

HONG KIL-DONG TRANSCENDING TIME

by

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Abstract

Hong Kil-dong Chŏn (洪吉童傳 [*The Story of Hong Kil-dong*]) is a work of Korean literature, which is generally believed to have been created by Hŏ Kyun (許筠 [1569–1618]). The popularity of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* can be seen in the number of versions of the text and revisions that have been written over the years.

The ultimate goal of the thesis is to investigate the factors that have made *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* popular while contributing to its staying power. Two fundamental research hypotheses explore this issue: (1) The three pre-modern versions and the three modern rewritings of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* reflect Confucian ethics. (2) The new Hwalbindangs and the modern rewritings of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* reflect the same quintessential aspects portrayed in the traditional Hong Kil-dong.

By depicting the relationships between its characters, *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* shows a unique combination of simultaneously obeying and disobeying Confucian ethics. This feature greatly appeals to Koreans as Korean society evolves from absolute Confucian ethics to relative and situational ethics. *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* successfully connects past with present and traditional values with changing morals adding to its popularity. Simple yet profound messages conveyed by the common quintessential aspects of the traditional Hong Kil-dong such as justice, bold action, optimism, and capability allow *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* to transcend time.

Hong Kil-dong has grown from a character in an orally transmitted story to a contemporary multi-media hero. Young and energetic Hong Kil-dong has indeed captured the heart and imagination of Korean people. He will continue to remain as an important representative of Korean identity.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Hong Kil-dong Chŏn is a work of Korean literature, which is generally believed to have been created by Hŏ Kyun. Hŏ Kyun was born in Kŏnch'ŏn-dong (乾川洞), Seoul as the youngest child of Hŏ Yŏp (許曄 [1517–1580]).¹⁾ Being a descendant of an illustrious family, Hŏ Kyun was so gifted as to compose a poem when he was only nine.²⁾ He achieved a relatively successful professional life by passing the classics licentiate (生員試) in 1589 and by holding several government positions including minister of the Board of Punishments (刑曹判書) and Sixth State Councillor (左參贊). Hŏ Kyun's professional life was characterised by his frequent dismissal from official posts. This seems to have resulted from his unconventional behaviour and lifestyle and from the conflict between his ideals and the Chosŏn reality. He was exiled twice between 1597 and 1618 in spite of the protection of his brother Sŏng who was a much-favoured subject of King Sŏnjo (宣祖 [1552–1608]). Accused of treason, Hŏ Kyun was executed in 1618 along with U Kyŏng-bang (禹慶邦), Kim Yun-hwang (金胤黃), Ha In-jun (何仁俊), and Hyŏn Ung-mun (玄應旻).³⁾

Hŏ Kyun was a statesman, a brilliant poet, and a radical philosopher. His achievements in the field of literature have been a popular subject of research. *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn*, which has long been regarded as Hŏ Kyun's masterpiece, has been at the centre of controversy due to its unestablished authorship and genre as well as ambiguity regarding which of its many versions is the original or the closest to the original. This chapter reviews previous discussions on the authorship of *Hong*

1) So Chae-yŏng, pp. II4-5.

2) Yu U-sŏn, p. 84.

3) Chang Yang-su, pp. 43-4.

Kil-dong Chŏn, the determination of its genre, and the identification of its original version. It then summarises the research to be conducted in the thesis.

1.1. Previous Research on Key Issues

Yi Pok-kyu categorises the debate over the authorship of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* into three arguments: recognition of Hŏ Kyun's authorship (許筠 創作論), denial of Hŏ Kyun's authorship (許筠 創作不正論), and reconfirmation of Hŏ Kyun's authorship (許筠 創作再肯定論).⁴⁾

The assumption of Hŏ Kyun's authorship is based on the following record in *T'aektangjip* (澤堂集) of Yi Sik (李植 [1584–1647]).

世傳 作水滸傳人 三代聾啞 受其報應 爲盜賊尊其書也

According to what people have said, three generations of descendents of the author of *Shuihuzhuan* (*Water Margin*) became deaf and dumb as retribution for devoting a book to bandits.

許均 朴燁等好其書 以其賊將別名 名占爲號以相謔

Hŏ Kyun, Pak Yŏp, and others liked the book. They took the nicknames of the leaders of bandits [in the book] as their courtesy names. They called themselves as such and poked fun at one another.

許又作洪吉同傳 以擬水滸 其徐羊甲沈友英等躬 躬蹈其行

[In addition] Hŏ Kyun wrote *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* in order to emulate *Shuihuzhuan*. Sŏ Yang-gap, Sim U-yŏng, and others willingly followed the bandits' conduct.

一村盡紛 許亦叛誅 此甚於聾啞之報也

A village was reduced to ashes. Hŏ Kyun was executed for his treason. This is worse than the retribution of becoming deaf and dumb.
(別集 十五 雜著)⁵⁾

4) This section relies on Yi Pok-kyu, pp. 299–317.

5) Ibid., p. 301. Yi Pok-kyu quoting *T'aektang Pyŏlchip 15 Chapchŏ* (別集 十五 雜著).

T'aektangjip is a collection of literary works published in 1674. It consists of three different editions: ponjip (本集), sokchip (續集), and pyölchip (別集). The ponjip is a collection of Yi Sik's writings. The sokchip was edited by Kim Su-hang (金壽恒 [1629–1689]) after Yi's death and the pyölchip was edited by Song Si-yöl (宋時烈 [1607–1689]).⁶⁾

Based on *T'aektang Pyölchip* (澤堂別集), Kim T'ae-jun (金台俊 [1905–1945]) concluded that Hō Kyun is the author of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn*.⁷⁾ Kim's opinion has become the orthodox theory since then. Other scholars such as Chu Wang-san (周王山), Pak Söng-üi (朴晟義), Kim Ki-dong (金起東), and Chōng Chu-dong (鄭鉉東) accepted his opinion and even copied the misspelled character tong (童) from his book without confirming the original (同) in *T'aektang Pyölchip*. Until the early 1960s, most scholars had never questioned the validity of Yi Sik's record, which was the only piece of evidence available. Some scholars, however, presented counter-arguments in the mid 1960s.

Yi Nüŋ-u (李能雨) first refuted the established theory based on his study of materials such as *Söngsobubugo* (惺所覆瓿藁), *Taedong Yasŭng* (大東野乘), *Sönjo Sujöng Sillok* (宣祖修正實錄), *Kwanghaegun Ilgi* (光海君日記), and *Yöllyösil Kisul* (燃藜室記述).⁸⁾ He revealed that Hō Kyun was not a great revolutionary but an adulator. According to him, Hō Kyun was neither a humanitarian who sympathised with illegitimate children nor an activist who committed himself to social reform. He concluded that the relationship between a petty person like Hō Kyun and a great work like *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* would be difficult to establish.

6) Ibid., p. 300, footnote 2.

7) Kim T'ae-jun, 1939, pp. 79–80.

8) Yi Pok-kyu, p. 302. Yi quoting Yi Nüŋ-u, 1965 and 1969 from Yi Nüŋ-u, 1975, pp. 141–79.

Kim Chin-se (金鎮世) strengthened the arguments against Hŏ Kyun's authorship:

- (1) The record about *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* written in *T'aektang Pyŏlchip* was edited and published by Song Si-yŏl twenty seven years after Yi Sik's death. Therefore its validity is questionable.
- (2) Yi Sik was involved in the publication of *Sŏnjo Sujŏng Sillok* and *Kwanghaegun Ilgi* both of which include negative evaluations of Hŏ Kyun. Yet he never mentioned anything related to *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* in these publications. It is questionable that *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* would have been mentioned after his death.
- (3) Hŏ Kyun hid his works in his daughter's house around the time he was executed. *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* was not among them and was not found later during a house search. The charges against him did not include his authorship of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn*.
- (4) The confidential memorial submitted by Ki Chun-gyŏk (奇俊格 [1594–1624]), son of Ki Cha-hŏn (奇自獻 [1562–1624]) who was once on amicable terms with Hŏ Kyun but later became his archenemy, had no mention of Hŏ Kyun's writing *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn*.
- (5) Hong Kil-dong's attack on Haein temple and the confiscation of its treasures are inconsistent with Hŏ Kyun's faith in Buddhism. Kim concluded that Hŏ Kyun is unlikely to be the author of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* and that its author must have been someone else.

In reaction to the arguments against Hŏ Kyun's authorship, a reconfirmation of his authorship emerged in the 1970s. The new argument consisted of two hypotheses: (1) Hŏ Kyun created *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* as a work of fiction (小說) and (2) Hŏ Kyun wrote a biography (傳) of a real person Hong Kil-dong (洪吉同).⁹⁾

9) Chu Myŏng-hŭi, pp. 324–34. Chu argues that the definition of “傳” varies depending on the scholar. Among various definitions of “傳,” Chŏng Ch'ang-bŏm's interpretation (“傳” is “傳記,” a form of biography) has been chosen for this context.

As for the argument for Hŏ Kyun's creation of a work of fiction, Ch'a Yong-ju (車溶柱) was the first person to refute Yi Nŭng-u and Kim Chin-se with the following arguments: (1) Hŏ Kyun's interest in Buddhism, which was quite temporary, was not religiously but intellectually motivated. (2) Negative evaluations of Hŏ Kyun's character are not quite justifiable. The claim that Hŏ Kyun had no philosophical capacity to create a work like *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* is a short-sighted opinion formed by the investigation of Hŏ Kyun's life only after his connection with Yi I-ch'ŏm (李爾瞻 [1560–1623]). Hŏ Kyun must have had the capacity and willingness to create *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn*. (3) There is no strong evidence to refute the record in *T'aektang Pyŏlchip*. It is highly unlikely that the record of such a prominent scholar was edited or something was added to the record.

Ch'a concluded that Hŏ Kyun should be honoured as the author of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* until convincing evidence supporting Yi Nŭng-u or Kim Chin-se's argument became available.¹⁰⁾

Cho Tong-il (趙東一) also criticised Kim Chin-se using the following reasons: (1) There is not enough evidence to refute the validity of *T'aektang Pyŏlchip*. (2) A *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* manuscript could have survived despite the house search. (3) Hŏ Kyun's faith in Buddhism should be seen as a separate issue from his hostility against the corruption of Buddhist monks. His interest in Buddhism was not to accept it as an absolute standard for solving problems but to rebel against Confucian ethics, the dominant belief of his time. (4) The most convincing evidence for Hŏ Kyun's authorship is that his philosophy is reflected in *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn*. His arguments

10) Yi Pok-kyu, pp. 307–8. Yi quoting Ch'a Yong-ju, 1972.

in both “Yujae-ron” (遺才論 [An Essay on Lost Talent])¹¹⁾ and “Homin-non” (豪民論 [An Essay on Brave People])¹²⁾ virtually coincide with those in *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn*. No one could have come up with such arguments and written *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* except Hŏ Kyun.¹³⁾ Cho then criticised Yi Nŭng-u for concluding that Hŏ Kyun was a petty person, for denying the likelihood of Hŏ Kyun’s creation of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn*, and for having a double standard: judging Hŏ Kyun according to a mediaeval standard but evaluating *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* by today’s standards.¹⁴⁾

11) Hŏ Kyun felt keenly the injustice of excluding illegitimate children from government posts. He was convinced that discrimination against illegitimate children was wrong and harmful to the state (Yi Mun-gyu, 1996, p. 214). In his essay “Yujae-ron,” Hŏ Kyun further criticised discrimination based on blood lineage: 天之生也 Heaven hands out gifts. 而人棄之 People discard them. 是逆天也 This is to violate the will of Heaven. (Chang Yang-su, p. 55). Hŏ Kyun’s argument can be summarised as follows: “Gifted people are not created by their social status. If people are gifted, the state should employ them. Ancient sages were able to govern their states successfully because they chose gifted men regardless of their social status. There were no countries that imposed restrictions on the recruitment of the gifted. Chosŏn’s law preventing the sons of low-birth or remarried women from entering officialdom poses a threat to the future of the kingdom.” (Yi Mun-gyu, 1996, p. 214).

12) In his essay “Homin-non,” Hŏ Kyun divided the people into three categories: hangmin (恒民), wŏnmin (怨民), and homin (豪民). The hangmin are those who follow the rulers abiding by the laws. The wŏnmin are those who hold a grudge against the rulers having had their properties confiscated by them. The homin are those who intend to revolt against the rulers at an opportune moment being dissatisfied by societal/political injustices. Hŏ Kyun took Kyŏn Hwŏn (甄萱 [867–935]) and Kung Ye (弓裔 [?–918]) as the most symbolic examples of homin. When the homin rise up, the wŏnmin will support them. Then the hangmin will follow them with their hoes and rakes leading to social reform (So Chae-yŏng, pp. III6–7). Hŏ Kyun regarded Chosŏn as a target for the homin. The life of the people was so devastated that the number of wŏnmin was on the increase. He described the situation as follows in his poem, “記見 (Recorded upon Observation).”

野妻相對哭荒村	Country women weep in a devastated village.
共設今年力役煩	So much compulsory labour this year, they say.
餘粒夜春充囊袋	Grind the leftover rice at night and fill the sack to the brim.
殘蔬日拾供朝昏	Gather leftover vegetables and serve them up day and night.
經春盡廢耕耘業	Exhausted, we cannot plough or weed even as spring passes us by.
(Ch’a Yŏng-ju, 1998, p. 288. Ch’a quoting “記見” 卷二 臆記詩).	

The women (野妻) in Hwang’chŏn (荒村) are examples of wŏnmin. Hŏ Kyun thought that the situation of seventeenth-century Chosŏn necessitated the emergence of homin and his *Hong Kil-dong chŏn* is the embodiment of “Homin-ron.” (Song Chae-so, pp. II78–9). The fundamental idea of “Homin-non” is that the ruling class should govern for the good of the people. Inhumane acts on their part will lead to an uprising of the homin. As a result the rulers will be assassinated and the state will collapse. Hong Kil-dong is a fictional version of the homin, while the bandits are the hangmin and wŏnmin awaiting such a leader. (Yi Mun-gyu, 1996, p. 221).

13) Yi Pok-kyu, p. 309. Yi quoting Cho Tong-il, 1977, p. 205 and 1978, p. 179.

14) Ibid., pp. 309–10. Yi quoting Cho Tong-il, 1981, pp. 31–2.

Yi Mun-gyu supported Cho's arguments based on his study of the relationship between *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* and Hŏ Kyun's arguments in "Yujae-ron" and "Homin-non." Through a comparison between *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* and Hŏ Kyun's five other stories,¹⁵⁾ Yi established that *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* was produced by Hŏ Kyun because the characteristics of the protagonists and the author's philosophy are clearly related.¹⁶⁾

One noteworthy fact is that some, while recognising Hŏ Kyun's authorship, have suggested strongly that the original *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* must have been a biography rather than a work of fiction. Yi Nŭng-u was the first person to come up with this argument based on his investigation of the life of Hong Kil-dong who really existed. While denying Hŏ Kyun's authorship,¹⁷⁾ Yi argued that it would be more appropriate to infer that Hŏ Kyun's *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* must have been a biography of the thief Hong Kil-dong who existed during the reign (1494–1506) of the Yŏnsan'gun (燕山君 [1476–1506]).¹⁸⁾

Cho Hŭi-ung (曹喜雄) made the same argument claiming that Hŏ Kyun wrote a biography of the historical Hong Kil-dong, while a work of fiction *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* must have been created in the nineteenth century based on the biography.¹⁹⁾

Chŏng Kyu-bok (丁奎福) concluded that Hŏ Kyun's *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* was in the form of a biography for the following two reasons: (1) The protagonist in *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* is not fictitious but real. The records of the thief Hong Kil-dong can be found in *Chosŏn Wangjo Sillok*.²⁰⁾ (2) It should be noted that the spelling of

15) *Namgungŏnsaeng Chŏn* (南宮先生傳), *Changsaeng Chŏn* (蔣生傳), *Ŏmch'ŏt'o Chŏn* (嚴處士傳), *Son'goksanin Chŏn* (孫谷山人傳), and *Changsanin Chŏn* (張山人傳). See Cha Yong-ju, 1998, pp. 225–71 for the analyses of the characters in these stories.

16) Yi Pok-kyu, p. 310. Yi quoting Yi Mun-gyu, 1986, pp. 100–10.

17) Kim Min-su, p. 3. Yi eventually recognised Hŏ Kyun's authorship despite his initial questions about it.

18) Yi Pok-kyu, pp. 311–2. Yi quoting Yi Nŭng-u, 1969, pp. 178–9 from Yi Nŭng-u, 1975.

19) *Ibid.*, 312. Yi quoting Cho Hŭi-ung, 1977, pp. 28–9.

20) *Yŏnsan'gun Ilgi* (燕山君日記) dated October 22 and 28, November 28, and December 29, 1500. *Chungjong Sillok* (中宗實錄) dated August 29, 1513, February 10, 1523, December 28, 1530, and January 1, 1531.

Hong Kil-dong Chŏn in Yi Sik's record is not “洪吉童傳” but “洪吉同傳.” What the great scholar observed states clearly that original *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* is likely to be a biography of the thief.²¹⁾

While strongly supporting the validity of the record in *T'aektang Pyŏlchip* by arguing that the record reflects Yi Sik's style, scholarship, and perspectives on life, Chŏng Sang-gyun (鄭尙均) suggested that it would be appropriate to regard *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* as a biography.²²⁾

Yi Pok-kyu, however, raised the following questions about the original *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* being regarded as a biography: (1) One possible reason for regarding the original *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* as a biography is the misinterpretation of the phrase “許又作洪吉同傳 以擬水滸.” Whether it is interpreted as “Hŏ Kyun wrote *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* in order to emulate *Shuihuzhuan*” or “Hŏ Kyun copied *Shuihuzhuan* and wrote *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn*,” *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* should be seen as something similar to *Shuihuzhuan* in nature i.e., a work of fiction. Otherwise the interpretation of the phrase would be quite awkward: “Hŏ Kyun wrote a biography by copying a work of fiction” or “Hŏ Kyun wrote a biography in order to emulate a work of fiction.” (2) It is hasty to conclude that *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* is a biography just because the protagonist's name Hong Kil-dong coincides with that of the real Hong Kil-dong. If this were the case, titles of pre-modern works of fiction would not carry the names of real people. *Im Kyŏng-ŏp Chŏn* (林慶業傳) and *Kim Su-sin Chŏn* (金廔信傳) are some examples to the contrary. The names of real people were still used as titles of works of fiction. (3) For the argument (*Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* is a biography) to be persuasive, the life of the fictitious Hong Kil-dong and that of the real Hong Kil-dong

21) Yi Pok-kyu, pp. 312-3. Yi quoting Chŏng Kyu-bok, 1991, pp. 159-60.

22) Ibid., p. 313. Yi quoting Chŏng Sang-gyun, 1992, pp. 129-34.

should coincide. What has been uncovered thus far proves otherwise. Yi concluded that even if the *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* written by Hŏ Kyun were a biography, it must have been a biography transformed to a work of fiction rather than a typical work of fiction.²³⁾

Yi Yun-sŏk denied the reconfirmation of Hŏ Kyun's authorship based on the following arguments: (1) Kim T'ae-jun, who first mentioned the author of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* based on the record in *T'aektang Pyŏlchip*, recognised Hŏ Kyun's authorship without offering concrete evidence or supporting data. (2) None of the twenty-nine different versions of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* Yi has seen mention any author(s). It is therefore absurd to support Hŏ Kyun's authorship based on only one phrase in *T'aektang Pyŏlchip*. (3) Existing versions of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* have been published since the late nineteenth century and the version Hŏ Kyun wrote has not yet been found. No record is available to prove the connection between Hŏ Kyun's *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* (if he had ever written any) and existing versions. Yi concluded that Hŏ Kyun should not be claimed as the author of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* unless the very version Hŏ Kyun wrote is identified or the version mentioned in *T'aektang Pyŏlchip* proves to be the same as one of the existing versions.²⁴⁾

Yi Pok-kyu admitted that the recognition of Hŏ Kyun's authorship has been regarded as the orthodox argument. Yi suggested the following points to strengthen the argument: (1) Circumstantial evidence proving the validity of *T'aektang Pyŏlchip* should be provided. (2) Extra efforts should be made to find new records that can prove Hŏ Kyun's authorship. (3) Convincing explanation should be offered as to why Yi Sik mentioned *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* only in *T'aektang Pyŏlchip* but not in other

23) Ibid., pp. 314-5.

24) Yi Yun-sŏk, 1997, pp. 137-41.

writings.²⁵⁾

Another controversial issue surrounding *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* has been the identification of the original or the version closest to the original.²⁶⁾ What makes it difficult to establish its original version is that *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn*, like many other works of pre-modern Korean fiction, has no record of any author(s).

Chŏng Kyu-bok became the first person to conduct actively a study of different versions. Chŏng's research focused on reviewing and comparing seven different versions such as the Seoul and Chŏnju wood-block prints, movable type prints, and manuscripts. Chŏng concluded that the twenty-four-leaf Seoul wood-block print (京板本 二十四張), which is also called the Hannam version (翰南本), would be the closest to the original. Chŏng's claim was accepted without major counter-arguments for some time and the Seoul wood-block print has been one of the most popular versions chosen for research.²⁷⁾

Song Sŏng-uk (宋晟旭) argued subsequently that the thirty-leaf Seoul wood-block print (京板本 三十四張), which is also called the Yadong version (冶洞本), would be the closest to the original. Yi Yun-sŏk also argued that the latter part (from leaf twenty-one) of the twenty-four-leaf Seoul wood-block print seemed to have been shortened from the thirty-leaf Seoul wood-block print and therefore it would not be appropriate to use the version as a basis of research.²⁸⁾ Yi claimed that the eighty-nine-leaf Kim Tong-uk manuscript would be the closest to the original.²⁹⁾

What drew renewed attention to a study of different versions is the introduction of the thirty-leaf Sŏgang University Hanmun manuscript by Yi Chong-ju (李鐘周). Yi

25) Yi Pok-kyu, pp. 315-6.

26) This section relies on Yi Yun-sŏk, 1997, pp. 17-23 and Chŏng Kyu-bok, 1998, pp. 277-92.

27) Yi Yun-sŏk, 1997, p. 19, footnote 14. Yi quoting Chŏng Kyu-bok, 1970 and 1971.

28) Ibid., p. 20, footnote 19. Yi quoting Yi Yun-sŏk, 1989.

29) Ibid., p. 21, footnote 22.

regarded the manuscript as being the closest to the original and suggested that it was written by Hŏ Kyun.³⁰⁾ Yi, however, focused his research only on comparing the manuscript with the twenty-four-leaf Seoul wood-block print and the thirty-six-leaf Chŏnju wood-block print. He did not take into account another category of version that has similar stories to the Hanmun manuscript.³¹⁾

In response to the questions about the position of the twenty-four-leaf Seoul wood-block print, Chŏng Kyu-bok reconfirmed his initial argument that it would still be the closest to the original. He also claimed that the Sŏgang University Hanmun manuscript is a translated version of the Seoul and Chŏnju wood-block prints combined.³²⁾ Cho Yong-ho suggested that the Hanmun manuscript would be the closest to the original and criticised Chŏng for having intentionally underestimated it.³³⁾

1.2. Statement of Current Research

Hong Kil-dong Chŏn has been one of the most compelling Korean classics of all time with its vivid depictions of the wondrous adventures of its protagonist. The popularity of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* can be seen in the number and types of prints and reprints of the text as well as modern writings and rewritings. *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* is one of the most researched works of Korean literature. Excerpts from the thirty-six-leaf Chŏnju wood-block print are included in the Korean literature textbook for middle school.³⁴⁾ *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* has been an integral part of Korean sentiment and the name of its protagonist Hong Kil-dong has become an important

30) Chŏng Kyu-bok, 1998, p. 279. Chŏng quoting Yi Chong-ju, *Hanmunbon Hong Kil-dong Chŏn Kŏmt'o*, 1988.

31) Yi Yun-sŏk, 1997, pp. 19-20, footnote 16. Yi quoting Yi Chong-ju, *Hanmunbon Hong Kil-dong Chŏn Kŏmt'o*, 1988 and *Hanmunbon Hong Kil-dong Chŏn Haech'e rŭl Wihan Toron*, 1988.

32) Ibid., p. 20, footnote 20. Yi quoting Chŏng Kyu-bok, 1990 and 1991.

33) Ibid., p. 20, footnote 21. Yi quoting Cho Yong-ho, 1993.

34) Ibid., p. 15.

representative of Korean identity.

As pointed out in the discussion of previous research, study of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* has focused mainly on two issues: the examination of its authorship and the determination of its original version. Scholars in the twentieth century carefully examined these issues but the debate is still ongoing without any definitive evidence. Even though establishing the authorship of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* and determining its original version are important issues, the thesis will examine this classic work from a broader perspective within its cultural, social, and historical contexts.

The ultimate goal of the thesis is to investigate the factors that have made *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* popular while contributing to its staying power. Two fundamental research hypotheses explore this issue through the following two claims: (1) The three pre-modern versions and the three modern rewritings of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* reflect Confucian ethics, the dominant moral values of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn*'s time. (2) The new Hwalbindangs and the modern rewritings of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* reflect the same quintessential aspects portrayed in the traditional *Hong Kil-dong*.

Chapter II summarises three pre-modern versions of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* that characterise the traditional *Hong Kil-dong*. Chapter III addresses traditional *Hong Kil-dong*'s perceptions of an unjust world including his discontent with discrimination against illegitimate children and societal/political injustices in Chosŏn. This chapter then discusses *Hong Kil-dong*'s rebellion against these injustices. Chapter IV describes traditional *Hong Kil-dong*'s plan for conquering the island kingdom of Yuldoguk, his establishment of a new world, and the characteristics of this world. Chapter V looks at modern expressions of a more contemporary *Hong Kil-dong*. This chapter begins by addressing the activities and characteristics of the new Hwalbindangs from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This chapter then summarises the modern

rewritings of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* in order to have a broader view of this story. Other modern expressions of Hong Kil-dong in various media are also discussed. Chapter VI examines the two research hypotheses. This chapter first investigates the influence of Confucian ethics on the pre-modern versions and the modern rewritings of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn*. This chapter then defines the quintessential aspects of the traditional Hong Kil-dong and investigates their influence on the new Hwalbindangs and the modern rewritings. Chapter VII explores the factors that have made *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* popular and able to transcend time.

For research material, three pre-modern versions have been chosen: the twenty-four-leaf Seoul wood-block print,³⁵⁾ the Toyo Bunko manuscript (東洋文庫本),³⁶⁾ and the Chŏng U-rak manuscript (吉童錄).³⁷⁾ These versions originated before 1900.³⁸⁾ They represent both the personal and the collective expressions of individuals of their time ranging from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century.

The three modern rewritings chosen for research include *Changp'yon Sosŏl Hong Kil-dong* (Fictional Hong Kil-dong) by Chŏng Pi-sŏk,³⁹⁾ *Changp'yon Sosŏl Seoul*

35) Han'guk Ŏmunhakhoe, 1998.

36) Yi Yun-sŏk, 1997, pp. 405-45.

37) Ibid., pp. 299-341.

38) Most literary scholars agree that orally transmitted folk tales about the historical Hong Kil-dong became the basis of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* regardless of Hŏ Kyun's authorship. If Hŏ Kyun's authorship is assumed, then he essentially translated orally transmitted stories of peasant rebellions and the real Hong Kil-dong to written form. If Hŏ Kyun's authorship is rejected, then the orally transmitted stories took place gradually from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth or nineteenth century. (Robert J. Fouser, *Translations of Hong Kildong: From Story to Classic to Icon and Beyond*, unpublished article). Yi Yun-sŏk argues that *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn*, like many other works of pre-modern Korean fiction, must have been produced in manuscript and then in wood-block prints. Existing popular stories rather than newly created ones were used as a source of publishing because the production of wood-block printed works was commercial. Yi also argues that existing versions of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* must have been created since the mid-nineteenth century as shown in the preface (序) of *Imjinnok* (壬辰錄) written in 1876. (Yi Yun-sŏk, 1997, pp. 146-7).

古談之播在巷間 如蘇大成趙雄洪吉同田羽致諸傳者 兄以一人事跡 錢成諺書

Widely talked about folklore such as the stories of So Tae-sŏng, Cho Ung, Hong Kil-dong, and Chŏn U-ch'i is a trace of only one person. [The folklore] was recorded and then became a book written in vernacular Korean. (Yi Yun-sŏk, 1997, p. 139. Yi quoting Yu T'ak-il, 1994, p. 187).

39) Books one (pp. 11-285) and two (pp. 11-279).

Hong Kil-dong (The Seoul Hong Kil-dong) by Pak Yang-ho,⁴⁰⁾ and *S. F. Hong Kil-dong* by Chŏng Kyŏng-hun and Yi Sang-ye.⁴¹⁾ These rewritings originated after 1950. They inherit the spirit of the traditional Hong Kil-dong and yet their contents, plots, and resolutions are uniquely different.

40) Books one (pp. 11-265), two (pp. 7-274) and three (pp. 7-308).

41) pp. 7-191.

CHAPTER II

PRE-MODERN VERSIONS

This chapter describes the story of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* as expressed in three pre-modern versions. All three pre-modern versions cover the following events: Hong Kil-dong's low birth and his life as an illegitimate child, the discrimination and mistreatment he suffers at home, his departure from home, his participation in a group of bandits, his banditry to rectify societal/political injustices during the reign (1418–1450) of King Sejong (世宗 [1397–1450]), his appointment as minister of the Board of War (兵曹判書), his departure from Chosŏn, and his establishment of a new world in Yuldoguk (硯島國). These versions are similar in terms of their plots and resolutions but differ in their expression of Hong Kil-dong's fight against Yuldoguk.

2.1. The Seoul Wood-block Print

The Seoul wood-block print⁴²⁾ is discussed in more detail than the other pre-modern versions to establish the basic story that is common in these versions. Kil-dong is an illegitimate son. His father is minister of the Board of Personnel (吏曹判書) and his mother Ch'un-sŏm (春蟾) was a maid servant. Kil-dong has one elder brother In-hyŏng (仁衡) who was born to Minister Hong's legitimate wife from the Yu clan. Kil-dong has not been allowed to call his father or his brother as such because of his illegitimacy. Kil-dong grieves over the fact that he is subject to discrimination and mistreatment due to his low birth. The concubine of Kil-dong's father Ch'o-ran (初蘭) is a former kisaeng originally from Koksan (谷山). She has not

42) Yi Yun-sŏk, 1997, p. 46, footnote 10. This version has twenty-four leaves. The first twenty leaves have fourteen lines averaging twenty-one letters. The last four leaves have fifteen lines averaging twenty-four letters.

produced a son and therefore she is very jealous of Kil-dong and his mother. She involves a shamanist and a physiognomist and then hires an assassin T'uk-chae (特才) in her conspiracy to kill Kil-dong. Kil-dong uncovers their attempt and kills the physiognomist and the assassin.

Kil-dong leaves his family in order to protect himself from potential threats. While wandering about the country, Kil-dong comes across a group of people who turn out to be bandits. He becomes their leader by displaying his unmatched powers. They pledge allegiance to one another and celebrate the occasion.

Kil-dong and his bandits practice martial arts and become well disciplined within a few months. They decide to attack Haein temple (海印寺) in Hapch'ŏn (陝川), South Kyōngsang Province (慶尙南道) in order to steal its wealth. Kil-dong invents an ingenious idea. Kil-dong informs the head monk that he will study at the temple and donate twenty bushels of polished rice. While all the monks and Kil-dong are having a banquet, he puts a grain of sand in his mouth and bites it. He blames the monks for humiliating him and has them tied up. At this moment his bandits rush in and take the wealth from the temple. Kil-dong disguises himself as a monk and deceives the local police by misleading them regarding the whereabouts of his bandits. After the success of their first attack, Kil-dong names his group the Hwalbindang (活貧黨 [a group of those who help the poor]).

Kil-dong and the Hwalbindang engage in banditry in the eight provinces of Chosŏn confiscating wealth unjustly gained and helping the poor and helpless. They then move to Hamgyōng Province (咸鏡道) to attack its corrupt governor and steal the grain and weapons from the government house. Kil-dong creates seven replicas of himself in order to avoid capture and expand his banditry. Eight Kil-dongs, each of whom has hundreds of followers, roam throughout the country stealing wealth from

magistrates in each township. Their banditry causes a stir in the country and becomes the main cause of commotion.

The chief of police Yi Hŭp (李洽) ventures out with his men on a mission to carry out the king's orders to capture Kil-dong. Kil-dong disguises himself as a young boy and visits the chief in a local tavern. Kil-dong the boy shows his determination to catch Kil-dong the bandit, so the chief is impressed by his loyalty. The boy leads the unsuspecting chief to his den on the pretext of testing the chief's power. The boy finally reveals his true identity and then sets the chief free with a piece of advice that he should not inform the king of the incident for his own sake.

The king appoints Kil-dong's brother governor of Kyŏngsang Province (慶尙監司) in a desperate attempt to capture Kil-dong. In response to the king's action, Kil-dong suggests that he would turn himself in and leave Chosŏn if he were appointed minister of the Board of War. The king accepts his proposal. Upon obtaining the position, Kil-dong travels in the direction of Namgyŏng (南京)⁴³⁾ and reaches Yuldoguk. He settles on Che Island (提島), which belongs to Namgyŏng. There he prepares his great plan to conquer Yuldoguk. He builds thousands of houses, devotes extensive resources to agriculture, and makes his followers practice military training to create excellent discipline. Kil-dong takes two wives, daughters of Paek Nyong (白龍) and Cho Ch'ŏl (趙鐵), whom he has saved from the monsters on Mount Mangdang (芒碭山).⁴⁴⁾

Kil-dong has been laying his plans to conquer Yuldoguk. He finally seizes the moment to attack. He leads his fifty thousand soldiers and heads toward Mount

43) Yi I-hwa, p. 31. Namgyŏng (Nanking) is a town on the Yangtze River in southern China. Kil-dong is not headed north to go to Pukgyŏng (Peking) that is closer to Chosŏn.

44) Ibid., p. 33. Mount Mangdang is in the south of Shandong. Its location indicates that it is adjacent to Yuldoguk.

Ch'ölbong (鐵峯山) where he begins his attack. The governor of Ch'ölbong Kim Hyön-ch'ung informs the king of Yuldoguk of the situation and then starts fighting back. Kil-dong kills the governor with just one blow and easily conquers Ch'ölbong. Kil-dong sends out a letter of declaration to the king of Yuldoguk demanding his surrender. The king surrenders along with his officials after losing his trusted subject. Kil-dong becomes the new king. He confers a title of lord (君) to the former king and gives his generals new appointments.

Three years after Kil-dong's enthronement, he builds a peaceful world where no bandits exist in the mountains and people are prosperous. Kil-dong has three sons and two daughters. He appoints his first son Hyön (賢) the crown prince and confers the title of lord to his other sons. The seventy-two year-old Kil-dong departs this world due to illness thirty years after his enthronement. His queen also passes away. The crown prince ascends the throne. Their descendents enjoy peace generation after generation.

2.2. The Toyo Bunko Manuscript

The Toyo Bunko manuscript was produced in 1901 and consists of three books.⁴⁵⁾ This version is a typical sech'aek (貰冊 [book for rent])⁴⁶⁾ of the late nineteenth century.⁴⁷⁾

The stories of books one and two are similar to that of the Seoul wood-block print. Book one begins with Hong Kil-dong's low birth and ends with the king's

45) Yi Yun-sök, 1997, p. 36. Books one and two have thirty-one leaves each. Book three has thirty-three leaves. Each leaf has eleven lines and each line averages fourteen letters.

46) Ibid., p. 86, footnote 32. Toyo Bunko is the bookstore in Japan that houses the largest number of sech'aeks of pre-modern Korean fiction. These books are said to have been bought from Korea in the mid 1920s. These books have between thirty and thirty-five leaves. Each leaf has eleven lines and the lines average fifteen letters.

47) Ibid., p. 61.

attempt to capture him. Book two begins with Hong Kil-dong's confrontation with the king/state and ends with his decision to attack Yuldoguk. Book three describes Hong Kil-dong's fight against Yuldoguk and his establishment of a new world. The description of Hong Kil-dong's fight against Yuldoguk is different from that of the Seoul wood-block print as described below.

Kil-dong and his three thousand bandits leave Chosŏn with one thousand bushels of polished rice borrowed from the king. They settle on Che Island. Kil-dong prepares his great plan to conquer Yuldoguk with his well-disciplined army. Kil-dong appoints his generals Hŏ Man-dal and Kul Tol-t'ong as advance guards and dispatches them on a mission to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of Yuldoguk. The two generals have five hundred soldiers each and travel to every township in order to evaluate public sentiment as well as the royal administration. They learn that the king of Yuldoguk indulges in banquets rather than paying attention to governing his kingdom. Chaos prevails in the royal court and concerned people go into the mountains to live in hiding.

Kil-dong's two generals have the best fifty soldiers hide in a fort in T'aehŭng from which they inform Kil-dong of the best time to attack. After Kil-dong and his army reach Yuldoguk, they conquer the T'aehŭng fort. They then move on to the Yŏsu fort guarded by the opponent's general Mun Chu-jŏk who has tens of thousands of soldiers. Kil-dong lets Mun win the fight and then hides his retreating army in ambush around the Yŏsu fort. Mun narrowly escapes death and flees to the fort on Mount Ch'ŏlbong. Kil-dong has defeated about seventy forts thus far. He sends a demand to surrender to both the governor of Ch'ŏlbong and the king of Yuldoguk. The king falls into an ambush, loses his motivation to fight back, and commits suicide. His son also takes his own life.

Kil-dong ascends the throne and tries his best to manage the affairs of state with virtue. Within ten years of Kil-dong's enthronement, the state prospers, people enjoy welfare and sing songs of jubilation, while bandits no longer exist in the mountains. Kil-dong has three sons and appoints his eldest son Hyŏn the crown prince. The sixty-year-old Kil-dong abdicates several decades after his ascension to the throne. Kil-dong and his queen, who have stayed in a pavilion on Mount Yŏng, disappear into the clouds.

2.3. The Chŏng U-rak Manuscript

The Chŏng U-rak manuscript was produced in 1936 and consists of two books.⁴⁸⁾ This version is believed to have been copied from a sech'aek.

The story of this version is similar to that of the Seoul wood-block print. Book one begins with Hong Kil-dong's low birth and ends with his departure from Chosŏn. Book two begins with Hong Kil-dong's conquest of Yuldoguk and ends with his establishment of a new world. The description of Hong Kil-dong's fight against Yuldoguk is different from that of the Seoul wood-block print as described below.

Kil-dong and his three thousand bandits leave Chosŏn and then settle on Che Island near Namgyŏng. Kil-dong assembles his soldiers and has them practice military training in preparation for conquering Yuldoguk he scouted out previously. He has one hundred thousand mounted soldiers and two hundred thousand infantrymen. Kil-dong and his army leave Che Island for Yuldoguk and take over about seventy forts within a few months. Their reputation shakes Yuldoguk. They reach the territory called Ch'ŏlbong under the rule of its governor Kim Hyŏn-ch'ung. Kil-dong dispatches a

48) Ibid., p. 40. Book one has thirty-seven leaves. Each leaf has twelve lines and the lines range between twenty and twenty-eight letters. Book two has twenty-three leaves. Each leaf has ten lines and the lines range between eighteen and twenty-two letters.

letter of declaration to the governor demanding his surrender. Kil-dong hides his soldiers in ambush after a confrontation with the governor and then captures him alive. The governor's soldiers surrender all at once upon witnessing the capture of their leader. The governor also surrenders to show his appreciation for Kil-dong's praise for his loyalty.

Kil-dong challenges the king of Yuldoguk. The enraged king deploys his army and desperately fights against Kil-dong. Despite his efforts the king is eventually defeated after falling into an ambush. The king commits suicide blaming himself for the failure. The crown prince also takes his own life following his father's death. The people and the army of Yuldoguk surrender to Kil-dong.

Kil-dong becomes the new king of Yuldoguk. Ten years into Kil-dong's enthronement, he builds a world where the people prosper and enjoy welfare. Kil-dong appoints his eldest son the crown prince among his three sons. The sixty-year-old Kil-dong abdicates thirty years after his enthronement and gets the crown prince to ascend the throne. Kil-dong and his queen, who have stayed in a pavilion on Mount Yöngsin for a while, suddenly disappear from this world.

CHAPTER III

AN UNJUST WORLD

This chapter addresses the unjust world that Hong Kil-dong perceives. This chapter begins with an examination of the confrontations Hong Kil-dong has with these injustices both on a personal and a societal/national level. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how Hong Kil-dong resolves these confrontations. The Seoul wood-block print is used as a basis of discussion unless otherwise acknowledged.

3.1. Confrontations

As described in the previous chapter, one of the most compelling issues raised at the beginning of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* is discrimination against illegitimate children. This section discusses the motivations of Hong Kil-dong's confrontations as reflected in his dissatisfaction with his illegitimate status and the assassination attempt to kill him. This section also describes Hong Kil-dong's confrontations as reflected in his departure from home, his participation in a group of bandits, and his fight for societal/political justice.

3.1.1. Hong Kil-dong's Illegitimacy

Kil-dong's father Minister Hong has no doubt that he will father a precious child because he has just seen a blue dragon in a dream. After being rebuffed by his wife, he approaches his maidservant Ch'un-sŏm who will later conceive Kil-dong. Kil-dong reveals on several occasions his frustration and grievance caused by his illegitimacy, which does not allow him to address his father and brother as such.

Kil-twong (吉童) i cyemcyem cola phal (八) syey (歲) twoymoy chywongmyeng (聰明) i kwain (過人) hoye honah ul tulumyen poyk (百) ul thwong (通) honi kwong (公) i tewok oycywung (愛重) hona kunpwon (根本) chyensoyng (賤生) ila Kil-twong (吉童) i moyyang (每樣) hwopwuhwohyeng (呼父呼兄) homyen mwuntuk skwucicye mwos hokey honi Kil-twong (吉童) i sip (十) syey (歲) nemtwolwok kam (敢) hi pwuhyeng (父兄) ul puluci mwos hokwo pipwok (婢僕) tung i chyentoy (賤待) hom ul kakkwolthwonghan (刻骨痛恨) hoye simso (心事) lol cyeng (定) chi mwos hoteni . . . 49)

Kil-dong grows up to become eight years old. He is so brilliant that he can understand the meanings of a hundred things when hearing but one. His Lordship cherishes him but whenever Kil-dong calls him father or his brother, brother, he rebukes him because Kil-dong is of humble origin. Kil-dong dares not call his father and brother as such even after he reaches the age of ten. Kil-dong grieves deeply over the fact that [even] the servants mistreat him. Kil-dong cannot calm himself and . . .

One night Kil-dong puts aside his readings in his study and laments his situation.

"na non escihoye ilsin (一身) i cyekmak (寂寞) hokwo pwuhyeng i isitwoy hwopwuhwohyeng (呼父呼兄) ul mwos honi simcyang (心臟) i thecil cila esci thwonghan (痛恨) chi aniliwo?". . . 50)

"Why am I so lonely? Even though I have my father and brother, I cannot call them as such. My heart will burst. How can I not grieve?". . .

Kil-dong reveals his grief when his father sees him roaming around and asks him the reason he is not asleep even though it is the middle of the night.

"taykay (大概) hanol i manmwul (萬物) ul noysimoy wocik salom i kwuy (貴) howona sywoin (小人) uykey nilolenon kwuyhowom i epsowoni esci salom ila howoliiska? . . . sywoin i phyengsoyng (平生) syelwun pa non taykam (大監) cyengki (精氣) lwo tangtang (堂堂) howon namco (男子) y twoyye[s]sowomoy pwusoyngmwohywukciun (父生母畜之恩) i kipsopkenol ku pwuchin (父親) ul pwuchin (父親) ilamwos howopkwo ku hyeng (兄) ul hyeng (兄) ila mwos howoni esci salam ila howoliiska?" hokwo nwunmwul ul hulye tansam (單衫) ul cyeksikenol . . . 51)

49) Yi I-hwa, p. 5. The Yale System is used for the transliteration of pre-modern Korean. Hanmun and punctuations do not appear in the original text but have been added to the quotations.

50) Ibid., p. 5.

51) Ibid., p. 6.

"Heaven created all things and mankind is the most precious being. However, such values have not extended to me. How can I be called a man? . . . My lifelong grief is this: I have grown to be a confident man thanks to the vigour Your Lordship has passed to me and I deeply appreciate your giving me life and my mother's rearing me. However, I have not been able to call my father, father and my brother, brother. How can I regard myself as a man?" He sheds tears dampening his single-lined jacket . . .

Kil-dong's illegitimacy is the cause of the discrimination and mistreatment he suffers at home. Kil-dong's grievance over the unfairness of discrimination against illegitimate children can be interpreted as his discontent with the class system based on blood lineage of his time.

The class system of Chosŏn is defined somewhat differently by different scholars but in general it can be divided into four levels: yangban (兩班 [ruling elite]), chungin (中人 [secondary group]), yangin (良人 [commoners]), and ch'ŏnmin (賤民 [low-born people]).⁵²⁾ The secondary group, beginning to emerge in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, included illegitimate children (庶孽) whose fathers belonged to the yangban class and whose concubine mothers belonged to the yangin or ch'ŏnmin classes. The "庶" indicates that all descendants of concubines from the yangin class (良妾子) were in the secondary group and the "孽" means that some descendants of concubines from the ch'ŏnmin class (賤妾子) were in the secondary group.⁵³⁾ Thus even though illegitimate children were born to yangban fathers, they were not entitled to yangban status because their mothers were concubines rather than legitimate wives.⁵⁴⁾

52) Kuksa P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe, *Han'guksa*, vol. 25, p. 43.

53) Ibid., p. 133. See also Chi Sŭng-jong, pp. 100-4.

54) Ibid., p. 135.

Discrimination against illegitimate children and concubines in ideological and legal terms increased during the Chosŏn Dynasty (1392–1910). The yangban officials, who had a deep-rooted notion that the children of low-born women should follow their mothers' status (賤子隨母), continued to impose restrictions on the descendants of concubines. The Law of Distinguishing Wives and Concubines (妻妾分揀法) established in 1414 reinforced the differentiation between legitimate wives and concubines. As a result, discrimination against illegitimate children was more strictly practiced.⁵⁵⁾ The Law of Discrimination against Illegitimate Children (庶孽差待法) proposed by Sŏ Sŏn (徐選) in 1415 prevented illegitimate children from obtaining official posts currently held by the yangban class.⁵⁶⁾ Illegitimate children were entitled only to posts ranging from the senior third rank (正三品) to the senior seventh rank (正七品) depending upon the ranks of the positions that their fathers and grandfathers held.⁵⁷⁾ The National Code (經國大典) initiated in 1458 and promulgated in 1485 stipulated that the children and grandchildren (子孫) of illegitimate children should be prevented from taking military examinations (武科) as well as civil (文科) examinations including the classics licentiate (生員試) and the literary licentiate (進士試). The Explanatory Notes to the National Code (經國大典註解) promulgated in 1555 expanded the range of illegitimacy to all descendants (子子孫孫) of illegitimate children and permanently prevented them from entering officialdom.⁵⁸⁾ Discrimination against illegitimate children was also practiced at home. Illegitimate children were not allowed to call their fathers and siblings born to legitimate wives as such. They were subject to mistreatment due to their illegitimacy.⁵⁹⁾

55) Ibid., pp. 133–4.

56) Ibid., p. 69.

57) Ibid., p. 135.

58) Ibid., p. 121. See also Chi Sŭng-jong, p. 103.

59) Ibid., p. 135.

Kil-dong, like other illegitimate children of his time, was also subject to discrimination and mistreatment. The concubine of his father regards Kil-dong as her enemy and plots to kill him out of jealousy and malice. The servants mistreat Kil-dong. The grievance and frustration caused by his illegitimacy as well as his concern about potential threats motivate Kil-dong to leave home.

Kil-twong (吉童) i emi chimsywo (寢所) uy ka wulmye kwo (告) wal (曰) . . . "sywoco (小子) uy phalco (八字) kuypak (奇薄) hoye chyen (賤) hon mwom i twoywoni phwumun han (恨) i kipsowon cila cyangpwu (丈夫) y seysang (世上) uy chye (處) homoy nam uy chyentoy (賤待) patum i pwulka (不可) howoncila sywoco (小子) y coyen (自然) kuywun (氣運) ul ekcey (抑制) chi mwos hoye mwochin (母親) sulha (膝下) lol stenalye howoni . . ." 60)

Kil-dong comes to his mother's chamber. Crying, he addresses his mother . . . "My destiny was so unfortunate that I became a person of low birth. The grief I bear is deep. Once born into this world, it is impossible for a great man to be subject to mistreatment by others. I am unable to suppress these feelings, so I intend to leave you . . ."

Kil-dong ponders his escape from his family right after he has uncovered the assassination attempt against him. Kil-dong explains his intention to his father.

Kil-twong i pwokci (伏地) tay (對) wal (曰), "sywoin (小人) i ilcuk pwusoyngmwohywukciun (父生母畜之恩) ul manpwunci (萬分之) il (一) ina kaphulka hoye[s]teni kanoy (家內) uy pwuluyicin (不義之人) i issowa syangkwong (上公) kuy chomsywo (讒訴) hokwo sywoin (小人) ul cywukilye howomoy kyeywo mwokswum un pwocyen (保全) hoye[s]sowona syangkwong (上公) ul mwoysil kil epsopkilwo kumil (今日) syangkwong (上公) kuy hacik (下直) ul kwo (告) honoita." 61)

Kil-dong prostrates himself and addresses his father, "I had intended to repay even just a little the beneficence of my father and mother. However, there is a malicious person in this household who slandered me and planned to kill me. I managed to save my life but as I have no way to serve Your Lordship, I bid you farewell today."

60) Yi I-hwa, pp. 6-7.

61) Ibid., p. 13.

Kil-dong's superficial reason for leaving home is to distance himself from Ch'o-ran but his real reason is to avoid the people who are attempting to harm him, a very talented illegitimate child. Ch'o-ran's plan to kill Kil-dong is not set by her only. She is the initiator but all members of the Hong family except Kil-dong's parents are involved in the plan. Both the wife of Minister Hong and Kil-dong's brother approve Ch'oran's plan on the pretext of protecting the state, the Hong family, and Minister Hong himself. They want to get rid of Kil-dong out of the groundless fear that Kil-dong's talent will do the Hong family harm given his illegitimate status. The conspiracy against Kil-dong reflects the harsh reality of his time that a child's life can be taken for the greater cause of preserving a family.⁶²⁾

Kil-dong decides to leave his family after the assassination attempt. His decision indicates that he questions the practice of discrimination against illegitimate children knowing full well that it will be impossible for him to lead a liberated life in an unjust world.⁶³⁾ Kil-dong takes action while other illegitimate children are not willing and able to do so.⁶⁴⁾ If he were an ordinary person, he would not be able to recognise the restrictions imposed on him or he would consider the restrictions to be something inevitable.⁶⁵⁾

After being confronted by Kil-dong, his father allows Kil-dong to address him as such. This is, however, a solution applicable only within his family. Kil-dong makes his personal dissatisfaction public by taking the decision to leave home. Kil-dong's action, which has been within the boundaries of his family, is about to extend to society at large.⁶⁶⁾ Kil-dong finally leaves behind his earlier self, an underprivileged

62) Yi Yun-sök, 1997, pp. 165-6.

63) Ibid., p. 166.

64) Kim T'ae-jun, 1986, pp. 153-4.

65) Yi Mun-gyu, 1990, p. 254.

66) Ibid., pp. 248-9.

child who has not been able to achieve success due to his illegitimacy. This signals the series of rebellious actions that Kil-dong will take against society and the state, which will ultimately lead to the establishment of the Hwalbindang.⁶⁷⁾

3.1.2. The Hwalbindang

Kil-dong embarks on a journey after leaving his family. He wanders about the country and comes across a group of bandits.

The bandits ask Kil-dong his reasons for coming to their place. Kil-dong explains as follows (The Seoul wood-block print and the Toyo Bunko manuscript):

Kil-twong (吉童) i . . . wal (曰), "na non Kyengsyeng (京城) Hwong (洪) phansye (判書) uy chyenchyep (賤妾) sywosoyng (所生) Kil-twong (吉童) ileni, kacwung (家中) chyentoy (賤待) lol pasci ani[ho]lye hoye sahoypalpang (四海八方) ulwo cyengchye (定處) epsi tanniteni wuyen (偶然) i ikwos uy tulewa . . ." 68)

Kil-dong . . . says, "I am Kil-dong, the child of a low-birth woman who is a concubine of Minister Hong of Kyōngsōng. I have been wandering everywhere in order to avoid the mistreatment I suffered at home. I happened to come to this place . . ."

Kil-dong voluntarily reveals his reasons for having left his family (The Chǒng U-rak manuscript).

"na non . . . katiwung (家中) chyentoy (賤待) lol pasci ailye hoye susolwo cip ul palikwo twotywu (逃走) hoye . . . kumil (今日) honoli cisi (指示) hosa ikwos uy ilalyesii . . ." 69)

"I . . . willingly abandoned my home and escaped from it in order to avoid the mistreatment I suffered there . . . Today I have reached this place through Heaven's guidance . . ."

67) Kim T'ae-jun, 1986, p. 154.

68) Yi I-hwa, p. 15.

69) Yi Yun-sōk, 1997, p. 312.

The bandits intend to test Kil-dong's quality as a leader. They require Kil-dong to lift a rock (The Seoul wood-block print and the Toyo Bunko manuscript).

"i kwos un yengwung (英雄) i mwotwoyesina acik kwoysywu (魁首) lul cyeng (定) chi mwos hoyesini kutoy manil ywongnyek (勇力) i isye chomnye (參與) khwocye holcintoy cye twol ul tule pwola." 70)

"Heroes have gathered in this place. However, we have not yet settled on a leader. If you have extraordinary power and intend to join us, try lifting that rock."

The bandits have one more criterion: attacking Haein temple (The Chǒng U-rak manuscript).

ku tywung (中) hon solom i nilwotoy . . . "yekuy twu kaci il nisii kutoy nung (能) hi hoyng (行) holsywonya?" Kil-twong (吉童) wal (曰), "ku twu kaci il ul alkwocye honwola." ku solom i iwolwotoy, "ku honah un i apph oy sywopwusyek ilan twoll i isiy mwukwoy chyen (千) kun (斤) ila nung (能) hi ku twol ul tulmyen hywongyek (勇力) ul al kes iwo twulcoy non Hapchyen (陝川) hoynginso (海印寺) lal chye ku coymwul (財物) ul chywuy (取) khwocye hona . . . nung (能) hi chil mwochoyk (妙策) i eponcila kutoy i twu kaci lal hoyng (行) homyen kumil (今日) nwo wuli kwoysywu (魁首) lol somulila." 71)

One of the bandits says, "There are two things here. Are you willing and able to do these things?" Kil-dong replies, "I want to know what the two things are." The man says, "The first thing is [for you] to lift the thousand kun rock in front that is called Sobu. If you lift the rock, we will know your strength. The second thing is [for us] to attack Haein temple in Hapch'ŏn in order to confiscate its wealth but . . . we have no ingenious idea to do so. If you can do these two things, we will elect you our leader today."

The process by which the bandits elect Kil-dong as their leader is very simple in that they only take into consideration strength (勇力) and an ingenious idea (妙策). Their criteria do not include age, social status, or family background.⁷²⁾ This reflects the

70) Yi I-hwa, p. 15.

71) Yi Yun-sŏk, 1997, p. 312.

72) Chang Yang-su, pp. 55-6.

author's view of an ideal world where people play appropriate roles depending on their abilities.⁷³⁾

Kil-dong successfully demonstrates his strength and then becomes leader of the bandits.

Kil-twong (吉童) i . . . wal (曰), "wuyen (偶然) i ikwos uy tulewa mwotun hwokel (豪傑) uy twongnywo (同僚) twoym ul nilusini pwulsungkamsa (不勝感謝) hokeniwa cyangpwu (丈夫) y esci cyemanhon twol tulki lul kunsimholiwo?" hokwo ku twol un tule sywusip (數十) pwo (步) lol hoyng (行) hotaka tencini ku twol mwukuy chyen (千) kun (斤) ila cyeycyek (諸賊) i ilsi (一時) uy chingchan (稱讚) wal (曰), "kwayen (果然) cangso (壯士) ylwota . . . onalnal hanol i twousya cyangkwun (將軍) ul cywusim ilwota." ⁷⁴⁾

Kil-dong . . . says, "I entered this place by chance and I am so grateful for being addressed as your member. Why would a real man worry about lifting such a rock?" He then lifts the rock, takes several dozen steps, and throws it down. The rock weighs a thousand kün. All the bandits praise him in unison, "He is truly a powerful man . . . Heaven helps us today and has given him to us."

Kil-dong emphasises the fact that he is part of the group of bandits. This indicates that Kil-dong and the bandits will share the same goals and dreams. The bandits were without a leader because no one had been able to satisfy the necessary conditions.⁷⁵⁾ Kil-dong demonstrates that his personal power has extended to group power by obtaining a leadership position. The private Kil-dong becomes a public figure who represents a discontented group of bandits. The cause of his discontent changes from his illegitimacy to broader societal/political injustices.⁷⁶⁾

The bandits have been unable to attack Haein temple due to a lack of tactics, so they ask for Kil-dong's help. Kil-dong prepares a detailed plan for attack and successfully carries out the plan with them.

73) Yi Yun-sök, 1997, p. 168.

74) Yi I-hwa, p. 15.

75) Kim T'ae-jun, 1986, pp. 155-6.

76) Yi Mun-gyu, 1990, p. 249.

taycyek (大賊) sywupoykyemyeng (數百餘名) i ilsi (一時) uy tala tule mwotun
coymwul (財物) ul ta cyey kes kacye katus honi . . . 77)

Hundreds of bandits rush to [the temple] all at once and take the wealth as
if it were theirs . . .

Kil-dong proves his quality as leader and strengthens his position through the attack.
He also makes the state aware of his existence and the territory of the bandits
extends to the whole country.⁷⁸⁾

Kil-dong then names his group the Hwalbindang (活貧黨), which means "A
Group of Those Who Help the Poor." This name gives some insight into the principle
behind the actions of Kil-dong and his bandits. He leads them through the eight
provinces of Chosŏn stopping in each township to confiscate the wealth unjustly
gained by magistrates and to help those who are poor and helpless. The Hwalbindang,
which had been a band of societal outcasts, is transformed into a group of righteous
bandits. They are underprivileged people and represent an extended form of their
leader. Members of the Hwalbindang are unconstrained by the normal rules of society
as they were abandoned by their families and society.⁷⁹⁾

Kil-dong's next target is the government house of Hamgyŏng Province. Kil-dong
and the Hwalbindang attack the province in order to punish its governor who has
extorted wealth from the people and caused them suffering.

Kil-twong (吉童) uy sywupoyk (數百) cyektang (賊黨) i ilsi (一時) uy
syengcywung (城中) uy tala tule changkwo (倉庫) lol yelkwo cyenkwok (錢穀)
kwa kwunkuy (軍器) lol sywutham (搜探) hoye . . . 80)

Kil-dong and hundreds of his bandits approach the castle all at once. They
open the warehouse and steal the grain and weapons . . .

77) Yi I-hwa, pp. 16-7.

78) Yi Yun-sŏk, 1997, p. 170.

79) Kim T'ae-jun, 1986, pp. 154-56.

80) Yi I-hwa, p. 18.

The attack on Hamgyŏng Province is significant because it is the birthplace of King T'aejo (太祖 [1335-1408])⁸¹⁾ and the burial site of his ancestors. The attack can be interpreted as Kil-dong's confrontation against the state.⁸²⁾

The successful attacks on Haein temple and the government house of Hamgyŏng Province display the strong power of Kil-dong and the Hwalbindang. Kil-dong has chosen these institutions as the targets for his confrontation. Kil-dong begins to rebel against society through these attacks, so the conflict in Kil-dong's family deepens and evolves into social tension. Kil-dong and the Hwalbindang's banditry prove that their power is not limited to certain areas such as Haein temple and Hamgyŏng Province but in fact permeates every part of society. The tension between Kil-dong and society intensifies.⁸³⁾

The king orders the chief of police to capture Kil-dong. The king's attempt indicates that the state reacts strongly to Kil-dong's challenge against society. When Kil-dong attacks Haein temple and the government house of Hamgyŏng Province, only the local magistrates are responsible for arresting him. The state takes stronger measures to capture Kil-dong as his power has increased. Kil-dong's dominance over the chief of police indicates that the state is now subject to Kil-dong's power⁸⁴⁾ and Kil-dong's confrontation becomes focused on the king himself.⁸⁵⁾

3.2. Resolutions

This section discusses Hong Kil-dong's resolutions of the confrontations he faces as reflected in his surrender to the state and his departure from Chosŏn.

81) First king of the Chosŏn Dynasty

82) Yi Yun-sŏk, 1997, p. 171.

83) Yi Mun-gyu, 1990, p. 249.

84) Ibid., pp. 249-50.

85) Yi Yun-sŏk, 1997, p. 173.

3.2.1. Hong Kil-dong's Surrender to the State

After the attempt to capture Kil-dong fails, the king takes Kil-dong's father into custody and reprimands Kil-dong's brother for his negligence. Kil-dong's brother immediately posts a notice in each province as soon as he is appointed governor of Kyöngsang Province by the king.

"salom i syeysang (世上) uy nam oy olywun (五倫) i ustumio olywun (五倫) i isimoy inuynyeyci (仁義禮智) pwunmyeng (分明) hokenul i lol aci mwos hokwo kwunpwu (君父) uy myeng (命) ul keyek (拒逆) hoye pwulch'wung-pwulhywo (不忠不孝) twoymyen esci syeysang (世上) uy ywongnap (容納) holiwo? wuli awo Kil-t'wong (吉童) un ilen il ul al kes ini susolwo hyeng (兄) ul chocowa salwocophila . . ." 86)

"Once we are born into this world, the Five Relationships become the code of appropriate conduct. [We can] define compassion, righteousness, decorum, and wisdom thanks to the Relationships. If you do not obey the commands of your king and father and therefore become a disloyal subject and an unfilial son, you will not be accepted in this world. My younger brother Kil-dong will know this. [Kil-dong], come to your elder brother and turn yourself in . . ."

The king, who has exhausted all resources, takes advantage of human relationships by involving Kil-dong's father and brother who do not have any other means but to appeal to Kil-dong's filial piety and brotherly love. Even though Kil-dong himself has the ability to exercise his power in this situation, he cannot resist the appeal made by his brother and turns himself in. As Kil-dong belongs to a Confucian society, he feels compelled to follow the morals and ethics of his time by being loyal to his sovereign and filial to his parents. He risks losing the power he has established over the state.⁸⁷⁾

The eight Kil-dongs, who have been captured in each province and sent to the royal court, defend their banditry and reveal their future plan to leave Chosŏn in the

86) Yi I-hwa, p. 26.

87) Yi Mun-gyu, 1990, p. 250.

presence of the king.

Kil-twong (吉童) tung (等) i syang (上) key cywu (奏) wal (曰) . . . "sin (臣) un pwontoy chenpi (賤婢) swosoyng (所生) ila ku api lol apila mwos howopkwo ku hyeng (兄) ul hyeng (兄) ila moshowoni phyengsoyng (平生) han (恨) i moyschye[s]sopkilwo cip ul pali kwo cyektang (賊黨) uy chomnye (參與) howona poyksyeng (百姓) un chywohwopwulpem (秋毫不犯) howopkwo kak (各) up (邑) sywulyeng (守令) uy cywunminkwothoyk (浚民膏澤) honon coymwul (財物) ul thalchwuy (奪取) hoye[s]sowona icey sipnyen (十年) ul cinomyen Tywosen (朝鮮) ul stena kawol kwos i issowoni pwokkel (伏乞) syengsyang (聖上) un kunsimchi malusikwo sin (臣) ul copnon kwanco (關子) lol ketwuwopsywosye" hokwo . . . 88)

[The eight] Kil-dongs address the king . . . "I am the child of a low-birth woman and I have not been able to call my father, father and my brother, brother. I bear a lifelong grief and [this was the reason] I joined a group of bandits. However, I have never abused the commoners in the slightest and confiscated only the wealth of magistrates in each township who had stolen the property of the people. I will leave Chosŏn in ten years' time as I have somewhere to go. Your Majesty should not worry and please retract your order to capture me" . . .

3.2.2. Hong Kil-dong's Departure from Chosŏn

The confrontation between Kil-dong and the state deepens. The only apparent solution to this conflict is for either Kil-dong or the state to prevail.⁸⁹⁾ Instead Kil-dong promises to turn himself in if the king appoints him minister of the Board of War.

Kil-twong (吉童) i . . . pang (榜) ul pwuschesitwoy, "ywosin (妖臣) Hwong (洪) Kil-twong (吉童) un amwoli hoyetwo copci mwos holini pyengcwo phansye (兵曹判書) kywoci (教旨) lol nalisimyen cophiliita." 90)

Kil-dong . . . puts up a notice [stating that] "Wily subject Hong Kil-dong will never be captured despite all your efforts. If [the king] will issue a writ to appoint [Kil-dong] minister of the Board of War, [he] will turn [himself] in."

88) Yi I-hwa, pp. 28-9.

89) Yi Yun-sŏk, 1997, pp. 176-7.

90) Yi I-hwa, p. 29.

When Kil-dong offers his conditional surrender, the confrontation he has with the state is resolved. Kil-dong, who is under the restrictions of Confucian ethics, does not have to violate them by challenging the king and undermining his authority. At the same time, he can maintain his power and control by obtaining the position.

In response to Kil-dong's suggestion, the king immediately appoints him minister of the Board of War. The king's acceptance of Kil-dong's request to appoint the child of a concubine to a position previously restricted to the yangban class implies the king's admission of the unfairness of discrimination against illegitimate children. Kil-dong's appointment demonstrates his overcoming the prohibition against holding such a position by an illegitimate person and sets a precedent for other illegitimate children to enter officialdom.⁹¹⁾ Kil-dong's upgrading of his status has not been an easy task. He has won a difficult victory over the societal restrictions on illegitimate children.⁹²⁾

Kil-dong's new position is not substantial, however. The king has offered the position as a last resort to capture Kil-dong knowing full well that he will leave Chosŏn. The court officials even resolve to kill Kil-dong.⁹³⁾

poykkwan (百官) i uynwon (議論) hotwoy, "Kil-twong (吉童) i wonal syaun (謝恩) hakwo nawol kes ini twopwusywu (刀斧手) lol moypwuk (埋伏) hoyesstaka nawoketun ilsi (一時) uy chye cwukila" hokwo yaksywok (約束) ul cyeng (定) hoye[s]teni . . . ⁹⁴⁾

All the officials confer, "Kil-dong will come out of the palace after paying his respects to His Majesty today. Have a hatchet man lie in ambush to assassinate Kil-dong on his way out." So [they] have decided . . .

91) Chang Yang-su, p. 58.

92) Yi Mun-gyu, 1990, p. 255.

93) Ibid., p. 250.

94) Yi I-hwa, p. 31.

Kil-dong has to wield stronger power to overcome this situation but he does not intend to do so.⁹⁵⁾

Kil-twong (吉童) i toy (對) wal (曰), "sin (臣) i cyenha (殿下) lol pattule mansyey (萬歲) lol mwoywolka howona, chyenpi (賤婢) sywosoyng (所生) ila mwun (文) ulwo woktang (玉堂) uy makhiwopkwo mwu (武) lwo syencye (宣傳) uy makhilcila ilemulwo sopang (四方) uy woywu (傲遊) howa kwanpwu (官府) wa cakphyey (作弊) hokwo tywocyeng (朝廷) uy tukcwoy (得罪) howom un cyenho (殿下) y olusikey howom ilyeni sin (臣) uy sywowen (所願) ul phwule cyuwuwopsini cyenhoy (殿下) ul hacik (下直) hakwo Tywosen (朝鮮) ul stena kawoni . . ." 96)

Kil-dong says, "It was my intention to serve Your Majesty for ten thousand years but my path to professional advancement as a civil or military officer has been blocked because I am the son of a low-birth woman. The reason I wandered about the country causing trouble for the government offices and offending the royal court was to bring my plight to Your Majesty's attention. As Your Majesty has granted my wish, I bid farewell to you and leave Chosŏn . . ."

Kil-dong's intention is to bring his plight (i.e., no paths to officialdom due to his illegitimacy) to the king's attention. Kil-dong remains a loyal subject who does not challenge his sovereign even though he has already demonstrated his superiority over the state. Kil-dong cannot lift the restrictions of Confucian ethics and these moral pressures from Chosŏn are the reason he bids farewell to the country.⁹⁷⁾ Kil-dong's decision to leave Chosŏn reflects his will to build a new world different from Chosŏn. Kil-dong, who has rebelled against society through banditry, shifts his attention beyond the reality of Chosŏn.⁹⁸⁾

95) Yi Mun-gyu, 1990, p. 250.

96) Yi I-hwa, p. 33.

97) Yi Mun-gyu, 1990, p. 250.

98) Kim T'ae-jun, 1986, p. 162.

CHAPTER IV

A NEW WORLD

This chapter discusses Hong Kil-dong's solution to the unjust world as reflected in his effort and plan to conquer the island kingdom of Yuldoguk as well as his establishment of a new world. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the characteristics of this world. The Seoul wood-block print is used as a basis of discussion unless otherwise acknowledged.

4.1. Conquering Yuldoguk

Kil-dong has just left Chosŏn with his bandits and settles on Che Island he scouted out previously.

Kil-twong (吉童) i Tywosyen (朝鮮) ul hacik (下直) [ho]kwo Namkyeng (南京) sta Cyeytwo (堤島) sem ulwo tuleka syw chenhwo (數千戶) cip ul ciskwo nwongep (農業) lul himssukwo coywo ul poyhwa mwukwo (武庫) ul ciumye kwunpep (軍法) ul yensup (練習) honi pyengcyengyangcwok (兵精糧足) hotela. ⁹⁹⁾

Kil-dong leaves Chosŏn and then settles on Che Island that belongs to Nanking. [Kil-dong and his bandits] build thousands of houses and try to develop agriculture. [They] learn the skills to set up arsenals and practice martial skills. The soldiers are well disciplined and have plenty of food.

Kil-dong's settling on Che Island suggests that he has expanded his power beyond Chosŏn where he could not overcome the restrictions of Confucian ethics. Kil-dong has directed his power to the outside world without such restrictions.¹⁰⁰⁾ When Kil-dong was still young, a physiognomist foretold that he would become a hero for

99) Yi I-hwa, p. 33.

100) Yi Mun-gyu, 1990, p. 250.

all ages (千古英雄) and a brave man of his time (一代豪傑). Kil-dong's father also saw a blue dragon (the symbol of the emperor) in a dream before Kil-dong was conceived. Kil-dong could not accomplish his goal in Chosŏn despite his preordained destiny to become a king. Thus he goes to Yuldoguk.¹⁰¹⁾ The introduction of Yuldoguk reflects a broader goal that goes beyond Kil-dong's personal success. Kil-dong is now able to lay the groundwork for establishing his own world in Yuldoguk.¹⁰²⁾

namcwung (南中) uy Ywultwokwuk (碑島國) ilan nali issuni, woknya (沃野) sywuchenni (數千里) uy cincis chyenpwucikwuk (天府之國) ila Kil-twong (吉童) i moyyang (每樣) ywuuy (留意) hotun po yla. ¹⁰³⁾

There is an island kingdom called Yuldoguk near southern China. It has a thousand li of fertile land and is indeed a land given by Heaven. Kil-dong had always paid attention to [it].

The geographical setting of Yuldoguk suggests seclusion. The distance between Chosŏn and Yuldoguk symbolises isolation from reality and heralds the emergence of a new world without societal/political injustices.¹⁰⁴⁾

Kil-dong, who has been laying his plans to conquer Yuldoguk, finally seizes the moment to attack. Kil-dong dispatches a letter of declaration to the king of Yuldoguk after defeating the opponent's army. Kil-dong's statement that a king is not just for one person but for everyone on earth¹⁰⁵⁾ reflects his discontent with the lack of good administration in Chosŏn. It also implies that a radical measure rather than a peaceful solution should be taken in order to correct this situation.¹⁰⁶⁾

101) Yi Mun-gyu, 1996, p. 225.

102) Yi Mun-gyu, 1990, p. 250.

103) Yi I-hwa, p. 38.

104) Chang Yang-su, p. 61.

105) Yi I-hwa, p. 38.

106) Kim Min-su, pp. 42-3.

Yuldoguk has not been conquered easily. Kil-dong and the bandits made a long voyage and reached Che Island. They accumulated wealth by developing agriculture and they also trained to become well disciplined soldiers. A strong economy and military power have eventually contributed to establishing a new world.¹⁰⁷⁾

4.2. Hong Kil-dong's New World

Kil-dong ascends the throne after conquering Yuldoguk. This symbolises his professional success, the ultimate victory over the societal restrictions on him.¹⁰⁸⁾ The new world Kil-dong has established in Yuldoguk can be described as follows.

In economic terms, the people in Yuldoguk are so affluent that they do not take other people's property. The issue of poverty, which was one of the reasons for the Hwalbindang's banditry in Chosŏn, has been solved in Yuldoguk.

wang (王) i chikwuk (治國) samnyen (三年) uy sanmwutwoeyek (山無盜賊)
hokwo twopwulsupywu (道不拾遺) honni ka (可) uy thoyphyengsyeykyey
(太平世界) 'ela. ¹⁰⁹⁾

Three years into the king's reign, there are no bandits in the mountains and no one picks up things left on the road. It is indeed a world of peace.

In societal terms, Yuldoguk does not practice discrimination based on status. An illegitimate son like Kil-dong can become king on the basis of his talents alone. Anyone can obtain official positions and titles based on merit. Kil-dong's mother, who had been unable to change her low status in Chosŏn, becomes queen mother.¹¹⁰⁾

Kil-dong does not reject the traditional form of family. He has two wives whom he saved from the monsters on Mount Mangdang. He has two sons by his wife from

107) Kim T'ae-jun, 1986, p. 163.

108) Ibid., p. 160.

109) Yi I-hwa, p. 39.

110) Chang Yang-su, p. 61.

the Paek clan and one son and two daughters by another wife from the Cho clan. This proves that by the standard of yangban society Kil-dong has succeeded in creating an extended family.¹¹¹⁾

The issue of discrimination against illegitimate children, which was Kil-dong's motivation to take rebellious actions, is not addressed in Yuldoguk. This can be interpreted as indicating that the issue is of secondary concern, which will resolve itself once Kil-dong achieves his main goal of obtaining power.¹¹²⁾

In political terms, Yuldoguk is a place where there is no reason for bandits to exist. Chosŏn is an environment where bandits flourish because of corrupt magistrates. Kil-dong himself was leader of a group of bandits who were considered to be societal outcasts.¹¹³⁾ Kil-dong demonstrates the qualities of a respectable leader by ministering state affairs with compassion (The Toyo Bunko manuscript).

According to Sŏl Sŏng-gyŏng who has uncovered detailed information on the historical Hong Kil-dong (1443–1510), Yuldoguk is the Ryukyu (琉球) Islands.¹¹⁴⁾ In an attempt to escape Chosŏn, Kil-dong travelled south in 1500 to Haterumajima (披照間島), a small island between Okinawa (沖繩) and Taiwan (臺灣) that is part of the Ryukyu Island chain. He travelled extensively in the Ryukyu Islands and died on Kumejima (久米島). Kil-dong's escape to the Ryukyu Islands is particularly interesting because it suggests that Yuldoguk is indeed a separate place from Chosŏn and China.¹¹⁵⁾

111) Kim T'ae-jun, 1986, p. 163.

112) Yi Mun-gyu, 1990, p. 255.

113) Chang Yang-su, p. 61.

114) Formerly known as Okinawa.

115) Robert J. Fouser quoting Sŏl Sŏng-gyŏng, 1998.

CHAPTER V

HONG KIL-DONG TRANSCENDING TIME

This chapter describes in chronological order the influences of Hong Kil-dong on Korean society and culture. The activities of the new Hwalbindangs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are first addressed. Three modern rewritings of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* are then summarised. These rewritings originated after 1950 and were published in the 1980s and 1990s. Their historical backgrounds are set in the early sixteenth century, the mid-twentieth century, and the present, respectively. Other modern expressions of Hong Kil-dong in film, television, and other media are also discussed.

5.1. The New Hwalbindangs

This section addresses the characteristics of the new Hwalbindangs that inherited the spirit of Hong Kil-dong and became groups of righteous bandits active in Korea since the late nineteenth century.

An actual group of bandits who first named themselves after Hong Kil-dong's Hwalbindang was made up of sixteen people including Pak Sang-gŭn (朴相斤), Yun Tong-gul (尹同屈), and Kim Mong-dol (金夢丕). They organised their group in Ŭmsŏng (陰城), North Ch'ungch'ŏng Province (忠淸北道) in January 1886. The group possessed weapons and robbed the houses of rich people in Ŭmsŏng and Koesan (傀山). They existed as a group only one month with six of their members being arrested and others fleeing.¹¹⁶⁾ This group that is also called the Original Hwalbindang

116) Chang Yang-su, p. 65, footnote 49. Chang quoting Pak Ch'an-sŭng, p. 116.

(原活貧黨) became a model for other Hwalbindangs in the early twentieth century.¹¹⁷⁾

The Hwalbindangs consisted of three major groups during this time: the group active in Kyōnggi (京畿道) and Ch'ungch'ōng Provinces (忠淸道), the group active in West Kyōngsang Province (慶尙左道) to the east of the Naktong River, and the group active in East Kyōngsang Province (慶尙右道) to the east of Mount Sobaek.¹¹⁸⁾ The first group was led by Kim Sōng-suk (金成叔) and Ma Chung-gun (馬中軍) who were also called Maeng Kam-yōk (孟監役) and Maeng T'o-jin (孟土振), respectively. Kim was arrested in Hwanggan (黃澗) in May 1907. The second group was led by different people with these same names Maeng Kam-yōk and Ma Chung-gun. Maeng is believed to have been Kim Ch'ang-sōng (金昌成) who was later arrested. Ma's identity has not yet been clarified. The third group was led by another individual who also took the name Maeng Kam-yōk. This Maeng is believed to have been Song Chong-baek (宋宗白) who was caught while attacking a rich household in Indong (仁同) in January 1906 and was then buried alive by the townspeople.

The head of each of the Hwalbindangs (Maeng Kam-yōk)¹¹⁹⁾ proclaimed himself the successor of Hong Kil-dong in his writing *The Announcement of the Hwalbindang* (活貧黨發令). These leaders tried to change their negative image as bandits and to project a positive image by adopting the name Hwalbindang from *Hong Kil-dong Chōn* and by taking Hong Kil-dong as their role model. They also reorganised their groups throughout Korea and changed their actions to those of righteous bandits. The bandits of the early twentieth century re-enacted the actions of Hong Kil-dong in real life as follows:¹²⁰⁾

117) Ibid., pp. 65-6.

118) Ibid., pp. 336-7.

119) Ibid., p. 66, footnote 50. Chang quoting Pak Ch'an-sūng, p. 116. Pak assumes that this Maeng is Kim Sōng-suk who was arrested in Hwanggan in May 1907.

120) Ibid., pp. 66-8.

(1) Maeng Kam-yŏk made his appearance in Kyŏngsang, Kyŏnggi, Ch'ungch'ŏng, and Kangwŏn Provinces. He also emerged in different provinces concurrently and he is presumed to have hidden his identity by letting others use his name. These actions are in accordance with Hong Kil-dong's creating seven replicas of himself and having them appear in the eight provinces of Chosŏn.

(2) Maeng voluntarily revealed his identity in *The Announcement of the Hwalbindang* just as Hong Kil-dong had made his identity public by posting a note after his attack on the government house of Hamgyŏng Province.

pwukmwun (北門) uy pang (榜) ul pwuschesitwoy: "amwo nal cyenkwok (錢穀) twocyek (盜賊) hon ca (者) non Hwalpintang (活貧黨) hoyngsywu (行首) Hwong Kil-twong (洪吉童) ila" hoyeskenol . . . 121)

[They] put a note on the north gate: "It was Hong Kil-dong, leader of the Hwalbindang, who stole grain on such-and-such day," reads the note . . .

(3) The Hwalbindangs helped the poor and helpless just as Hong Kil-dong had done. The Hwalbindangs in Kyŏngsang and Ch'ungch'ŏng Provinces distributed the money and goods they confiscated to poverty-stricken people. In 1900 hundreds of righteous bandits armed with rifles and swords entered downtown Nonsan (論山). They assembled poor merchants and provided them with capital contributed by rich people.¹²²⁾

(4) The Hwalbindangs followed the rule of not attacking commoners just as Hong Kil-dong had never abused them. They rarely caused damage to the property of poor farmers and petty merchants. Their main targets were the yangbans and rich

121) Yi I-hwa, p. 18.

122) Chang Yang-su, p. 67, footnote 51. Chang quoting *Hwangsŏng Sinmun* (皇城新聞) dated May 12. Han'guk Chŏngsin Munhwa Yŏn'guwŏn, *Han'guk Minjok Munhwa Taebaekkwa Sajŏn*, vol., 25, pp. 481-2. *Hwangsŏng Sinmun* was published in 1898 by Namgung Ŏk (南宮億 [1863-1939]) and Na Su-yŏn (羅壽淵) under the banner of enlightening the people and fighting against invasion by foreign powers. Upon the announcement of Chosŏn's annexation to Japan (August 29, 1910), they were forced to change the title to *Hansŏng Sinmun* (August 30-September 14) and they soon discontinued its publication.

landowners.

(5) The Hwalbindangs also punished oppressive local officials just as Hong Kil-dong had executed corrupt magistrates. A gang of eighteen people led by a man who called himself Maeng Kam-yök trespassed on the government house in Nŭngju (綾州) in 1903 and assaulted the county head. Numerous attacks on government houses and officials were made in the early twentieth century.

(6) They demanded that the government should rectify its misadministration just as Hong Kil-dong had addressed the societal/political injustices in the presence of the king. They also issued *The Thirteen Articles concerning Korean Noblemen and Commoners* (十三條目大韓士民論說) and demanded elimination of heavy taxes on peddlers (article 7), equal possession of land (article 9), and elimination of severe punishment (article 11).

The members of the Hwalbindangs had been cruel and violent before they recreated themselves as righteous bandits.¹²³⁾ After this they did not commit acts that caused the people grievance except when they took revenge.¹²⁴⁾ This is evidenced by the claim made by Pak Ch'an-sŭng (朴贊勝) that not a single incident of robbery committed against itinerants and peddlers by the Hwalbingdang in West Kyōngsang Province was reported between 1900 and 1901.¹²⁵⁾ The Hwalbindangs also spoke out against feudalism and invasion by foreign powers. For this reason some people call the activities of the Hwalbindangs the Hwalbindang movement.¹²⁶⁾

123) Ibid., p. 168.

124) Ibid., p. 168, footnote 63. Chang quoting Pak Ch'an-sŭng, p. 127.

125) Ibid., pp. 168-9, footnote 64. Chang quoting Pak Ch'an-sŭng, p. 139.

126) Ibid., p. 167, footnote 58. Chang quoting Pak Ch'an-sŭng, p. 107.

5.2. Hong Kil-dong in Modern Rewritings

This section describes the story of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* as expressed in three modern rewritings. These rewritings are similar to the pre-modern versions in terms of their basic themes but differ in their contents, plots, and resolutions. These differences are described below.

5.2.1. *Changp'yŏn Sosŏl Hong Kil-dong*

The original version of *Changp'yŏn Sosŏl Hong Kil-dong* by Chŏng Pi-sŏk (鄭飛石 [1911–1991])¹²⁷ was published in 1962 under the name *Sosŏl Hong Kil-dong Chŏn*. It consisted of two books and had illustrations by Kim Ki-ch'ang. The name of the book was changed to *Changp'yŏn Sosŏl Hong Kil-dong* in 1996 when it was published by Koryŏwŏn. Book one has twenty-eight chapters and book two has twenty-four.

Book one describes Hong Kil-dong's low birth, his life in a Buddhist retreat called Puryŏng'am (佛影庵), his participation in a group of righteous people, his fight against corrupt magistrates during the reign of the Yŏnsan'gun, and his endeavour to rescue his father who is accused of treason. Book two covers Hong Kil-dong's fight against the royal court and the police, his attack on the government house of Hamgyŏng Province and on Haein temple, his participation in the Chungjong Coup (中宗反正) in 1506, his dissolution of the Hwalbindangs, and his retreat to Mount Kŭmgang (金剛山) as a Buddhist monk.

127) Chŏng Pi-sŏk was born in Ŭiju, North Pyŏng'an Province. His work of fiction *Sŏnghwangdang* (城隍堂 [Shrine for Tutelary Deity]) was selected in 1937 in the New Year's Literary Arts Contest (新春文藝) held by *Chosŏn Ilbo* (朝鮮日報). He subsequently became a prolific writer publishing more than thirty novels. Many of his works were serialised in major newspapers.

Kil-dong is an illegitimate son. His father is a minister (判書) and his mother from the Kang clan is his concubine. Young Kil-dong studies very hard and practices horseback riding and archery in order to become a great person who will rectify societal/political injustices. As he grows older, he learns that children born to concubines cannot obtain high-ranking positions or become great generals. His frustration deepens as he laments his low birth, which is a severe impediment to his professional aspirations.

The legitimate wife of Kil-dong's father involves Im Sung-jae (任崇載 [?-1505]) in her conspiracy to kill Kil-dong out of hatred. They employ a hatchet man Ŏm Chang-han (嚴壯漢). Ŏm's assassination attempt fails but Kil-dong forgives him. Kil-dong reveals his intention to leave his family. His father is quite content with Kil-dong's determination because he believes that his son will make a substantial contribution to the state.

Kil-dong embarks on his journey to Mount Kŭmgang to develop his scholarship and practice his archery. Kil-dong is attacked by a tiger on his way to the mountain but is saved by a man named Pŏm-su (范洙) who will later turn out to be a former disciple of reverend Hakcho (學祖大師). Kil-dong meets the reverend at Puryŏng'am and then spends three years under him developing his scholarship and martial skills. Kil-dong possesses the qualities of a great scholar and general. Just when the nineteen-year-old Kil-dong is ready to leave Puryŏng'am to rectify societal/political injustices, he has an unexpected visit by Kim Yam-jŏn whom he met on his way to Mount Kŭmgang. Kil-dong and the girl then part with each other with a promise to reunite in three years.

Kil-dong joins a group of forty people who call themselves the Ŭisadan (義士團 [a group of righteous people]). Their leader Pŏm-su willingly transfers his leadership

to Kil-dong. After changing the group's name to the Hwalbindang, Kil-dong and the group attack the magistrate of Kŭmhwa County (金化郡) in Kangwŏn Province. They confiscate the grain and wealth from the county house and distribute them to the commoners.

Kil-dong comes across his father's fellow statesman Sŏng Hŭi-an (成希顔 [1461–1513]) on his way to the capital Hanyang (漢陽). Sŏng informs Kil-dong that Kil-dong's father has been accused of treason and imprisoned. Kil-dong lays out a plan with Yi Ch'un-ho (李春昊) to rescue his father. Yi's responsibility is to bribe the prison guards and get Kil-dong inside the prison. Kil-dong, however, finds himself surrounded by hundreds of soldiers hiding in ambush at the prison. Kil-dong strengthens his will despite the failure. Knowing that the filial Kil-dong will come to his father's rescue, court officials spread the news of his impending execution in order to lure Kil-dong. The fight between Kil-dong and the police intensifies when they offer a handsome reward for arresting Kil-dong.

Kil-dong's strategy is to distract the attention of the police. Kil-dong causes a commotion by setting fire to the residences of the three most powerful statesmen: Im Sa-hong (任士洪 [?–1506]), Yu Cha-gwang (柳子光 [?–1512]), and Han Ch'i-hyŏng (韓致亨 [1434–1502]). All of them order the police to come to their place and the police get confused not knowing which request to honour first. Ŏm, former assassin of Kil-dong and current member of the Hwalbindang, rescues Kil-dong's father by taking advantage of the pandemonium.

Kil-dong's Hwalbindang is reinforced by about two hundred new volunteers. The more popular Kil-dong and the Hwalbindang become among the people, the stronger are the actions of the government officials to catch them. The newly appointed chief of police Kim T'ae-gon (金泰坤) is unable to catch Kil-dong. The chief arrests an

innocent firewood collector and imprisons him instead. His guile is uncovered when several Kil-dongs appear throughout the country. They are in fact the members of the Hwalbindang who have been dispatched by the real Kil-dong and given responsibility for punishing corrupt magistrates.

Kil-dong and Yam-jŏn reunite in Kŭmhwa three years after their separation. Kil-dong leaves her again to head for Hamgyŏng Province upon learning that its governor Ch'ŏn Pyŏng-jun (千丙俊) is oppressing the people and applying all his energies to destroy the Hwalbindang there. Kil-dong arrests the governor and punishes him by flogging. Kil-dong and the Hwalbindang distribute the wrongly accumulated wealth to the people. They also visit P'yŏng'an and Hwanghae Provinces (黃海道) in an effort to monitor the activities of the Hwalbindangs there. Kil-dong then moves to Kyŏngsang Province in order to attack Haein temple and punish corrupt monks as well as magistrates.

Kil-dong, who has a deep concern for the people's well-being, plans to dethrone the Yŏnsan'gun and eliminate corrupt court officials for the great cause of rectifying societal/political injustices. Kil-dong and the Hwalbindangs in the country finally seize the moment to attack with the help of Sŏng, reverend Hakcho, and other concerned officials. Kil-dong's successful execution of a military coup contributes to the dethronement of the Yonsan'gun and the enthronement of a new king, Chungjong (中宗 [1488-1544]). People welcome the new world brought about by the coup.

Kil-dong is tormented by the fact that he has committed treason. He refuses to take the position of minister of the Board of War offered by Sŏng. Kil-dong dissolves the Hwalbindangs in the end. Rumours have it that Kil-dong has disappeared into the clouds or has become the king of Yuldoguk. With his mother by his side, Kil-dong heads toward Mount Kŭmgang along with fellow monks Yam-jŏn and Ŏm in hopes of

joining reverend Hakcho.

As discussed above, *Changp'yŏn Sosŏl Hong Kil-dong* is similar to the pre-modern versions both in terms of Hong Kil-dong's perceived injustices and his resulting actions. However, the way Hong Kil-dong achieves a new world is different. Hong Kil-dong challenges the authority of the sovereign by leading a military coup instead of leaving Chosŏn to avoid a direct confrontation with the king. Hong Kil-dong takes bolder and more drastic actions in an attempt to accomplish his ultimate goal.

5.2.2. *Changp'yŏn Sosŏl Seoul Hong Kil-dong*

As mentioned in the preface by its author Pak Yang-ho, *Changp'yŏn Sosŏl Seoul Hong Kil-dong* was originally a one-book story written in 1980. More plots were added later for serialisation in a newspaper, which became the source of books two and three. This expanded edition published in 1996 consists of three books that have ten, six, and seven chapters each.

Book one describes Hong Kil-dong's leaving home, his training under Muhanjŏng (無限定), his joining a group of gangsters and establishing the Hwalbinhoe (活貧會 [an organisation for helping the poor]), his rectifying of societal/political injustices in Korea of the 1950s, and his building a house of Hwalbin. Books two and three describe the arrest of the members of the Hwalbinhoe, Kil-dong's reunion with the members, his rescue of a group of people disillusioned by a cult, his marriage, and his participation in an attack on a broadcasting station.

Kil-dong's father is a liaison officer serving in the Korean independence army stationed in Manchuria. Kil-dong's uncle Hong Mang-jong is a constable serving in the Japanese police. Kil-dong's father meets a tragic end because his younger brother

has informed the police against him. Kil-dong, who has planned to kill his uncle to revenge his father's horrible death, breaks into his uncle's house. He stabs his uncle with a sickle but ends up killing his cousin instead. Kil-dong leaves home on the night of the killing. He is only eight years old.

Kil-dong happens to meet Muhanjǒng on a train and follows the Taoist to Mount Kyeryong. Kil-dong spends ten years under him practicing martial arts, Taoist magic, and witchcraft. Muhanjǒng suggests that Kil-dong leave him in order to save war-torn Korea.

The eighteen-year-old Kil-dong arrives in Seoul in late September 1953 two months after the Korean War (1950–1953) has ended. He gets into a fight with members of one of Seoul's largest gangs. Kil-dong demonstrates his unmatched fighting skills and becomes leader of the gang of a hundred people. Kil-dong calls this gang the Hwalbinhoe and then announces its ten principles. He also selects seven members of the gang, who pledge allegiance to one another and become sworn brothers.

In 1954 Kil-dong and his seven sworn brothers plan their first move to attack the Korean Business Association (韓國實業協會) in an attempt to obtain the right to sell American goods disposed by the U. S. army. The confrontation between Kil-dong and the president of the association is resolved when Kil-dong demonstrates his superiority in fighting skills. Kil-dong and the Hwalbinhoe's power are recognised throughout the Korean underworld.

Kil-dong commits himself to the cause of helping the poor and hungry. In an effort to raise funds, Kil-dong and the Hwalbinhoe take wealth from corrupt officials as well as from those who have extorted people. They set up an orphanage in Namdaemun (南大門) and take care of the orphans. The government order in 1955 to

demolish the orphanage forces them to relocate their camp to Chamsil (蠶室) in southern Seoul. The number of people in the orphanage increases to five hundred in 1956.

On the political front, the ruling party has made several attempts to change the constitution in order to allow Rhee Syng-man (李承晩 [1875–1965])¹²⁸⁾ to have perpetual power. The ruling party arbitrarily passes the amendment with the opposition party absent from the parliament house. Rhee is re-elected to power in the presidential election held on March 15, 1960. The people demonstrate against the government and its corrupt politics. The April 19 Revolution (四一九革命) in 1960 topples the government and brings power to the opposition. The May 16 Military Coup (五一六軍事革命) takes place in 1961 and Park Chung-hee (朴正熙 [1917–1979]) assumes power.

Kil-dong regains consciousness in March 1961 after a long coma caused by the gunshot wounds he received in an anti-government demonstration. He leaves behind the world of gangsters and tries to lead a new life as a private person. He becomes a fruit vendor and marries a woman named Ch'un-hŭi whom he saved from a cult group on Mount Kyeryong. Kil-dong's wholesale fruit business expands its market and he becomes a wealthy merchant in southern Seoul. He also builds a house of Hwalbin for elderly women.

Kil-dong returns to the underworld and decides to assist a group of elderly generals who once belonged to the Korean independence army in Manchuria. In commemoration of the April 19 Revolution, they occupy a broadcasting station to spread their message of rectifying political injustices to the public. Despite their determination they are defeated by the armed soldiers and Kil-dong is shot in the end.

128) First president of the Republic of Korea

Changp'yŏn Sosŏl Seoul Hong Kil-dong is quite similar to the pre-modern versions. Hong Kil-dong perceives an unjust world in the Korean society during the 1950s and 1960s where there exist societal injustices such as poverty and a lack of social welfare system. Political injustices include the corrupt presidential election, the May 16 Military Coup, and the normalisation of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Korea and Japan. The way Hong Kil-dong takes action to rectify these injustices is not very different from that of the traditional Hong Kil-dong. However, modern Hong Kil-dong becomes more direct, aggressive, and confrontational than the traditional Hong Kil-dong as shown in the scope and intensity of his actions. What is uniquely different from the pre-modern versions is Hong Kil-dong's life after achieving a just world. Modern Hong Kil-dong, who was once a private person, has become a public figure. He then wants to be a private person again and remains as such. This does not apply to the pre-modern versions where the private Hong Kil-dong remained a public figure even after establishing a new world.

5.2.3. *S. F. Hong Kil-dong*

This 1995 edition of *S. F. Hong Kil-dong* was first published in 1993. Authors Chŏng Kyŏng-hun and Yi Sang-ye mention in the preface that their motivation for writing this book was their interest in science fiction. This juvenile work of fiction is a combination of story and illustrations consisting of twenty-one chapters.

Kil-dong is in grade five. He visits a library for the first time in his life and there he happens to find a book titled *The Will of the King of Yuldoguk* that has two chapters: Wisdom and Taoist Magic. This book was written by an illegitimate child called Hong Kil-dong who later became the founder of Yuldoguk.

Time travels to the future from 1993 and it is the year 2100. Scientists have

invented the Z Computer 2100 that controls the whole world and its people. Although it has added convenience to people's lives, the computer suddenly stops functioning and produces Cyborg-X. Scientists discover that a virus has caused the problem by breaking into the computer system. The only vaccine programme able to cure the virus is V6 developed in 1993 by a Korean scientist Dr. Kim Chang-ho. The computer does not respond to V6 despite the efforts of young scientists RAM, ROM, and their creation Cyborg DX-7. Instead it issues a command for Cyborg-X to go to Korea and destroy V6. Cyborg DX-7 volunteers to go there on a mission to stop Cyborg-X from causing a disaster.

Kil-dong and his classmate Yu-na visit the science institute where Dr. Kim conducts research. While they are copying some educational software, V6 is also added inadvertently because Kil-dong's disk is connected with the future. Cyborg-X enters the institute, threatens Dr. Kim, and destroys V6. The cyborg then chases Kil-dong and Yu-na because they have a copy of V6. Cyborg DX-7 protects them whenever they face danger. They all escape to Mount Pukhan where the laboratory of Dr. Mangch'i is located. Cyborg-X defies all counter-attacks made by Kil-dong's group and eventually destroys Cyborg DX-7. Kil-dong ultimately uses his Taoist magic to explode Cyborg-X.

Time travels to the future again. The Z Computer 2100 reviews the activities of Cyborg-X and learns that Kil-dong from the past has caused its failure. The computer begins to analyse Kil-dong's fighting skills in order to produce a newer, stronger Cyborg-X to send back to Korea in September 1993. Kil-dong and Yu-na learn that the new cyborg will enter the science institute, so they go there to create an extra copy of V6. Cyborg-X keeps chasing Kil-dong and Yu-na. They venture out to find the secret Taoist magic described in *The Will of the King of Yuldoguk*, which

has disappeared from Kil-dong's house. In the meantime Dr. Mangch'i tries to develop a new weapon to destroy the new cyborg.

Kil-dong and Yu-na travel to Namhae (南海) Island to get information about Yuldoguk. They learn that some inhabitants of the island escaped to Yulch'on in order to avoid maladministration during the reign (1455–1468) of King Sejo (世祖 [1417–1468]). Kil-dong and Yu-na go to Yulch'on believing it to be Yuldoguk. They run into Yun Yŏ-jin, daughter of the village head, and learn from her that Yuldoguk is indeed former Yulch'on. They then tour the village including the place called "Room of the King of Yuldoguk," which is a cave with its entrance blocked by a rock gate. Kil-dong discovers thirty-six palm prints imprinted around the gate. Kil-dong assembles seventeen children and gets them to place their palms on the imprints. The gate starts to open as soon as Kil-dong puts his palms at its centre. A torrential stream of water issues from the cave. Kil-dong transforms himself into a falcon, flies into the cave, and then recovers *The Will of the King of Yuldoguk* containing the secret Taoist magic.

The new Cyborg-X enters the village. Kil-dong cites the incantation of Taoist magic. The new cyborg is hit by a bolt from the sky and falls into a deep crevice appearing in the earth. Kil-dong and Yu-na leave Yulch'on but the cyborg appears once again. Dr. Mangch'i, who has been following the two children all along in his flying saucer, appears and suggests that they use his new invention called Super-Magnetic-Reactor. Kil-dong attaches the reactor to the cyborg's knee and cites the incantation. The reactor reacts to a bolt brought by Kil-dong and Cyborg-X is shattered into many pieces in a huge explosion. Kil-dong, Yu-na, and Dr. Mangch'i leave Yulch'on after destroying the cyborg.

S. F. Hong Kil-dong is also similar to the pre-modern versions in terms of its

basic themes. Hong Kil-dong perceives injustices on a personal and a global level. He studies hard and gains confidence in an attempt to overcome the personal injustice of being teased by his classmate. He achieves global justice by defeating Cyborg-X that has been a threat to the world. One interesting fact is that in this story there are no societal/political injustices, which were the main issues raised in the pre-modern versions. Unlike the traditional Hong Kil-dong who strived to expand his power and achieve personal success, young Hong Kil-dong takes action based on his altruism rather than a desire to expand his influence beyond his personal life.

5.3. Other Modern Expressions of Hong Kil-dong

This section explores the presence of Hong Kil-dong in many different forms of expression other than in writing.

Cinema has been one of the major stages where Hong Kil-dong has made several appearances. *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* was made into a popular film in 1934 with a sequel following in 1936. The film attracted one hundred thousand viewers making it one of the most popular Korean-language films during the Japanese occupation of Korea (1910–1945). Japanese authorities permitted the use of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* as a critique of the Chosŏn yangban whom they had displaced and as a way to negate influence of the Chinese tradition on Korean culture. The transition of Hong Kil-dong into a children's hero, which began with a comic book and animation film in the 1960s, gathered force in the 1980s and 1990s. A series of three children's films that portrayed Hong Kil-dong as a martial arts superhero appeared during this time. The 1996 animation film *The Return of Hong Kil-dong* features a simplistic battle between superhero Hong Kil-dong and a monster-like yangban king. It received critical acclaim for raising standards of Korean animation to those of Japan.¹²⁹⁾

When it comes to the North Korean movie industry, director Kim Kil-in produced the film *Hong Kil-dong* (colour, 35mm, 190 minutes) in 1986.¹³⁰⁾ *Hong Kil-dong*, along with seven other films, represented North Korea in the Udine Festival of Far East Film 2000 (UdineIncontri Cinema 2000) held in Udine, Italy between April 8 and 15.¹³¹⁾ In this film, the aristocratic-born Hong Kil-dong espouses a primitive form of communism by attacking greedy landowners who hoard rice from the poor. His communism turns to unbridled nationalism when Japanese ninja invade Korea. *Hong Kil-dong* is a martial arts piece, albeit one with socialist characteristics. Aside from providing an opportunity to peer into North Korea's secretive world, the film offered some engaging and sentimental moments amid the propaganda.¹³²⁾ A short run of an opening and a battle scene are available for viewing.¹³³⁾ A video version of *Hong Kil-dong* is also available for sale on the Internet.

Television drama has also been a stage for Hong Kil-dong. MBC TV in South Korea broadcast in 1993 a madanggŭk (i.e., a drama/play performed outside) version of the Hong Kil-dong story as part of its madangsori series. SBS TV developed in 1998 a cartoon figure for its Hong Kil-dong TV drama series.¹³⁴⁾ A CD-ROM version containing its theme song is also available for sale on the Internet.

Hong Kil-dong has emerged as a symbol of the cultural industry. Sŏl Sŏng-gyŏng has claimed Changsŏng County (長城郡) in South Chŏlla Province (全羅南道) as the birthplace of the historical Hong Kil-dong. This county has taken the historical Hong Kil-dong into its local culture industry. In 1997 the county named the road that

129) Robert J. Fouser, unpublished article.

130) <http://www.fareastfilm.com/schede/Hongkildong.htm>

131) For an introduction to the North Korean cinema presented at the festival, visit <http://www.fareastfilm.com> and <http://www.fareastfilm.com/Inglese/Edition2000.htm>

132) Richard James, Peering Into A Closed World: North Korea Seen through Its Movie Industry, *Asiaweek* (May 19, 2000, vol., 27, no., 19), <http://www.asiaweek.com/asiaweek/magazine/2000/0519/as.cinema.html>

133) <http://tangun.co.jp/movieeg/Favorites/F000020.htm> and <http://www.tangun.co.jp/movieeg/Lists/D0002.htm>

134) Robert J. Fouser, unpublished article.

goes past Hong Kil-dong's birthplace "Hong Kil-dong Road" and began developing a Hong Kil-dong cartoon figure as its official icon. Since 1999 the county has sponsored a two-day Hong Kil-dong Festival in May that includes seminars and other special events in areas where it is believed that Hong Kil-dong once lived. In an effort to promote the Hong Kil-dong industry, the county devotes a considerable section of its Website¹³⁵⁾ to the Hong Kil-dong tour, festival information, and an official icon. The city of Kangnŭng (江陵) where Hŏ Kyun was born has developed a Hong Kil-dong mask and plans to develop other Hong Kil-dong souvenirs.¹³⁶⁾

Hong Kil-dong also appears on a South Korean postage stamp (26mm x 36mm) designed by Chŏng Yŏng-nam and printed by Korea Minting and Security Printing Corporation.¹³⁷⁾ The Hong Kil-dong stamp was first issued on October 20, 1999 along with three other pre-modern works of Korean literature as part of the fifth annual Korean literature series collection.

135) <http://www.chonnam.rda.go.kr>

136) Robert J. Fouser, unpublished article.

137) To view the whole set of the postage stamps, visit <http://www.pennfamily.org/KSS-USA/991020-main.html>

CHAPTER VI

EXAMINATION OF RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

This chapter examines the two research hypotheses addressed in the statement of current research. These hypotheses investigate the factors that have made *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* popular while contributing to its staying power. Hypothesis one is that the pre-modern versions and the modern rewritings of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* reflect Confucian ethics, the dominant moral values of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn*'s time. Hypothesis two is that the new Hwalbindangs and the modern rewritings of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* reflect the same quintessential aspects portrayed in the traditional *Hong Kil-dong*.

6.1. Hypothesis One – Reflection of Confucian Ethics

This section explains Confucian philosophy in general and Confucian ethics in particular and then investigates the extent to which the Confucian code of conduct influences the pre-modern versions and modern rewritings of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn*.

The cultural and social values that prevailed in Chosŏn society were based on Confucianism (性理學). Confucianism can be defined as a moral system and ideology, or ethics and norms. It perceives the universe as a unified system where people, nature, and the world are connected with one another without any conflicts or tensions. People, society, and nature are on parallel and equal lines forming a world of harmony. The ultimate principle behind this harmony and unity is Tao (道 [The Will of Heaven]). It is not only the universal rule transcending time and space but also the entity forming the everlasting truth.¹³⁸⁾

138) Ch'oe U-yŏng, pp. 71-3.

People can achieve divine happiness and identify their will with that of Heaven by practicing the Five Virtues. These virtues include in (仁), ũi (義), ye (禮), chi (智), and sŏng (誠). In can be defined as compassion, love, or the quality peculiar to people in their relationships with others. Ũi is righteousness and justice tempered by in. Ye can be translated as the ritual-observing disposition or fondness for ceremonies through which people show respect and awe for their fellow creatures. Chi can be rendered as wisdom, the self-conscious perception of the implanted Will of Heaven. Sŏng means sincerity in the sense of a wholehearted, disinterested self-surrender to the Will of Heaven. It precludes all hypocrisy and hidden cruelty.¹³⁹⁾

As an extended form of people, society also has the Will of Heaven by nature and can achieve it through the Three Bonds (三綱) and the Five Relationships (五倫).¹⁴⁰⁾ The Three Bonds are the three basic types of human relationships between husband and wife (夫婦), parent and child (父子), and sovereign and subject (君臣), respectively. The Five Relationships define the appropriate nature of human relations as well as the code of conduct required depending upon the position people have. The Five Relationships stress conduct in this world but see such conduct as divinely commanded.¹⁴¹⁾

(1) Husband and wife should know their place and fulfill their respective duties (夫婦有別). The foundation of the Will of Heaven begins in this relationship between men and women. Marital love leads not only to the other four relationships but to a mysterious and enjoyable harmony with the physical universe itself.

139) American Corporation, *The Encyclopedia Americana*, vol., 7, p. 497.

140) Ch'oe U-yŏng, p. 75.

141) Ch'oe U-yŏng, p. 80.

The Encyclopedia Americana, vol., 7, pp. 497-8.

Han'guk Minjok Munhwa Taebaekkwa Sajŏn, vol., 11, pp. 276-7.

(2) Parent should be benevolent to his/her child and child should respect his/her parents with filial piety (父子有親). This relationship furnishes abundant situations in which to practice unselfishness. A child is introduced for the first time to the Will of Heaven, which for the child enjoins love, reverence, and obedience toward elders.

(3) Elder and younger person should respect the hierarchy in their relationship (長幼有序). This relationship stresses the role of elders as being responsible for younger people and the duty of the younger person to respect elders.

(4) People and their friends should be trustworthy to one another (朋友有信). It is in this relationship that a person, from the practice of the virtues learned at home, is now expected to turn to a field offering greater scope.

(5) Sovereign and subject should be righteous to one another (君臣有義). The emperor is the symbol of morality. As the father of all people, the emperor is expected to take care of their well-being. The subject, who is compared to a child in a family, is expected to support the emperor in good administration based on virtues.

Confucian ethics are reflected in the three pre-modern versions of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* as described below.

The relationship between Kil-dong and daughters of Paek Nyong and Cho Ch'ŏl reflects the code of conduct between men and women. The situation in which Kil-dong saves the two women on Mount Mangdang shows how their roles are different based on gender. Kil-dong is the saviour aggressive enough to destroy the monster, while the women are the recipients of such heroism.

The relationship between Kil-dong and his parents reflects the code of conduct between parent and child. Kil-dong reveals to his father before leaving home that he intends to repay the beneficence of his parents. Kil-dong assures his mother that he will come back and serve her again in future. Having compassion for his illegitimate

son, Kil-dong's father allows Kil-dong to call him father. Kil-dong's mother wails in agony and pain when she senses her impending separation from her son. Kil-dong respects his father's love for Ch'o-ran, so he spares her life even though she has plotted to kill him. Kil-dong's act is an extended form of filial piety. Kil-dong's surrender to the state at the demand of his brother who has preached filial piety reflects how Kil-dong values this virtue. He chooses his father's well-being over his own. Kil-dong continues to show his respect for his parents even after their death by burying them in the best site and by completing the necessary funeral ceremonies.

The extreme form of filial piety is seen in the following examples. Kil-dong's father tells the eight Kil-dongs that they committed an enormous sin of unfiliality to their parents and therefore their lives should not be spared. The crown prince of Yuldoguk takes his own life after his father has committed suicide when defeated by Kil-dong (The Toyo Bunko and the Chǒng U-rak manuscript). Filial piety is indeed regarded as a virtue more precious than life. The virtue is also reflected in the deed of Kim Hyǒn-ch'ung. While preparing for battle against Kil-dong's army, the governor of Ch'ǒlbong allows children, adults having parents, and eldest sons to leave the fort (The Chǒng U-rak manuscript). His remark that they should return home and serve their parents shows that he puts more importance on filial piety than on the impending battle.

The relationship between Kil-dong and his brother reflects the code of conduct between elder and younger person. In-hyǒng appeals to brotherly love when he persuades Kil-dong to turn himself in. As a younger brother, Kil-dong shows respect for his elder brother by obeying him. One noteworthy fact is that In-hyǒng himself preaches to Kil-dong the importance of the Five Relationships.

The relationship between Kil-dong and the bandits reflects the code of conduct

between friends. While celebrating his joining a group of bandits, Kil-dong announces that death will await those who betray their commitment to sharing life, death, happiness, and sorrow (The Chǒng U-rak manuscript). The bandits respect Kil-dong's authority and obey his command. This shows the extent to which Kil-dong and the bandits value trustworthiness.

The relationship between Kil-dong and the king of Chosŏn reflects the code of conduct between sovereign and subject. Kil-dong confesses to the king before leaving Chosŏn that he has intended to serve the king for ten thousand years. Kil-dong contemplates a way to repay the beneficence of the king even after he becomes the king of Yuldoguk. He not only dispatches an emissary to the king as a token of his gratitude but he also repays the king with one thousand bushels of polished rice together with other tributes. Kil-dong admits in his letter to the king that he was disloyal to the state and asks for forgiveness (The Toyo Bunko and the Chǒng U-rak manuscript). The king of Chosŏn displays his magnanimity by sending Kil-dong's brother to Yuldoguk in reaction to Kil-dong's boundless loyalty. The virtue of loyalty is also expressed in other situations. Kil-dong shows his concern for the state when he tries to lure Yi Hŭp. The chief of police has no doubt about Kil-dong's motives because he is moved by Kil-dong's loyalty. Kim Hyŏn-ch'ung chooses death over surrender when confronted by Kil-dong. Kil-dong praises his loyalty to the king of Yuldoguk and releases the governor of Ch'ŏlbong even though he is Kil-dong's opponent. The governor eventually surrenders as a token of his appreciation for Kil-dong's praise for his loyalty. Loyalty emerges as an important factor that can save life even on the battlefield.

Confucian ethics are also reflected in the three modern rewritings of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* as described below.

In *Changp'yŏn Sosŏl Hong Kil-dong*, the relationship between Kil-dong and Yam-jŏn reflects the code of conduct between men and women. Kil-dong plays the role of man saving Yam-jŏn from being conscripted by the royal court. She is portrayed as a helpless girl waiting for a resourceful man like Kil-dong. Kil-dong puts more emphasis on his ambition to achieve societal/political justice than on his relationship with her. She believes that her role is to support Kil-dong and eventually follows his path. This shows how the two people assume different positions and play different roles in their relationship.

The relationship between Kil-dong and his parents reflects the code of conduct between parent and child. Kil-dong's mother harbours deep grief over her son's illegitimacy and cares about his well-being. Kil-dong is the most precious being to his mother. Kil-dong's father shows compassion for his son by reassuring him that he will always be his father regardless of Kil-dong's status. Kil-dong's parents deeply grieve over the fact that their son has to leave home. Kil-dong's filial piety is shown through his sincerity to his parents. Kil-dong makes his plan to save his imprisoned father his first priority. His remark that one who does not know his parents does not understand the affairs of the world suggests that filial piety is the most fundamental virtue of all. The significance of filial piety is reinforced by the title of chapter eighteen of book one: Son's Duty.

The relationship between Kil-dong and his teacher reflects the code of conduct between elder and younger person. Reverend Hakcho tries his best to train Kil-dong as a scholar and general. He gives Kil-dong moral support in his endeavour to achieve a new world. Kil-dong shows respect for his teacher by willingly doing menial work for him. He even strengthens his will to perform any difficult task because he believes that it is his duty as a disciple to serve his teacher. After

revealing his intention to leave Puryŏng'am, Kil-dong is troubled that he has disobeyed the will of his teacher. Kil-dong changes his mind to stay with him for a longer period.

The relationship between Kil-dong and the bandits reflects the code of conduct between friends. Pŏm-su has confidence in Kil-dong's quality as a leader and willingly transfers his leadership to Kil-dong. Kil-dong is deeply moved by his magnanimity and appreciates his moral support. Kil-dong and the Hwalbindang share dreams and goals with one another uniting themselves with the great cause of saving the state. The leader of the Hwalbindang in Hamgyŏng Province shows how much they value comradeship by admitting in his welcoming speech that Kil-dong's spirit runs in their blood and Kil-dong has always been on their mind. The virtue of trustworthiness is also shown in the relationship between Kil-dong and his former assassin. Kil-dong shows compassion by sparing Ŏm Chang-han's life even though Kil-dong was in a position to punish him. Ŏm feels indebted to Kil-dong and volunteers to rescue Kil-dong's imprisoned father.

The relationship between Kil-dong/Kil-dong's father and the king of Chosŏn reflects the code of conduct between sovereign and subject. When Kil-dong's father learns that his son will leave home, he points out that the Hong family has been renowned for its loyalty to the state. He himself believes strongly that state affairs are more important than personal well-being and he encourages Kil-dong to commit himself to the well-being of the state. When Kil-dong's mother learns that her son plans to rescue his father, she pleads with him to dedicate himself to the greater cause of saving the state instead of risking his own life to save a single life. Her remark indicates that loyalty is a virtue more important than personal life. Kil-dong's agony over his involvement in the dethronement of the king shows that betrayal of

loyalty is a sin and loyalty to the sovereign should not be violated lightly. The fact that Kil-dong entreats the members of the Hwalbindang to be loyal when dissolving the group stresses the continuing role of this virtue in society.

In *Changp'yŏn Sosŏl Seoul Hong Kil-dong*, the relationship between Kil-dong and his wife reflects the code of conduct between men and women. When Ch'un-hŭi volunteers to help Kil-dong with his business, he tells her that she should play the role of woman and homemaker. Kil-dong's opinion that men and women are different and therefore they should play respective roles respects this distinction between men and women.

The relationship between Kil-dong and a group of orphans reflects the code of conduct between parent and child. Kil-dong establishes an orphanage to look after the orphans. He also provides food for the homeless. Kil-dong plays the role of father and the orphans shows sincerity by working hard. His compassion for the underprivileged people is an extended form of parents' love for their children. Not only is Kil-dong a compassionate parent, he is also a filial son. He has a deep-rooted grievance over the miserable death of his parents. He continues to show his filial piety even after their death by visiting their burial site and performing the Confucian ritual of ancestral worship. Kil-dong's respect for parents goes beyond the circle of his family. He takes care of elderly women who have no one to rely on and also takes in the mother of one of his seven sworn brothers. His speech made at the opening of a house of Hwalbin that elderly women are no different from our mothers reflects his view of an extended form of filial piety. He admits that he regards every one of them as his own mother.

The relationship between Kil-dong and his teacher reflects the code of conduct between elder and younger person. Muhanjŏng has Kil-dong under him as a disciple

for ten years. He has trained Kil-dong with dedication and given him moral support. Kil-dong shows his respect for his teacher by sincerely following his teachings. Kil-dong's attitude toward Muhanjŏng also displays the virtue Kil-dong has internalised. He changes his postures in the presence of his teacher and even bows toward the place where his teacher is. This is an expression of the internalised virtue of respect for elders. Kil-dong's respect for elders extends to the mother of Ch'un-hŭi. Kil-dong has lived with Ch'un-hŭi for some time without formally getting married. He finally proposes to her at her mother's request. Ch'un-hŭi appreciates Kil-dong for following the will of her mother. Kil-dong treats his mother-in-law with the appropriate manners required of a younger person.

The relationship between Kil-dong and the members of the Hwalbinhoe reflects the code of conduct between friends. Kil-dong and the seven members of the gang pledge allegiance to become sworn brothers. The statement Kil-dong makes after the allegiance that they will die for righteousness and live for truth represents the characteristics of their relationship based on mutual trust. They share their life together when carrying out their activities and plans. The sworn brothers stand by Kil-dong even when he is in a coma. Kil-dong shows his utmost gratitude to them in appreciation of their sincerity.

In *S. F. Hong Kil-dong*, the relationship between Kil-dong the ancestor and his parents reflects the code of conduct between parent and child. Kil-dong states in his book *The Will of the King of Yuldoguk* that he left Chosŏn because he could not overcome his guilt of causing his parents the pain and suffering resulting from his banditry. His decision to leave Chosŏn shows that he puts his parent's well-being before his own. Kil-dong the descendant also shows an extended form of filial piety in his profound respect for his ancestor who existed four hundred years previously.

Kil-dong has been ashamed of his name but he gains confidence as soon as he learns that his name was handed down from his ancestor. After reading the book written by his ancestor, Kil-dong transforms himself into a more mature person who is courteous to his parents and grandfather. The change in his attitude shows the process by which Kil-dong internalises the virtue of filial piety.

The relationship between Kil-dong, Yu-na, and Dr. Mangch'i reflects the code of conduct between elder and younger person. Dr. Mangch'i shows the two children his benevolence and gives them moral support. He is the one who rescues them from Cyborg-X. Kil-dong and Yu-na regard Dr. Mangch'i as their mentor and value his opinions following his advice with gratitude.

The relationship between Kil-dong, Yu-na, and Dr. Mangch'i also reflects the code of conduct between friends. They never lose trust in one another despite many trials and errors they undergo while trying to destroy Cyborg-X. They eventually succeed in their mission to protect the world from the invader.

As discussed in this section, some fundamental behaviours of the people in the stories of the pre-modern versions and modern rewritings of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* reflect the Confucian code of conduct. Each of the pre-modern versions reflects the Confucian code of conduct required in all five relationships. *Changp'yŏn Sosŏl Hong Kil-dong* also reflects the Confucian code of conduct required in all five relationships. *Changp'yŏn Sosŏl Seoul Hong Kil-dong* reflects the Confucian code of conduct in the four relationships. *S. F. Hong Kil-dong* reflects the Confucian code of conduct in the three relationships.

6.2. Hypothesis Two - Quintessential Hong Kil-dong

This section defines the quintessential aspects of the traditional Hong Kil-dong

and investigates the extent to which these aspects influence the new Hwalbindangs and the modern rewritings of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn*.

Hong Kil-dong in the pre-modern versions has the following four quintessential aspects.

- (1) Confucian ethics required in the Five Relationships should be respected *but* it is acceptable to disobey the code of conduct between sovereign and subject when necessary in order to overcome personal or societal/political injustices.
- (2) People should take action to overcome and solve the injustices they perceive.
- (3) Good conquers evil and justice will prevail both on a personal and a societal/national level.
- (4) One person can make a difference regardless of inherited status such as age, social class, and family background.

Each of these aspects of Hong Kil-dong is revealed through his actions and reactions as described below.

Kil-dong conforms to the Confucian code of conduct required in his relationships with his parents, brother, and the king. He is a filial son, a trustworthy brother, and a loyal subject. The reason he turns himself in and surrenders to the state is that he chooses to remain a loyal subject and by doing so he can avoid causing his parents and brother grievance. Kil-dong, however, shows that the code of conduct between him and the king can be violated depending on circumstance. Kil-dong disobeys the king's will by challenging him indirectly even though he is a loyal subject who is dedicated to serving the king and grateful for his benevolence. Kil-dong's banditry through the eight provinces of Chosŏn is a rebellion against the state. His actions confirm his belief that the Confucian code of conduct required in the relationship between sovereign and subject can be violated for the greater cause of achieving

societal/political justice.

Kil-dong not only recognises various injustices but he also takes actions to correct them. Kil-dong questions the practice of discrimination against illegitimate children and leaves home. He then joins a group of bandits and engages in banditry to correct societal/political injustices. He finally leaves Chosŏn after a confrontation with the king. When Kil-dong redirects his attention and power in stages from the Hong family to a group of bandits, to society and to the state, he provides appropriate solutions to the injustices once they are recognised. His leaving home is his solution to the mistreatment he suffers at home, his leading the Hwalbindang is his solution to societal/political injustices, and his leaving Chosŏn is his solution to the confrontation he has with the king. His establishing a new world in Yuldoguk is his ultimate solution to his personal problem of illegitimacy as well as societal/political injustices in Chosŏn.

Kil-dong shows through his actions and their outcomes that justice will prevail both on a personal and a societal/national level. Although an illegitimate child, Kil-dong overcomes societal, political, and moral restrictions imposed on him and eventually becomes the king of Yuldoguk. He shows that personal success and stature can be achieved by talent and merit (justice) rather than only through inherited status (injustice). Kil-dong also proves through his banditry that it is possible to punish corrupt magistrates (injustice) and to help the poor (justice). His new world Yuldoguk is the ultimate achievement of justice.

Kil-dong was born to a low-born woman and is discriminated against due to his illegitimacy. He becomes leader of a group of bandits based on his merit alone despite his low status. His promotion from an illegitimate child to the position of a leader is his achievement of justice on a personal level. He not only corrects societal injustice

by helping the poor and the helpless but he also achieves political justice by punishing corrupt magistrates. He builds a peaceful and prosperous world in Yuldoguk. His actions and their outcomes prove that with such determination and willingness he can make a difference by overcoming the unfavourable conditions.

These quintessential aspects of the traditional Hong Kil-dong are also reflected in the new Hwalbindangs and the modern rewritings of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* as described below.

The actions of the new Hwalbindangs reflect three of the aspects of Hong Kil-dong. The challenges the new Hwalbindangs made against the government and its officials show that it is acceptable to violate the Confucian code of conduct (loyalty) required in the relationship between sovereign and subject. Their engaging in banditry and punishing corrupt officials were a form of rebellion against the government. Their actions imply that attempts to achieve societal/political justice should not be outweighed by loyalty to the government.

The fact that the new Hwalbindangs attacked government offices, punished corrupt officials, and demanded that the government rectify its maladministration by adopting *The Thirteen Articles concerning Korean Noblemen and Commoners* is consistent with Kil-dong's willingness to take action to correct perceived injustices. The new Hwalbindangs show through these actions that underprivileged people like them can achieve their goal of societal/political justice. They proved that even societal outcasts such as bandits can make a difference in society.

In *Changp'yŏn Sosŏl Hong Kil-dong*, Kil-dong shows that the Confucian code of conduct between sovereign and subject can be violated for the greater cause of creating an environment for reign based on virtues. Kil-dong is a leading member of a group of statesmen who prepare for a military coup. He participates in the

Chungjong Coup along with the statesmen and plays an important role in dethroning the Yönsan'gun. His violation of loyalty to the king is justified by the fact that he has eliminated the very cause of maladministration and that people welcome the new world brought about by the coup.

Kil-dong leaves home because he has recognised the unfairness of discrimination against illegitimate children. Kil-dong trains under reverend Hakcho so as to develop his scholarship and martial skills. As a righteous bandit, he attacks the government house of Hamgyöng Province and Haein temple. He participates in the Chungjong Coup in the end. Kil-dong proves through these activities the importance of taking actions to correct personal, societal, political injustices.

As leader of the Hwalbindang, Kil-dong carries out his plan to rescue his wrongly accused father, punishes corrupt magistrates and disloyal court officials, and contributes to dethroning the king. His successful execution of a series of plans proves that justice will prevail in his personal matters as well as in the societal/political arena.

Kil-dong was born an illegitimate child. Thanks to his hard training, his martial skills excel those of privileged legitimate children. Kil-dong becomes leader of the Hwalbindang even though he cannot obtain a high-ranking government position due to his illegitimacy. Kil-dong rises to the occasion despite his low status, exerts his power to help people and correct injustices, and contributes to achieving a just world.

In *Changp'yön Sosöl Seoul Hong Kil-dong*, Kil-dong shows that it is acceptable to violate the Confucian code of conduct required in the relationship between elder and younger person as well as between sovereign and subject. Having witnessed the miserable death of his father and his mother's subsequent demise, Kil-dong harbours hatred for his uncle who caused the death. He premeditates murder to kill his uncle

and breaks into his house. Kil-dong's belief that even an eight-year-old boy like him can attack his own uncle indicates that it is necessary to violate the code of conduct required of a younger person for the greater cause of taking revenge for his parents. Kil-dong also shows that the code of conduct required of a subject can be violated for the greater cause of achieving democracy and freedom. His participation in a demonstration against the government to challenge the incumbent president during the April 19 Revolution explains his belief that loyalty to the state cannot always be appropriate conduct.

Kil-dong shows throughout his life how he perceives injustices and takes necessary actions to correct them. His personal injustice is his father's death. Societal injustices are poverty and unequal distribution of wealth in Korean society during the 1950s and 1960s. Political injustices include the presence of pro-Japanese Koreans, North Korean communists, corrupt politicians, and dictators during this period. Kil-dong takes actions to correct these injustices. He attempts to kill his uncle to take revenge for his father. He builds orphanages and shelters for underprivileged children and elderly women. He attacks his uncle (a pro-Japanese public servant) and his police station. He also participates in an anti-government demonstration.

Kil-dong becomes an orphan when he is ten and leaves home. He has no one to rely on but himself. He strives to be someone and spends ten years under Muhanjŏng. Kil-dong is recognised as a genius given by Heaven. He becomes the leader of one of Seoul's largest gangs and wields his power to change an unjust world. The process by which an unfortunate child becomes a powerful man in the Korean underworld shows that even a gang can make a substantial contribution to society.

In *S. F. Hong Kil-dong*, Kil-dong shows that it is possible to take action to correct both personal and global injustices. The personal injustice Kil-dong faces is

the teasing by his classmate. Kil-dong concludes that the best way to change his classmate's mischievous behaviour is to prove his intelligence. He studies hard. Much wiser Kil-dong successfully punishes the prankster and receives acclaim from Yu-na. The global injustice Kil-dong faces is the malfunctioning Z Computer and its product Cyborg-X. Kil-dong overcomes the injustices by fighting for the world with his solution to the computer (the V6 vaccine programme) and to Cyborg-X (Super-Magnetic-Reactor).

Kil-dong proves that justice will prevail through the successful outcomes of his actions. Kil-dong and Yu-na are teased by one of their classmates and become the subject of practical jokes. Kil-dong learns skills from the book written by his ancestor Hong Kil-dong and then punishes the prankster. This is his achievement of justice on a personal level. Kil-dong also demonstrates that good conquers evil by exploding Cyborg-X that has made several attempts to destroy the world. This is his achievement of justice on a global level.

Kil-dong is an ordinary boy in grade five. Kil-dong's actions prevent the world from being destroyed. He proves that a young boy like him can play an important part in society and achieve justice.

As discussed in this section, the new Hwalbindangs and the modern rewritings of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* reflect the quintessential aspects portrayed in the traditional Hong Kil-dong. The new Hwalbindangs reflect three of these aspects as does *S. F. Hong Kil-dong*. *Changp'yŏn Sosŏl Hong Kil-dong* and *Changp'yŏn Sosŏl Seoul Hong Kil-dong* reflect all four aspects.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

As addressed in the statement of current research in chapter I, the ultimate goal of the thesis is to investigate the factors that have made *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* popular while contributing to its staying power. This chapter will examine this theme and reach conclusions based on the evidence presented in chapter VI regarding the research hypotheses about the Confucian code of conduct and quintessential aspects of Hong Kil-dong.

As examined in research hypothesis one, *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* reflects the Confucian code of conduct required in the Five Relationships. These values permeated every part of Chosŏn society and they continue to have a strong influence on contemporary Korean society.

Through the depictions of various relationships between its characters, *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* stresses the importance of respecting the Confucian code of conduct. Korean people can easily identify themselves with Confucian ethics, and *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* provides an opportunity for them to confirm that their traditional moral values remain a strong presence in contemporary Korean society. At the same time, *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* implies that Confucian ethics can be violated when necessary for greater causes. *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* shows through its protagonist's rebellions against the state that the Confucian code of conduct required between sovereign and subject can be challenged especially when the former is not concerned about the people's well-being. For Korean people who have a history of standing up against sovereigns and governments, *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* offers a sense of victory that results from breaking through the rigidity of Confucian ethics and from overcoming seemingly

insurmountable power.¹⁴²⁾ This unique combination of obeying and disobeying Confucian ethics in *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* greatly appeals to Koreans as Korean society moves from absolute Confucian ethics to relative and situational ethics. *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* successfully connects past with present and traditional values with changing morals adding to its popularity and longevity.

As examined in research hypothesis two, the pre-modern versions and modern rewritings of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* possess quintessential aspects that make this legend popular and allow it to transcend time. These aspects are justice, bold action, optimism, and capability.

Kil-dong pursues justice. He dedicates his life to building a just world by overcoming personal restrictions and rectifying societal/political injustices. Kil-dong's indignation over discrimination based on social status, unequal distribution of wealth, and political corruption shows his righteousness as well as his compassion toward people. Kil-dong's justice means studying and training hard to develop his potential, sharing economic resources with people in need, combatting corrupt politics to achieve democracy, and using stronger force to punish unjust power. Kil-dong's pursuit of justice leads to his taking action against injustice.

Kil-dong is action-oriented. Kil-dong has the willingness to provide solutions to perceived societal/political injustices. Kil-dong's bold action is reinforced by his creativity, persistence, and shrewd marshalling of resources. When in action, Kil-dong is not afraid of going beyond the boundaries of law and risking his own life to attain his goals.

142) The Chungjong Coup (中宗反正) in 1506 that dethroned the Yŏnsan'gun (燕山君 [1476–1506]) and the Injo Coup (仁祖反正) in 1623 that dethroned the Kwanghaegun (光海君 [1575–1641]).

Kil-dong projects optimism through the outcomes of his actions. He proves that good conquers evil and justice will prevail. Kil-dong becomes a symbol of hope and his optimism encourages people especially in times of trouble.

Kil-dong is capable of bringing about change. He confirms that anyone can make a contribution to society with his/her talent alone. He awakens people to the importance of self-reliance and to the possibility that talent can overcome inherited status. Kil-dong's achievements prove that nothing is impossible.

The story of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* appears in many modern settings as described earlier in the thesis. These modern settings include the Japanese occupation of Korea in the 1930s, Korea of the 1950s and 1960s with its societal, political, and military upheavals, and fictional superheroes defending Korean society in animation films and comic books. While these settings are very different both in time and situation, the themes of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* are universal because they portray the common quintessential aspects of the traditional Hong Kil-dong.

The staying power of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* is based on its universal appeal to contemporary Korean society. According to a survey conducted among 225 men residing in Seoul, Hong Kil-dong was chosen as the second most popular protagonist (10.7 per cent) whom they admired when they were young.¹⁴³⁾ Hong Kil-dong appears in literature for adult readers as well as in fairy tales and comic books targeting children. A bilingual version of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn* by Kim Yong-kŏl¹⁴⁴⁾ introduces Hong Kil-dong to English and Korean speaking children. In the comics by Yi Yŏng¹⁴⁵⁾ and Han Kyŏl,¹⁴⁶⁾ Hong Kil-dong comes alive with his flamboyant appearance and

143) Kim Kyŏng-hun, pp. 224-5. Peter Pan was chosen as the most popular protagonist (12.9 per cent).

144) *Brave Hong Kil-dong*

145) *Sosŏl Manhwa Ŭijŏk Hong Kil-dong Chŏn*, pp. 9-190.

146) *Uri Kojŏn: Manhwaro Ponŭn Hong Kil-dong Chŏn*, pp. 6-191.

dynamic actions. He comes even closer to the Korean public as he makes his appearance on the postage stamp issued as part of the fifth annual Korean literature series collection. Hong Kil-dong is also very much alive in contemporary computer chatrooms as a controversial topic for debate.¹⁴⁷⁾ Students at several North American institutions such as Columbia University, Harvard University, University of California at Los Angeles, and University of British Columbia participated in online discussions, which took place between February and March 2000. The main issues that were discussed included Hŏ Kyun, his family background, different versions of *Hong Kil-dong Chŏn*, interpretations of Yuldoguk, the historical Hong Kil-dong, and the genealogies of the Namyang Hong clan.

Hong Kil-dong has grown from a character in an orally transmitted story to a contemporary multi-media hero. It is quite rare for a protagonist in a timeless classic to be reborn in real life long after his creation and to emerge as a new cultural idol. Young and energetic Hong Kil-dong has indeed captured the heart and imagination of Korean people. He will continue to remain as an important representative of Korean identity and his simple yet profound message will never fail to give Koreans encouragement and hope.

147) <http://google.yahoo.com/bin/query?p=Hong+Kil+site:www.iic.edu>

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