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The Seondeok–Jigwi Encounter: A Folkloric and Historical Artifact of the Silla Kingdom's Religious and Social Landscape

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Abstract: In English-language academic publications outside of a small handful of translations, the encounter between Jigwi (지귀 [志鬼]) and the Silla monarch Seondeok (선덕여왕 [善德女王], r. 632–647) has received scant attention, perhaps because of scholarly views that dismiss folklore as an insufficient foundation for a thoroughly objective evaluation of the past. On the other hand, an assessment of folklore as a repository of cultural and societal knowledge can help to justify the use of the Stith Thompson classification system as a way of extrapolating insights on the life of Queen Seondeok and the man who passionately desired to have a personal audience with the monarch. Through discerning reflections on the tale of the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter, one can appreciate the contours of a nuanced and pluralistic world of Silla belief systems, a complicated society partly guided by the powerful attraction of Seondeok's personality, and a social hierarchy that one cannot carelessly reduce into simplistic dichotomies between privileged nobles and humble commoners.

Keywords: Seondeok of Silla (r. 632–647); Jigwi; Stith Thompson classification system

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1. Introduction: Sources and Historiography

Despite her patronage of the Cheomseongdae (첨성대 [瞻星臺]) astronomical observatory that the public views as possibly the most famous piece of Silla (신라 [新羅], 57 BCE–935) architecture, Queen Seondeok (선덕여왕 [善德女王], r. 632–647)—the 27th ruler of the Silla kingdom—remains veiled behind fragmentary and apologetic accounts of her lifetime (Jeon 1974; Nha 2001; Park 2005). Few references to her reign exist in contemporary form, and these allusions appear to offer almost nothing to even the most diligent scholars. The paucity of sources means that even extant histories, such as the twelfth-century *Samguk sagi* (삼국사기 [三國史記], 1145) of Kim Busik (김부식 [金富軾], 1075–1151) and the thirteenth-century *Samguk yusa* (삼국유사 [三國遺事], 1281) of Iryeon (일연 [一然], 1206–1289), draw on earlier works that no longer survive (Kim [1145] 1997a, [1145] 2012a; Iryeon [1281] 1972a, [1281] 1997a). Histories such as the *Samguk yusa* describe the queen about six centuries after she died, giving a de facto secondary perspective comparable to twenty-first-century writings on fifteenth-century events devoid of contemporary eyewitnesses.

Because the life of Seondeok essentially unfolds in secondary sources, any biographical exercise on her necessitates historical and historiographic analyses. The historian Tzvetan Todorov has argued for how European accounts of the New World reveal more about European ideas and less about Amerindian ideas (Todorov 1984). In the spirit of Todorov's point, one might think that Iryeon presumptuously assumed knowledge of a world that preceded the Buddhist monk's life by about six centuries. As a chronicler who probably compiled the *Samguk yusa* in his free time, Iryeon may not have had some agenda to purposely misrepresent the worldview of the Silla kingdom, but this supposition will not save Iryeon from the scrutiny of discerning historians (Ha [1281] 1972).

To a modern observer, the most striking aspect of the life of Queen Seondeok lies in the very person of the queen herself. The accession of Queen Seondeok and, by extension, the

accession of her female successor (and cousin) Jindeok (진덕여왕 [眞德女王], r. 647–654), hints at the latitude that women—or at least aristocratic women—enjoyed in the society of the Silla kingdom. The precise dimensions of this latitude remain subject to debate, but scholars believe that East Asian polities of Seondeok's time used regal ornaments to emanate prestige and authority. In the ancient Korean peninsula, any onlooker would have greatly admired the beauty and workmanship of the preserved headpieces of Silla queens. These headpieces did not arise from nowhere or from the imagination of a solitary craftsman; they had a heritage dating all the way back to the earliest periods of history on the peninsula. The verdant imagery of Korean and Chinese crowns from the fifth and sixth centuries, for instance, hearkened to the nature-loving careers of shamans (Bush 1984). In an East Asian world that valued learning, any sign of cultural sophistication would have carried a profound resonance in the public consciousness. If Seondeok really had the prophetic foresight attributed to her in the *Samguk sagi* and the *Samguk yusa*, then any indication of cultural splendor would have reflected that gift in the clearest way possible.

To the present day, the personal narrative of the queen has continued to merit the attention of laypersons and scholars alike. This impression has remained steadfast, even as scholars recognize the queen's struggles within and outside of her kingdom. No one can casually dismiss the evidence for this pressure, but if historians of Seondeok have to content themselves with only viewing Seondeok through the dissatisfaction of others, then only a skewed narrative on the queen will emerge. Despite incessant court intrigues, foreign threats, and distractions from every corner of her kingdom, Seondeok had a vibrant personality that—at least in some respects—remained undiminished even in adversity. Scholars have discerningly opined on the queen's struggles by noting Seondeok's willingness to simultaneously tackle issues relating to the protection of the realm and issues relating to the more mundane realities of everyday governance (Korean Spirit and Culture Promotion Project 2014). In Seondeok's hopeful mindset rested the future of the Silla kingdom.

On the other hand, the notion of attributing some resilience to the queen should not degenerate into an unconditionally hagiographic tone. At least one native Korean historian has resorted to a rather unquestioning approach that describes Seondeok as a sovereign instrumental in not just the development of the Silla kingdom's culture, but also the international prominence of the kingdom (Lee 2008). Given the sparseness of contemporary material on Seondeok, this sweeping proposition will not withstand the rigors of scholarly analysis, and such a claim appears to reflect an approach that privileges emotion over sound historiography. When disguised as historical insight, unjustifiably apologetic perspectives on Seondeok seem to reveal more about the historian's biases and less about the subject of the historian's analysis.

Among the ancient secondary accounts, a source that may separate Seondeok's personality from her domestic and foreign struggles rests in the story of Jigwi (지귀 [志鬼])—a Silla person who sought (and ultimately received) the queen's attention. As a courtesy to both Korean-language and English-language audiences unfamiliar with the narrative, the author has included both modern Korean and English translations of the story. The author has gently edited the Frits Vos translation according to the Revised Romanization system (Gwon [1589] 2008; Vos 1981).

> 지귀(志鬼)는 신라 활리역(活里驛) 사람이다. 선덕왕의 미모를 사모하여 걱정과 근심으로 울다가 형용이 초췌했다. 왕이 절에 행차하여 행향(行香)하려다가 듣고 그를 불렀다. 지귀가 절에 가서 탑 아래서 왕의 행차를 기다리다 갑자기 곤히 잠이 들었는데, 왕이 팔찌를 벗어 가슴 위에 두고 궁궐로 돌아왔다. 그 뒤에 곧 잠이 깨었는데, 지귀가 오랫동안 번민하다 가슴에 열이 나서 나가 그 탑을 돌다가 곧바로 변하여 화귀(火鬼)가 되었다. 왕이 술사(術士)에게 명하여 주사(呪詞)를 짓게 했는데, "지귀가 가슴에 불이 나, 몸을 태워 불귀신으로 변했네. 멀리 바다 밖으로 옮겨가, 보지도 말고 친하지도 말라(志鬼心中火,燒身變火神.流移滄海外,不見不相親)"라고 했다. 당시 풍속에 이 주사를 문이나 벽에 써 붙여 화재를 막았다.

Jigwi (志鬼), a man from Hwalli station (活里驛) in Silla, became infatuated with [the] beautiful Queen Seondeok. He kept weeping in distress, and his appearance became hag-

gard. When the queen visited a monastery to burn incense (行香), she heard about Jigwi and summoned him. Jigwi came to the foot of the pagoda in the monastery compound, but he fell into a deep sleep while waiting for the royal carriage to arrive. The queen removed a bracelet, placed it on his chest, and returned to the palace. Jigwi remained in a stupor for a long while after he awoke. The fire from his heart coiled around the pagoda and [he] became a fire demon (火鬼). The queen ordered a magician (術士) to write an incantation (呪詞) that read:

The fire in Jigwi's heart [志鬼心中火]
Consumed his body, and he became a fire-ghost [燒身變火神].
Let him be exiled over the ocean [流移滄海外],
Neither appearing here nor being intimate with me [不見不相親].

According to the custom of the time, this text was pasted on gateways and walls in order to ward off conflagrations.

This story of the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter has survived as "Simhwa Yotap (심화요탑 [心火繞塔])," which translates into "Heart Fire Surrounding the Pagoda". Jigwi's story originally came from the *Silla sui jeon* (신라 수이전 [新羅殊異傳])—a collection of narratives translated as *Tales of the Bizarre from Silla*. Unfortunately for present-day readers, the work no longer survives in a complete form, and uncertainty still reigns regarding the chronology of the work's publication. Scholars and translators of the English-speaking and Korean-speaking worlds have disagreed on whether to attribute the original *Silla sui jeon* to the Silla philosopher Choe Chiwon (최치원 [崔致遠], 857–after 908), Bak Inyang (박인양 [朴寅亮], d. 1096), or other compilers from the Goryeo Dynasty (고려 [高麗], 918–1392) (Gwon [1589] 1970, [1589] 2008; Kim 2003; Pettid et al. 2018; Vos 1981). Only about a dozen narratives of the *Silla sui jeon* have survived to the present day in various sources and in varying degrees of survival, but six of these narratives (including, fortunately enough, "Simhwa Yotap") come from the *Daedong unbu gunok* (대동운부군옥 [大東韻府群玉]). One may translate this title as the *Encyclopedia of Korea, Arranged by the Rhymes of the Entries*—a compendium of knowledge compiled in 1589 by Gwon Munhae (권문해 [權文海], 1534–1591), a fervent devotee of the teachings of the Neo-Confucian (성리학 [性理學]) scholar Yi Hwang (이황 [李滉], 1501–1570, also known by the pen name of Toegye 퇴계 [退溪]). "Simhwa Yotap" turns up in Book 20 (권20) of the *Daedong unbu gunok* (Gwon [1589] 2008; Pettid et al. 2018; Pratt et al. 2013). The tale, or at least its ending portion, also survives in the *Samguk yusa*, which offers the following retelling: "[The monk Hyegong (혜공 [惠空])] said to the chief monk, 'Undo this fastening in three days and you will see a miracle.' The dumbfounded monk followed his directions [. . .] in three days [. . .] Seondeok visited the temple and the flames of Jigwi [. . .] swallowed the temple pagoda, but the Golden Hall and the tower were not damaged (Iryeon [1281] 1972b, [1281] 1997b)." The Seondeok–Jigwi narrative also turns up in book 73 (권73) of the *Taepyeong tongje* (태평통재 [太平通載], 1492)—a compilation that came through the efforts of the Joseon Dynasty (조선 [朝鮮], 1392–1910) bureaucrat Seong Im (성임 [成任], 1421–1484), but the work did not come out until eight years after he died, during the reign of King Seongjong of Joseon (조선 성종 [朝鮮成宗], r. 1469–1495) (Kim 2015; Lee Jeongwon 2008; Yoon and Yoon 2012). The Seondeok–Jigwi narrative also turns up in book 4 (권4) of the *Haedong jamnok* (해동잡록 [海東雜錄], 1670) of Gwon Byeol (권별 [權鼈], 1589–1671, also known by the pen name of Jukso 죽소 [竹所])—the son of Gwon Munhae (Kim 2015, 2023; Lee 1999; Park 2013). In the centuries that separated these treatments of Jigwi, chroniclers diverged in minor details. In the *Taepyeong tongje* account, for instance, Jigwi actually writes a letter to ask for Seondeok's attention, and this insertion probably reveals more about Seong Im and less about the actual person of Jigwi; perhaps the Joseon Dynasty compiler wanted to present Jigwi as a person intimately familiar with the customs of Confucian letter-writing etiquette (Lee Jeongwon 2008; Riotto 2017). Such differences aside, the essence of the tale—a subject's admiration for the queen—remained. Unless otherwise noted, this paper will draw its analysis from the *Daedong unbu gunok* version of the tale. In the absence of the original tale as preserved in the *Silla sui jeon*, the *Daedong unbu gunok* version will effectively function (for the purposes of this study) as the ancient presentation of the Seondeok–Jigwi

encounter. The author arrived at this decision partly because of the widespread availability of the *Daedong unbu gunok* version of the tale in modern Korean and English translations. The wide dissemination of the *Daedong unbu gunok* version will cultivate an open scholarly forum where both English speakers and Korean speakers can participate. This decision also stems from the fact that most (but not all) scholars of this topic have similarly deferred to the *Daedong unbu gunok* version.

At this point, one should acknowledge the reality of the *Silla sui jeon* as a type of writing that belonged to a transcultural flowering of literary expressions that affected the three major East Asian civilizations of China, Korea, and Japan. Through an acknowledgement of this reality, one might better appreciate the content of writing found in the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative. The narratives of the *Silla sui jeon* belong to the Tang Chinese (당나라 [唐朝], 618–907) literary form known as *chuanqi* (전기 [傳奇]). The English translation of this term depends on the scholar attempting to elaborate on the concept, with suggestions ranging from "traditions relating to strange matters" to "transmitting the marvelous" (Ditter et al. 2017; Idema and Haft 1997). As the Chinese scholar Sheng Yang notes, the popularity of the *chuanqi* form seems to have surpassed the appeal of the shorter *zhiguai* (지괴 ["records of anomalies"] [志怪]) literary expressions that evolved and blossomed in popularity in China from the third century BCE to the sixth century CE (Yang 2015). Korean scholars have explored the relationships of surviving *Silla sui jeon* specimens to both the *chuanqi* and *zhiguai* forms (Eom 2010; Um 2015). In the *chuanqi* narratives, as Heunggyu Kim argues, the characters hail from a variety of social positions; given this reality, the fact of an eclectic cast of characters in the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative hardly makes the tale entirely unique in the canon of "tales of wonder"—a translation preferred by some Korean literature specialists (Kim 2003). William Nienhauser, a leading authority on Tang Dynasty tales, speaks of the *chuanqi* form as having inspirations drawn from China's longstanding biographical composition traditions. These traditions might not have focused on unimpeachable objectivity in the accounts of individuals chronicled by Chinese biography writers, but these authors still sought to communicate the foundational characteristics of the chronicled individuals (Nienhauser 2001). As this paper will soon demonstrate, the Seondeok–Jigwi tale very much operated in this tradition of attempting to provide some fundamental truth (if not the precise truth) regarding the circumstances and protagonists of Seondeok's era.

Compared to earlier periods of dynastic turmoil, the relative stability of the Tang Empire arguably played a role in strengthening China's transcultural sway in East Asia—particularly in the dissemination of belief systems. One cannot separate scholarly considerations regarding the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter from this phenomenon. The scholars Yongseok Seo and Shunichi Takekawa focus on the dissemination of two specific belief systems (viz., Buddhism and Confucianism) as an event involving two "waves of globalization" that East Asian states embraced, disdained, and accommodated to varying degrees. These processes of embracement, disdain, and accommodation ultimately resulted in Buddhist and Confucian values becoming firmly established in China, Korea, and Japan (Seo and Takekawa 2006). In this East Asian environment of cross-cultural intercourse, Japanese and Korean scholars could, through travels to China or through correspondence with Chinese individuals, intensify access to Buddhist and Confucian erudition (Ng-Quinn 1986; Wang 1994). The resultant infusion of miraculous tales in the Japanese literary canon has garnered a considerable degree of scholarly interest. Jeongseon Ryu has coherently argued for how the aristocracy of Heian Japan (헤이안 시대 [平安時代], 794–1185) sought to vicariously enjoy the company of celestial maidens described in Tang *chuanqi* literature by recreating those individuals through indigenous Japanese literary forms, thereby substantiating a hypothesis on the international diffusion of these tales of wonder (Ryu 2014). In a sense, tales of wonder probably proved intuitively satisfying as narratives that stimulated the imaginations of audiences.

Other scholars have regarded Japan's fascination with tales of wonder as evidence for the growing attractiveness of a grassroots kind of Buddhism, and the intensity of this positive reception among the people might have even outpaced the intensity of enthusi-

asm shown by the bureaucracy. For Charles Holcombe, substantial evidence exists for a Japanese fascination with the themes of miraculous tales. As Holcombe argues, one example of this fascination arises in the archipelago's oldest surviving compilation of Buddhist legends in the *Nihon Ryōiki* (日本霊異記 [*Miraculous Tales of Japan*, c. 787–824]) (Holcombe 1999). In these legends, one finds the story of the eminent Japanese monk Dōshō [道昭] (629–700), who furthered his Buddhist studies in Tang China. If one believes the accounts, then the animal kingdom also played a role in promoting the transcultural attractiveness of miraculous tales. According to legend, Dōshō apparently traveled to the Silla kingdom in order to deliver a lecture series because five hundred tigers asked him to do so. The tigers had presumably figured out a virtuous path towards Buddhist sensibilities, for otherwise the animals could not have convinced Dōshō to travel to the Korean peninsula (Kyōkai [824] 1973). On the other hand, one should not view the medieval Japanese fascination with tales of wonder as prima facie evidence for the dominance of Buddhism's influence in these tales. As William Nienhauser carefully notes, scholars must remember the fact that the dispersion of Tang Dynasty literary forms from China to Japan (and, ipso facto, from China to Korea) involved both Buddhist and non-Buddhist elements (Nienhauser 2001). As this paper will soon demonstrate, the presence of distinctly non-Buddhist elements in the Seondeok–Jigwi tale serves as a literary reminder of the Silla kingdom's religious pluralism—a pluralism that one cannot reduce into simplistic generalizations.

Modern English-language translations of the Jigwi tale have come from Ha Tae-Hung and the Korean Spirit and Culture Promotion Project (Ha 1962; Korean Spirit and Culture Promotion Project 2014). These translators have taken extensive liberties with the tale by adding an abundance of dialogue and various impressions of the emotions shown by the participants in the folktale (to say nothing of decisions to omit material from the earliest extant *Silla sui jeon* retelling), perhaps out of a desire to nurture the international appeal of Korean culture for Western audiences. To put it another way, these translators arguably viewed themselves as individuals entrusted with the solemn task of bringing otherwise laconic or vague narratives to life. Debates on how one should translate, paraphrase, or creatively reconstruct ancient texts have long existed both inside and outside the field of Korean studies. As the scholarly investigations of Jacob Neusner have shown, translators of ancient texts can have a reasonable debate on whether translations or paraphrases serve the needs of individuals who wish to understand the past through otherwise fragmentary or incomplete materials (Neusner 1986). The author contends that the relatively brief length of the Jigwi folktale ought to invite attempts at analytical and reflective interpretation, and such attempts at interpretation should also include efforts in reconstructing certain details of the folktale.

Scholars of varied disciplines have clearly asserted a belief in the fact that written transcriptions of ancient oral tales typically happen after alterations and improvisations have become intertwined with the original content of the tales. This point matters because illiterate audiences of the Korean peninsula would have surely counted among the earliest audiences of the oral retellings of the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter. In his remarks on the Jigwi story, Michael Pettid argues for how the first transcription of the narrative reflected the desires of later generations anxious to faithfully transcribe the details of the encounter, but various compilers over the centuries had probably tinkered with those details (Pettid et al. 2018). The centuries between the actual historical event that might have inspired the Jigwi story and the hypothesized eleventh-century compilation (according to some, but not all, scholars) of the *Silla sui jeon* arguably witnessed many attempts of oral storytellers who would have stayed faithful to the original source material, introduced novel content to the tale, or resorted to some combination of the first two editorial choices. As the philologists Hector Munro Chadwick and Nora Chadwick have contended, the survival of orally transmitted narratives depends on the manner in which successive generations of storytellers faithfully recount the originally presented materials, creatively reinterpret those originally presented materials, or follow some middle course between the first

two approaches, thereby signifying the extent to which oral traditions evolve over time (Chadwick and Chadwick 1940). This evolution arguably occurred with the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative, even if scholars cannot find a lengthy series of ancient publications and republications that might have added more evidence to the nature of how this evolution happened.

In the creativity of their modern English translations, Ha Tae-Hung and the editorial board of the Korean Spirit and Culture Promotion Project do not, technically speaking, offer evidence for a living folkloric tradition for this particular tale, but this assessment does not entirely negate the legitimacy of the creative liberties undertaken by these contemporary translators. A scholarly judgment of the efforts of Ha Tae-Hung and the editorial board of the Korean Spirit and Culture Promotion Project ultimately rests on one of three possibilities. In the first place, the creative elaborations reconstruct events that might have plausibly occurred during the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter. In the second place, the creative elaborations offer glimpses into how ancient storytellers of the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter might have improvised on the retellings of the tale. In the third place, the creative elaborations completely sacrifice any notion of fidelity to the original sources. On the basis of the first two possibilities, the author of this article will analyze certain parts of the creative and paraphrastic translations, but the author will sidestep paraphrases or reconstructions that appear to utterly contravene the spirit of the original version of the tale as preserved in the *Silla sui jeon* and compiled in sources such as the *Daedong unbu gunok*.

In the academic world, direct treatment of the Jigwi episode has remained somewhat muted, but not quite totally silent. This circumstance partly stems from the reality of scholars who have paid more attention to events relating to Bidam's rebellion against Seondeok and other aspects of Seondeok's queenship. In the popular imagination, the Jigwi tale has become a part of modern Korean theater, and dramatic interpretations of the episode have attracted the notice of scholars (Kim 2016b). Since academic scholarship seems to characterize Korean folktales describing premodern events as having varying degrees of creative imagination as opposed to historical objectivity, some researchers have refrained from deeply analyzing the Jigwi episode (Grayson 2015). In the past fifty years, scholars have had more things to say about general trends in Korean folklore scholarship, but this focus on general trends has not excluded the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter from those considerations (Janelli 1986; Yoon 1975; Yun 2011). Scholarly treatments of the Jigwi episode have tended to explore the foundations of the narrative. This approach has affirmed the transcultural influence of Buddhism—a faith that profoundly influenced the destinies of India, China, Korea, and Japan. Among scholars of folklore and history, Hwang Paegang offers a hypothesis on the episode's origins. Hwang's theory calls attention to the similarities between *Sulpaga* (述婆伽) and the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter. *Sulpaga* existed as a folktale compiled in the *Dazhidu lun*, or *The Commentary on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* (大智度論), originally composed in Sanskrit and later translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva ([鳩摩羅什], 343/344–413) (Hwang 1975). As a multilingual Buddhist ecclesiastic immersed in both Vedantic and Indian erudition, Kumārajīva had a pioneering influence in Buddhism's spread among the Chinese people (Fan 2016; Kantor 2014; Yang 2004). Through the efforts of missionaries and translators such as Kumārajīva and the Buddhists who preceded him, the Chinese people developed and retained an interest in Buddhism (Boucher 2006; Chan 1958). The *Sulpaga* folktale eventually turned up again in *Fayuan zhulin* (*Forest of Gems in the Garden of the Dharma* [法苑珠林])—a Tang Dynasty compilation dating to the year 670. Hwang compares the plotlines of *Sulpaga* (as preserved in the *Dazhidu lun* and the *Fayuan zhulin*) and the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter. In this comparison, he points out the fundamental similarity between the two tales—namely, the theme of a lowborn man visibly enamored with a person of noble or royal lineage. In both stories, the lady contravenes the expectations of a rigid social hierarchy by showing a token of appreciation for the importuning person (Hwang 1975).

Despite these tantalizing similarities, Hwang feels that he does not have enough information in order to make a judgment on whether to characterize the Seondeok–Jigwi

encounter as a longer retelling of the *Sulpaga* folktale. On the other hand, he mentions a key point on the nature and survival of Korean folktales through time: "[. . .] secondary recreation is possible through an expansion and abridgement of the proper meaning of a tale by a writer or a transmitter (Hwang 1975)". If one takes Hwang's basic argument and extrapolates that argument further, then he confirms the foundational processes of "expansion and abridgement" through which folktales evolve over time. As emphasized before, this evolution takes place through the abovementioned processes of faithful recounting and/or creative interpretation. If treated with judicious discernment, creative modern retellings/translations of the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter can offer provisional conjectures on the types of refinements that might have plausibly occurred during the narrative's transition from oral traditions to the permanent media of the written word. At the very least, such creative retellings can offer possible reconstructions of the atmosphere of the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative. As it turns out, scholars can feel reasonably sure that the Seondeok–Jigwi story probably went through several creative retellings before the ancient writers finally transcribed the tale. Concrete evidence for this hypothesis arguably comes in the form of the small *Samguk yusa* reference to the ending of the tale. The scholar Frits Vos correctly says that this reference would have meant nothing to someone unfamiliar with the entirety of the tale (Vos 1981). When Iryeon put this reference down on paper, he likely assumed that his audience had prior knowledge of the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter—specifically, knowledge of the events that preceded the burning of Jigwi. One can only speculate on the degree to which peasant recounters of the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative had extemporized on those events.

More insights on the historical (as well as international) dimensions of the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative came from the pioneering research of In Gwonhwan (인권환), who opined on the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative as a product of Buddhism's transmission from India and the efforts of Buddhist storytellers. These storytellers inserted Buddhist elements into an otherwise banal narrative about a lowly subject desiring to see Seondeok (In 1968). In other words, In affirms the historicity of the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative, even if that historicity became overlaid with various attempts to transform Jigwi into an actor in an event that testified to a monarch's Buddhist devotion. In's characterization of the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative as grounded in history should naturally lead scholars to wonder about whether Jigwi actually lived as a person in real life. The ancient accounts describe Jigwi as a post station (驛) staff member, and this kind of position had some history in the Silla kingdom (Gwon [1589] 1970, [1589] 2008). As the *Samguk sagi* notes, in year nine (487) of the rulership of Silla elevated chieftain Soji (소지 마립간 [*maripgan*] [炤知麻立干], r. 479–500), the government set up postal stations (驛) in various areas (Kim [1145] 1997b, [1145] 2012b, 2005; Lee 1984). Michael Pettid calls attention to the fact of how postal station staff persons came from the ranks of slaves through birth, and this fact of hereditary enslavement obviously served as an affirmation of the inflexibility of the Silla social hierarchy (Pettid et al. 2018). For many centuries—and indeed, even long after the Silla kingdom's sunset—the phenomenon of hereditary enslavement in the peninsula's stations continued unabated in the Korean peninsula. In the census records of 1708, for instance, the Joseon Dynasty authorities referred to a private female slave's maternal grandfather as a station clerk (驛吏) (Kim 2016a).

One can almost sense a curious irony going on in the chronicles of the premodern Korean peninsula. For centuries, the state essentially doomed lowborn individuals to lives of ceaseless misery, but the same state had to stay assiduous in keeping records to guarantee everybody's awareness of the hierarchy. This assiduousness also entailed the necessity of making sure that peasants could not even think about trying to successfully rebel against an oppressive state. In short, the state could ill afford to casually ignore the concerns of the peasantry. The *Samguk sagi* chronicles about Seondeok say much more about her foreign policy with Tang China and far less about the nuances of peasant worries, but sometimes, the silence of records can still prove illuminating. As the scholar Jeongshin Lee argues, the phenomenon of peasant revolts actually mattering to the state's elites would not re-

ally come to the Silla kingdom until Kim Heonchang's rebellion in 822, during the reign of King Heondeok (헌덕왕 [憲德王], r. 809–826), and even then, the revolt still required the assistance of various disgruntled elites (Lee 2000). During the next section of this article, the author will more closely examine the question of whether peasant revolts might have occurred in the time of Jigwi, but for now, this introductory section on sources and historiography emphasizes the probable historical existence of Jigwi in the context of previously existing scholarship on the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative.

Other studies of the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter have not only continued debates on the enigmatic origins of the *Silla sui jeon*, but also offered commentaries on how tales such as this one factor into the evolution of literature on the Korean peninsula. This literary evolution, in turn, serves as an illustration of the relatively slow development of the Korean peninsula since prehistoric times. This reality particularly applied to the southeastern areas, where Chinese influences developed later than in the northern regions that more directly experienced the impact of the Middle Kingdom. For Michael Pettid, who built upon the foundations of Jo Dongil's pioneering efforts on chronicling the history of Korean literature from ancient times to the end of World War II, the *Silla sui jeon* narratives serve as the Korean peninsula's oldest extant writings on imaginary topics. As such, the *Silla sui jeon* narratives exemplify the Korean peninsula's proud traditions of skillfully weaving the craft of orality with the craft of freestyle composition. As Pettid argues, these traditions might have existed in only a kernel form during the Three Kingdoms era, but these traditions would ultimately blossom into the rich novels of the Joseon Dynasty (Pettid et al. 2018). The *Silla sui jeon* emerged from a Silla world nominally Buddhist at the national level, yet religiously pluralistic in orientation. One should remember the fact that the Silla kingdom—a kingdom that initially emerged in the southeastern regions of the peninsula—had enjoyed a degree of shelter from the direct coercion of the Han Commanderies (한사군 [漢四郡], 108 BCE–313 CE). In other words, the peninsula's longstanding proclivities of gradual development, retention of indigenous nature cults, and receptiveness to unrefined expressions of Daoism would continue to have certain lingering influences in the Silla kingdom. In the meantime, the philosophical complexities and intricacies of Confucian philosophy would have some prominence in the Silla royal court, but not outside that court. Neo-Confucianism's towering influence over Korean culture, and that philosophy's erosive influence on supernatural belief systems such as Buddhism, had not yet come, and the Confucians and Buddhists of the Silla royal court appear to have accommodated each other without an abundance of unnecessarily awkward drama (occasional exceptions notwithstanding).

This research article uses the Stith Thompson classification system, a system named after the folklorist Stith Thompson (1885–1976), as a methodology for analyzing the Jigwi folktale. After presenting a justification for the usage of the Stith Thompson classification system, this article will use that system and related folkloric insights in an attempt to uncover various realities relating to the life and times of Queen Seondeok at the time of the Jigwi folktale. Although she started her reign 105 years after the traditional date in which Buddhism became the official faith of Silla, Seondeok did not govern a state hermeneutically sealed in Buddhism to the exclusion of other beliefs (Kim 2010a). Exaggerated imagery of her army aside, Seondeok, who ruled before the unification of the peninsula, probably could not expect to simply impose Buddhism on everyone. The existence of an official faith belied the existence of local belief systems that predated Buddhism.

As long as the annals of Silla Buddhism remain subsumed in a narrative possibly more apocryphal than historical, finding the true story of the role of faith in the time of Seondeok will prove difficult. The difficulty of separating history from fiction, or mining through a scarcity of sources, nonetheless lends interest to even the most tentative conclusions. The author of this study hopes to explain the ways in which this folktale offers a snapshot in time of an intensely complicated Silla world. In this world, factors of cultural splendor, the power of personal queenship, an evolving presentation of Buddhism, and a profoundly complicated religious landscape converged in ways that defined the

folktale's arguable core of believable events—patently fictitious religious miracles notwithstanding. While the author understands the possibility of limitations posed by two important chroniclers/compliers (i.e., Iryeon and Gwon Munhae) who may have utilized worldviews rather divergent from the worldviews that may have prevailed at the time of the supposed Seondeok–Jigwi encounter, the possibility of uncovering even the most provisional insights can spark a healthy academic discussion long overdue in debates on the vicissitudes of Queen Seondeok's reign and kingdom.

2. A Rationale for the Stith Thompson Classification System as a Cornerstone for Scholarly Reflection

Replete with miracles, the Jigwi tale as presented in both the *Samguk yusa* and the *Daedong unbu gunok* has many folkloric elements. The historicity of the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter also factors into the tale's usefulness for gleaning details on Seondeok's character. In exploring these issues, one might assume the existence of an antithetical relationship between the supposedly contrived nature of folklore and the cold objectivity of history. For the sake of disproving this assumption, the cultural anthropologist Arthur Campa firmly rejected the simplistic tendency of placing history and folklore in categories utterly and totally exclusive to one another. Campa argued for how historical narratives emerge from retellings deeply embedded in the oral narratives of a culture. He then plausibly claimed that the intensification of complexities and nuances in the historical discipline caused that discipline to branch away from folklore. On the other hand, history and folklore remain inextricably connected because the architects of history and the architects of folklore share an interest in prioritizing the preservation of humankind's annals (Campa 1965). If one applies Campa's view to the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative, then one can discover certain basic realities of the Silla kingdom. According to these basic realities, Buddhism resonated with the people, and a queen could—for whatever reason (or no reason at all)—act benevolently towards her subjects.

Through reflections on universal folktale motifs present in the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter, one may more properly understand certain historical realities that might have existed at the time of the narrative. This process requires an index of themes found in folktales around the world and across the centuries of humankind's existence. Although based mostly on tales from Western Civilization, the Stith Thompson classification system contains themes that transcend culture, space, and time. Such timeless motifs can help scholars to uncover realities about specific cultures. The careful study of the folktale as a unit for understanding the culture of that folktale's society had diligent students before the time of Stith Thompson's career, but modern academics credit Thompson with a profoundly insightful unification of two notions once regarded as separate before his time—namely, the notion of scientifically classifying a folktale's elements, and the notion of academically studying a folktale as a cultural artifact of that folktale's society (Dorson 1977; Martin 2007). It would seem that vast geographic distances between the world's premodern cultures exist as prima facie evidence for the profundity of differences between those cultures. Stith Thompson accepts this premise, but he also carefully argues for the necessity of "immemorial tradition" as an indispensable cornerstone of any culture's folkloric output (Thompson 1964). Stith Thompson's insistence on the universality of "immemorial tradition" as a construct across global cultures helps to insulate his classification system from criticisms of appearing too focused on Western folktales. The folklorist Alan Dundes successfully refuted this criticism by calling attention to Thompson's extensive use of non-European folkloric themes and motifs—particularly themes and motifs drawn from oral (as opposed to written) traditions (Dundes 1997).

In Seondeok's kingdom, the concept of "immemorial tradition" as understood by Stith Thompson would have entailed reverence for the ruler, and the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative certainly qualifies as a tribute to the supposedly wonderful personality of the queen. The tribute function of the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative did not exist as some haphazard product of a chronicler's emotions. Thompson, like other folklorists of the modern era, had

long argued for the intentionality of folklore. In other words, as academics like to say, the composer/compiler of a folktale has long internalized the notion of folklore as a means of triumphantly presenting the eternal and timeless majesty of a culture's folkloric tradition (Šmidchens 1999). This triumphal presentation comes across as a deliberate and willful (intentional, in other words) act of the composer/compiler (i.e., Gwon Munhae in the illustration of the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative).

The justification for utilizing the Stith Thompson index as the basis for a reflection on the Jigwi episode stems from various considerations that include the definition of folklore and the need for a systematic method to properly dissect the various elements of the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter. Although an exhaustive compilation of definitions of folklore lies beyond the scope of this paper, a clear academic consensus exists in which scholars believe in folklore as a unit of analysis for the interpretation of the past. The ethnographer Charles Marius Barbeau refers to transcribed records as legitimately belonging to the world of folklore studies, and Barbeau firmly embraces the notion of these records as pregnant with cultural insights. One may naturally conclude that Barbeau would have seen the folkloric accounts of the *Samguk yusa* and the *Daedong unbu gunok* as legitimate units of analysis in discernment on the religious landscape of the Silla realm. The scholar Benjamin Albert Botkin speaks of how folklore exists as a universally accepted (obvious, in other words) form of common sense to any individual who might have formed the initial audience of some folktale. Seondeok's most devoted adherents would have almost certainly accepted Seondeok-related folktales as plainly self-evident affirmations of the greatness of Silla culture. The folklorist Aurelio Macedonio Espinosa links two endeavors together—namely, the scientific categorization of folkloric themes/motifs, and the task of analyzing the cultural aspects signified by those themes/motifs. The folklorist Archer Taylor emphasizes the need to carefully and discerningly systematize recurring and unique themes and motifs found across all folktales, but Taylor does not artificially restrict the science of folklore studies to the mere systemization of data. Taylor views the analysis of folktale themes and motifs as a task inseparable from the classification of those themes and motifs (Leach 1972). In short, the existence of the folkloric discipline imposes a solemn obligation on the scholar of the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter. The researcher must endeavor to reflect upon the account by focusing on the most realistic and plausible elements as cornerstones of the political, religious, and social life of the Silla kingdom.

3. The Seondeok–Jigwi Encounter: A Folkloric Analysis

As recounted by Gwon Munhae (who, in turn, depends on the *Silla sui jeon*), the first reference to Queen Seondeok in the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative occurs with her arrival at a Buddhist temple. As both the physical and philosophical backdrop of the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative, the Buddhist temple symbolizes the fusion of the national enshrinement of Buddhism as the official Silla ideology with the presence of an institutionalized Buddhism that stayed loyal to the faith's monarchical patron. Modern scholarship has broadly confirmed this reality, even if this fusion of religious and political power occasionally had tension-filled moments according to the vicissitudes of Buddhism's relations with the state (Kim 2004, 2010b). The story describes Seondeok as a sovereign who wished to dignify a Buddhist ceremony through her attendance (Gwon [1589] 1970, [1589] 2008). As a conferral of prestige, the physical appearance of Seondeok at a Buddhist rite illustrates the Stith Thompson parallel motif of honor as a reward (Q113.0.1) (Thompson 1975f). Buddhism enjoyed a privileged station in the Silla kingdom because of royal patronage. Since the story describes her presence at the temple as a visit, Seondeok probably had no real obligation to come, but the *Samguk sagi* court records apparently show the queen's desire to personally invest her time in temple visits (Gwon [1589] 1970, [1589] 2008; Kim [1145] 1997c, [1145] 2012c). Assuming that they had proper dispositions in humble virtue, Buddhist clerics of the Silla period probably did not want to arrogantly elevate themselves over the monarchy; in 608, after all, the monk Won-gwang (원광 [圓光], 541–c. 630) famously described himself as a person who wasted the sovereign's food (Gakhun [1215] 1969). Seon-

deok's decision to come to the ceremony reveals, at least outwardly, a genuine commitment to the Buddhist faith. In the lens of folkloric analysis, Seondeok, through her physical visit, honored the virtuously disposed Buddhist clerics who preferred to withdraw into lives of religious contemplation and not become immersed in self-aggrandizing and secular attempts at political influence.

Of course, alternative interpretations arguably exist for this theme of honor as a reward. As shown by the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative, Seondeok ruled as a monarch who could dignify others through her mere presence. The folklorist Marcia Lieberman has argued for how women can dream about their future lives by living vicariously through powerful female characters in fairy tales. One measurement of a girl's attraction to a fairy tale can come in the form of her assessment of the rewards that a heroic woman can give or receive; in other words, girls will feel more drawn to tales in which powerful female protagonists prove capable of giving and receiving rewards (Lieberman 1972). Although no historical documentation exists on the reactions that girls would have felt after listening to the Jigwi tale, a system of rewards clearly existed in the Silla kingdom, even if the relevant authorities seemed to more frequently confer these rewards upon men. At the time of Seondeok, for instance, people who demonstrated their skills in archery could probably find rewards in the form of appointments to the civil bureaucracy (Kim [1145] 1997d, [1145] 2012d). For individuals lacking in skills conducive to bureaucratic appointments, talent on the battlefield existed as an alternative pathway to recognition from the state. Regarding developments that matured in the sixth and seventh centuries of the Silla kingdom, various scholars have commented on systems of rewards granted for demonstrations of military competence. These increasingly sophisticated reward systems would ultimately call attention to the rising levels of majesty and confidence that the monarchy wished to display (Go 2021).

As one would naturally expect, the prospect of state rewards for women during the time of Seondeok existed as a bleaker possibility than the prospect of state rewards for loyal generals. On the other hand, women of Seondeok's time would have surely known this reality. This knowledge, in turn, would have encouraged a Silla lady to internalize a differing notion (in comparison to a man's anticipation of gifts from the state) of meaningful or significant rewards. The evidence for this notion in the ancient Korean peninsula comes in the story of Princess Pyeonggang (평강공주 [平岡公主]), who lived in the Goguryeo (고구려 [高句麗], 37 BCE–668 CE) realms during the reign of Pyeongwon of Goguryeo (평원왕 [平原王], r. 559–590). In the story as recounted by the *Samguk sagi*, Princess Pyeonggang contravenes the hierarchical expectations of her noble family and marries Ondal (온달 [溫達], d. 590), who hails from a lower social class. On paper, the lady's decision elevates the socially inferior husband, but she also does everything in her power to make sure that he fulfills his potential as a member of the noble vanguard entrusted with protecting the kingdom. The husband then becomes a skilled general. Although the husband tragically dies on the battlefield, his coffin refuses to move unless his widow touches the coffin and sends the husband away (Kim [1145] 1997e, [1145] 2015a). As Sookja Cho argues, the princess's story shows how, even in death, the husband continued to shower the honor of devotion on his dedicated lifetime companion (Cho 2016). Just as Princess Pyeonggang internalized the notion of living as a vessel of embodying, receiving, and giving signs of generosity for her beloved husband, so too did Seondeok exemplify a woman's capability in embodying, receiving, and giving signs of generosity for the Buddhist faith. The Seondeok–Jigwi encounter would have served as a story that arguably existed within Lieberman's folkloric notion of a corpus of narratives intended to inspire women.

After leaving the ceremony, Seondeok finds herself greeted by well-wishers, but a person named Jigwi does not content himself with simply participating in the crowd's accolades. As someone representing a lower social position than that of the queen, Jigwi has the duty to stay in the crowd and avoid burdening the queen with requests, but he nonetheless presents his own request. If he can see her face (even if only for a moment), then he

will proclaim a joyful readiness to meet his end. This sequence of events exists as a creative reimagining of the two modern English translators of the Jigwi tale (Ha 1962; Korean Spirit and Culture Promotion Project 2014). While no one should simplistically assume that the cultures of the Three Kingdoms (57 BCE–668 CE) and Unified Silla (668–935) eras remained static over time, the event of crowds surrounding a royal entourage or some royal event seems plausible enough across the centuries of Silla's existence. In 527, the execution of Ichadon (이차돈 [異次頓])—the devout Buddhist whose martyrdom would encourage the Silla kingdom's conversion to Buddhism—happened in an event that had the attendance of the monarch as well as the monarch's humble subjects (Iryeon [1281] 1972c, [1281] 1997c). Both the *Samguk sagi* and the *Samguk yusa* indicate that the final Silla monarch's resolution to end his dynasty resulted in his participation in a long carriage party that attracted crowds (Kim [1145] 1997f, [1145] 2012e; Iryeon [1281] 1972d, [1281] 1997d). The two paraphrastic translations also call attention to the way in which a very talkative Jigwi becomes captivated by Seondeok's beauty. In the older paraphrastic translation, Jigwi says that he will die for the sake of just looking at the queen once (Ha 1962). In the more recent paraphrastic translation, Jigwi calls out Seondeok's name all day long (Korean Spirit and Culture Promotion Project 2014). By way of contrast, the *Daedong unbu gunok* source simply describes a crying Jigwi who becomes physically fatigued from the unfulfilled expectation of seeing the queen's face (Gwon [1589] 1970, [1589] 2008). As a matter of fact, the original account does not provide any spoken dialogue for Jigwi at all.

Since the *Daedong unbu gunok* source does not give any spoken words to Jigwi, scholars have to rely on the narrative's laconic description of Jigwi as a person who adores Queen Seondeok on account of her beauty (Gwon [1589] 1970, [1589] 2008). In this sense, the modern translations and the *Daedong unbu gunok* generally agree on Seondeok's beauty—a beauty that, in turn, aligns with the Stith Thompson parallel motif of a beautiful woman (F575.1) (Thompson 1975a). The folklorist Jeana Jorgensen has urged scholars of folklore to view a folktale character's beauty as a fluid construct that covers a variety of criteria (and not just the criteria of physical beauty) (Jorgensen 2019). Scholars who investigate the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter should keep Jorgensen's exhortation in mind as a guiding research methodology, and indeed, the ancient but secondary *Samguk sagi* and *Samguk yusa* accounts appear to focus more on the beauty of Seondeok's humanity, munificence, and wisdom. The laconic *Daedong unbu gunok* version of the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter does not offer details on the specific reasons for the beauty of Seondeok, but then again, neither the *Samguk sagi* nor the *Samguk yusa* offers intensely detailed or exhaustive descriptions of how the Silla people defined womanly beauty. Perhaps the original storytellers of the Jigwi tale simply assumed that listeners would have already known the meaning of feminine beauty as defined by the Silla kingdom, but this assumption means that modern readers can only wonder about the precise dimensions of Seondeok's beauty. The task of pinning down precise definitions of feminine beauty in the Silla era has attracted the efforts of archaeologists, interpreters of ancient sources, and other academics. According to scholars of historical fashion trends, the Silla kingdom recognized several categories of beauty, with some emphasis on the elegance of textiles and decorations (Kim and Chae 2013). A more exhaustive recapitulation of present-day scholarship on the nature of beauty in the Silla kingdom functions as a task beyond the ambit of this article, and furthermore, any attempt to dissect the nature of Seondeok's beauty would exist as something closer to a speculative exercise.

On the other hand, academics would seem to rest on firmer ground in moving away from fruitless attempts at pinning down the precise dimensions of Seondeok's beauty and moving towards the notion of feminine beauty as a motivator of significant events in the Three Kingdoms era. The literary canon of the Korean peninsula abounds with narrative examples of the ways in which womanly beauty could serve as a catalyst for pivotal moments in the annals of the Korean peninsula. At least some citizens of the Silla kingdom would have certainly internalized this idea and appreciated the extent to which Seondeok's beauty could motivate her subjects. The tale of "Suro Buin (수로부인)", also known

as "Lady Suro (水路夫人)" or "Lady of the Waters", details the beauty of the wife of a bureaucrat who lived during the reign of the Silla monarch Seongdeok (성덕왕 [聖德王], r. 702–737). Since this wife apparently had no equal in her beauty, even gods and dragons found themselves attracted to her. A dragon of the deep sea decided to steal Lady Suro away, much to the dismay of her husband, who then went through tremendous exertions to save his wife. On the other hand, the wife seems to have passed her time in a highly benign form of captivity, since she described the bottom of the sea as full of culinary delicacies. The dragon apparently must have felt so enamored of Lady Suro that the prospect of harming her would have seemed unthinkable (Iryeon [1281] 1972e, [1281] 1997e). The name of a beautiful lady once loved by the famous Silla general Kim Yusin (김유신 [金庾信], 595–673) became the namesake of a Buddhist temple (Iryeon [1281] 1972f, [1281] 1997f). Beauty, of course, could also potentially serve as a motivator for bad decisions. At the age of twenty, before becoming King Gyeongmun of Silla (경문왕 [景文王], r. 861–875), the *hwarang* warrior Kim Eung-ryeom (김응렴 [金膺廉]) found himself at a banquet where he met his future monarchical predecessor, King Heonan (헌안왕 [憲安王], r. 857–861). Eung-ryeom's wisdom deeply impressed King Heonan, who promptly offered the *hwarang* warrior the privilege of choosing one of the monarch's two daughters for marriage. Although Eung-ryeom initially deferred to his parents' advice in choosing the younger and prettier daughter, he eventually followed a wise monk's advice and opted for the older and less aesthetically gifted daughter. By privileging wisdom over an intuitively satisfying choice (namely, the selection of the prettier girl), Eung-ryeom obtained many blessings in his life (Iryeon [1281] 1972g, [1281] 1997g). The critical point lies in how love existed as an emotion that literary writers viewed as a motivator for people across the Silla kingdom's centuries. The heyday of Confucianism had not yet come in the Three Kingdoms era, and what Peter Hacksoo Lee describes as Confucianism's attempts to denigrate passionate love as some unrefined sentiment had not yet arrived (Lee 2003).

Jigwi's love for the queen should strike any historian of this period as very curious. While the narrative leaves no doubts over the sincerity of his affection, Jigwi showed a desire that arguably contravened an intrinsically Buddhist elevation of the spiritual world over the temporal world. Through a *Haedong goseungjeon* (*Lives of Eminent Korean Monks* [해동고승전] [海東高僧傳], 1215) reference to the action of transcending the forgettable transience of the world, one can glean an image of how Silla Buddhists emphasized the preeminence of spiritual matters. In this *Haedong goseungjeon* reference, the Silla monk Anham (안함 [安含], d. 640) embodied this spirituality by believing that an enlightened Buddhist could rise into the sky or walk on top of the water with the ease of someone walking up a staircase or walking on the earth (Gakhun [1215] 1969). One should, of course, remember the fact that not everyone in the Silla population internalized the need for Buddhist definitions of enlightenment. Academic scholarship has broadly described Silla Buddhism as a missionary faith expression for which acolytes immersed themselves in travel for the purposes of edification, the transmission of the faith in foreign lands such as Japan, and visits to sacred places in China and India (Buswell 2009; Grayson 2002). By way of contrast, as a lowly post station staff member, Jigwi surely lacked both the disposable time and the financial resources to work on refining his Buddhist piety (if that religiosity even existed at all) in the ways of Buddhist missionaries (Gwon [1589] 1970, [1589] 2008). The Seondeok–Jigwi narrative also seems to indicate that Jigwi eschewed any desire for enlightenment, since he only wanted a physical sighting of the queen. In other words, during the seventh century, the appeal of Buddhism did not exert an absolute hold on everyone in the Silla kingdom. Jigwi's unique actions offer a glimpse into the motivations behind people who did not necessarily typify every nuance of Buddhist piety. Even in a climate saturated with lofty appeals to enlightenment, simple personal desires could trump the theological complexities of Buddhism.

To the royal bodyguards who physically discourage Jigwi from trying to approach the queen, Jigwi's wish borders on utter ridiculousness. This absurd desire, classified as a nonsensical wish parallel motif of the Stith Thompson index (J2079), emphasizes the ways

in which Jigwi continues to dream about seeing the queen despite obvious hindrances that would have discouraged almost anyone else in Jigwi's position (Thompson 1975c). According to the story, even the commoners ridicule Jigwi because they see him as a nonentity who needs coddling as opposed to compassion. It seems as if the people think that Jigwi will never see the queen anyway, and they allow him to approach the queen simply for the sheer amusement of watching the guards reject him. Despite this clear victory in at least overcoming the crowd's resistance to his plan, Jigwi lacks awareness of how much he has progressed towards his ultimate goal. After the guards push him away, he reaffirms his love for the queen (Ha 1962; Korean Spirit and Culture Promotion Project 2014).

In comparison to the scholarly literature regarding the meaning of womanly beauty in folklore, folkloric discussion on the absurd desire seems rather sparse. On the other hand, since folkloric studies draw inspiration from interdisciplinary reflection, a turn to the thoughts of the famous German essayist Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) may provide some insight into Jigwi's mindset at this point in the narrative. Benjamin writes about the ironic notion of how a literary character can exchange a desire for the fulfillment of that desire, thereby effectively conceding to the reality of a fulfilled wish's negative consequences (Benjamin 1968). The lady who desires wealth knows that this desire might turn her into an arrogant materialist, and the devoutly religious single male who desires a girlfriend knows that this desire might lead to the forfeiture of his chastity before marriage. Jigwi would have surely known that his desire to meet Seondeok would have resulted in resistance from bodyguards who could have physically harmed him. In other words, Jigwi's awareness of the seriousness of Silla's royal bodyguard culture would have deepened his understanding of the potentially grave consequences associated with his ardor for the queen. Exploring this hypothesis on Jigwi's mindset requires a reflection on the royal bodyguard culture that might have existed in the time of Seondeok.

The interactions between the commoners, Seondeok's guards, and Jigwi appear to have existed as creative interpretations of the modern English translators. On the other hand, this attempt at reconstruction warrants an analysis because of the possible insights that one can glean about the Silla state, even if those insights remain restricted to hypotheses regarding the upper classes. Despite the predictably incomplete nature of the evidence, the royal bodyguard culture had clearly evolved in the Korean peninsula, testifying to the complex and embryonically centralizing tendencies of a Seondeok-era state on the cusp of unifying the warring kingdoms of Baekje (백제 [百濟], 18 CE–660 CE), Goguryeo, and Silla. Sometimes, archaeologists who have uncovered Goguryeo tomb murals wonder whether the depicted figures show imperial bodyguards, thereby testifying to the uncertainty that scholars have regarding the typical appearance of bodyguards from one of the Three Kingdoms (Jeon 2006). Despite such uncertainties, academics would seem to rest on firmer ground in hypothesizing upon the extent to which the ancient Korean peninsula had internalized the significance of having a strong imperial bodyguard at the time of Queen Seondeok. For the year 405, the Baekje chronicles of the *Samguk sagi* refer to the Baekje crown prince's acceptance of assistance in the form of one hundred guards from Baekje's trusted diplomatic partner—namely, the Yamato Kingdom of the Japanese archipelago. The crown prince found himself abroad during the murder of the provisional head of a caretaker government intended to only function until the return of the crown prince, so the crown prince had to quickly return to restore order (Kim [1145] 1997g, [1145] 2015b). During the Three Kingdoms era, royal bodyguards would have existed as manifestations of the visual splendor and affluence of the monarch. The decision of a diplomatic partner (Yamato) to essentially donate bodyguards to Baekje would have emphasized not only the generosity of an East Asian archipelago, but also the Baekje kingdom's appreciation for such a gesture, since a well-developed civilization would have profoundly recognized the significance of receiving an armed escort of so many men. While one should not simplistically view the royal bodyguard cultures of Baekje and Goguryeo as placeholders for Silla's royal bodyguard culture (i.e., by assuming that all three kingdoms evolved in the same way in terms of ideas on how to protect the monarch), the limited archaeological and

documentary evidence suggests a general awareness of the significance of having royal bodyguards in the Silla kingdom.

Of course, any discussion of the nature of the royal bodyguard culture in Seondeok's realm should not ignore the influence of the *hwarang* (화랑 [花郞])—the so-called Flower Youth who represented the vanguard of defending the integrity and existence of the Silla kingdom. Although their role in the peninsula's unification had not yet become fully clear for everyone to see during the reign of Seondeok, the *hwarang* epitomized a unity of erudition and martial skill that symbolized both the cultural fruit and prowess of the nation. In their youth membership, the *hwarang* existed as Silla's attempt to reconcile an ancient past of youth associations with the royal prerogative of King Jinheung (진흥왕 [眞興王], r. 540–576). In issuing his royal prerogative, the king intended to systematically organize those youth associations. The key point of the Flower Youth's existence rested in the group's mission of respecting the doctrines of Buddha, the doctrines of Confucius, and the doctrines of Daoism. The Silla chronicles of the *Samguk sagi* refer to three teachings that the *hwarang* optimally internalized. These teachings included (1) the promotion of goodness alongside the avoidance of evil (Buddhism), (2) loyalty to the family alongside loyalty to the nation (Confucianism), and (3) wordless edification in the spirit of Daoism (Kim [1145] 1997h, [1145] 2012f). The scholar James Huntley Grayson describes the continued maturation of the *hwarang* as a product of the efforts of the abovementioned monk Won-gwang. On the other hand, Grayson's characterization of the *hwarang* as an order that syncretized the belief systems of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism appears to contravene a scholarly consensus that emphasizes the religious pluralism of the Silla kingdom (Grayson 2002). Although one cannot indicate the precise dimensions of royal bodyguard involvement and *hwarang* involvement in the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative, the hypothesized presence of both types of protectors in Seondeok's entourage would have symbolized the complexity, interactivity, and pluralism that existed within Silla's faith traditions and philosophies.

Jigwi's ignorance of everyone around him in the story (except Seondeok) only underscores his unflinching attraction to the queen. As an expression of the Stith Thompson parallel motif of general obliviousness (J1749), Jigwi's behavior at this point in the story truly assumes ridiculous proportions (Thompson 1975d). His ignorance accounts for his decision to remain physically tied to the area of the queen's visit, and he refuses to concede. In Jigwi's perception of events, he cannot and will not retreat from what he aimed to do from the beginning. Since nothing can discourage him from giving up, he continues to persevere in his desire for a meeting with the queen. His simple wish—an idea basic to folkloric literature—encompasses the parallel motif of a happiness quest (H1376.6) (Thompson 1975b). Jigwi will either succeed or fail in this quest, but for Jigwi, every hindrance that comes to him does not constitute failure. In his blissful naiveté, Jigwi cannot even intellectually understand the reality of having obstacles in his quest (Ha 1962; Korean Spirit and Culture Promotion Project 2014).

From the perspective of folkloric analysis, Jigwi's happiness quest provides an opportunity through which scholars can contrast the literary presentation of Jigwi's passion with the ways in which the Silla kingdom broadly defined happiness. Jigwi's definition of happiness greatly differed from the notions of happiness as defined by the kingdom. In the long centuries of Silla's existence, it seems that the chroniclers preferred to emphasize happiness as an idea that entailed everyone living lives of peace. This idea clearly antedated the rise of Buddhism in the peninsula; during the early part of his reign, the Silla successor prince Yuri (유리 이사금 [*isageum*] [儒理尼師今], r. 24–57) felt saddened to see the misery of his citizens. He then urged his bureaucracy to care for the poor and marginalized subjects of his realm, and this initiative brought peace and happiness to the kingdom (Kim [1145] 1997i, [1145] 2012g; Lee 1984). During the first year of the reign of the Silla successor prince Naehae (내해 이사금 [*isageum*] [奈解尼師今], r. 196–230), droughts left the people despondent, but the coronation of the monarch coincided with a rainfall that resulted in the happiness of the people (Kim [1145] 1997j, [1145] 2012h; Lee 1984). In short, Jigwi's happiness quest seems to have existed for one and only one person—namely, Jigwi

himself—while the Silla kingdom's apologists viewed the prosperity of the nation as the more important definition of happiness. The Seondeok–Jigwi narrative therefore plainly illustrates competing visions of happiness in the time of the queen. This phenomenon, moreover, carries cross-cultural dimensions. As the philosopher Svavar Hrafn Svavarsson has argued, the emergence of the natural law tradition in Europe created an environment in which individuals learned to subordinate their individualistically hedonistic proclivities to the protection of the soul and, ultimately, the welfare of the kingdom (Svavarsson 2015). As the evidence of the historical chronicles clearly shows, the Silla kingdom, working independently of medieval Europe, also developed a notion of happiness that entailed the subordination of individual desires to the welfare of the nation.

Of course, as the discussion returns to the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter, it becomes clear that the modern English translators have amplified the intensity of Jigwi's desire to see the queen. Still, the ancient source material plainly refers to Jigwi becoming utterly exhausted in his efforts to wait for Seondeok's presence (Gwon [1589] 1970, [1589] 2008). Given the sincerity of Jigwi's desire to see Seondeok, and given Jigwi's modest position as an enslaved person working at a post station, the question of the true nature of Seondeok's popularity becomes a topic that deserves some reflection. Although the lack of public opinion surveys among Silla's citizens makes it impossible to discern the extent to which the citizens truly admired her as much as Jigwi did, the more important question turns upon the extent to which apologists for the monarchy tried to reinforce Seondeok's prestige. Many authorities have commented on the nature of Seondeok's flattering treatment in the *Samguk sagi* and the *Samguk yusa*—particularly with regard to her supposedly prophetic abilities (Adams 1986; Kim 2008; Lee 2004; Shin 2012).

If scholars simply take the *Samguk sagi* and *Samguk yusa* accounts at face value, then Seondeok's popularity—a popularity that arguably played some role in attracting Jigwi—had almost entirely personal dimensions. The modern English translators of the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative certainly presented this image, but this image likely distorts a far more complicated reality. A significant part of Seondeok's appeal had to do with her incredibly privileged background—a background that she had simply by virtue of her birth. As one scholar notes, in the time of Seondeok, the Silla monarchy's protectors had definite plans to glorify and sanctify the image of the queen, thereby buttressing Seondeok's divine lineage (Ku 2019). As the scholar Jungyoung Lee notes, the peoples of the Korean peninsula had long acknowledged their own divine origins, and this reality meant that rulers could have discourse with the heavens (Lee 1973). Over the centuries since the Korean civilization's supposed formation, however, the sovereigns had slowly but deliberately transitioned into managing the intensity of bureaucratic concerns more relevant to the governance of the peninsula. In contenting themselves with the management of earthly affairs, the sovereigns preferred to delegate the prerogative of heavenly discourse to the shamans of the peninsula. Still, the Silla sovereigns never quite forgot their roles as the chief intermediaries between the spiritual and temporal realms. As James Huntley Grayson contends, this role of the chief intermediary now existed not between the people and the gods of the peninsula's indigenous expressions of folk religiosity, but rather between the people and Buddha (Grayson 1984).

On the other hand, the Silla monarchs could sometimes forget their spiritual dimensions and become decidedly political, depending on the circumstances. This overt politicization would have also served to underscore Seondeok's prominence, and this prominence would have almost certainly deepened Jigwi's expectation of meeting his sovereign. During the seventh century, the Silla monarchy always sought to remind Buddhist monks of the loyalty that those clerics owed to the state. This loyalty could theoretically even trump the tenets of the Buddhist faith. When Won-gwang viewed himself as a monk who wasted the monarch's food in the abovementioned incident of 608, the utterance happened in the context of how King Jinpyeong (진평왕 [眞平王], r. 579–632) had asked the cleric to assist in the composition of a request for military assistance from the Chinese Sui Dynasty (수나라 [隋朝], 581–618) in a military expedition against the Goguryeo kingdom (Gakhun

[1215] 1969). Although the prospect of facilitating a violent military campaign seemed theologically abhorrent to the pacifism of Won-gwang's faith, the monk ultimately acceded to the king's wishes. The scholar Sanghyun Kim notes that the mere fact of living in the Silla sovereign's physical kingdom made the Buddhist clergy utterly beholden to the monarchy. This reality remained constant throughout the latter half of the Silla kingdom's existence, and indeed, the Korean peninsula's Buddhist ecclesiastics seem to have followed the examples of Sui and Tang Chinese Buddhist monks who similarly showed deference to the national authorities, even when those authorities asked the monks to do things that arguably contravened the spirit of Buddhist doctrines (Kim 2010b). In other words, the relationship of Silla Buddhism to the Silla state hardly existed in a vacuum; that relationship existed as a transnational phenomenon that embraced precedents from China.

Aside from having spiritual functions and the ability to enforce the subservience of Buddhist clergy to the whims of the sovereign, the Silla monarchy during the reign of Seondeok also drew strength from the monarch's social status. This point must necessarily emerge in any reflection on the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter, since one should not fall into the temptation of viewing Seondeok's attractiveness to Jigwi as a phenomenon entirely dependent on the supposed aura of the queen. For centuries before the dawn of Silla, the southeastern Korean peninsula had remained in a state of relative isolation from developments in the transmission of metallurgy and the transmission of sophisticated cultural developments from elsewhere in Asia; after all, the Silla kingdom's official recognition of Buddhism in 527 happened long after the faith's initial appearances in the kingdoms of Goguryeo (372) and Baekje (384) (Iryeon [1281] 1972h, [1281] 1997h). In the relatively undeveloped southeastern area of the peninsula, families had to stick with each other in order to survive, thereby forming group-based social survival nets that would eventually become the foundations of social hierarchies that privileged the fortunes of families rather than the fortunes of individuals. Among the various regions of the Korean peninsula, the southeastern regions probably moved the slowest in embracing notions of coercive authority and sharply defined social hierarchies, and the archaeological evidence appears to bolster this supposition (Barnes 2015; Davey 2019; Nelson 1993). On the other hand, this isolation sometimes had unambiguous benefits; the lands that would coalesce into Silla enjoyed relative peace from the Han Chinese Commandery strongholds in the northern and central parts of the Korean peninsula. This circumstance probably forced Han Chinese Commandery officials to modify their policies of finding native collaborators who could assist the (almost certainly) outnumbered Chinese officials. In these modified policies, Han Chinese Commandery overlords probably tended to defer to the preexisting indigenous leadership of the peninsula's southeastern peoples. In other words, at least in the southeastern regions of the Korean peninsula, the Chinese people recognized the need to eschew the practice of forcibly imposing arbitrarily chosen native collaborators who would then undermine preexisting authority structures (Henthorn 1971; Kim 2012). The upshot of all these centuries of relatively slow and isolated development rested in the reality of how family-based aristocratic social structures (as opposed to individual-based social structures) lingered in the Silla kingdom. These family-based social structures arguably served as links to a past that even the Silla citizens themselves regarded as inveterate and ancient. As Sarah Milledge Nelson laconically writes in her assessment of the governmental overlords of the Silla kingdom, "The only thing we can be sure about is that leadership was invested in families or clans, rather than individuals (Nelson 2017)". Seondeok lived within this family-based or clan-based leadership system, and while she probably lived as the most famous Silla beneficiary of that system in her time, she too remained limited by that system. Without that system, she and her predecessors could not have become rulers. If something about Seondeok's personality or queenship resonated with Jigwi, then the foundations for that appeal would have emerged in evolving processes that had unfolded for many centuries before either person first entered the world.

As the tale progresses, more clues about Queen Seondeok's person emerge. After feeling compassion for Jigwi, Seondeok admonishes her circle for discouraging his entreaties.

The tale then describes Seondeok as a virgin sovereign who moves fluidly and gracefully. Because of her chastity, Seondeok fits the Stith Thompson parallel motif of virginity personified (Z139.8) (Thompson 1975g). As a characteristic that exemplifies the queen's noble prestige, chastity exists as not only an attribute of Seondeok's physical being, but also an attribute of her demeanor. The gentle movement attributed to Seondeok means that the purity of her womb symbolically mirrors the purity of her unassuming public mannerisms. As the story implies, Seondeok feels at ease with the public trappings of her virginity, whether she witnesses a Buddhist ceremony or moves around with her entourage (Ha 1962; Korean Spirit and Culture Promotion Project 2014). Although the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative reference to Seondeok's virginity exists as Ha's attempt to creatively describe the queen's personality, the characterization of the queen as a virgin seems credible. The silence of the *Samguk sagi* on any possible consort of Seondeok implies that she did not marry, and in the *Samguk yusa*, Seondeok herself acknowledges the mockery coming from the Tang Chinese royal court on account of her not having a husband (Iryeon [1281] 1972i, [1281] 1997i; Kim [1145] 1997a, [1145] 2012a). On the other hand, even within the *Samguk yusa*, inconsistency on Seondeok's marital status exists, since the work contains a "Royal Chronology (Wangnyeok or 왕력 [王曆])" reference to a prince consort of Seondeok (Iryeon [1281] 1972j, [1281] 1997j). The scholar Sanghyun Lee has explained this inconsistency by describing the "Royal Chronology" as a *Samguk yusa* addition made in 1310 (viz., after the death of Iryeon in 1289), during the reign of Chungseon of Goryeo (고려 충선 [高麗忠宣], r. 1298, 1308–1313). The "Royal Chronology" also contains information that frequently diverges from the *Samguk yusa* content generally credited to Iryeon; in one example among many, the insertion describes Seondeok's reign as beginning in 634, and not the generally accepted date of 632 (Lee 1985). Scholars of Buddhism have agreed with this assessment of the situation (Buswell and Lopez 2014). The author of this study has decided to take Seondeok's own words at face value and discount the significance of the fourteenth-century *Samguk yusa* insertion.

Given the paucity of Seondeok-era documents, the question of how Silla denizens viewed chastity remains a difficult one. Despite the difficulties of this question, the folklorist's anthropological insistence on the cross-cultural phenomenon of the parallel motif of virginity personified can allow scholars to provide helpful insights. As the historian Hanne Blank has argued, the task of defining virginity and chastity can prove problematic and imprecise, largely because one can only view the effects of virginity and chastity, and not the actual statuses of virginity and chastity. Everyone agrees on the constructs of virginity and chastity as notions entirely constructed by humankind, given the animal kingdom's complete unfamiliarity with these two concepts. Despite this point of universal agreement on the human origins of virginity and chastity, the ambiguity of these notions exists as a cross-cultural phenomenon, and this reality intensifies the difficulties of appreciating any ancient culture's particular understanding of these concepts (Blank 2007). With these preliminaries in mind, the scholar of the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter can at least appreciate the certainty of feeling uncertain over the Silla citizenry's attitudes on chastity and virginity. The annals of the Three Kingdoms hint at the peninsula's attitudes on virginity in a Baekje song entitled "Jirisan (Song of Mount Jiri)"—a piece preserved in the *History of Goryeo* (*Goryeosa* [고려사] [高麗史], 1451). As summarized by Peter Hacksoo Lee, the story tells of the radiant daughter of a father living under Mount Jiri (지리산 [智異山]). When summoned by a lustful king, the girl expresses a preference for the death of her virgin body over acquiescence to a monarch's amorous desires (Lee 1957). If a high regard for female virginity transcended cultural distinctions between the Three Kingdoms, then Seondeok, like the girl in "Jirisan", would have stressed the virtues of a life without a husband of matrimonial relations. If anything, Seondeok's indignant attitude about the Tang state's mockery of her unmarried state would have arguably intensified her desire to stay unmarried. Through this attitude, she could have stubbornly defended the viability of her lifestyle choice. As shown by the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative as creatively but plausibly re-

constructed by the editorial choices of modern English translators, Seondeok wanted to affirm both the nominal reality and everyday application of a chaste virginity.

Her probable chastity aside, Seondeok also shows a discerning character influenced by the touching devotion of a man who had—up to this point in the narrative, at least—never actually met her. As he finds himself sleeping in the temple where his journey began, Jigwi remains oblivious to the queen standing over him. Seondeok notices the sleeping Jigwi and she takes note of the sun's final rays falling upon his face. At this point, the queen's mindset takes a reflective turn as she expresses pity for his decision to essentially wait all day for her. These events, of course, exist as dramatic reconstructions of the modern English translators, but these reconstructions emphasize the reality of how the royal court wanted to call attention to the monarch's virtues whenever possible (Ha 1962; Korean Spirit and Culture Promotion Project 2014). For Seondeok, the final rays of the sun symbolize Jigwi's enthusiasm for seeing the queen, even if that enthusiasm has finally started to fade in the face of his need to sleep. The queen had not forgotten Jigwi's spoken desire, but her description of him as dreaming to see her required foresight, since the sleeping Jigwi could not explicitly tell her his thoughts. The queen's penetrating foresight—a foresight present in the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative and in the prophetic abilities attributed to her in the *Samguk sagi* and the *Samguk yusa*—hints at a woman who could ineffably see through the minds of her people.

On the other hand, one should do far more than to just let this matter rest at a simple confirmation of Seondeok's apparent gift of foresight. More complicated reasons surely existed for Seondeok's discernment on whether or not to help Jigwi. As it turns out, this mood of discernment likely extended from Seondeok to the rest of the court, mainly because of the unseen character(s) of the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative—namely, the individual or individuals who informed Seondeok about Jigwi's desire to see the queen (Gwon [1589] 1970, [1589] 2008). Seondeok's court clearly thought it important to tell the queen about a humble subject's desire, and over the centuries, this detail remained in the narrative from the period of the story's oral retellings to the transcription of the narrative. This circumstance naturally leads scholars to wonder about the responsiveness of the Silla court to the concerns of individuals of humbler social statuses. As William Henthorn has argued, the flowering of Buddhism in the Korean peninsula crystallized the importance of generous empathy for the poor (Henthorn 1971). According to the *Samguk sagi*, in the year 187, the Silla successor prince Beolhyu (벌휴 이사금 [*isageum*] [伐休尼師今], r. 187–196) decreed a stoppage of construction projects that would have required the involvement of farmers needed for food production (Kim [1145] 1997k, [1145] 2012i; Lee 1984). Later on, in the year 272, the Silla successor prince Michu (미추 이사금 [*isageum*] [味鄒尼師今], r. 262–284) decreed the suspension of any obstacles that could possibly hinder agricultural productivity (Kim [1145] 1997l, [1145] 2012j; Lee 1984). A few decades later, in 318, the Silla successor prince Heulhae (흘해 이사금 [*isaegum*] [訖解尼師今], r. 310–356) called attention to the recovery of the nation's farming production after periods of low rainfall. With the sad memories of droughts now behind him, Heulhae said that nothing should interfere with the agricultural productivity of the people (Kim [1145] 1997m, [1145] 2012k; Lee 1984). In 496, the Silla elevated chieftain Soji (r. 479—500) personally observed agricultural activities (Kim [1145] 1997n, [1145] 2012l, 2005; Lee 1984). The monarchy also enjoined the assistance of many governmental departments in the promotion of agriculture and, ipso facto, the welfare of farmers; in 502, for instance, King Jijeung (지증왕 [智證王], r. 500–514) required all magistrates and military governors to support agricultural initiatives (Kim [1145] 1997o, [1145] 2012m).

Seondeok, in short, had many precedents for wanting to show sympathy to the needs of poorer individuals, and Jigwi certainly came from a humbler social status. On the other hand, her reasons for wanting to show sympathy probably had more to do with the maintenance of the Silla economy and less to do with any supposed personal munificence on her part. As noted by Chongsun Kim, the case for such an economically motivated generosity rested on the reality of how the statistically numerous farmers—and not the few members

of the aristocracy—had the capacity to produce the vast supply of harvests needed to financially buttress the state (Kim 2004). No one can dispute the results of this policy of harnessing the collective economic prowess of the peasantry, and archaeology has uncovered some of these results. In the period from the beginning of the reign of Beopheung (법흥왕 [法興王], r. 514–540) to 653 (the sunset of the reign of Queen Jindeok), the cultural studies scholar Geunjik Lee has argued for an intensification in the pace at which royal tombs became ever more complicated. This intensification reached an apogee in the form of what Dr. Lee describes as the "separate establishment" of royal tombs for King Jinpyeong, Queen Seondeok, and Queen Jindeok. These tomb projects differed from earlier efforts that focused more on the burial of monarchs in group settings that would have deemphasized the majestic characteristics of individual sovereigns (Lee 2009). Only a mobilized workforce subsidized by revenues from the state could have transitioned these ambitious royal tomb plans from the metaphorical drawing board to completion. Scholars should therefore not simplistically accept Seondeok's thought process about whether or not to accommodate Jigwi as some momentously fantastic gesture of mercy.

Aside from Seondeok's supposed prescience, the environment of the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative also emphasizes the uniqueness of the story. One critical detail, the presence of the sun shining on Jigwi, coincides with the queen's actions (Ha 1962). The salient point rests in how the sun's last rays cling to Jigwi at the moment in which his wish becomes fulfilled (although he cannot yet appreciate the fulfillment of his desire). In the Jigwi story, imagery relating to the sun existed as the product of paraphrastic liberties taken by the modern translators. On the other hand, if this moment relating to the sun had existed in earlier oral versions of the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative, then that imagery would have had a very understanding audience in the time of Seondeok. Throughout the history of the peninsula, the wonders of the sun had always left an impression on the early Korean peoples. The Silla foundation myth featured a special event in which lightning preceded the advent of a favorable rainbow coming from the firmament. This rainbow clearly had not happened by accident, and the rainbow beckoned people to an egg. From the egg emerged a baby child whose face had a light comparable to the light of the sun (Iryeon [1281] 1972k, [1281] 1997k). In remarks that arguably explain the prevalence of sun imagery in the Silla foundation myth, Lewis Lancaster has pointed out the depth of religious sentiments that the Korean peninsula's habitants had for the sun before the advent of Buddhism. Archaeological excavations have uncovered ancient Korean images of celestial bodies that the ancient Koreans viewed as the final destinations for departed souls (Lancaster 2002). Ha Tae-Hung agrees with this idea when he characterizes sun worship as a central aspect of indigenous (i.e., pre-Buddhist) Korean religion (Ha [1281] 1972). As an indication of heavenly favor, the sun could arise in contexts ranging from the foundation of a kingdom to the story of a post station staff member's devotion to a monarch. The dominance of auspicious sunlight as a theme in the ancient storytelling records of the Korean peninsula hints at the prominence of environmental imagery in the Korean peninsula's indigenous expressions of folk religiosity. Long before the time of Seondeok, the inhabitants of the Korean peninsula had clearly retained an inveterate religiosity of indebtedness to the sun, and the presence of the sun would have symbolized heavenly favor on a meeting that (initially at least, subsequent developments notwithstanding) seemed to depend on a lowly person's desire, Seondeok's kindness, and her insight in discerning a man's love.

On the other hand, the significance of the sun in the Korean peninsula's culture had clearly evolved by the time of Seondeok's reign, and any exploration of the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative's hypothesized usage of sun imagery should accommodate this argument. Despite the relative absence of exhaustive scholarship that exclusively focuses on the evolution of sun imagery in Korean literature in ancient times, the relevant point lies in the way in which Buddhism had successfully appropriated the nature-centric imagery of the Korean peninsula's ancient religions. According to the *Haedong goseungjeon*, the monk Won-gwang once visited his indisposed monarch, who then became firmer in the foundations of the Buddhist faith on account of Won-gwang's ability to explain the religion. Later on,

as the story goes, the monarch and his court saw a halo as bright as the sun surrounding the head of Won-gwang. Upon this sighting of the sun-like halo, the ruler immediately convalesced (Gakhun [1215] 1969). The notion that the mere explication of Buddhist ideas could assist in the physical recovery of a person (in this case, the monarch) obviously had precedents in the Korean peninsula's religious past, since practitioners of indigenous expressions of folk religiosity probably had formal and informal repertoires of intercessory prayers addressed to the eternal world. The Buddhist form of this kind of spirituality evidently proved superior to alternatives from the era of the Korean peninsula's indigenous religions (otherwise, conversions to Buddhism would not have frequently occurred), but the Buddhists of Seondeok's time had clearly incorporated certain aspects of those alternatives. As James Huntley Grayson contends in reflections on the similar Buddhist ceremonies of the *baekjwahoe* (First Assembly of One Hundred Seats [백좌회] [百座會]), which first took place in 551, and the *palgwanhoe* (Assembly of the Eight Commandments [팔관회] [八關會]), which also first took place in 551, the ceremonies' themes of praying for the health and welfare of individuals (or the state) and pleasing deceased souls sounded very much like shamanistic themes (Grayson 1984). The intensification of Buddhist attempts at appropriating the vocabulary and ideas of preexisting nature worship expressions would ultimately infuse nature imagery with Buddhist ideas, and this imagery would have included the sun.

During the seventh century, the use of sunlight in literature would continue to herald significant events. This literary idea reflected themes closer to Buddhism (or, rather, Buddhism's ability to accommodate preexisting nature beliefs) than to preexisting religious nature worship traditions. One example of this literary trend came in the form of a narrative about a seventh-century friendship between two monks named Gwangdeok (광덕 [廣德]) and Eomjang (엄장 [嚴莊]). In the story as preserved in the *Samguk yusa*, the retreating final rays of the sun provided a setting in which the heavenly voice of the recently departed Gwangdeok exhorted his still-living friend (Eomjang) to follow the commands of Buddha and thereby earn the right to enter paradise. Eomjang then tried to force a special bedtime session on Gwangdeok's widow, but the fervently Buddhist lady would have none of this carnal desire. Fortunately for the annals of Silla's virtuous Buddhists, Eomjang repented of his immorality (Iryeon [1281] 1972l, [1281] 1997l).

Although one can understand the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative as a treatment of the virginity of the queen and a man's longing to lay his eyes on the monarch, the narrative also outlines a lowly person's hope in transcending the vast gulf that separates him from a royal in the social hierarchy. Despite living under the nominal obligation to behave like a submissive admirer in the crowd hypothesized by the modern translators, Jigwi privileges his absurd wish over the duties imposed upon him by his lowly social status (Gwon [1589] 1970, [1589] 2008; Ha 1962; Korean Spirit and Culture Promotion Project 2014). In Jigwi's determination to see Seondeok, one recognizes his firmness in upholding desire over duty. In other words, for Jigwi, the parallel motif of the difficult choice between fulfilling desire or fulfilling duty (J233) poses no challenges for him whatsoever (Thompson 1975e). In Jigwi's decision to fulfill desire and forget about duty, one can perceive the truly unique parallel motif of a poor individual loving a royal (T91.6.1) (Thompson 1975h).

That Jigwi favored desire (a desire to meet the queen despite his lowly status) over duty seems rather obvious, but the thinking process through which he arrived at that decision remains necessarily hidden behind the brevity of the story. On the other hand, despite the paucity of documentary evidence in the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative, research on the controlling assumptions that animate individuals to choose desire (or duty) justifies the folklorist's decision to try to recover parts of Jigwi's otherwise veiled discernment process. This research can shed some light into certain hypothetical characteristics of Jigwi's mindset at the time of his meeting with Seondeok. As the philosopher Antony Duff argues, moral (dutiful) individuals have the ability to properly distinguish between one's wishes and the weighty concept of virtue, while individuals who only prefer personal desires lack this ability. The moral individual will follow the path of virtue because that person has in-

ternalized the desire to do one's duty, and that internalization process typically flows from an understanding of virtue as separate from desire. A desire for virtue, in other words, exists within a dimension far more profound than a mere sense of obligation. Duff also believes that the moral individual does not act morally out of some divinely inspired mastery over the temptations of base desires; the moral individual has simply chosen to freely and unreservedly embrace the goodness of doing one's duty (Duff 1980).

Given Duff's profile of the virtuous person who unfailingly endorses duty, the question on how far Jigwi diverges from this profile naturally assumes significance. Jigwi's desire technically originated in a man's willingness to (try to) leave the confines of his expected subservience to a social hierarchy that all but condemned free and unfree peasants to anonymous lives of toil. Of course, one may readily acknowledge the arguably revolutionary nature of how Jigwi (whether consciously or unconsciously, but more likely unconsciously) wanted to overturn the decorum of the Silla social world, if only temporarily. Still, that wish totally contravened the definitions of virtue laid down by the elites of the Korean peninsula at the time. After all, Jigwi's desire to see the queen did not flow from the monarch's personalized invitation to a nonentity; Jigwi, and not Seondeok, had started the entire situation. On the other hand, one should not turn Jigwi into some sort of catalyst for sociopolitical change in the time of Seondeok. The struggles of Jigwi likely did not change the Silla elites' indifference to the commoners. Indifference from the upper strata thematically mirrored the acquiescence of the lower classes to a restrictive hierarchy, or so Kim Busik and Iryeon would have readers believe, since the chroniclers do not mention any large-scale peasant rebellion dating to the queen's reign (Kim [1145] 1997a, [1145] 2012o; Iryeon [1281] 1972m, [1281] 1997m). The historical problem of ascertaining the existence or nonexistence of truly viable peasant rebellions during the reign of Seondeok becomes more complicated when one considers the ways in which the ancient chroniclers unreflectively denounced peasant rebels and other discontented lowborn individuals as thieves or bandits, as Kim Busik did at various times in the *Samguk sagi* (Kim [1145] 1997p, [1145] 2012n). One genuinely wonders over the level of solemnity or moral virtue that peasant rebels needed to achieve in order for Kim Busik to dignify them.

If Kim Busik failed to objectively perceive the import of peasant rebellions, then an unbiased ancient voice on civil unrest in Seondeok's time may prove elusive. Still, despite this issue relating to the objectivity of the sources, one may reasonably say that peasant insurrections likely never became viable during Seondeok's reign. In this environment, modern politics—defined in 1936 by sociologist Karl Mannheim as "a more or less conscious participation of all strata of society in the achievement of some mundane purpose, as contrasted with a fatalistic acceptance of events as they are, or of control from 'above'"—could not begin (Mannheim 1936). Jigwi's success merely reflected a random act of kindness (and perhaps an economically motivated one at that) shown by a ruler. Even if Jigwi did not initiate a political discourse in the modern sense of the word, he had dismissed the possibility of feeling resigned to a life under the metaphorical thumb of a social hierarchy. Like their descendants today, some of Silla's peasants probably dreamed of a freer world, but the discussion of this topic does not necessarily end here. Jigwi's Seondeok-loving behavior, while odious to aristocrats who might have felt personally offended by even the prospect of having their shadows stepped upon by destitute individuals, never came close to the morally reprehensible behavior of rebels denounced by Kim Busik. At this point in the narrative (at least before he became a fire ghost who would ultimately earn the profound disdain of Seondeok), Jigwi clearly placed himself in the world of desire over duty. On the other hand, this decision did not mean that Jigwi would become forever relegated to the metaphorical basement of the Silla imagination; rebels deserved that kind of fate, but not Jigwi. In this sense, any decision to label Jigwi as a person completely antithetical to Duff's conception of a virtuous person would seem careless and simplistic. The essential point in this section, of course, has to do with the fact that the Silla monarchy had a certain degree of elasticity in the assessment of individuals outside the uppermost echelons. Not

every single behavior that contravened a display of virtuous obedience to the state suffered under equal condemnation from the kingdom.

If scholars accept the notion of the Silla social hierarchy in the time of Seondeok as a hierarchy that restricted social mobility and viable dissent, then the specific contours of that restrictiveness deserve discussion. In the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative, Jigwi's persistently unwavering attempts to see Seondeok initially meet fierce resistance from the guards (Ha 1962). This idea follows the parallel motif of the lowly person who never receives much of anything despite all of his entreaties (N264) (Thompson 1975i). Through a reliance on the discipline of anthropology, the folklorist would almost certainly characterize this indifference to Jigwi's entreaties as the direct product of the notion of the habitus, or the idea of how people involuntarily (viz., without thinking) adhere to the conventions and hopes of any given society. This involuntary adherence, in turn, allows people to resolve dilemmas in an improvisational manner, but that seeming improvisation always exists within the margins of society's abovementioned conventions and hopes (Chandler and Munday 2011). In his study of folklore, the habitus, and other relevant concepts, Simon Bronner elaborates on this idea by noting the ways in which society unquestioningly accepts these conventions and hopes as foundational and above reproach in any given culture (Bronner 2012). In the moments before making the choice to physically restrain Jigwi, the guards probably did not extensively reflect upon the values and norms of the Silla social hierarchy; the decision to stop Jigwi, in other words, came instinctively. The guards probably lacked a helpful precedent on what to do with enslaved individuals drawn to the beauty of a queen, and this circumstance forced Seondeok's protectors to improvise a solution to the dilemma. This improvisation nevertheless took place firmly within the parameters of acceptable behaviors in the kingdom.

This scene exemplifies the sclerotic hierarchy of the Silla bone rank system (골품제도 [骨品制度], golpumjedo) that disdained merit in the determination of one's place in Silla society, and this social system would have justified the habitus that dictated the initial attempts to thwart Jigwi. Although legally enacted by the governance of King Beopheung (r. 514–540), the bone rank system arguably systematized longstanding class distinctions traceable to time immemorial in Silla's history. The golpum system divided royal kin into so-called holy/sacred/hallowed bone (성골 [聖骨], seonggol) groups and lower true bone (진골 [眞骨], jingol) groups (Joe 1998; Lee 1984). Lesser nobles and everyone else did not belong to the holy or true bones. Given her description as a queen who had a bracelet (or, in the conjectures of the modern translators, a constellation of priceless and shiny ornaments) in the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative, Queen Seondeok would have visually captured the high privileges accorded to the holy bone (Gwon [1589] 1970, [1589] 2008; Ha 1962; Korean Spirit and Culture Promotion Project 2014). There existed a wide gap in the class system between Jigwi and Seondeok. This wide gap existed as not only a mere distinction in property-based wealth, but also the outward expression of a social hierarchy that predated both Jigwi and the queen for some time.

Given the visual splendor of the queen as described in the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative, one cannot dispute the presence of a legal and resource-based separation between the wealthy and the commoners. On the other hand, any attempt to describe the Silla kingdom's aristocrats as individuals who felt totally content with the trappings of privilege and status simplifies a more complicated reality. During Seondeok's life, and undoubtedly during the lives of a few Silla monarchs, even privileged aristocrats resented the oppressiveness of the bone rank system. One need not even wonder about the reasons for this resentment. Jingol men, for instance, could not nonchalantly wear hats for any moment in time. Jingol men also did not have state permission to use boots that contained violet leather, and jingol waist belts could not have white jade. Among other restrictions, jingol women could not use raw silk in outer clothing. Jingol ladies also could not use tortoise shells for combs (Kim [1145] 1997q, [1145] 2015c). Although the promulgation of these rules took place during the reign of King Heungdeok (흥덕왕 [興德王], r. 826–836), several scholars have called attention to how the state actually declared an intention to reestablish

preexisting customs through these regulations (Chun 1998; Kim 1971; Nelson 2017). In other words, the simple passage of a decree could always remind the nation of some of the bone rank system's core assumptions, viz., the maintenance of the social hierarchy and the aristocratic desire to constantly emphasize the subservience of social inferiors.

Given the fact that King Heungdeok called attention to a national erosion of public virtue as the reason behind his desire to enforce regulations on what people could and could not wear, it seems plausible to infer that not everyone would have felt internally motivated to follow these decrees (Kim [1145] 1997q, [1145] 2015c). After all, a Silla populace that supposedly had a loosening grip on civic morals would not easily transform into a beacon of virtue overnight. Queen Seondeok might have heard tales about people who disliked the bone rank system. Perhaps she knew about the narrative of Seol Gyedu (설계두 [薛罽頭]). According to the narrative as preserved in the *Samguk sagi*, Seol decided to use a drinking party with friends as a forum for the airing of his grievances about the Silla kingdom's principles for organizing society. In this social gathering, Seol loudly complained about the bone rank system's ignorance of a person's worthy accomplishments. In 621, his dissatisfaction ultimately led him to move to Tang China in an attempt to find the meritocracy that the Silla kingdom would never provide (Kim [1145] 1997r, [1145] 2015d). The sclerotic nature of the bone rank system remains patently observable in the Jigwi story, and history only confirms the restraining proclivities of Silla society.

At the end of the narrative, Jigwi finally wins the fulfillment of his wish, even if this fulfillment technically happens only in an indirect manner. In the ancient versions, Seondeok puts a bracelet on the sleeping Jigwi's chest, and Jigwi wakes up to find the bracelet after the queen returns to the palace. One of the two modern translators also maintains this part of the narrative (Gwon [1589] 1970, [1589] 2008; Korean Spirit and Culture Promotion Project 2014). In the Ha Tae-Hung modern translation, the sleeping Jigwi awakens and actually sees the queen, but this version of events appears more fantastical than plausible (Ha 1962). This scene follows the parallel motif of a character finally receiving the fruits of his diligent patience (Q81) (Thompson 1975j). The fruit of this patience—the fortunate incident of the queen giving a memento of her presence to Jigwi—graphically illustrates a happy surprise given to Jigwi. Few others in Jigwi's social station could have expected this memento, which illustrates the parallel motif of the realization of one's desired wishes (N202) (Thompson 1975k).

Later on, Jigwi, presumably feeling overwhelmed by the show of Seondeok's generosity, becomes so inflamed with passion that a fire emerges from his heart and entirely consumes his body (Gwon [1589] 1970, [1589] 2008). The *Samguk yusa*'s seemingly random allusion (an allusion that Frits Vos, as noted above, describes as meaning almost nothing to someone unknowledgeable about the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter) to the Jigwi tale describes a monk named Hyegong, the ecclesiastic briefly mentioned earlier in the introduction of this article. Hyegong has a prophetic ability, since he predicts a miracle that ultimately happens when a burning Jigwi consumes the pagoda. Despite the burning pagoda, the nearby buildings remain perfectly intact (Iryeon [1281] 1972b, [1281] 1997b; Vos 1981). In its conclusion, the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative takes a sharp turn into miraculous fantasy. It would seem that Jigwi's consumption by fire graphically symbolizes the depth of his feelings for Seondeok, but Seondeok apparently wanted to have nothing to do with what she presumably began to see as an unhealthy obsession. At this point in the narrative, it seems clear that the queen's initial sympathy for Jigwi had turned to grave concern, because she then asked a sorcerer to cast a spell that would stop Jigwi (now a fire ghost or *hwagwi* [화귀] [火鬼]) from causing fires that would disrupt the lives of her people; Korean translations of the spell poetically call attention to the fact that the queen refused to even entertain the notion of friendship with her arsonist constituent (You 2005). With her powers of coercive authority, Seondeok tasked a sorcerer with the solemn obligation of dispensing with Jigwi's posthumous influence. This decision arguably testifies to the abovementioned reality of how politicized Silla monarchs represented the peninsula's latest versions of high priests (or priestesses). These ecclesiastical monarchs preferred to delegate the functions

of heavenly discourse to other shamans, sorcerers, and wizards. The temporal demands of the kingdom had simply become far too complicated for Seondeok to personally handle spiritual matters, although her less administratively burdened predecessors might have had different opinions about these kinds of situations.

In this ending of the story, the queen's decision to summon a sorcerer most evidently displays the religious pluralism of a Silla society that, while Buddhist in the national faith, still had a profound diversity of belief systems. A straightforward reading of the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative text indicates the continued influence of shamans, sorcerers, or wizards in the court, but the fact of Jigwi's entrance into the spirit realm also underscores the endurance of inveterate beliefs that contained notions of both benign and malignant spirits. The anthropologist Laurel Kendall has argued for the existence of supernatural ghosts as the mainstay of a constellation of Korean religious notions with origins extending into a distant past (Kendall 1985). These notions clearly predated the arrivals of Buddhism and Confucianism in the peninsula. By the time of Seondeok, the people of the ancient Korean peninsula had long internalized the notion of trying to appease unhappy or otherwise restless ghosts, and this notion would outlast the queen's lifetime. The *Samguk yusa* abounds with several examples of restless spirits broadly analogous to Jigwi the fire ghost. One account relating to restless spirits involved the monk Milbon (밀본 [密本]), perhaps most famous for healing a bedridden Queen Seondeok. In the account, Milbon found himself summoned to an emergency involving some malicious ghosts who had ruined the speech and movements of a young boy named Kim Yangdo (김양도 [金良圖]). Although these ghosts had killed a lesser monk who had tried to help the child, they proved no match for Milbon and an army of allied ghosts. Thanks to this intervention, the child would live, and later on, he would serve the kingdom as a Silla official (Iryeon [1281] 1972n, [1281] 1997n). A second narrative involved the spirit of the famed Silla general Kim Yusin. During the reign of King Hyegong (혜공왕 [惠恭王], r. 765–780), Kim Yusin's spirit showed anger against the monarch for executing a member of Kim Yusin's family. The spirit of the deceased Silla successor prince Michu (r. 262—284) then somehow placated the spirit of the deceased Kim Yusin. Michu's spirit pulled off this unlikely feat by telling the dead general to persevere in intercessory faithfulness to the nation (Iryeon [1281] 1972o, [1281] 1997o). In the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative, the presence of the sorcerer did not exist as some tokenistic concession to the reality of Silla's pluralistic religious world. After all, the incantation probably assuaged Seondeok's own discomfort with the prospect of Jigwi starting fires anytime he desired. The sorcerer had certainly figured out a way of earning a figurative place of honor in the royal consciousness.

From the vantage point of folkloric studies, the end of the narrative entails two fascinating developments, the first of which entails a significant transformation. In this significant transformation, Jigwi has seen a reward for his patience, but his overly enthusiastic attachment to Seondeok has alienated his soul from the kingdom. The tale, in essence, has transitioned from a somewhat lighthearted narrative about a single person's admiration of Seondeok into an admonition about the dangers of allowing fire demons to run around unchecked. According to the conventions of folkloric studies, the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter functions to edify the audience on the dangers of having an unhealthy obsession with the person of the monarch. In other words, the narrative has what the folklorist Seemin Hasan would characterize as the "didactic element"—an element found in folk literature. This element can serve one or more of three purposes: (1) a focus on the significance of the setting where the story takes place, (2) instruction on the virtues of eternal values such as patience and integrity, and/or (3) attempts to resolve questions on why certain phenomena occur (Hasan 2009). Before the moment of Jigwi becoming overwhelmed by flames, the story probably drew one's attention to the rewards of patiently anticipating the possible kindness of the sovereign. This emphasis would have aligned with Hasan's second purpose of a didactic narrative. On the other hand, Jigwi's transformation into a malevolent fire spirit deserving of expulsion by a sorcerer would have served to inform audiences about the necessity of particular incantations to promote harmony in nature. In

this situation, harmony in nature would have entailed the absence of destructive fires. This emphasis would have aligned with Hasan's third purpose of a didactic narrative.

The second fascinating development at the end of the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative concerns the temple of the setting. The temple, earlier described in this article as a symbol of Buddhism's spiritual and institutional power in the Silla kingdom, now functions as the scene of Jigwi's immolation. In the *Samguk yusa* retelling of this event, the flaming Jigwi consumes the pagoda, but the nearby buildings remain intact. The *Samguk yusa* fragment also contains something that the *Daedong unbu gunok* account lacks—namely, the actual name of the place where Jigwi became a heart fire: Yeongmyo Temple (영묘사 [靈廟]) (Iryeon [1281] 1972b, [1281] 1997b). The *Samguk sagi* chronicles leave no doubt about the establishment of Yeongmyo Temple as an event that happened in 635 under the auspices of Seondeok herself, but the first record of a fire happening at the temple does not appear until 662, during the reign of King Munmu (문무왕 [文武王], r. 661–681) (Kim [1145] 1997s, [1145] 2012o). In an attempt to reconcile this divergence between the *Samguk sagi* and the *Samguk yusa*, the scholar Kiyoung Um concludes that the Buddhist tendency of associating temples with temple founders (among other reasons) accounted for the Silla people's apparent desire to associate fires at this temple with Seondeok and not with King Munmu (Um 2007). In other words, the compilers of the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter sought to create a monarchical character portrait that emphasized the queen's patronage of Buddhist temples, and this need to flatter the profile of Seondeok trumped the need for historical precision in the recounting of events that the *Samguk sagi* could not corroborate.

The temple would symbolize not only the growing intimacy of church and state, but also the early stages of a triumphant ascendancy of notions of coercive authority, stratified social hierarchies of strict rules, and organized religion over notions of cooperation, socially fluid situations, and the primacy of indigenous local cults. These triumphant proclivities had converged in not only the person of Queen Seondeok, but also the Yeongmyo Temple that she personally established. Rather than dither on a project of this magnitude, she established this temple during a stage so early in her reign that she left no ambiguities over the placement of her sympathies with respect to the governance of her kingdom. Maurizio Riotto broadly characterizes the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter (as presented in the *Taepyeong tongje*) as a meeting between the embodiment of a simpler bygone world of indigenous practices long before the advent of Buddhism (Jigwi) and the symbols of the Buddhist faith (Seondeok and Yeongmyo Temple). In this dramatic showdown as envisioned by Riotto, Jigwi gives the metaphorical last gasp of indigenous culture by unsuccessfully trying to burn down the temple (Riotto 2017). This viewpoint aside, one should exercise a good deal of caution in viewing the tension at the Yeongmyo Temple as a sign of the inevitable decline of indigenous culture in the Korean peninsula. Indigenous traditions did not suddenly die because of Jigwi's heart fire; moreover, the apologists for indigenous culture surely had better representatives than Jigwi to use in an attempt to embarrass royal authority.

Small differences between the versions of the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative also complicate the question over determining the depth of the discordance shown between the bygone world and the ascendant Buddhist order. In the *Taepyeong tongje* account, Seondeok tells Jigwi that she intends to visit him beforehand, but in the *Daedong unbu gunok* account, Seondeok simply hears about Jigwi's desire from third parties prior to her decision to improvise a meeting with him. In both accounts, of course, Jigwi's decision to sleep ends any possibility of his actual cognizance of the queen's arrival. On the other hand, even this slight difference, as Jeongwon Lee argues, still has significance. In his decision to sleep, the *Taepyeong tongje* Jigwi has decided to terminate any possibility of a relationship with Seondeok on his own. By way of contrast, the *Daedong unbu gunok* Jigwi simply exists as a victim of fate; he slept without any knowledge of the queen's decision to visit him (Lee Jeongwon 2008). In other words, the *Taepyeong tongje* Jigwi understands his role in the failure to meet Seondeok (because he purposely slept when he should not have), but the *Daedong unbu gunok* Jigwi utterly resents the fact that the queen only deigned to meet

him on a whim and did not bother to notify him in advance. Even seemingly insignificant or cosmetic differences between versions of the same folktale can complicate the task of trying to uncover the nature of Jigwi's motives, but in any case, at the conclusion of the tale, the stronger influences remained unambiguously within institutionalized Buddhism and the personal monarchy of Seondeok.

4. Summary and Conclusions

One possible ancient secondary account that might provide a more intimate glimpse into the life of Queen Seondeok comes in the story of Jigwi—the Silla person who supposedly admired the queen's beauty and desired to have an audience with her. The story has survived in "Simhwa Yotap", or "Heart Fire Surrounding the Pagoda", even though the *Silla sui jeon* collection of stories that once contained "Simhwa Yotap" only survives in fragments today. Complete versions of the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative turn up in the *Taepyeong tongje* (1492), *Daedong unbu gunok* (1589), and *Haedong jamnok* (1670). A small part of the narrative also turns up in the *Samguk yusa* (1281). The *Silla sui jeon* narratives collectively belonged to a broader phenomenon of transcultural literary forms that had seized the imagination of East Asia, and indeed, the original inspirations of the *Silla sui jeon* came from the Tang Chinese *chuanqi* (and older *zhiguai*) literary expressions that focused on tales of marvels and wonders. In the twenty-first century, two modern English-language translations of the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative have served as illustrations of debates held among translators today on standards of translation. When a translator tries to creatively interpret an ancient narrative, a scholar might wish to carefully accommodate the possibility of reconstructing the society that oversaw the composition of that source.

Studies that have attempted to trace the origins of the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter have focused on the tale's similarities with the *Sulpaga* narrative and the innovative proclivities of Buddhist storytellers. If one gives scholarly attention to these origin theories, then one can appreciate the ways in which the tale could have changed during the processes of cross-cultural transmission and transcription. Other academic studies on the folktale have focused on questions of the tale's historicity, especially since Jigwi had a position of hereditary enslavement within a society that took careful pains to emphasize the social hierarchy's inflexibility. Other scholarly explorations of the tale have focused on the role of the *Silla sui jeon* narratives in the evolution of Korean literature.

Despite the limitations of using folklore as source material for reconstructing the religious and historical landscape of the Silla kingdom at the time of Seondeok, there exists a relationship between folklore and history. The table of universal folk motifs found in the Stith Thompson index might provide insights on the particular locality or culture in which a folktale happened, and Stith Thompson's emphasis on so-called immemorial traditions can at least partially apply to aspects of Seondeok's world. In the long history of attempts to define the folktale, scholars of the folkloric discipline have discussed folk narratives as (1) tales pregnant with possibilities for cultural insight, (2) expressions of realities easily understandable to the intended audiences, and (3) stories that invite both classification and analysis. Most scholars would view the discipline as involving far more than mere attempts to classify folktales into one category or another. In other words, the Stith Thompson index exists as far more than a simple methodology for the organization of findings related to the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter; the index also opens novel pathways for the analysis of folkloric material.

The folktale's setting at a Buddhist temple and Seondeok's willingness to spend time there exemplify the Stith Thompson folkloric theme of honor bestowed as a reward (Q113.0.1). A deeper folkloric reflection on this theme leads one to understand the ways in which female audiences would have viewed the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative as a possible illustration of a woman's virtuosity as the embodiment, recipient, and dispenser of generosity for the sake of some noble idea (in this case, the Buddhist faith). The decision of modern English translators to insert crowds into the narrative seems historically plausible, and Seondeok's appearance corresponds with the Stith Thompson folkloric theme of exceptional beauty

(F575.1). Despite the existence of fascinating archaeological discoveries on the complexities of Silla fashion, scholars should understand the futility of finding precise definitions of beauty as understood by Silla citizens in Seondeok's time. On the other hand, within the Korean peninsula's ancient narratives, one can find frequent references to the notion of beauty as a catalyst for meaningful events in a world before the takeover of Confucian ideals that denigrated the ideas of passionate and unrefined love.

Jigwi's desire to see the queen and his ignorance of obstacles to that desire align with the Stith Thompson folkloric themes of ridiculous wishes (J2079), ridiculous ignorance (J1749), and happiness quests (H1376.6). Instead of merely acknowledging the absurdity of Jigwi's hope for a meeting with Seondeok, scholars can also view Jigwi as an illustration of someone who stubbornly adhered to the appeal of simple personal desires. This appeal contravened the spirit of a Buddhist faith that emphasized loftier aims for the human consciousness, but Buddhism had clearly not exerted a dominating influence on individuals such as Jigwi. The folklorist's reliance on interdisciplinary studies naturally reveals the theme of a literary character who concedes to the possible negative consequences that can arise from the fulfillment of a wish. Jigwi might well have understood this idea in light of the evolving royal bodyguard cultures of the Three Kingdoms and Silla's reliance on the *hwarang* warriors who professed loyalty to Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist belief systems. The hypothesized presence of both royal bodyguards and the *hwarang* in Seondeok's entourage would have testified to the religious pluralism of the Silla kingdom. Jigwi's individualistic happiness quest presents a contrast with the Silla kingdom's definition of happiness, since the *Samguk sagi* (1145) chronicles broadly emphasized a kingdom's prosperity as the sign of a nation broadly content with everyday life. In other words, in the ideal way of things, Silla's citizens had internalized definitions of happiness that entailed the subordination of individual desires to the welfare of the state.

The intensity of Jigwi's desire to see Seondeok raises questions about the foundations of Seondeok's supposed prestige—a prestige that may have had more to do with Seondeok's inherited social position and less to do with anything specifically related to the queen. Although Silla monarchs had practically retreated from the roles of personally exercising the functions of serving as the nation's most prominent intermediaries between heaven and earth, these sovereigns had never theoretically abdicated on those ecclesiastical prerogatives. The politicizing Silla monarchy would exercise its growing powers by reminding Buddhist clerics of the loyalty that those monks owed to the institution that philosophically and financially supported the religion. This phenomenon also existed in Tang China, thereby testifying to a transcultural phenomenon of ecclesiastical obedience to the state. While Seondeok arguably lived as the kingdom's most famous beneficiary of family-based or clan-based systems during her reign, those group-based systems had evolved for centuries before her time as remnants of the southeastern peninsula's longstanding physical isolation from the influences of Chinese civilization.

In some parts of the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter, the modern English translators appear to have amplified certain parts of Seondeok's personality. One such instance of amplification happened in attempts to call attention to the supposed chastity of Queen Seondeok, in accordance with the Stith Thompson theme of chaste virginity (Z139.8). Problematic contradictions within the *Samguk yusa* on the question of Seondeok's matrimonial status may find their resolution in the fact of the Royal Chronology's inclusion after Iryeon's death, and in any case, Seondeok described herself as having no husband. Anthropological research has underscored the definitively human nature of the notion of virginity, but the slippery vagueness of this notion exists as a phenomenon that transcends cultural boundaries around the world. Despite the fragmentary survival of literary texts from the ancient Korean peninsula, the extant testimonies appear to show that the people of the Three Kingdoms had some understanding of the ways in which virgin ladies sought to discourage the advances of lustful men. Seondeok's supposedly penetrating insight plays some role in her ability to understand Jigwi's desire to see her, even if this specific insight exists as the reconstruction of modern paraphrastic translators. While a simple reading of this part of the

narrative confirms Seondeok's prophetic gifts shown elsewhere in the *Samguk sagi* and the *Samguk yusa*, a closer reading leads scholars to a larger discussion of the Silla kingdom's responsiveness to the needs of lowborn individuals. The court records abound with instances of the government intervening to promote agriculture and food production, but the motivations for these initiatives probably had more to do with the economy and less to do with personal desires for merciful generosity.

Even if it mostly exists according to the liberties undertaken by modern translators, the hypothesized presence of the sun in the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter would have had a profoundly understanding audience in the queen's lifetime. The prominence of the sun in the Silla foundation myth probably existed as a tribute to the inveterate nature cults that had long preceded the rise of Buddhism. On the other hand, Silla's Buddhist clergymen had proven quite adept at appropriating the imagery of the sun for their own purposes. Evidence for this hypothesis comes in the form of Silla Buddhist ceremonies and narratives that employed nature imagery.

All of the versions of the Seondeok–Jigwi narrative mention Jigwi's intense desire to see the queen. According to the Stith Thompson classification index, Jigwi has a situation of living between his desire and his duty (J233), and he possesses the love of a lowly subject for a queen (T91.6.1). Folklorists would understand the ways in which philosophers differentiate virtuous individuals from individuals who operate through base desires. While it might seem superficially tempting to characterize Jigwi as a potential agent for social change, the historical evidence clearly indicates that the Silla peasantry came nowhere near the possibility of actualizing a grassroots desire for that kind of transformation. Still, a hereditary slave such as Jigwi probably avoided the rhetorical condemnations that scholars reserved for insurrectionists denounced as thieves or bandits. The state, in other words, could quietly countenance certain signs of discomfort from the peasantry.

Although they primarily exist within the creative liberties of the modern English translators, the guards who try to stop Jigwi underscore Jigwi's initially fruitless attempts to win the privilege of an audience with the queen. In this way, Jigwi's actions fall under the Stith Thompson motif of the lowly person who fails to receive meaningful assistance despite an abundance of entreaties (N264). The folklorist would certainly characterize the resistance of the guards as evidence of the notion of the habitus, or the notion of how people instinctively and unreflectively internalize the aspirations and standards of any given society. The notion of the habitus served as one possible mechanism through which individual actors operated in the Silla bone rank system, but of course, not everyone in Seondeok's time accepted the controlling assumptions of that system.

In the ending of the story, Jigwi finally wins (if only indirectly) the fulfillment of his wish. He sees a bracelet on his chest as evidence of the queen's visit during the time in which he slept. In this moment, the Stith Thompson motifs of a reward for perseverance (Q81) and the fulfillment of personal wishes (N202) clearly occur, but dark events for the Silla kingdom quickly ensue. Jigwi's transformation into a fire ghost later turns Seondeok against him, since she has to summon a sorcerer to cast a spell that will send Jigwi's spirit far away from the kingdom. In this scene, one can clearly sense the so-called didactic element that folklorists like to indicate as a possible way in which audiences would have learned things from folk narratives. The presence of a sorcerer also indicates the religious pluralism of Silla's society—a society that remained anchored to inveterate notions of the fearful power of ghostly spirits. The detail of the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter occurring at the Yeongmyo Temple survives in the fragmentary retelling of the tale in the *Samguk yusa*. Although one can quibble over the nature of the socially disruptive proclivities arguably shown by Jigwi (as the hypothetical representative of a bygone world) at this Buddhist temple, one unambiguous truth remained. In this unambiguous truth, the Silla kingdom would continue a slow but inexorable and irreversible retreat from the bygone order of a society that had once depended on collaboration, the relative absence of social hierarchies, and the primacy of indigenous nature cults.

Through this article on the Seondeok–Jigwi encounter, the author hopes to encourage further discussions of the folkloric discipline's significance as a tool for investigating the Korean peninsula's ancient narratives. The possible cross-pollination of folkloric investigations with historical studies exists as an undoubtedly interdisciplinary endeavor. Of course, the theoretical element of folkloric studies should never overwhelm the historical discipline's involvement in research of this nature, and the potential rewards of this kind of study can help to recover otherwise enigmatic or obscure aspects of the ancient Korean peninsula. In the world of Korean studies, this article hopefully exists as an overdue attempt to reconcile the perspectives of English-language scholarship and the views of Korean-language scholarship on this slightly understudied topic.

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