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**Kosan Yun Son-do (1587-1671) The Man and His Island**

**Kim Yong-dok**

**THE MAN**

Kosan Yun Son-do1 was born in Seoul—Yonji-dong near Changgyong-gung, Palace—in 1587, five years before the Imjin-waeran, the Japanese invasions of 1592-1598. At age eight he was adopted by his father’s eldest and childless brother and moved to his uncle’s home near Myongdong Cathedral.

Kosan’s ancestors came from Kaesong, the capital of the Koryo Kingdom (918-1392). In 1471 the family moved to Cholla-do to what is now in Chollanam-do, Haenam-gun, Haenam-up. There they established a home that has remained the clan seat. Its remoteness spared the house and artifacts from the ravages of the Imjin-waeran and the Korean War.

Kosan’s life was typically stormy for men such as he, with innate intelligence and integrity who, in addition, were undesirably outspoken. The point is made that he had no special mentor, was more or less self-taught, yet passed the Chinsa, the first official examination, in first place at age twenty-six. At thirty he was exiled for the first time for criticizing the powerful Minister Yi I-ch’om.

As a result, his father lost his government job and died soon after. Kosan was sent to Hamgyong-do, the northernmost province of north Korea but later was moved to Kyongsang-do. After eight years he was released when the evil Kwanghae-gun was deposed and King Injo (r. 1623-1649) ascended the throne.

Five years after that, he passed the Mungwa-ch’oshi, the advanced civil service examination, again in first place. For this he was recommended as tutor to the two sons of Injo: Pongnim, who succeeded his father as King Hyoiong, and Inp’yong. [page 62]

Later, Kosan served on the Board of Rites. In a victim of factional squabbling, he was demoted, but in the same year resigned and returned to Haenam.

In 1636 the Manchus attacked Korea for the second time. Kosan gathered together followers, family members and servants and set sail for Kang-hwa-do. This is the same island west of Seoul where the Koryo government had moved during the Mongol invasions, and where the royal family had again sought refuge. By the time Kosan arrived, the enemy had already captured the island.

The king, unable to accompany his family, had escaped to Namhan-san-song, the fortress east of Seoul. There, after a forty-five day siege, he was forced to surrender This was one of the darkest days of Korean history.

Kosan was so devastated that he wanted to isolate himself far from the peninsula under control of the enemy.2 He set sail for Cheju-do but bad weather forced him to interrupt his voyage on an island nearer the mainland which we now know as Pogil-do. He was so enamored of its natural beauty, he decided to make it his home and lived there, on and off, for a total of fourteen years out of his remaining thirty-four. But even though living in such a remote location, Kosan’s bouts with the government were not over.

In 1638, offered a government position in Seoul which he refused, he was exiled from Pogil-do to Yongdok, Kyongsangpuk-do. The following year he was released, visited Haenam, where he left affairs of the family to his son, and returned to his island to continue improving his ponds and gardens.

In 1649 King Injo died and Kosan, in response to King Hyojong, his former student, accepted a position at Songkyunkwan—the prestigious Confucian academy from which all civil servants had to pass examinations. In 1652 he refused another position on the Board of Rites and the following year sailed back to Pogil-do.

Duty called again, however, and in 1657 he assumed a new posting in Seoul. When Hyojong died two years later, Kosan became embroiled in a dispute over an auspicious burial site and the length of the mourning period for the Dowager Queen Cho, stepmother of the deceased king.

Rites were used less to honor the dead than as tools to dislodge opponents: dominance and power were the real issues. In this case, Kosan was on the losing side. Instead of death, which was often the punishment for such “crimes”, Kosan was exiled for the third and last time, between 1659 and 1667, to Samsu in Pyonganpuk-do then to Kwangyang. He was in his seventies during this period! When released, he returned to Pogil-do where he lived until his death in 1671 at age eighty-four by western count，as previous ages [page 63] have been given; eighty-five by Korean count.

At age twenty, Kosan had come into possession of a then forbidden book: Sohak—the primer for traditional Confucianists. This book had been edited and amplified by Chu Shi (Chu Tzu, Chinese; Chuja, Korean). He combined the natural philosophy of Yin and Yang of Taoism and the conventional moral teaching of Confucianism to develop Neo-Confucianism. His philosophy not only emphasizes traditional moral values but places great importance on poetry and music. This seems to be source of Kosan’s lofty ideals and his passion for poetry and music.

Kosan had begun writing Chinese poetry when he was only fifteen and sijo3 during his first exile. He is considered one of the greatest sijo3 poets of Korea. Kim writes that “...as a poet he attained a monumental height as the greatest master in the history of Korean literature.” Two of his sijo are especially outstanding and have been translated countless times: “Five Friends” was composed in a retreat near Haenam and “Four Seasons of the Fishermen” on Pogil-do.

OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS

Kosan was not the only member of his family to reach the pinnacle of success. His grandson, Kongjae Yun Tu-so (1668-1715), was one of the three most famous painters of the Choson Period. In addition to traditional black and white literati paintings, he made a self-portrait in color, maps of Japan and Korea, and wrote and illustrated books on astronomy.

Another descendant, famous or infamous, depending on your point of view, was Paul Yun Chi-ch’ung (1959-1791). Paul, as his Christian name indicates, adopted Catholicism. He and his cousin, James Kwon Song-yu, have the distinction of being the first Catholic martyrs. The church, without trying to understand local mores, had summarily banned ancestral rites as idolatrous. For failing to carry out these rites, the xenophobic Choson government, fearing an erosion of Confucian values, found Pau and James guilty of jeopardizing the foundation of society and dishonoring their parents. With the signed consent of King Chong-jo, who later regretted having done so, but not for humane reasons, the two men were condemned to be beheadea. This order was carried out on December 8，1790 near P’ungnam-mun in Chonju.

The family register lists Paul as having “died in sin.” Ironically, this is an expression sometimes used by Catholics to describe people who have died without baptism! [page 64]

Another illustrious man, Tasan Chong Yak-yong, was related by marriage. His mother was a Haenam Yun. Tasan (1762-1836) had become Catholic and recanted, nevertheless, in the persecutions of 1801 he was exiled to Kangjin for eighteen years. During his time there, virtually alone, he made himself the most prolific writer of Korea. His future adherence to the faith continues to be a topic of controversy.4

In the early 1980s the current head of the clan, Yun Hyong-shik, had embarked on the formidable task of sorting through an estimated 2,000 documents, records, pictures and artifacts dating as far back as the Koryo period when the family lived in Kaesong. The home is not open to the public, but an adjacent museum displays paintings and writings, mostly copies, of members of this distinguished family.

KOSAN’S ISLAND

After deciding to make Pogil-do his home, Kosan first chose a site for shelter, later made a hillside retreat, and in 1640 began to develop his famous gardens. Altogether, he built twenty-five structures or beautifications. He called this entire area Puyong-dong, Lotus Flower Village.

Seventy-seven years after Kosan，s death, his great-great-grandson, Yun Wi，visited Pogil-do and left a detailed description of the gardens and Kosan’s life style there.

HIS HOME COMPLEX

He built his home below Kyongja Peak in the autumn of 1637 and named it Nakso-jae (樂書齊), Enjoy Writing/Reading Pavilion. In 1653, to the right of it, he built a one-kan5 house, Mumin-dang (無悶堂) No Agony/Melancholy Pavilion. Did he choose this name to imply he had no regrets about leaving his family, friends and former life to begin anew on Pogil-do? Or coula ne have meant there was no agony for him here, such as there had been in Seoul?

There is almost always such hidden significance, and so much reference to ancient Chinese literature, that it is extremely difficult to interpret any such names. Even though there is controversy, not to try, with caution, seems to deprive the reader of some added insight into the sensitivity of the era.

Later Kosan dug a lotus pond next to Mumin-dang and two more one- [page 65] kan buildings between it and Nakso-jae. After Kosan’s death, his son, Hak-kwan, repaired the site and tiled the roofs. Today the site of Mumin-dang is littered with tile shards. Other than these shards and part of the stone retaining wall, all that remains of the complex are parts of the two peripheral walls that enclosed the 1500-2000 p’yong (4,950-6,600 square meter) compound.

Behind where the houses sat is a rock named So-un-byong (小隱屛). Byong means folding screen so the rock is described as like a folding screen and gave the area a cozy, secluded feeling” (Pogil-do Sightseeing, p. 21). Kosan and his friends are said to have sat there to visit or to drink tea or liquor.

KOKSU-DANG COMPLEX

Farther down the hill, on the right, was another complex that was built, presumably, by Kosan’s son, Hak-kwan, while his father was alive. Today the ponds are distinguishable but with rice being grown in them. The other remains are the leveled land where Koksu-dang (曲水堂) Bent Stream Pavilion sat, a wall behind it, and, through the underbrush and bushes, parts of other stonework.

Two other names for these pavilions were: Ch’wijok, (取適) Be At Ease With Yourself and Ikch’ong (益淸) Increase Virtue/Purity.

There are also three bridges on this complex. One called Ilsam-gyo (曰三橋) Literally, Day Three Bridge, but meaning that three times a day Hak-kwan crossed it to visit his father Yu-ui-gyo (有意橋) Have Purpose-Bridge, was built and named with significance and symbolism. Erected in the midst of peach and plum trees, the name was taken from a poem comparing the dropping of spring petals to the end of a life that had been lived with purpose.

Yet a third, in this relatively small area, was named Mujigae-dari (무지개) Rainbow-bridge; dari is Korean for bridge. From the description, which is not at all clear, it sounds more like an “overpass”, not over water, but connecting a lotus pond with the western side of the pavilion.

SOKSHIL COMPLEX

Across the valley from Kosan’s home, over a hundred meters up a steep-sided hill, is an outcrop of bare rock protruding conspicuously through the otherwise heavily forested slope. This outcrop so attracted Kosan that he [page 66] spent a great deal of time and effort developing it. He excavated two ponds on a ledge beneath one of the steep, high rocks on which he sat to drink tea. Thus we, if not Kosan, call it Ch，a-pawi, (茶바위) Tea-rock: Ch’a is Chinese, pawi is Korean. At the base of Ch’a-pawi he built stairs that lead down to his “shower.” This is a slightly tilted rock on which he lay while water from an opening at the bottom of the adjacent pond poured over his reclining body.

At the opposite side of the ponds are more stairs leading up to a path by which to reach the top of Ch’a-pawi. The path continues to a small open area where one can still see the four cornerstones that supported the pillars of Tongch’on-sokshil, (洞天石室) another one-room pavilion. Tongch’on refers to an area where Taoists roam or to an especially spiritual place; literally sok-shil means rock room and here refers to a room among the rocky outcrops.

Near the pavilion, at the edge of a nearly vertical drop, is a narrow, less than half a meter, rock slab on which Kosan used to sit to watch the moon rise. Obviously he was not a man who suffered from acrophobia. Kosan designed a pulley between two large upright rocks with which, on a silk cord, he could haul up supplies from the base of the hill.

Think of the enormous amount of time and energy that had to be expended to create these three complexes, especially with the primitive tools available at the time. And all were fashioned for pleasure and self-cultivation, not for any commercial purpose, but as elaborate and impressive as they were, they do not compare to Kosan’s first love—his gardens.

GARDEN COMPLEX

The best known and most visited site on the island, and the one of greatest interest to Kosan, is that of his ponds and gardens. This must have been an especially auspicious site for him as it is two kilometers east of his home.

Kosan began work on this complex in 1640 and enhanced the 5000 p’yong site for over fourteen years. In addition to the two ponds and all their refinements, there were two dancing platforms, one major pavilion; according to one writer, a total of five but they were not identified by name or location. At one end of the gardens is a ponghwa-dae, a beacon hill, from which he communicated with smoke signals with his home. On the slope of this mound is a grave for one of his horses.

The name of the first pond, Seyon-ji, reflects Kosan’s reverence for nature and this area in particular: seyon means as if washed or purified; ji is pond. This one has a sloping, natural basin with an average depth of 1.2 [page 67] meters, and is filled with stream water trapped by Rattling Bridge at the north end.

The “story” of Rattling Bridge is that a loose stone rattled when anyone crossed the walkway. First of all, the structure is not a bridge but an eleven-meter long, one-meter wide levee to hold back water for Seyon-ji. The guide said the rattling came from water rushing over it when the stream overflowed. A diagram of a side view shows that only the lower two-thirds of the interior is solid and above that are loose stones which could well have been “rattled around” by water rushing through cracks between the support stones. Since all the exterior rocks have been cemented together recently there is likely to be no such effect in the future.

In the south, stones were placed strategically to deflect the rushing waters of the swollen stream in flood periods.

This pond was large enough for a row boat in which Kosan glided about. He had placed other stones of various shapes and sizes in the pond, one at least ten meters long with a rounded end raised from the water almost like a bow of a ship. It was given the appropriate name of Hokyak-am (或躍岩) Maybe Will Spring rock because it looks as if it is ready to leap out of the water. Sometimes Kosan sat on this rock to chat and drink with friends or to write poetry. It was here he wrote Obu-sashi-sa, “Four Seasons of the Fisherman.” (See note 2 for one source of a translation of its forty verses.)

There is another rock from which archery was practiced. Traces of where the arrows were stored can be seen.

The second pond is artificial, nearly square and with vertical sides. It is called Hoesu-dam (回水潭) Returning Water Pond because water entered through five under-surface holes in a narrow divider separating Hoewu from Seyon-ji and exited from three openings on the opposite side. The path of flow caused it to swirl around a rock, placed for that purpose, apparently, so that the movement took place beneath a calm surface while keeping the water from becoming stagnant. Both ji and dam, pronounced “dahm” with a soft “a”, are Chinese for pond or pool: dam, by definition，is a deeper body of water.

Another rock, rectangular and flat-topped, was placea in the pond and served as a stage on which kisaeng, in bright colored dresses, danced to entertain Kosan. Also in Haesu-dam was a square, artificial island with trees and bushes. One juniper that Kosan supposedly planted died only twenty years ago.

North of the ponds were Tong-dae and Sodae, (東西臺), East and West Platforms, on which both young girls and young men danced. [page 68]

In between the two ponds, on a twelve by thirteen meter foundation, was Seyon-jong, a pavilion, in the form of a squared cross with an ondol room in the center. On each side was a different name: Seyon-jong (洗然亭)，Nakki- gwan (樂飢館)，Enjoy Meager Life Pavilion; Tongha-gak (同何閣) Tong means equal or identical6 and Tong ha is a quote from Mencius that everyone is born equal in morality and justice; Ho-gwang-nu7 (呼光樓) Beckoning Light Pavilion. We are told repeatedly of KosaiTs enjoyment of the reflections of sky and scenery and particularly of the colorful dancing girls, whether he was in the boat with them or watching from various pavilions or sites. The name, Beckoning Light Pavilion, would seem to reflect this pleasure.

If reports are correct, Kosan did not lack for attention or amusement. According to the Kajang-yusak documents quoted in the Choson Ilbo, a Korean language newspaper, of November 5，1991 “… [Kosan] woke up with the roosters… had a cup of kyongokrju, [liquor] combed his hair neatly...After breakfast he rode his four-wheeled cart which he invented...followed by kisaeng with musical instruments...” he carried liquor and food on another cart!” To his credit, the article goes on to say he was “...not only a man of self-indulgence, but looked after the welfare of others… a moral pillar of the community.”

Reading descriptions of Kosan’s life here, the word sybaritic comes to mind! Accurate or not, such talented individuals are entitled to special lifestyles.

THE PEOPLE’S ISLAND

A visit to Pogil-do will confirm the beauty that captured Kosan’s heart Pogil-do is one of Korea’s over 3,300 islands, most of them in the southwest where the peninsula literally sank and the hills became islands as water inundated the valleys. In Wando-gun alone there are 206 islands; 57, including Pogil-do, are inhabited and 149 uninhabited as of 1983.

Pogil-do is twelve kilometers east-west and eight kilometers north-south, but because of its bulbous shape in the west and narrow extension to the east, is only 3,670 hectares (9,000 acres). As hilly as the island appears, its highest point is only 435 meters. There are approximately 5,300 people in thirteen villages; over 20 kilometers of road; nine to the east are paved but eleven of the northwest coastal road are rather rough. Car ferries run from Wando-up and Land’s Ena in Haenam-gun; taxis and buses are available on the island.

There are at least six hiking trails over the hills and a number of swim- [page 69] ming beaches, one of black, water smoothed stones that emit an eerie, hollow sound when rolled by the waves. Fishing villages dot the coast. In the surrounding sea are white and pastel floats that mark beds of cultivated seaweed: the black seaweed used for kimbop or eaten in squares and the long, wide kelp.

The black stone beach is in Yesong-ni, about five kilometers to the east, or to the left, from the ferry landing. Also at this village is a 740 by 30 meter wind break woods of fifteen species of evergreens and eight of deciduous trees. Together with the beach this is Natural Monument 40. especially prominent are the camellias, the county-flower of Wando, that bloom from November to May.

A side road goes to T’ong-ni and Chung-ni, both with white sand beaches and the latter with an interesting assemblage of houses, some with elaborate roof decorations made of tin.

Turning right from the ferry landing one goes to the areas inhabited by Kosan, an unusual shrine, and the only yogwan, but minbak, homes with rooms for rent are everywhere.

The shrine was erected by neighbors about 100 years ago to honor a woman who was so devoted to her husband that she starved herself to death within twenty-eight days of his dying. Ironically, what makes the shrine unique is the architecture that was copied from Ching China—country of the Manchu enemy that drave Kosan to Pogil-do!

Even during our November visit the island is colorful with wild flowers and late-falling leaves decorating the roadsides and hillsides. The rugged coast and the seascapes are always bewitching. An added benefit at that time of year is the scarcity of tourists. Minimum temperatures of seven or eight degrees Celsius (about forty-four or forty-seven Fahrenheit) give more incentive to a late fall or winter visit there. Remember，it was winter when Kosan found the island irresistibly attractive.

REFLECTION

Kosan was named the Cultural Person of the Month for November of 1991. On January 23,1992, the areas he developed on Pogil-do were designated Historical Site 368.

Kosan, who took himself off the beaten path, as did others during the factional turbulence of the Choson Period, could not have envisioned that hundreds of years later he would, in contrast to his reclusive life on his island, be featured in the historical limelight.

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NOTES:

1. Ho, is generally translated as “pen name” but it is different it is a name, adopted by a person or more often given by a mentor, by which a man is addressed. In Korean literature, when both ho and birth-names arc given they are written in that order: Kosan Yun Son-do- Kosan means “Lonely Mountain.”

2. Kevin O’Rourk in Tilting the Jar, Spilling the Moon, writes, from another reference, that Kosan” … got into trouble again during the Manchu Invasion for failing to accompany the king...” If Kosan was in Haenam, as the other story indicates but does not make clear, he would have been unable to return to Seoul in time to accompany the king.

3. Sijo is a poetic form born in the late Koryo (pre 1392) and developed in the Choson to the point that statesmen, scholars and military men were all writing sijo. Jaihiun Joyce Kim (Joyce [adopted from Joyce Kilmer] Kim Jae-hyon [official transliteration]) describes sijo in Master Sijo Poems from Korea—Classical and Modern. “The sijo is a traditional lyric of three lines or verses averaging 44 syllables in a stanza, each line made up of four phrase-groupings with a major pause after each grouping... elastic in form... it does not adhere to a strict syllable count...”.

4. Tasan was the subject of two RAS lectures: 1989-6-14, ‘‘Encounter of a Special Kind: The Life and Times of Tasan”, Ms. Hahn Moo-sook; 1991-3-27, “Influence of Christianity on the Life and Thought of Chong Yak-yong”, William Kister.

5. A kan is an inexact measurement that refers to the space between two supporting pillars. Mumin-dang would have had four supports, one at each corner, thus one kan in either direction.

6. Ha means who, what, which, where, how, why... does the reader see a problem here?

7. Chong/jong, kwan/gwan, ru/nu/lu, and kak/gak can all be translated “pavilion” and

in usage, at least, are interchangeable.

Sources of Information on Pogil-do

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