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CASTLES OF PEARLS AND CUTS IN THE INTESTINES:
PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS ON METAPHORS OF EMOTIONS
IN KOREAN KINYŎ POETRY *

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to analyse and discuss expressions of bodily sensations connected to inner emotions in *kisaeng's sijo* poetry of traditional Korea, i.e. in a period comprised between the XV and the XIX century, better known as the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910).

The *kisaeng* (or *kinyŏ*) were women of lowborn origin recruited by the central government and educated to the complex arts of entertainment, which included singing, dancing, playing musical instruments and, a matter of importance to our subject of discussion, poetry composition. All these functions and abilities were thought of as instrumental to the «amusement» and entertainment of literati at the highest level, during royal banquets, official and private gatherings. The *kisaeng* were already existing during the previous dynasty (Koryŏ) and were active around the Court's structure known under the name of *Kyobang*, but it can

* This article is part of an ongoing broader research project on «Emotions and States of Minds in East Asia, through Textual Analysis», led and coordinated by Prof. Paolo Santangelo of Naples University «L'Orientale». The final product of this project will appear in an Encyclopedia of Emotions and States of Minds. The article has been presented in a slightly modified form during an International Conference on «Perceptions of Bodily Sensations and Emotions in South and East Asian Cultures», held at Ca' Foscari University of Venice on 27-28 May, 2004. The poems included in this article are part of a *sijo* (short poems in vernacular Korean) and *hansi* (poetry in Classical Chinese) anthology of *kisaeng's* poetry entitled *Canti dal padiglione azzurro (Songs from the Blue Pavillion*, Armando Caramanica Editore, 2005) compiled, annotated and translated into Italian by the author. Translation in English is by the author and it is exclusively meant for use in the present article. For quotation, the Italian translation should be used instead. Original Korean texts are provided in the Appendix.

be affirmed that the *kisaeng* system underwent a «restructuring» phase with the coming to power of a new dynastic family and the adoption of a new ideology supporting the newly-born bureaucratic state. This restructuring was part of the overall reorganization scheme brought forward by the new Chosŏn legislators, which aimed at reforming the entire societal and administrative structures according to Neo-Confucian principles. The reforms resulted in a strict separation of the sexes in everyday life, even though restrictions interested mainly the higher levels of society, at least in the initial phase. High class women saw themselves confined almost exclusively to the boundaries of their homes, thus creating a void in the public life of the Neo-Confucian male administrators.

The new situation, and new societal needs, eventually resulted in the construction of a more organized system of recruitment and training of the young *kisaeng*, which were periodically selected nationwide, to be absorbed within the ranks of the performers working for the Ministry of Rites.¹ The *kisaeng* were selected every three years among the ranks of *ch'ŏnmin* children for their beauty or for their musical and artistic talent.

One major restraint met in the study of *kisaeng*-related subjects is that information on their lives is only rarely attested in primary sources, thus making it very difficult to present authors in strict chronological order. However, in the course of this paper, biographical data on the cited women authors has been provided whenever possible.²

Another major research restraint lies in the fact that, with the exception of few cases, most of the literary production of *kisaeng* authorship is in fact «attributed» rather than soundly attested in contemporary written sources. The *sijo* literary corpus contributed by *kisaeng* is based primarily on the transmission modalities of an oral tradition and only at a very late stage it is codified into written form.³ The chronological distance occurring between the

¹ The selection procedure was considered so important to be included in the main legal code of the Chosŏn dynasty, the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn*.

² An article by the author, attempting at providing a tentative chronological order of *kisaeng* poets is forthcoming on the issue 8/9 of *Asiatica veneziana*, not yet printed at the time of submission of the present contribution. A table summarizing a proposed chronology of *kisaeng* authors is included in *Canti dal Padiglione azzurro*, cit., 34, and reproduced in part at the end of the present article, only with reference to the authors who have been mentioned here.

³ The situation is completely different in the case of *hansi* (poetry in Classical Chinese) written by *kisaeng*. Being the production of poetry in Classical

supposed period of composition and the actual moment of codification can extend itself even over a two-three centuries span, as it is the case for *kisaeng* who lived in the early Chosŏn period. The first written collections of *sijo* and other songs are namely compiled during the reign of King Yŏngjo, at the beginning of the XVIII century.⁴

The sijo poetry form: a brief outline

The *sijo* poetry form can well be considered the longest poetic form among the overall Korean literary production, the most beloved and most sought after, with the widest repertoire. Debate is still open regarding the origin of the *sijo*: some scholars consider it a descendant of Ming China Buddhist chants, some others an elevation of shamanistic songs. Other scholars simply consider the Korean *sijo* as a consequence of the practice of translating Classical Chinese poetry into Korean. According to another theory, the *sijo* poetic form might have originated from the *hyangga* compositions of the Silla times, passing through the phase of the *tan'ga* poetry of the Koryŏ period.

The term *sijo* is attested for the first time in primary sources of the Koryŏ period: in the History of Koryŏ (*Koryŏsa*), it is reported that Kim Wŏnsang composed for the first time a song and called it *sinjo* (new song), whereas a later source of the XV century, the *Tongguk t'onggam*,⁵ attributes to Kim Wŏnsang the merit of the first *sijo* composition. A discrepancy is evident between the two terms (*sinjo* vs. *sijo*), but it seems logical to suppose that the poetic genre was considered a novelty during the Koryŏ dynasty, and therefore it was called *sinjo* (new song) whereas the later source uses the term *sijo* because in the XV century the poetic form had established itself among all other poetic forms and was simply called *sijo* (song of the times).

Historians and critics of Korean literature generally agree

Chinese directly connected to the written dimension of the poem, we have many instances of *hansi* collections written and autographed by *kisaeng*. *Maech'angjip* (Collected poems by Maech'ang) and *Chuksojip* (Collected poems by Chukso) are just two examples of the different – written – dimension poetry in Chinese holds in the realm of Korean classical poetry.

⁴ The first collection is known under the title *Ch'ŏnggu yŏngŏn* (Songs from the Green Hills), where the expression «Green Hills» was often used to indicate Korea, and it is dated 1728.

⁵ A history of Korea compiled in the XV century by Sŏ Kŏjŏng.

with the statement that *sijo* form is without doubt connected to a kind of musical performance and it was originally an engendered poetic form, as it was written exclusively by the male Korean literati. The only women who authored *sijo* during the Chosŏn period were the *kisaeng*. It is possible to suppose that it was the complex and variegated nature of the entertainment role they played in society which initially required from them the learning of poetry composition, as the *kisaeng* were to entertain Confucian literati at their same cultural level, and poetry was one of the most preferred activities by Chosŏn intellectuals. But if earlier compositions seem to develop within more canonized and conservative poetic patterns, both in terms of form and contents, later *sijo* compositions by *kisaeng* authors reveal a higher degree of originality, presenting highly poetic results often praised in their own writings by the same male Confucian who happened to interrelate with *kisaeng* in the course of their lives.⁶

The *sijo* genre has with the centuries developed into several derived forms, but the basic three-line single-form *sijo*, known as *p'yŏngsijo* (which is also the form widely used by *kisaeng*) is generally composed by a series of tetrameters, repeated three times in the same poem.⁷ The first two lines introduce the theme, creating a sort of tension which is later released in the third and final verse, which contains the author's opinion and conclusions on what stated in the previous two verses. The *sijo* rythmical form has usually been analysed by counting syllables, but it has been demonstrated that only few *sijo* respect (with slight variations) the structure 3/4/4(3)/3 in the first line, 3/4/4(3)/4 in the second and 3/5/4/3 in the third.

The *sijo* form soon became very popular among the dominant literati class. The highly educated men seemed to consider it the best poetic form to express with dignity their feelings and

⁶ Many famous Korean writers of the Chosŏn period who met *kisaeng* poets and had the opportunity to listen to their poetic production, have left highly praising comments to this regard in their writings. For obvious reasons it cannot be further elaborated here, but this theme might well become another subject for later research on *kisaeng*'s poetry and their reception within their contemporary literary circles.

⁷ «Tetrameter is composed of four segments on one line, but the length of those segments is not equal. (...) Most *kasa* were written in tetrameter (...), used extensively in *sijo* and in many *minyo* (folk songs): it was also the basic form in the *sibi kasa* (long *kasa* known as "the twelve *kasa*") and short *p'ansori* songs». KIM HUNGGYU, *Understanding Korean Literature*, M.E. Sharpe, New York & London, 1997, 43.

sensations, without falling into self-complacency and/or self-pity. Moreover, the fact that *sijo* poems were also sung could not play but in their favour, because, as the great philosopher Yi Hwang wrote in his «Postface to the Twelve Songs by Tosan» (*Tosan sibi kokpal*) dated 1565, «poems in Classical Chinese were good to be read but not to be sung»,⁸ hereby confirming once again the strong preference Korean literati had for a combination of music and poetry.

During the first half of the Chosŏn period the *sijo* composition assists to the production of particularly elegant poems, on themes such as the relationship between human beings and nature, hereby becoming an escape, a refuge from the boring daily chores set up by political games. Authors such as Yi Hyŏn (1467-1555), Yi Hwang (1501-1570), Chŏng Ch'ŏl and Yun Sŏndo belong to this period. The latter, with his «Fisherman's Calendar» (*Obu sasisa*, 1651) and with his «New Songs from the Mountains» (*Sanjung sin'gok*, ca. 1642-1645) becomes one of the most refined and reknowned *sijo* authors.

During the second half of the Chosŏn period the *sijo* genre, born as an exclusive poetic form of the noble class, spreads also among lower class authors, hereby revealing a simpler and less technical structure, easier to be musically performed. Typical of this period are the first *sijo* anthologies such as the *Ch'ŏnggu yŏngŏn* (1728) and the *Haedong kayo* (1755), which greatly contribute to the diffusion of this poetic genre, at the same time producing evidence of the widespread success and popularity such poetic form had reached at those times.

Contrarily to the rarefied and sophisticated atmospheres found in poetry in Classical Chinese, (*hansi*), *sijo* poems offer to the lower classes, less familiar with Classical Chinese, the possibility to express their own feelings in poetry. As a consequence of this, themes and contents of XVIII century *sijo* poetry become diversified: side by side with themes inspired by nature, typical of the early period, we find more realistic themes, typical of the everyday-life of the non-noble classes of the period.

The authors and their metaphors of emotions

Hwang Chini (1511-1541) is one of the few *kisaeng* poetess whose dates of birth and death are certain. She is also one of the most

⁸ From a quotation in KIM, *op. cit.*, 68.

well known and, probably most beloved *kisaeng* of Korea. Her figure was so famous at her times and also later, that an aura of mystery and legend has been built by local history compilations on the circumstances of her birth and on her entire life. The most reliable information on her comes, as in most of the cases, from the men who met and/or loved her. We know that she was born in Songdo (modern Kaesŏng, currently in the DPRK), as daughter of a literate and a *kisaeng*, and that she lived during the reign of Chungjong (1506-1544).

Under the guidance of her mother, already at a very young age Chini demonstrated to be well versed in music, writing and poetry composition. It is said that at the age of 15, after a boy died of love for her, she decided to become a *kisaeng*, following her mother's path. Probably this story belongs to the legend. However, in a very short period of time she became famous not only for her beauty but also for her talent and outstanding literary capabilities. These qualities paved the way for her to meet some among the greatest intellectual figures of her time, such as the literate and Neo-Confucian philosopher Sŏ Kyŏngdŏk (1489-1546). In spite of his great talent and authoritative personality, he had decided not to pursue a brilliant public career and lived in a solitary refuge on the mountains around Songdo. It is said that Hwang Chini became his pupil and that Sŏ Kyŏngdŏk loved her in a tenderly and platonic way. *Sijo* exchanges between the two demonstrate not only the feelings and the deep attachment existing between them, but also the high level of literary mastery reached by the woman. After the literate's departure, Hwang Chini dedicated to him a very intense *sijo*:⁹

When did I betray your faith?
 When did I betray my love?
 Deep in the night, the moon is about to go,
 There seem to be no signs of you.
 Leaves fall under the autumn wind
 How to bear their song?¹⁰

The introspective search started with the two initial questions remains unanswered. It hints at revealing a woman lost in her des-

⁹ Text no. 1 in the Appendix.

¹⁰ «Quando avrei tradito la tua fiducia?/Quando tradito il mio amore?/La luna sta per andar via, nel cuore della notte/non sembrano esserci segni di te./Le foglie cadono col vento d'autunno:/come sopportare il loro canto?» Quoted from V. D'URSO, *Canti dal padiglione azzurro*, cit., 55.

peration and immerse in solitude. The same solitude her eyes see in the lonely moon «deep in the night» (the woman is not asleep and night hours are the most solitary hours of the day, as she feels nostalgia for her absent beloved). She desperately searches for signs of him, any sign which might suggest his return. The only sound she can hear is the one that reminds her of the time passing by: «Leaves fall under the autumn wind», she concludes. And one might be led to question how loud could a leaf be, while falling from the tree? Well, her feeling of solitude is such that even a soft noise such as that of a falling leaf becomes to the suffering ears of the woman an unbearable «song».

The original poem uses the word «*sori*» which can also be translated as «sound/voice». The «voice» of the falling leaves seems to suggest that the woman is surrounded by a deep silence, too unbearable to the woman. Autumn was the season when literati from the provinces left for the capital, in order to take state examinations. For the poetess, even the delicate voices of the falling leaves are an unbearable cry in her silent solitude, even the moon is preparing to leave the woman alone, for a new day of solitude. Chini is left in her painful awareness: the beloved one has gone away and most likely will never return, as she bitterly states: *there seem to be no signs of you*.

Chinok – No biographical data regarding this *kisaeng* is attested in primary sources. However, it is possible to desume some information from the only *sijo* attributed to Chinok handed down to us: *Ch'ŏri, ch'ŏrirak'ŏnal*, supposedly dedicated to the great poet and thinker Chŏng Ch'ŏl (pseudonym Songgang, 1536-1593)¹¹ and written as a reply to another *sijo* dedicated to her by the man. Chinok is indicated as the author of the *sijo* only in one of the two sources in which the poem is attested: the *Kŭnhwa akpu* (槿花樂府), including the poem at no. 392, indicates Chinok as the author, whereas the *Pyŏngwa kagok chip* (瓶窩歌曲集), at no. 546, attributes the *sijo* to a woman called Ch'ŏri (鐵伊, the «Metal Woman»). This attribution seems to be related to the term «metal» (meaning of the first character composing the name of the woman, Ch'ŏl-i).¹² It

¹¹ These dates lead us to suppose that the woman lived between the reigns of Myŏngjong (1545-1567) and Sŏnjo (1567-1608).

¹² In traditional Korea the suffix *-i* (corresponding to the Chinese character 伊) is frequently used, especially in female and male names of people belonging to lower social status. The name of another *kisaeng* author, Songi, is one

is not to be excluded that the two different names correspond in reality to the same person, but no evidence in primary sources comes to our help in confirming it.¹³

In both *sijo* the authors make use of paronomasia, a very diffused practice in poetry composition of the times. They play with the meanings of their own names by creating literary puns inserted in the joyful game intended in their poems. The expression 'Chŏng Ch'öl' is, as a matter of fact, homophone of «true/pure metal» whereas the woman's name «Chinok» is homophone of «true/pure jade». In addition to noting the parallel construction of both *sijo*, where it is sufficient to substitute few terms in order to obtain the woman's reply to the proposal advanced by the man, it must be noted that the hint to sexual invitation is rather evident and obvious, quite a surprise in the strict and puritan Confucian world depicted by the leading official ideology of the times.

Here follows Chinok's *sijo*:¹⁴

Metal, I have been told.
I thought it was poor metal.
Looking better,
it is clearly excellent metal.
I have a furnace,
I am thinking of trying to melt it.¹⁵

The text of the *sijo* Chŏng Ch'öl dedicated to the woman is as follows:

Jade, I have been told.
I thought it was poor jade.
Looking better,
it is clearly excellent jade.
I have a chisel,
I am thinking of carving it.¹⁶

such example, but many such instances can be found in slave rosters of the Chosŏn dynasty.

¹³ It is not rare to find references to the author's name in *kisaeng* poems. After all, the attribution of an artistic name to the *kisaeng* was a very important event. The name was usually decided by a very important male figure in the life of the *kisaeng*, most often the first man with whom she had sexual intercourse. When not meant to bring her good luck, the name usually described the most salient aspects of her personality.

¹⁴ Text n. 2 in the Appendix.

¹⁵ «Metallo, mi è stato detto./Ho pensato si trattasse di metallo scadente./Guardando meglio/è chiaro che si tratta di metallo eccellente./Ho una fornace,/sto pensando di provare a fonderlo.» D'Urso, *op. cit.*, 39.

¹⁶ «Giada, mi è stato detto./Ho pensato si trattasse di giada scadente./Guardan-

The two compositions present a perfectly parallel structure, built on a similar phrasing construction, as it was typical of the poetry games – solicited poetic exchanges – the *kisaeng* were often called to participate and intervene in.

In these two *sijo* compositions the relationship between hearing and sight lead both authors to a state of evident sexual arousal. At first, hearing (*Jade, I have been told/Metal, I have been told*) seems to lead to a misunderstanding, as both declare that the metal and the jade respectively, seem to be of poor quality. However, after the sight comes to their rescue (*Looking better/ it is clearly excellent jade/Looking better/it is clearly excellent metal*), Chinok «True Jade» and Chŏng Ch'ŏl «True Metal» become fully aware of the reciprocal qualities, respectively *excellent metal* and *pure jade*, therefore the sight raises in the woman, who owns a *furnace*, the desire to melt the *excellent metal* and in the man, who possesses a chisel, the desire to use it for carving the «pure jade».

Another case of solicited poetic exchange between a Confucian literate and a *kisaeng* is to be found in the *sijo* exchange between Im Che (1549-1587) and the *kisaeng Hanu* (寒雨, «Cold Rain»). It provides us with interesting information regarding the relationship between literati and *kisaeng*, other than offering us another amusing poetic exchange typical of the early Chosŏn period.

Very scanty is the information handed down to us about the life of Hanu: we only know that she was active in the city of P'yŏngyang during the reign of Sŏnjo (1567-1608). It seems that she had a love story with the Confucian literate Im Che.

Primary sources refer that one day Im Che, in his encounter with the woman, improvised the following verses, also known by the title of «Hanuga» 寒雨歌 (Song of the Cold Rain).

Today the northern sky was clear,
I came out unprepared for the rain.
It snows on the mountains,
and cold rain falls on the fields.
Today the cold rain soaked me,
I fear I might freeze during my sleep.¹⁷

do meglio/è chiaro che si tratta di giada eccellente./ Ho uno scalpello,/sto pensando di provare a scolpirla.» The text of this poem is not anthologized in *Canti dal padigione azzurro*, cit., but is quoted in the same text, note 1, 140.

¹⁷ «Il cielo del nord era sereno,/ sono uscito impreparato per la pioggia./Sui monti nevica,/e nei campi scende la fredda pioggia./Oggi la fredda pioggia mi ha bagnato,/temo di congelare nel sonno.» D'Urso, op. cit., note 3, 142.

The woman, clearly caught in her pride, responded with the *sijo* *Oi ōrō chari*,¹⁸ where it is evident once again the use of paronomasia (reference to herself as Cold Rain, paraphrasing Im Che's *sijo*) and the level of wit contained in her poem, which hardly veils an explicit invitation to sexual intercourse.

What do you mean... Sleeping and freezing.
Why should you freeze?
Where are the soft embroidered silk covers,
if you sleep in the cold?
Today you met the Cold Rain,
try and sleep in the melting warmth!¹⁹

If Im Che's *sijo* suggests that, in spite of a full immersion (the use of the verb *soaked*) in the cold rain, the man still freezes during his sleep, the woman's answer, on the other hand, originates from her own damaged self-esteem and it seems to take revenge by hinting at the incapability of the man to sleep with other women (the line *Where are the soft embroidered silk covers, / if you sleep in the cold?* is as a matter of fact an open reference to a woman's quarter, identified by soft silk covers. *Today you met the Cold Rain*, continues the woman, inviting the literate to *try and sleep in the melting warmth*. Interesting enough, in Korean the use of the verb «to meet» (맞아시니, *majasini*, «to meet» but also «to touch») has an evident implication of tact. Through the gesture of touching, Hanu invites the man to have a «melting night» with her.

Maech'ang – (1573 - after 1610) is one of the names under which is known the *kisaeng* Yi Kyerang, also known as (Yi) Kyesaeng or Hyanggŭm, who lived in Puan (Chŏlla province) between the second half of the XVI and the beginning of the XVII century. *Maech'ang* was born in a middle class family: her father, Yi T'anjong was a *chungin*, a low-ranking local administration clerk (*ajŏn*) and supposedly her mother was herself a *kisaeng*. Since

¹⁸ The above-mentioned *sijo* is the only one attributed to Hanu which has been handed down to us, and it is included in nine *sijo* anthologies, among which only five attribute it to her: *Haedong akchang* (海東樂章, 139), *Pyŏngwa kagok chip* (瓶窩歌曲集, 553), *Haedong kayo* (海東歌謠, 141), *Siga* (詩歌, 287), and *Akpu* (樂府, in its variant kept at the Seoul National University – Sŏultaebon, 74). It corresponds to text no. 3 in the Appendix.

¹⁹ «*Che dici... Dormire e congelare?/Perché mai dovresti congelare?/Dove sono le morbide coltri di seta ricamata,/se dormi nel freddo?/Oggi hai incontrato la Fredda Pioggia,/prova a dormire nel caldo che ti scioglie!*» D'URSO, *op. cit.*, 43.

her very young years, Maech'ang not only revealed a special talent for poetic composition, but she also was an exquisite dancer and performer of musical pieces at the *kōmun'go*. Her fame soon spread not only in the entire province, but also reached the far away capital. During a visit in Puan, the poet and secondary son Yu Hūigyōng (1545-1636) requested to meet the woman: from that encounter a deep love relationship was born among the two, as witnessed by an intense poetry exchange between them. The poet, however, already had a family waiting for him in the capital city, and soon for the two lovers came the moment of parting. Both found consolation in poetry, the sole testimony of their deep solitude and sadness. In the years which followed, the poetess met other great intellectual and literary figures of the time, such as Yi Kwi (1557-1633), Kwōn P'il (1569-1612) and the writer Hō Kyun (1569-1618).

Yi Kwi later became her lover. It is said that also Hō Kyun, after meeting her, having read her poems and having listened to her playing the *kōmun'go*, fell deeply in love with the woman, but being her already involved with Yi Kwi, one of his best friends, Hō Kyun gave up his love for Maech'ang and accepted to share with the woman an intense exchange of poems and letters.

After 15 years of separation, destiny brought the poet Yu Hūigyōng again in the region, in Chōnju. Emotions ran high during his visit, and the two found their old love back again. But that was destined to be their last encounter: after ten short days they had to separate again. Following their last farewell, Maech'ang lost every interest in life and died in solitude after three years. She left a collection of poems in Classical Chinese, entitled *Maech'angjip*.²⁰

The *sijo* entitled *Ihwau hūppurilche* is attested in 30 *sijo* anthologies, all of which agree in attributing it to Maech'ang. Some sources, like the *Tonggasōn* (東歌選, 142) add that «The famous Puan *kisaeng*, well versed in poetic composition, has left the poetry collection *Maech'angjip*. She met in her hometown her old love Yu Hūigyōng. After he left for the capital, she did not say a single word, lost all hopes, wrote this poem and remained faithful to him».²¹

Similar annotations are also to be found in various editions

²⁰ KIM TALCHIN, *op. cit.*, 335, and KIM CHYONG, *op. cit.*, 650.

²¹ (扶安名妓 能詩 有梅窓集 以村隱劉希慶所眊 劉上京後 頓無音信故 作比歌守節), as reported in SIM, *op. cit.*, 851-853.

of the *Kagok wollyu* (歌曲源流), in the *Haedong akchang* (海東樂章) and in the *Hyömyul taesöng* (協律大成). Her poem, one of the most famous and beloved *sijo* in Korea, is a celebration of sadness and desperation:²²

You, who left,
I have tried to hold in tears,
when like rain fall the petals of the pear tree.
Perhaps you too think of me
now that the autumn wind blows away the leaves?
The dream of solitude 1000 li away comes and goes.²³

The man Maech'ang loves, the greatest love of her life, is preparing to leave, she knows it will be the last time she sees him, so she tries her best not to let him go. At a time *when, like rain, fall the petals of the pear tree*, she tried to stop him. She held him, cried all her tears, while all around the petals were flying lightly, like raindrops. Spring was almost gone when they separated: now fall has come, she still thinks about him, her solitude and pain are immense. The suffering is so unbearable that not even two images of extreme lightness seem to come to her rescue: the autumn wind and the dream. The autumn wind, indifferent to her despair, takes away the fallen leaves, almost an omen of the fast approaching winter, another inevitable, long and cold winter, with no perspective of seeing him again. As for the dream, which often is seen as curing the pain of nostalgia, not even the dream can come to Maech'ang's rescue: her *1000 li away* dreams, are dreams of desperate, undeniable solitude.

Songi – No biographical information is currently available on Songi. Some authors seem to agree that the woman lived around the XVIII century, but no data have been handed down to us, regarding the place where she was active. Even for what concerns the issue of attribution, we are confronted with a discrepancy in the primary sources: out of about 20 sources, only one attributes all poems to the woman author, whereas the remaining others indicate anonymous authorship for the same poems.

The composition presented here is construed upon and around

²² The original text corresponds to the *sijo* no. 4 in the Appendix.

²³ «Te, che sei partito,/ho cercato di trattenerlo piangendo/al tempo che a pioggia cadono i petali del pero./Forse anche tu pensi a me/ora che con sé il vento d'autunno porta via le foglie?/Il sogno di solitudine lontano mille li va e viene.» D'URSO, *op. cit.*, 71.

a very popular legend in the Far Eastern Asian region, the legend of Altair and Vega.²⁴

The Silver River is swollen,
 maybe it overboarded.
 Would the Magpie Bridge be overflowed?
 Perhaps the Heavenly Spirit who leads the oxes
 Will not be able to cross it?
 Vega's fragile soul
 melts like spring snow.²⁵

The narrating voice in the poem belongs to a woman who compares herself to Vega: it is the voice of a woman in love who probably has not met her beloved one in months, just like the female protagonist of the legend, Vega, who is obliged to live for an entire year separated from her lover. The poem is about fear, fear that Altair might not be able to cross the flooded Magpie's Bridge, fear that the narrating woman might never see her beloved again.

As an emotion, fear positions itself very low and deeply in the human body: the author very well renders this state of mind when she describes that Vega's *fragile soul melts like spring snow* at the thought that she might not see Altair. The «fragile soul» is a partial rendering of the original expression «small liver and intestines melt like spring snow». Touchable, material entities such as liver and intestines, two human organs, risk to melt and dissolve: the woman existence itself seems to be jeopardized by such a transformation. Concrete elements such as flesh and blood, the cradle of life and existence, might soon melt into water, an element in principle deprived of its form, a colorless, invisible, intangible entity. The lover's presence assures existence, concreteness. Fear of his absence makes the woman precipitate into feelings of annihilation: the apparently soft image of melting spring snow hides a deep tragedy, well expressed by the feelings of fear, astonishment and anguish contained in Songi's last verse.

Ch'ŏn'gŭm – Nothing is known about the life or the literary activities of this *kisaeng*. According to the literary critic Sŏng

²⁴ In Korean Kyŏnu and Chingnyŏ. It corresponds to text no. 5 in the Appendix.

²⁵ «Il Fiume d'Argento è in piena,/deve essere straripato:/il Ponte di Gazze e Corvi sarà allagato?/Vuol forse dire che lo Spirito Celeste che porta i buoi/non potrà attraversarlo?/Il fragile animo di Vega/si scioglie come neve a primavera.» D'URSO, *op. cit.*, 107.

Kiok, Ch'ön'g'üm is to be chronologically positioned in the late XIX century, but no information regarding her has ever been attested in primary sources of the period. Only one *sijo* has been handed down to us:²⁶

Come has the night, in the solitary mountain village,
Far away I hear a dog barking.
I open the wooden gate,
the cold sky and the moon.
Tell me, why bark
at the silent moon on desert mountains?²⁷

In this *sijo* we are confronted with two kinds of bodily sensations, one perceived through the hearing (the dog's barking far away in the distance) which seems to recall to the woman's mind her present state of solitude and loneliness; the second one perceived through the eyes, through the sight of the solitary moon, far away and high up in the clear, cold night sky. Both bodily sensations recall in the woman inner emotions of solitude, loneliness and sadness. Interesting enough is the description given of the «cold sky»: how can the faraway sky be perceived as «cold»? It is clear that in this case we are in the presence of an already interiorized sensation, given through an experience in absence (the touch of the clear, cold sky) which leads the woman to infer that the sky is cold, because the sky is a mirroring of her soul, her inner, cold being. It seem logical to ask if the coldness of the sky Ch'ön'g'üm is describing isn't already an inner emotion: a cold sky which cannot be touched is in reality the expression of the woman's sadness, for her solitude and delusion: her beloved one is gone, has not returned yet and will probably never return. The woman's sadness is further reinforced by the presence of the solitary, silent – almost cruel in its brightness – moon: it seems like staring, indifferently cold, at the desperate woman, without giving her any hopes.²⁸

²⁶ It corresponds to the *sijo* no. 6 in the Appendix.

²⁷ «Scesa è la notte sul solitario villaggio di montagna./Odo un cane abbaiare in lontananza./Apro il cancelletto di legno,/il cielo freddo e la luna./Dimmi, perché mai abbai/ alla silenziosa luna sui monti deserti?» D'Urso, *op. cit.*, 41.

²⁸ The moon described in these verses reminds us of another famous solitary moon, the one described by the great Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi in the early XIX century in his *Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell'Asia*: «Che fai tu, luna, in ciel? Dimmi, che fai,/silenziosa luna/Sorgi la sera e vai,/contemplando i deserti; indi ti posi./(...)» Leopardi's moon is as much silent, as much indifferent to the destiny of human beings, as Ch'ön'g'üm's moon: neither of them seems to care about the emotions of the two human beings in distress.

Sijo by Anonymous

The following three *sijo* poems are by anonymous, but judging from the contents they seem to be the product of woman's hand.

The first one²⁹ transcends the limits of bodily sensations, probably too tight and confined to express in full the woman's emotions: words and metaphors are not enough to describe her pain and sufferings, so the author proposes a full «body-switch». She wants her cruel beloved to become her: only by doing so will he be able to fully grasp her long and painful bodily sensations, only by doing so will he be able to feel the pain she has experienced during her entire life.

The two of us, in our next life,
will become you me, and I you.
You too will feel the same pain
I felt for you.
I want to give back to you
the pains of my entire life.³⁰

The woman's wish for revenge is very strong in the three short verses, so strong as the deep sense of hatred expressed in the last line. In those few words *I want to give back to you/the pains of my entire life*, the emotion of hatred is so intense, and yet so contained and elegantly expressed. Such pain is comparable to a «cut in the intestines», innermost expression of one's existence and literal translation of the second line of the poem. It is quite a strong *sijo*, and it expresses a direct relationship between the pain felt in one of the innermost parts of the body, the intestines, and an emotion of hatred born of prolonged nostalgia. Nostalgia that has provoked in the woman a deep sense of deprivation and solitude, later developed, as already mentioned above, in hatred.

The second *sijo*³¹ by anonymous is built on a more composed and subdued sense of hatred, which does not assume the intense colors of blood we just saw in the previous one, but rather takes the delicate dimension of a castle of pearls.

If tears were pearls,
I would prohibit them to flow, I would gather them,

²⁹ Text no. 7 in the Appendix.

³⁰ «Noi due, nella prossima vita,/diventeremo tu me e io te./Anche tu proverai lo stesso dolore/che io ho provato per te./Voglio restituirti/le sofferenze d'una vita intera.» D'Urso, *op. cit.*, 131.

³¹ Text no. 8 in the Appendix.

and after ten years I would ask my beloved
to sit in the pearl castle.
No trace of him now,
I remember him with nostalgia.³²

This time the woman, always overwhelmed by nostalgia, imagines that all the tears shed while waiting for her beloved to return, be transformed in pearls. She imagines to gather and save all her tears transformed in pearls, and then to build a castle in which to invite her beloved one, who is long gone. The tactile sensation of a tear, soft, warm, wet, but also short-lived, is here transformed into a cold but smooth and elegant touch of pearls. Contrarily to tears, which easily disappear evaporating into nothing, pearls are a concrete presence, a tangible testimony of the woman's sufferings (nostalgia). Miriads of pearls collected over a ten-year span – where probably the reference to ten years wants to mean a long and unbearable period of waiting – are enough to build a castle, for the beloved one to enter and sit down. The view and touching of all those pearls could probably – and hopefully – render justice to the woman's long waiting, by expressing and communicating her beloved the deep sense of solitude, nostalgia, sadness and pain. The return of her beloved, however, is just a hope, a dream, because in the third line the woman returns back to reality, only to realize that there is «no trace of him now». The only thing left for her is to continue remembering him «with nostalgia».

This *sijo* presents quite an interesting and unusual structure, because the author succeeds in creating a dynamic dichotomy between the concreteness and abstractness of the two main elements of the poem: tears and pearls. Tears, so impalpable, fragile, ephemeral, almost intangible, *vs.* pearls, delicate, elegant, small like tears but at the same time concrete, tangible, accountable for, a true testimony of the woman's sufferings. Ten-year-old tears cannot be seen, they have evaporated, they can only be imagined, but the impression they leave behind is quite weak and ephemeral if compared to the visual and tactile impact of a castle made of pearls. For the beloved one to sit down inside the pearl castle, the contact with the ten-year-old woman's pain is immediate, overwhelming and perfectly rendering.

³² «Se le lacrime fossero perle,/proibirei loro di scorrere, le accumulerei,/e dopo dieci anni chiederei al mio amato/di accomodarsi nel castello di perle./Non v'è traccia di lui ora,/lo ricordo con nostalgia.» D'URSO, *op. cit.*, 137.

With the third *sijo*³³ by anonymous we once again find two of the most frequent bodily sensations used in *kisaeng*'s poetry: hearing and sight, this time softly intersecating with each other already in the first line:

Stop blowing, you snowy wind,
on my window brightly lit by the moon.
I know only too well, that you are not
the sound of his steps on the snow.
I struggle, I suffer, let me be,
I want to hope it is him.³⁴

The woman hears the wind blowing strong against the window of her solitary room. The moon is high, it illuminates her window so bright that it seems daylight. Both sensations, the hearing of the wind blowing outside the house, and the sight of the bright moonshine reflecting on the window, anticipate and suggest a terrible sense of solitude and despair, confirmed by the second line, where the woman seems to realize that, once again, her hopes of seeing the beloved have been disappointed: indeed, the woman bitterly realizes, the sound of the blowing wind is **not** *the sound of his steps on the snow*.

Once again the poem refers of a bright moon remaining indifferent to the woman's solitude. In her room, deep at night, when nostalgia grows so strong and becomes almost unbearable, all she can do is to hope that her beloved will return. Through bodily perceptions such as the hearing of the wind's sound, we assist to the woman's journey immersed in solitude, anguish, despair. After gaining consciousness that another night of solitude has been prepared for her, the woman gives in to despair and suffering: in the last line she struggles, suffers, but nevertheless her hopes have not died: in a wonderful concluding line she still wishes to be able to see her beloved, one day: *I struggle, I suffer, let me be, / I want to hope it is him*.

Conclusions

The few poems analysed in this article represent only a small

³³ Text no. 9 in the Appendix.

³⁴ «*Smetti di soffiare, o vento di neve, / sulla mia finestra illuminata a giorno dalla luna. / So bene che non sei / il rumore dei suoi passi sulla neve. / Mi struggo, soffro, lasciami fare, / voglio sperare che sia lui.*» Last *sijo* anthologized in the poetry collection *Canti dal Padiglione azzurro*, cit., 139.

part of the *kisaeng*'s literary production. They provide a brief glimpse into the emotional world of *kisaeng*: a world often made up of loneliness, solitude, despair and nostalgia, a world mostly described in the limited space of a solitary woman's quarter.

The authors have been arranged in a tentative chronological order and we can clearly notice how themes and emotions expressed in the poems suggest a change over the centuries: the most evident difference is perhaps represented by the use of solicited poetry exchanges only in the early half of the Chosŏn Dynasty, i.e., in the poems attributed to Chinok and Hanu, whereas this kind of solicited exchanges seems to disappear during the second part of the dynasty, when *sijo* compositions by *kisaeng* seem to assume a more intimistic dimension. Perhaps it is also possible to affirm that the only exception to the rule might be represented by the poetess Hwang Chini who, in view of her extraordinary character and poetic inspiration, has left behind poems of extreme depth and beauty.

Moreover, it seems possible to also affirm that emotions included in *sijo* of the early Chosŏn period, like those attributed to Chinok and Hanu, present a more joyful connotation and openly refer to sexual arousal, whereas this seems not to happen anymore in the case of *sijo* of later composition.

Another important observation concerns the fact that inner emotions are often expressed in bodily sensations collected through hearing, sight and tact: taste and smell do not seem to be the *kisaeng*'s favourite channels for expressing inner feelings.

It also seems important to stress how in two cited cases the expression of strong emotions like fear or strong pain, this is done through bodily sensations which involve innermost parts of the body: when pain gets as unbearable as it can be, or when the woman has to express the greatest pain ever, then sensory organs become the intestines, the liver, two of the innermost parts of the human body. As if, being deeply hidden within the body, the effect of mentioning them would become more realistically linked with an emotion of the most intense pain and despair. As if to suggest that a very strong emotion has the power to reach the deepest innerself, the hiddenmost parts of our bodies and souls. This particular aspect of *kisaeng*'s poetry makes their literary production extraordinarily vital and modern, for the sensitivity expressed.

Poetic language is by definition a work of art made up of few formal elements. *Kisaeng*'s poetry seems to communicate the women's innermost feelings through the use of simple, very effec-

tive images. A solitary moon or a dog barking in the middle of the night become metaphors of solitude; a castle made of pearls resembles tears shed over a ten-year long period of waiting for the beloved one. The sound of the wind in a deep winter night is defined as *not* being the *sound of his steps on the snow*, but rather an omen of additional solitude and nostalgia. Deep pain is perceived as a «cut in the intestines». When the beloved one is gone, never to return, sadness is so unbearable that even dreams are unable to offer a shelter to the women's souls, overwhelmed by pain and despair.

Kisaeng's sijo are only a minor part of the entire Korean *sijo* production: they comprise around hundred-hundred and fifty poems in a production of several thousands *sijo* composed over many centuries. It would be interesting to look into the rest of the poems in future research, as it would be worth conducting further analysis on how feelings are expressed in poetry written by men and by women and seeing which differences (if any!) the two canons of expression present to the readers' eyes.

If we consider the humble origins of the *kisaeng*, literary and poetic achievements such as the ones presented above are quite remarkable and worth being re-considered and re-evaluated for their important contribution to the progress and development of Korean cultural and literary history.

APPENDIX

Original texts of sijo presented in the article.

1. Hwang Chini

넋 언직 無信하여 님을 언직 속엿관디
 月沈三更에 온 뜻지 전혀 업디
 秋風에 지는 님 소리가 넋들 어니 흐리오

2. Chinok

鐵을 鐵이라커든 무쇠錫鐵만 여것더니
 다시보니 柳澈일시 的實흐다
 맛츄익 꿀품모 잇더니 녹여 불가 흐노라

3. Hanu

어이 어러 자리 므스 일 어러 잘이
 鴛鴦枕 翡翠衾을 어되 두고 어러 자리
 오늘은 춘 비 맞자신이 녹아 잘까 흐노라

4. Kierang

梨花雨 훗뿌릴제 울며 줌고 離別한 님
 秋風落葉에 저도 날 生覺는가
 下理에 외로운숨은 오락가락 흐다

5. Songi

銀河에 물이 지나 烏鵲橋 쓰단말가
 쇼 잇근 仙郎이 못 거너 오단말가
 織女의 사만흔 肝腸이 봄눈 스투 흐여라

6. Chŏ'ng'ŭm

山村에 밤이 드니 먼되 가 즈저 온다
 柴扉를 열고 보니 하늘이 즈고 달이로다
 저 기야 空山 잠든 달을 즈저 무슴 흐리오

7. Anonymous

우리두리 後生하여 네 나 되고 너 너 되야
 너 너 그려 굿던 이를 너도 날그려 굿쳐보렷
 平生에 너 설워흐던 줄을 돌너볼가 흐노라

8. Anonymous

눈물이 眞珠라면 흐르지 안케 싸 두었다가
 十年後 오신 입을 구슬 城에 안치련만
 痕跡이 이 내엿스니 그를 설워 하노라

9. Anonymous

雪月이 滿窓흔되 바람아 부지마라
 曳履聲 아닌 줄을 判然히 알건마는
 그림고 이수은 적이면 형여 권가 흐노라

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METAPHORS OF EMOTION IN KOREAN KINYŎ POETRY

Table 1. *Chronology of Korean kings of the Chosŏn dynasty.*

T'aejo	太祖	1392-1398	Kwanghaegun	光海君	1608-1623
Chŏngjong	定宗	1398-1400	Injo	仁祖	1623-1649
T'aejong	太宗	1400-1418	Hyojong	孝宗	1649-1659
Sejong	世宗	1418-1450	Hyŏnjong	顯宗	1659-1674
Munjong	文宗	1450-1452	Sukjong	肅宗	1674-1720
Tanjong	端宗	1452-1455	Kyŏngjong	景宗	1720-1724
Sejo	世祖	1455-1468	Yŏngjo	英祖	1724-1776
Yejong	睿宗	1468-1469	Chŏngjo	正祖	1776-1800
Sŏngjong	成宗	1469-1494	Sunjo	純祖	1800-1834
Yŏnsan'gun	燕山君	1494-1506	Hŏnjong	憲宗	1834-1849
Chungjong	中宗	1506-1544	Ch'ŏlchong	哲宗	1849-1863
Injong	仁宗	1544-1545	Kojong	高宗	1863-1907
Myŏngjong	明宗	1545-1567	Sunjong	純宗	1907-1910
Sŏnjo	宣祖	1567-1608			

Table 2. *Places and periods of activity of the kisaeng authors mentioned in this article.*

Name	Period	Region	City
1. Hwang Chini	(1511-1541)		Songdo/ Kaesŏng
2. Chinok (Ch'ŏri)	Lived between 1545 and 1608	—	—
3. Hanu	Lived between 1567 and 1608	South P'yŏngang	P'yŏngyang
Yi Kyesaeng, (also known as Mac- ch'ang, Kyerang o Hyanggŭm)	End XVI- Beginning XVII centuries	North Chŏlla	Puan
4. Songi	XVIII century	—	—
5. Ch'ŏn'gŭm	XIX century	—	—

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to analyse and discuss expressions of bodily sensations connected to inner emotions in *kisaeng's sijo* poetry of traditional Korea, *i.e.* in a period comprised between the 15th and the 19th century, better known as the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910). The article is part of an ongoing broader research project on «Emotions and States of Minds in East Asia, through Textual Analysis», led and coordinated by Prof. Paolo Santangelo of «L'Orientale» University of Naples. It was presented in a slightly modified form during an International Conference on «Perceptions of Bodily Sensations and Emotions in South and East Asian Cultures», held at Ca' Foscari University of Venice on 27-28 May, 2004.

KEYWORDS

Courtesans' poetry. Emotions. *Kinyō*.

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