

SIJO AS AFFECTIVE REFUGE: CHOSŎN COURT POLITICIANS' POETIC EMOTIONAL COMMUNITY

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Negative emotions occupy a complicated position in the emotional framework inherent to a Neo-Confucian society like that of Chosŏn Korea. This complication begins with the philosophical and ideological conception of emotions central to Confucian thought and later debates across different schools of Neo-Confucian philosophy. Put roughly, under this philosophical lens the expression of negative emotions is discouraged in favor of their sublimation, i.e. the diversion of their negative psychic energy into a socially acceptable form. Even so, when we read the poetic works produced by Chosŏn court politicians—namely *sijo*, the poetic form of choice for Korean politicians following the Koryŏ dynasty—we see them replete with expressions of the poet's negative emotions. This is especially problematic when we consider that these court politicians, in theory, should be the figures who most closely adhere to the ideals of Neo-Confucianism, considering that their ascendance to the court requires extensive demonstration of their knowledge of Confucian philosophy in the civil service examinations. How, then, can we begin to understand this disjunction between the approach to emotions in theory and in practice? To this end, Barbara H. Rosenwein's framework of emotional communities laid forth in her work *Emotional Communities in the early Middle Ages* proves invaluable. She posits that, in a given society, there is a fundamental emotional community that governs over accepted modes of emotional expression and the values associated with them. For Chosŏn court politicians, this fundamental community would derive its rules over emotional expression from Neo-Confucian conceptions of emotions and psychology. Under a fundamental emotional community, Rosenwein contends that there exist smaller communities that are subordinate to the fundamental one, drawing on many of its basic assumptions but revealing its shortcomings. These smaller communities allow members to make expressions of emotions otherwise discouraged by the rules of the basic community, forming a site of affective refuge for those who feel limited under the regulations of the larger community's sanctioned emotionality. Using this framework, I argue that, for court politicians filled with political discontent, the composition and performance of *sijo* constitute a literary and social site that serves as an outlet for negative emotions that would otherwise not be sanctioned by the emotional framework laid forth in Neo-Confucian thought. To put it in terms of Rosenwein's framework, the social and textual space of *sijo* allowed these politicians an avenue of emotional expression that is removed from the constraints of their

fundamental emotional community; the social relations between performers and listeners of *sijo* form a smaller emotional community that serves as their affective refuge.

To make this argument, I will first describe the philosophical and ideological conception of emotions under the context of Neo-Confucianism, thus defining the emotional framework of these politicians' fundamental emotional community. Next, I will shift my focus to analyzing the presence of negative affect in selections of *sijo* by Chŏng Ch'ŏl, paying particular attention to the manner in which the expressions of such emotion in these poems mark a disjunction between the poets' individual affectivity and the ideologically endorsed emotionality. Finally, I will dive into a consideration of the political and social factors that motivate these literati's refuge in these poems and their social spaces.

The Confucian Conception of Emotions

Any discussion of emotions in the context of Neo-Confucian thought is necessarily complicated by the four-seven debate that ravaged both the intellectual and political culture of the Chosŏn court. We can, however, put these concerns aside for now and first consider the fundamental Confucian view of human affectivity which served as the foundation for these later debates. This basic conception of emotions is expressed in the primary Confucian texts that scholars during the Chosŏn era would have considered seminal to their outlook: the *Book of Rites*, the *Analects*, and *Mencius*. In these three texts, emotions are conceived as an essential component of one's ethical and moral character. Wang Yunping, scholar of comparative philosophy, brings our attention to this significance of emotions in Confucian ethics in his essay "Confucian Ethics and Emotions." To this point, he notes that, in these foundational texts of Confucian thought, ethical ideals are expressed and exemplified through "specific emotions rather than logical reasoning."¹ Confucius and Mencius alike present and advocate for the pursuit of what they conceive to be ethical ideals in life through passages where significant emotional reactions are noted, instead of relying on rationally constructed arguments about ethics. For example, in the *Analects* Confucius promotes the learning of rightness by expressing his "appreciation and admiration" of one of his disciples who embodies such learning; Mencius, similarly, emphasizes the ethical ideal of filial love by conveying his "unconditional acceptance" of sage Shun's affective response towards his parents and brothers.² The centrality of emotions to these textual presentations of how to lead an ethical life in line with Confucian values such as rightness and filiality demonstrate the significant role they play in the Confucian conception of morality.

¹ Wang, "Confucian Ethics and Emotions," 355.

² Ibid.

Emotions and their relation to ethics are not only limited to the manner in which Confucian thinkers *talk* about morality but also further extend to their manner of *conceiving* of ethical action and character. Ethical action from the Confucian position, Wang writes, “cannot be done and evaluated separately from emotional responses.”³ In other words, for an action to be considered properly moral, it must be motivated by an emotional response that is itself inclined towards benevolence or rightness. It is not sufficient for an action to appear ethical in either its presentation or consequences. Mencius illustrates this point when he says that gentlemen “should not be constrained by the false and empty presentation of *li* [rites, kr: *rye*].”⁴ The rites (that is, engaging in ancestor worship) are an example of one such action that might be regarded as ethical in its presentation and consequences. However, as Mencius tells us, if the rites are carried out by someone lacking *ren* (benevolence, kr: *in*) or love for one’s lineage—two ethical affections in this framework—the ethical value of these rites becomes lost and empty. Thus, in the Confucian conception of ethics, actions—even technically ‘right’ actions—are subordinate to the emotions that motivate an agent’s action.

Emotions in this view of morality are so privileged above action that they “can be important in themselves even without necessarily motivating any moral actions.”⁵ Mencius himself emphasizes this intrinsic value of emotions in his discussion of the fundamental human aversion to the sufferings of others. Here, he uses the example of a person seeing a child about to fall into a well to argue that, upon witnessing the suffering of others, anyone would “be filled with alarm, distress, pity, and compassion.”⁶ He then describes an action taken by the viewer as arising not “because he would use the opportunity to ingratiate himself with the child’s parents, nor because he would seek commendation from neighbors and friends, nor because he would hate the adverse reputation,” leaving it to the reader to understand that whatever action taken would arise as a result of the viewer’s emotional response.⁷ Even so, Mencius does not describe this action as necessary, choosing to make the focal point in this discussion the viewer’s appropriate emotional response. Thus, what is ethically significant in this scenario is the proper emotional sense of pity and compassion, shame and aversion, modesty and compliance, and right and wrong—not that the viewer takes some action.⁸ For the immoral viewer can still be motivated to the seemingly proper action for the wrong reasons.

Given the primacy of emotions in this ethical framework, it follows that one’s ethical character is directly related to the management of their emotions. As

³ Ibid, 356.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ De Bary et al., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 129.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

Wang notes, “emotions are so essentially relevant to an ethical life that they are the defining features of a good life,” and having an ethically good life “means to have developed [one’s] emotions.”⁹ One is responsible for nurturing their own affectivity to have an uninhibited “emotional involvement in and commitment to the good.”¹⁰ To this end, Confucius encourages one to cultivate oneself to embody the affectivity of the *junzi* (gentleman, kr: *kunja*), who “has a broad and easy heart.”¹¹ This view of one’s ethical character as emanating from their personal affectivity gives great insight into the kind of ‘proper’ emotionality prescribed by Confucian thought. Under this framework, the proper composition of the individual psyche is such that all emotional impulses are inclined towards the good. It follows from this that any affect that does not have an ethical origin or telos is deviant and must be cultivated to reflect a total emotional investment into the good.

Emotions and Society in Korean Neo-Confucianism

Moving forward in time to the intellectual context of the poets in question, such an ethical conception of emotions was largely adopted by Korean Neo-Confucians. The Neo-Confucians continue to promote a proper emotionality that is conducive to one’s upholding of ethical and moral goodness. They argue that one’s emotions can be classified in two groups: those that are “socially apt” and those that are “self-centered.”¹² Halla Kim discusses the Neo-Confucian taxonomy of feelings in his article “Existential Dimensions of Korean Neo-Confucianism.” He notes that the so-called socially apt emotions are those that encourage the subject to reject their own egoism and promote ideal social interactions, the heart of which is a cultivated sense of concern for others.¹³ This class of emotions corresponds with the four innate dispositions Mencius covered in the passage above, called the “four sprouts”: one’s feeling of pity and compassion, shame and aversion, modesty and compliance, and sense of right and wrong. These sprouts, Neo-Confucians maintain, must be cultivated to grow into the “source of our apt social life with others.”¹⁴ Conversely, the self-centered emotions are those given to “violating the norms of social aptness” by encouraging one to take care of themselves rather than others.¹⁵ Such emotions are joy, anger, grief, fear, love, hate, and desire—called the “seven emotions” in the *Book of Rites*. These seven emotions, because they threaten the ideal stability of social relations, must be sublimated into a form that “expresses social aptness.”¹⁶ Put roughly, sublimation of these wayward emotions is achieved by one’s regulation of their inner metaphysical and psychic forces. Self-cultivating

⁹ Wang, “Confucian Ethics and Emotions,” 357.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Kim, “Existential Dimensions of Korean Neo-Confucianism,” 596.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid, 597.

¹⁵ Ibid, 596.

¹⁶ Ibid, 598.

practices that promote inner quiet and a rejection of one's ego, such as meditating and "maintaining reverential seriousness," were found by Neo-Confucians to be the best means of sublimating their negative emotions.¹⁷ Such practices are aimed at encouraging one to embody the aforementioned broad and easy heart of the *junzi*. Taking into consideration both the Neo-Confucian two-class articulation of the nature of emotions and the fundamental Confucian view of emotions as vital components of morality, we come into a clearer view of the ethical good that proper emotionality should be directed towards. Namely, the ethical telos of emotions is the subject's social aptness—i.e., their rejection of self-centeredness and dedication to upholding and developing the harmony of all social relations. Improper emotions are considered inappropriate and selfish under this ideal of social harmony, and consequently, their transformation into something more socially apt is prescribed as a necessity.

The two-class taxonomy of emotions Kim has directed our attention to is at the heart of the aforementioned four-seven debates—the name referring directly to the *four* sprouts (the non-egotistic, socially apt emotions) and the *seven* emotions (the self-centered emotions). These debates centered on the metaphysical relation between *li* and *qi* (kr: *gi*) and their affect on the human psyche. *Li* is the fundamental structuring principle of the universe found within all things (including humans) and is conceived of as the "source of good in the world"; *qi* is a psychophysical force and vehicle of *li* whose imperfection blocks the manifestation of the inherent good embodied by one's *li*—such imperfection, if unmanaged, gives rise to evil.¹⁸ Two Neo-Confucian thinkers in particular were drawn to investigating these two opposing forces—not only on the grounds of their metaphysical relations (namely, how *qi* functions as a limiter of *li*) but also for their involvement in the formation of one's emotions. These two figures were T'oegye, an established member of the literati who held several positions in the Chosŏn court but was best known for his development of Neo-Confucian thought, and Gobong, a budding scholar who had recently passed his civil-service examination. T'oegye, on one hand, argues for a strict bifurcation of the four sprouts and seven emotions along the lines of their moral valence and their metaphysical origins. The good emotions embodied by the four sprouts are issued from *li*; the bad emotions of the seven are issued from *qi*.¹⁹ Gobong, on the other hand, argues for a non-dualist interpretation of the relationship between the four and seven. He posits that they each involve *li* and *qi* together: the four are the good side of the seven and are not in any way separate from the seven.²⁰

From here, the debate passed hands continually, and scholars continued to introduce new views regarding the origins of "good" and "bad" emotions in the

¹⁷ Ibid, 599.

¹⁸ Ibid, 597.

¹⁹ Ibid, 600.

²⁰ Ibid, 601.

cosmology of Neo-Confucianism. Capturing the nuance of each scholar and faction's position is beyond the scope of this paper, but what remains important is that these scholars, despite their disagreements over the ontological source of certain emotions, generally agree on the attitude one should take towards emotionality: that one should manage their inner self and its *qi* to promote a socially appropriate affectivity. For instance, T'oegye emphasizes the importance of internally "redirecting the blind forces of *qi* and nourishing human nature" to sublimate one's potentially evil emotions into something harmonious.²¹ Gobong, similarly, advocates for the "role of controlling *qi*" so that it does not disturb *li* in bringing about evil feelings.²² The shared view of these scholars on this point, in spite of their diametrically opposed positions in other regards, reflects the far-reaching extent to which Neo-Confucian thought insists upon an ethical, socially apt orientation of the individual's psyche and all its emotions.

Underlying this insistence is the political necessity of promoting the individual's proper maintenance of their negative emotions. Under Neo-Confucian metaphysics, the harmony of the universe is contingent upon the unobstructed manifestation of the structuring principle *li*—the same function of *li* applies to the harmony of the state as well. As scholar Jisoo Kim notes in her book *The Emotions of Justice: Gender, Status, and Legal Performance in Chosŏn Korea*, the proliferation of negative emotions generates negative energy (i.e., imperfect *qi*) that obstructs the state's harmonious *li*. It is crucial, then, for the state to play a hand in relieving the people's negative emotions as they can generate a threatening amount of negative energy.²³ The Chosŏn state enacts their duty to resolve the people's grief through their implementation of a petition process unique to their judicial system, which allowed commoners to levy complaints and seek restitution when suffering an injustice.²⁴ This ideological stance towards popular manifestations of negative affect affirms the sense that, in addition to their importance in defining one's personal and ethical character, emotions play a significant role in the political realm of the Chosŏn polity.

This practice of the Chosŏn legal system to encourage those who have been wronged to externally express their discontent seems antithetical to the notion of inner sublimation discussed in the previous section. However, there is a key difference between these two situations that justifies the contrasting ideological attitudes they entail—namely, along the lines of class. The negative emotions which Jisoo Kim describes as necessitating expression are demotic by nature, as they are specifically the emotions that are aroused "when subjects [are] legally violated or wronged."²⁵ Inherent to the experience of such feelings, therefore, is a lack of

²¹ Ibid, 603.

²² Ibid, 602.

²³ Kim, *The Emotions of Justice*, 11.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid, 7.

political agency whereby the subject lacks the means to deal with the injustice on their own, leaving them to breed sensations of discontent and anger. Externally expressing their emotions through the proper legal channel allows the state to intervene and relieve their discontent. By providing such relief, the state avoids the proliferation of negative energy which otherwise could have threatened the state's harmony.²⁶ For Chosŏn statesmen with a paternalistic view towards their subjects, non-elites' external expression of negative emotions is philosophically reconcilable and politically necessary because (1) they lack the means to resolve their cause(s) on their own and (2) their lack of learning would make them unaware of the metaphysical necessity of sublimating their negative emotions. Conversely, the political elite—who do possess the material and political means of resolving their injustices and the sufficient learning to know about the importance of sublimation—while not specifically barred from it, would have little to no use for the petition system. They know that the expression of their negative emotions when there is no paternalistic apparatus like the petition system to relieve them will only enable those feelings to “become self-assertive... [and violate] the norms of social aptness.”²⁷ What their learning prescribes for them instead is a management of one's emotions and *qi* that is entirely contained within oneself. In essence, the negative emotions of the disempowered masses must be expressed for the sake of the state as their expression will, in theory, lead to their relief at the hands of the state. The negative emotions of the political elite, however, must not be expressed externally as their expression will not yield any relief and will only contribute to the deterioration of one's moral character and the state.

Synthesizing the aspects of emotions discussed up to this point, we can define the fundamental emotional framework of Neo-Confucianism in Chosŏn as a prescribed notion of emotionality that privileges a set of ethically oriented emotions which promote moral character and the harmony of the society and polity. Negative emotions—specifically, those feelings that do not conform to the maintenance of social harmony and instead exacerbates one's self-interest—are shunned, and their sublimation into a socially apt form is presented as an ethical ideal. In this framework, there is no sanctioned room for expression of such emotions for the political elite; they must be resolved and sublimated *internally*. Politically speaking, ethically oriented emotions are endorsed for their contribution to the social and political order of the state; negative emotions are discounted for their disruption of this order. Per Rosenwein's notion of emotional communities, this framework constitutes the governing laws of the fundamental emotional community of Chosŏn court politicians, representing their “fundamental assumptions, values, goals, feeling rules, and accepted modes of expression.”²⁸ The members of the Chosŏn court

²⁶ Ibid, 11.

²⁷ Kim, “Existential Dimensions of Korean Neo-Confucianism,” 597.

²⁸ Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, 24.

collectively belong to this community as they all share “a common stake, interests, values, and goals”—this being the health and prosperity of the state.²⁹ Moreover, being members of the court, each would have had to rigorously study the Confucian classics and other such texts to pass the civil-service examination. In this way, the court politicians collectively share an intellectual culture, meaning that they constitute what Rosenwein considers a “textual community,” whose conceptions of emotionality are created and reinforced “by ideologies, teachings, and common presuppositions.”³⁰ These intellectual commonalities remained even among those opposing each other in the four-seven debate. Ultimately, the fundamental emotional community of Chosŏn court culture is one that endorses ethical emotion and shuns negative affect.

Negative Affect in *Sijo* and the Formation of a Subordinate Emotional Community

Given that a central feature of this fundamental emotional community is its proscription of court politician’s ability to express their negative feelings, one would expect that members of the Chosŏn literati would shy away from such expressions. However, various politicians would frequently express their negative feelings, especially those that relate to their discontent with the political affairs of the court, in writing. As historically removed readers, our only access to these politicians’ affectivity is through surviving textual sources that would have served as outlets for personal expression. It is for this reason that, to make an investigation of their negative affect, turning to examples of *sijo* written by court politicians will be invaluable. As translator Kevin O’Rourke notes in the introduction to his translated anthology of *sijo*, “they are songs of the heart, without the artificiality and elaborate decoration that confuses rather than clarifies.”³¹ In this sense, we can read the affectivity expressed by the speaker in these poems as a genuine expression of their mental and emotional state.

Let us begin our investigation of negative affect in *sijo* through the works of Chŏng Ch’ŏl (1536-1593). His poetry is valuable to our study for not only its range and depth (he left 107 poems covering many topics) but also the unique political life of the poet himself. As a politician, Chŏng had a complicated career: he faced great criticism for his political beliefs, he voluntarily left service, he returned after four years only to be exiled in 1591, and, finally, he returned to the court in 1593 to serve as an envoy to the Ming.³² Moreover, the tail end of his career overlapped with the first invasion of the Imjin War—a moment which was, among many other things, defined by heightened political strife and factional tension in the Chosŏn court. The

²⁹ Ibid, 25.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ O’Rourke, *The Book of Korean Shijo*, 21.

³² Lee, *A History of Korean Literature*, 181.

precarity of his political career gave rise to sensations of discontent and disillusion with the ongoings at the court, which were often expressed through his poetry.

For example, in one poem Chǒng expresses his detestation of royal ineptitude and the disunity in the court by comparing the sycophantic politicians who disrupt its efficiency to carpenters running about aimlessly in a decrepit structure. He writes,

What happens if you pull down
beams and supports?
A host of opinions greet the leaning, skeleton house.
Carpenters
with rulers and ink keep milling around.³³

Peter Lee, in his analysis of this poem, notes that this verse serves as an “oblique censure of royal folly, and the king’s misuse of royal authority that...[culminates] in catastrophic disunity in the realm.”³⁴ Moreover, O’Rourke reminds us that this poem is a direct response to the “confusion in the court in drafting a policy to deal with the Hideyoshi Invasion.”³⁵ This reflects how his mocking presentation of “carpenters...milling around” is meant to serve as an expression of his discontent with the present political culture at the court.

The expressions of negative affect in his poetry can also express an emotionality that is more pervasive and fundamental, unlike the poem above which served as a direct response to a trend in the court. For example, one poem reflects his deep-seated dissatisfaction with the world:

White gull,
floating on the water,
it was an accident my spit hit you on the back.
White gull,
don’t be angry: I spat because the world is a dirty place.³⁶

Although this song features only a natural image of a white gull floating on water, the speaker’s dissatisfied affectivity is directed at the social and political conditions of his world. The natural object, i.e. the gull, stands as a helpless victim caught in the speaker’s scorn; he regrets that he cannot pay nature its proper heed and must unintentionally express his frustration onto it. In the heart of the speaker, the dirtiness of political affairs has caused him to accumulate so much imperfect *qi* that he is unable to properly appreciate the natural world represented by the gull—a world which further represents the harmony of the structuring principle *li*.

Chǒng’s open expression of his negative affects (disdain and dissatisfaction) in his poetry reflects the sense that his affectivity and his management thereof operate outside of the emotional framework of

³³ O’Rourke, *The Book of Korean Shijo*, 65.

³⁴ Lee, *A History of Korean Literature*, 182.

³⁵ O’Rourke, *The Book of Korean Shijo*, 65.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 66.

Neo-Confucianism. He dwells emphatically on the kinds of emotions that, in theory, should be sublimated rather than expressed per se. Chǒng's poetry, then, operates in contradiction to the fundamental emotional community to which he belongs. His contradiction, however, is not a bold-faced, individualistic moment of affective rebellion. It is, rather, a social expression of affect. *Sijo* was an inherently social form of art, meant to be sung and heard to move the hearts of its listeners.³⁷ The performance of *sijo*, for the literati, stands as a firsthand account of the performer's "personal experience of life and emotion," communicated to an audience of like minded friends who are themselves politicians as well.³⁸ *Sijo*, then, is not only a textual site for emotional expression but a social one too. The social and textual avenue for emotional expression that *sijo* allows constitutes a smaller emotional community subordinate to the fundamental community. Rosenwein characterizes a smaller community as one that "[partakes] in the larger [i.e., fundamental] one and [reveals] its possibilities and *limitations* [emphasis added]."³⁹ In revealing the limitations Neo-Confucian thought places on expressions of negative affect, this smaller emotional community establishes a site of emotional refuge, wherein disgruntled literati are allowed "alternative forms of emotional expression" that frees them, if just for a moment, from the constraining nature of the fundamental emotional community.⁴⁰ Thus, participation in the performances of *sijo* forms a subordinate emotional community, in which they can take a degree of affective refuge from the constraining conception of proper emotionality in Neo-Confucian thought.

This is not to say that this smaller emotional community accounts for a wholesale rejection of the Neo-Confucian emotional framework on behalf of the literati participating in it. There is, in fact, evidence that a kind of sublimation of one's negative affect was idealized in these poetic spaces. Namely, it is the sublimation of one's discontent into an attitude of nonchalance involving one's resignation from the realm of politics. Such an ideal is expressed in Chǒng's poem about his desire to be like the lotus leaves:

A dash of rain upon
the lotus leaves. But the leaves
remain unmarked, no matter
how hard the raindrops beat.
Mind, be like the lotus leaves,
Unstained by the world.⁴¹

The resilience represented by the lotus leaves in this verse reflects Chǒng's ideal of nonchalance and the renunciation of petty political affairs. In this poem,

³⁷ Ibid, 9.

³⁸ Ibid, 10.

³⁹ Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, 24.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 20.

⁴¹ Lee, *A History of Korean Literature*, 182.

Chŏng is sublimating the discontent he feels with the world into a sense of hope and desire for his eventual embodiment of the “broad and easy heart” emblematic of the *junzi* who avoids the anxious mind reflective of the “lesser man”—an ideal put forth in the Confucian *Analects*.⁴² Such an idealization of nonchalance and withdrawal from politics is captured in the *sjjo* of later poets as well. For example, Kim Kwang’uk (1580-1656), an official who wrote poetry following his unjust dismissal from Kwanghaegun’s court, writes of his relief after withdrawing from court:

Bundle the piles of verbose missives
and throw them away!
At last I ride home on a swift horse
whipping the autumn winds.
No bird freed could be happier.
What freedom, what relief!⁴³

Underlying this poem is a sense of the poet’s disdain for court affairs, represented by the “verbose missives” he is gleefully casting away. His removal from the court allows him to sublimate his negative emotions towards the fractured politics of his day realm into personal happiness and relief, which are founded upon his lack of concern for contemporary affairs, i.e. his nonchalance.

The sublimation at play in each of these two poems, at first glance, conforms to the Neo-Confucian imperative of sublimation. It seems to conform especially on the basis that this means of sublimating helps the poet rid himself of anxiety and embody a calmer heart, as is necessary for the ideal figure of the *junzi*. However, we must consider what is being sacrificed for the sake of this sublimation: the poet’s participation in society and politics. Recall that ethical emotions are ethical owing to their promotion of social harmony. Rather than embodying an affectivity consisting of such ethical emotions, these poets are sublimating their negative emotions into an affectivity that prides itself on rejecting their involvement in social and political affairs. Such a rejection, in a broader sense, represents the poets’ emotional disavowal of their responsibility to attend to and foster the health and prosperity of the state. Instead, their nonchalant affectivity affirms and exacerbates their egoism, turning their concern towards their own happiness rather than others and the harmony of the state. Thus, their method of sublimation does not truly conform to the one prescribed in the Neo-Confucian framework. Nevertheless, it is notable that the impulse to sublimate one’s negative emotions is preserved by these poets within their smaller emotional communities and is presented as an ideal. The poets’ smaller emotional community, although it may contradict the larger community’s rules regarding emotional expression, partakes in

⁴² Wang, “Confucian Ethics and Emotions,” 357.

⁴³ Lee, *The Columbia Anthology of Traditional Korean Poetry*, 114.

and derives from the emotional logic laid forth in the fundamental community it is subordinate to.

In sum, the works of poets such as Chŏng Ch'ŏl reflect the capacity of *sijo* to be a means of expressing their discontented emotions. Such expression through *sijo* is not only textual but also social, as songs written in the style were performed for close peers and other politicians. In this way, the composition and performance of *sijo* serves as a vehicle for these poet-politicians to establish a communal site of emotional refuge from the emotional restraints of their state ideology. Despite the rejection of these constraints that *sijo* allows performers and listeners to engage in, the emotional logic of such an emotive form of writing and performing derives directly from the Neo-Confucian conception of emotions—although its application of that logic betrays the harmonious teleology of the Neo-Confucian approach to emotions.

Concluding Thoughts

As we have seen, the governing laws of the fundamental emotional community of Chosŏn politicians is such that emotions which are not socially oriented in nature are shunned and must be sublimated into something socially apt. One's negative emotions, especially those that scorn the political system that buttresses the order and harmony of society, are among such feelings that must be transformed and not expressed per se. Even so, court politicians who are particularly discontent with the political culture of Chosŏn find avenues for textually and socially expressing their frustrations within a subordinate emotional community which responds directly to the emotive constraints of the fundamental community's governing laws. Their means of constructing both the social structure of this community and the textual means for its sanctioned emotional expression is through the composition and performance of *sijo*.

The formation of such a community, beyond the aesthetic and social consequences it had, brings to light a problem central to what we can consider Neo-Confucian praxis in Chosŏn Korea. Court politicians' participation in these communities reflects the incompleteness of proper ideological and philosophical praxis on behalf of these politicians, as they are, in theory, meant to embody the figure of the sage who has proper command over his emotions. Instead, they failed to manage their emotions in the way of the sage and resorted to less harmonious means of resolving them. Could we attribute this to a lack of character or discipline? Or should we instead attribute it to some external factor? Making a decisive attribution here is a difficult task, but I venture to say that it is more likely the latter. Recall, for example, Chŏng Ch'ŏl's apologetic and regretful attitude towards the white gull he spits on: proper engagement with the harmony that the gull symbolizes seems to be an impossibility to Chŏng but, nevertheless, a desire he maintains. Implicit in these poets' expressions of their negative affect is a yearning

for the matters of the state to not be so dissonant and disconcerting. The attitude of nonchalance they collectively idealize in their smaller community is an emotional response to their self-perceived powerlessness in rectifying these discordant political matters. Such nonchalance is the sublimated (albeit incorrectly so) form of an affect like frustration, coming only after the poet-politician has faced undue stress from factional strife or regal ineptitude.

Considering that these court politicians are driven to form this smaller emotional community because they already feel frustrated with politics, the gap between their actions and the ideology they supposedly subscribe to can be accounted for by the shortcomings of Neo-Confucian thought when put into practice. The management of imperfect *qi* on the individual level for the sake of statal harmony is a difficult ideal to achieve in practice, requiring several individuals—all with their own imperfections and stakes—to uphold this practice. The lack of an ideologically sanctioned mode of communally addressing the build-up of negative affect in the minds of court politicians inhibits the proper handling of such emotions. Further, the modes of managing one's emotional frustrations Neo-Confucianism approves are, by design, non-cathartic and self-contained in nature. The emotional pressure of dealing with one's own wayward emotions on their own creates a need for some cathartic release. In part, this need for an external catharsis is a significant contributing factor to the formation of the politician's smaller emotional community. There a poet-politician can find their avenue for emotional release, but the consequence is that they begin to resolve their emotions in a way that benefits only their own happiness rather than the state. It is, then, the constraints of the fundamental emotional community, governed by Neo-Confucian notions of emotion, that has pushed politicians of the Chosŏn court to break with their fundamental ideological beliefs and find affective refuge in the writing and performance of *sjjo*.

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