been busy studying? Have you married and fallen in love with someone else? Did you forget me? .... When you left here, your face [was] so pretty, but now you've grown up" (p. 338 [Sejong]). Ch'unhyang is not the only one who has transformed physically; she notices that Mongryong has returned as a mature man, a mendicant. Furious at the sudden change, Wolmae rages, "You call this man in rags a husband?" Ch'unhyang's responds, "He is my husband. I don't care whether he is a high official or not," asserting that Mongryong's change in status does not alter their relationship as husband and wife (p. 338 [Sejong]).

Ch'unhyang's body may be evidence of her faithfulness, but to Mongryong the blood that is written on the page to testify to her virtue is still the blood of a *kisaeng*'s daughter. In this sense there is little difference between Mongryong and Pyön, who both belong to the *yangban* upper class: despite all she has sacrificed, Ch'unhyang's blood fails to communicate her identity as a virtuous wife. It is because Ch'unhyang understands herself in terms of this identity that she uses the Confucian virtues to refute Pyön's advances and his belief that her birth entitles him to her body: "As the saying goes, 'A subject cannot serve two kings, and a wife cannot belong to two husbands.' Don't you know this? There is no difference between your wife and me in remaining

faithful. In troubled times are you going to betray the king and serve two kings?" (p. 75 [Jeong]). Ch'unhyang conflates the Confucian virtue of chastity with the virtue of loyalty to subvert social stratification. Virtue is Ch'unhyang's justification and leverage, a means of making herself equal to Pyön's *yangban* wife and placing Pyön in a theoretically impossible position to take advantage of her.

Mongryong's repeated failure to honor his promise to remember Ch'unhyang as his wife entails the irreparable splitting of her private and public identities. Mongryong betrays the private vows between himself and Ch'unhyang, subjecting her to degrading tests which he believes will prove her worthy of his love and qualify her to be his wife. When Mongryong returns to Namwön having passed the state examination and received the appointment as royal inspector of Chölla province, he decides not to reveal his identity to Ch'unhyang with full knowledge that she has been incarcerated and tortured for his sake. In the Kim Yeonsu version, which is the most revealing of Mongryong's inner thoughts, Mongryong accepts responsibility for her pain when seeing her in prison: "This is not your fault; my negligence is to blame. It's all my fault" (p. 232 [Yeonsu]). Still, he chooses not to reveal his new position to her and continues to test her the next day. As she is being taken before the royal inspector, believing she will be executed, Ch'unhyang is still searching for her husband:

Oh, my! Now I'm going to die! Jailer, have you seen a man in shabby clothes with a broken horsehair black hat outside the prison or the gate? ... Where is my husband when I'm going to die? ... My kind-hearted husband won't forget our promise and he will come back to see me. He will be overwhelmed by grief (p. 112 [Jeong]).

But again, Yi Mongryong fails where Ch'unhyang succeeds; she has remembered him in every choice, while he does not even consider Ch'unhyang in her greatest hour of need, and is not, despite her hope, "overwhelmed with grief". Rather, having assumed the role of royal inspector, "It is hard for [Yi] to bear to see [Ch'unhyang] lying down still on the ground," but "he pretends to be firm with her," and even when faced with physical scars that prove otherwise, accuses her of infidelity:

The inspector says, “Chunhyang, listen! As a humble gisaeng’s daughter, you insulted the mayor. So do you want to live having committed this crime?

“It’s only a matter of chastity. Please judge this matter justly since you are the just royal inspector.”

“Did you really serve only one husband?”

“I only served husband ‘Yi.’”

Hearing this, the Inspector gets angry.

“What kind of fidelity have you shown if you served two husbands?”

“It’s ‘Yi’ meaning ‘plum,’ not ‘yi’ meaning ‘two’!”<sup>16</sup>

“Well then, my surname is also ‘Yi,’ so what about serving me?” (p. 249 [Sejong]; p. 112 [Jeong])

This final moment of testing occurs in all four versions, indicating its centrality to the story. Yi Mongryong pretends to misunderstand Ch'unhyang's answer by punning on his own name, making his quest for her chastity a public spectacle. Just as Ch'unhyang's blood on the page and her battered body were insufficient to convince Mongryong of her faithfulness, her words also fail to communicate their meaning. Mongryong can no longer hear her, as he has exiled himself from the sphere of private understanding he co-inhabited during his year with Ch'unhyang in Namwon as her husband.

### Ch'unhyang's Sublimation of Self as a Consequence of Perfecting Virtue

Yi Mongryong's revelation of his identity to Ch'unhyang, which allows for their public reunion, marks the death of her private life. Perhaps Mongryong wishes this death, as he is content to tell her who he is only when she chooses death over the infidelity Mongryong himself proposes. Upon hearing Ch'unhyang's answer to his final test, Mongryong sends her the ring he has kept: As Chunhyang takes it, she knows it's the ring she gave to Mongryong when she parted from him. She stares at the ring as if confused and asks, “Where have you been? Why have you come so late?” (p. 445 [Soheui]) The ring no longer car-

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<sup>16</sup> The family name Yi (李) and Chinese-derived number two (二) are homonyms in Korean.

ries its original meaning, and it is indeed too late to salvage their private marriage, as Mongryong has undermined the integrity of their union. Ch'unhyang faints, no longer able to receive information or to communicate. After the humiliation and deception Ch'unhyang has endured in Mongryong's hands, her mind and body collapses under the awareness that he is not the husband she remembers, the one for whom she has been waiting at great cost. Public and physical death has lost meaning for Ch'unhyang because its function was to preserve her faithfulness to Mongryong; now that he has returned as a different and unknowable person, the death of her private life is Ch'unhyang's only means of halting the momentum of loss.

Many read the reunion of the lovers as a momentous occasion, a reason to celebrate as Wolmae herself does:

I'm so happy! How good it feels! ... My daughter! Good for you! 'Water flows from head to feet.' [Chunhyang was] born of me to be a faithful wife. So good! A seasonal flower blooms on the dying old tree. People of Namwon! Don't be so attached to sons, but bear a daughter like Chunhyang, raise her well, and get a son-in-law from Seoul. Great! Good! (p. 446 [Soheui])

And yet, although Wolmae admonishes the citizens of Namwön to treasure their daughters, she also recognizes that her daughter's value is limited to being a faithful wife, enabling her to obtain the real prize, the son-in-law from Seoul. Thus, unlike the Shakespearean model in which marriage at the end of a play signals that it is a comedy, Ch'unhyang's marriage to Mongryong on public display at the conclusion of *The Tale of Ch'unhyang* renders the work a tragedy. This marriage is a vision of the private subsumed into public life, the death of Ch'unhyang – the flesh-and-blood woman – in exchange for the socially acceptable symbol of a virtuous wife.

In the Kim Yeonsu version, “The king takes special notice of Ch'unhyang's case, and gives Ch'unhyang an honorary position as a ‘faithful wife,’” after which Mongryong throws a party and registers Ch'unhyang as his wife (p. 256 [Yeonsu]). Such an “honorary position” would, in reality, have been impossible in the era in which the story takes place. The daughter of a *kisaeng* could not have changed her status through

virtuous actions, and her marriage to a *yangban* could only have been made real in the realm of the imagination or at best as a secondary wife or concubine. The polemical intent of this fictional work is revealed in a poem Mongryong writes, which effectively ends the feast Pyön holds at which Ch'unhyang is to be executed:

Fine wine in golden cups is the common people's blood,  
 Rich food on jade dishes are the common people's flesh;  
 When the wax of the candles drips, the people's tears are  
 falling, The noise of the music is loud, the people's cries are  
 still louder (p. 108 [Jeong]).

“The people’s cries” are manifest in Ch'unhyang’s own as she becomes the symbol of a virtue transcending class. Bereft of the husband she remembers, in reaction to Mongryong’s deception and disbelief, Ch'unhyang sublimates her private identity for the anonymous and public perfection of a virtue which is located in the dreams of the common people and embedded in the female ideal of the *yangban*.

### Conclusion

The consequence of Ch'unhyang’s sublimation is as lasting as the reputation of her virtue. While monuments have been erected and stories continue to be told and sung, attesting to Ch'unhyang as a model of perfected virtue, Ch'unhyang’s individuality has been effaced. It appears this model of virtue has been the typecast established, the ideal perpetuated, the Confucian-steeped indoctrination absorbed in popular consciousness and memory. According to Deuchler, “Confucian society acclaimed particular women not for the individuality, but of the degree of perfection with which they were able to mimic the stereotype” (Deuchler, 1977, p. 6). As Ch'unhyang is a fictional character, she is not only the epitome of the stereotype, she is in fact the foundational basis of the model of virtue itself.

Rosaldo and Lamphere state that “in learning to be women... we have accepted and even internalized, what is too often a derogatory and constraining image of ourselves ... and women’s goals and ideologies are assumed to be coordinated with those of men” (Rosaldo & Lamphere,

1974, pp. 1, 9). As is apparent, this notion is not new; the image that Chosōn women were presented by the authoritative men of power and in turn accepted to be true, was one of absolute obedience and unspotted virtue, even at the cost of self, as observed in the *Tale of Ch'unhyang*. The tale suggests that the only way to perform the virtue requisite of a woman in the Chosōn period was for her to sublimate her individual selfhood.

## Appendix A. The Tale of Ch'unhyang

The story begins long ago in the town of Namwön where lived a young woman by the name of Ch'unhyang who was not only beautiful, but clever, musically gifted, and the master of many artistic endeavors, including poetry and calligraphy. In the same town there also lived a young gentleman by the name of Yi Mongryong, the handsome, intelligent, and gallant son of a well-respected mayor from the aristocratic class known as *yangban*. One spring day, tired of studying and in need of respite, he and his servant, Bangja, set out for the scenic Kwanghallu Pavilion. There he spies the beautiful maiden Ch'unhyang on swing in the distance — it was love at first sight.

That very night, Mongryong visited Ch'unhyang's house, and after convincing her mother, Wolmae, a retired *kisaeng* (entertaining woman), of their new, but profound love, the two exchanged nuptial vows. A year passes and their love deepens, until one day the mayor is promoted to serve a higher governmental position in Seoul, and Mongryong, as an obedient, filial son, is obliged to accompany his parents to the capital city. Under the strict neo-Confucian social principles, it was not acceptable for a son of a nobleman to take a wife before passing the state examination — especially a woman of the lower class society to which Ch'unhyang was consigned as the daughter of a *kisaeng*. Despite pledging his devotion to Ch'unhyang, and promising to return after he passed the exams, the two are grieved by their separation from each other, and Ch'unhyang begs Mongryong not to go. As they part, they bestow upon one another gifts: for Ch'unhyang, a mirror, and for Mongryong a jade ring taken from the hand of his beloved.

In time, a lecherous new mayor by the name of Pyǒn Hakdo arrives to replace Mongryong's father. He is aware of Namwön's fame as the home of Korea's loveliest and most talented *kisaeng*, and has heard of Ch'unhyang's stunning beauty and skills. Immediately following his inauguration, Ch'unhyang is summoned to serve the new mayor. Despite being harassed, she flatly refuses to do so, instead pledging her love, devotion, and chastity to Yi Mongryong; as a result the mayor has her imprisoned and tortured. After enduring an extended period of torment, she is eventually scheduled to be executed as part of a spectacle planned

to celebrate the birthday of the Mayor Pyǒn.

Meanwhile, Yi Mongryong has applied himself to his scholarship and has won first place in the state examination; the king empowers him with the royal insignia to serve as secret inspector. He leads his band of covert officers through the countryside and eventually to Namwǒn investigating the corruption and wrongdoings of various governmental officials along the way. On the eve of Ch'unhyang's execution, in tattered attire Mongryong shows up at Wolmae's door, who, unaware of his true identity, is utterly disappointed to see him in such a destitute condition. Her last hope of saving her daughter from execution was Mongryong's return as a high official, but now she sees him only as a pathetic beggar. That night the young lovers are reunited at Ch'unhyang's prison cell.

In the middle of Pyǒn Hakdo's birthday banquet a loud call announcing the presence of the secret royal inspector rings out — Pyǒn and all of his corrupt cohorts began to tremble at the unexpected turn of events. All of the evil officials are punished and justice is restored, including the release of all wrongfully imprisoned citizens of Namwǒn. Ch'unhyang is brought before the royal inspector who, like Pyǒn before him, tests her loyalty by requesting that she serve him. Not knowing it is her own beloved Yi Mongryong, she scolds him for his lack of principles. He orders the head *kisaeng* to show her the ring given to him by Ch'unhyang at the time of their separation. She recognizes it, recognizes her husband, and the story ends with a happy celebration.

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