

scientific corpus (e.g. anthropology, history, psychology). This resulted in a laudably interdisciplinary study, equally relevant to sinologists and oneirologists.

While its depth and sophistication may render parts of it inaccessible to non-specialist readers, I would consider assigning chapter 4 to an advanced seminar of undergraduate or masters students, as it offers a concise, compellingly argued introduction to narrative analysis as a scholarly method, while also providing numerous insights into the classical and medieval Chinese dreamscape. Moreover, while all chapters feature original translations by the author, chapter 4 is particularly valuable for including various lengthy selections from narrative sources, some of which had not previously been rendered in English.

In all, this is a landmark publication. Just as the previous generation of researchers on the topic could not help but cite Carolyn T. Brown's edited volume *Psycho-Sinology: The Universe of Dreams in Chinese Culture* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1988), I predict a similar future for this slim volume.

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HWISANG CHO:

The Power of the Brush: Epistolary Practices in Chosŏn Korea.

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Through writing letters, people at different social levels in Chosŏn Korea were empowered to communicate about private and political questions. After the promulgation of the Korean alphabet in 1443, women and men began to exchange letters. With the introduction of the vernacular script, elite women could exchange letters with their male relatives, and with each other, having previously been largely excluded from written culture.

Cho's study has many strengths: by focussing on the material qualities of surviving letters, and by examining the means of transmission in an age before postage, he reveals a complex social network of messengers, family retainers and slaves, who delivered letters with difficulty, and usually without envelopes. Cho references the seventeenth-century *Tale of Ch'unhyang* in which the heroine hires a messenger to send a letter to her lover. In the novel, the lover persuades the messenger to open the letter, without revealing that he is in fact the intended recipient (pp. 26–7).

Six chapters examine examples of letter writing between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. Chapter 1 introduces the particular features of Korean letter writing, with reference to linguistic and social features of the Chosŏn. Chapter 2 describes the remarkable variety of forms letter writers used, sometimes combining text in different orientations on one sheet of paper. "Spiral" letters and their relationship to formally printed and circulated texts are illustrated, with the author speculating that space-saving, aesthetics, ease of communal reading, or simply fashion, could have led to Korean letter writers composing their texts in an unusually wide variety of layouts and orientations. Letters written by women, in the Korean

alphabet, could have influenced Korean men, including scholar-officials, to compose spiral letters even when writing about serious, political topics (p. 67).

Chapters 3 (“Letters in the Korean Neo-Confucian tradition”) and 4 (“Epistolary practices and textual culture in the academy culture”) discuss the role of letters in the distinctive political culture that developed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with particular focus on T’oegye and Yulgok, the two great thinkers of the time. By applying the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Zhu Xi, the Korean Confucians created a system of local academies, particularly in the south of the country, and established communities of students and scholars who aspired to live according to Confucian teachings. T’oegye published *The Abbreviated Essence of Master Zhu Xi’s Letters* in 1556, noting that “letters are different from other writings, which discuss scholarly issues in dry tones. There is no letter that does not discover people’s minds and hearts . . .” (p. 78). T’oegye also compiled an anthology of his own letters, *Record for Self-Reflection*, aiming to bring Neo-Confucian principles into everyday life. Originally written as responses to scholars’ questions, T’oegye’s selected letters are cited as an example of the ambiguous status of letters, straddling the boundary between private and public discourse. After T’oegye’s death, his followers edited further collections of his letters. Some disciples practised self-cultivation by reading one letter each morning, and reflecting in writing on lessons learned. Cho’s discussion of local academies further notes the importance of letter writing in both teaching and administration: “Mastering versatile usages of letter writing ideally equipped Chosŏn literati with the essential political tool – administrative literacy”.

Chapters 5 (“Social epistolary genres and political news”) and 6 (“Contentious performances in political epistolary practices”) examine the network of local academy scholars who corresponded energetically among themselves. Academy scholars wrote to each other about mundane matters such as meeting dates, as well as weighty philosophical issues. Circular letters, preserved in academies or in kinship organizations, suggest that these letters were read aloud or publicly posted. Letters were usually delivered by slaves owned by academies or elite households (p. 130). Surviving examples of circular letters that reached hundreds of local scholars are illustrated to good effect (p. 132). Chapter 6 cites a 1565 legal case where a monk was accused of spreading Buddhist ideas. Hundreds of scholars from dozens of prefectures signed a petition calling for the monk to be executed. Scholars travelled from the south to the capital to present their memorial, demonstrating for several weeks outside the palace until the King received them.

Letters were widely used in Chosŏn political debates thereafter, and the author summarizes a number of cases where letters and public demonstrations were effective in influencing decisions by the monarch. Controversies about ritual sites were a rich source of disagreement and controversy. When the Royal Confucian Shrine was restored after the Imjin Wars, literati, academy students and royal ministers joined forces to propose their chosen figures for enshrinement, in the so-called Five Worthy debate (pp. 157–61). Pressure from local scholars in the form of daily requests for the Five Worthy to be enshrined in the Royal Confucian Shrine achieved their aim in 1610 when the King performed the sacrificial ritual at the shrine, honouring the Five. The remainder of the chapter, discussing changes in Korea’s political culture after the Ming–Qing transition in seventeenth-century China, shows that rural scholars remained actively engaged in the political process, and continued the practice of writing serious letters on matters of national importance. The appearance of a memorial signed by huge numbers of scholars, so-called *maninso* or petition of 10,000 people, demonstrated that voices of regional populations were heard at the political centre. The King “directed that the details of this

memorial should be recorded. The summary of the memorial was included in the *Sillok* [*Veritable Records*]” (p. 178).

Well illustrated with relevant examples of letters, and including helpful tabulations, this study covers an enormous range of historical and political experience, bravely attempting to compare Korean and other societies’ letter writers, as well as the persistence of letter petitions in modern South Korea (p. 189). Physical characteristics of letters and other texts are carefully and appropriately woven into the study, allowing the reader opportunities to reflect on the life circumstances of writers and recipients of Korean letters. The author also draws attention to differences between Chinese, Japanese, and Korean letters as expressive and political forms. He notes the importance of women as letter writers, suggesting that informality associated with their lives in the domestic realm might have influenced the presentation of letters written by men. Many further enquiries can be made into Korea’s distinctive epistolary culture, building on this imaginative and thought-provoking study.

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