

Examining women's lives through their writings

Michael J. Pettid

Binghamton University

This talk will examine the vernacular writings of three Chosŏn period women in an effort to better understand their lives. These women are Lady Cho of Namp'yŏng (1574-1645), Lady Chang of Andong (1598-1680) and Lady Yi Pinghŏgak (1759-1824), each of whom left written works that have been transmitted to the present day. Lady Cho is the author of *Pyŏngja ilgi* [Diary of the year *pyŏngja*], Lady Chang the writer of a cookbook entitled *Ŭmsik dimibang* [Methods for preparing tasty food] and Lady Yi the author of the woman's guidebook *Kyuhap ch'ongsŏ* [The encyclopedia of Daily life]. While the contents of the works are certainly different, they all do provide insights into how these women lived and viewed their worlds.

Lady Cho compiled her diary during and after the Manchu Invasions of 1636. Covering a period from the twelfth lunar month of 1636 through the eighth lunar month of 1640, she imparts to her readers the difficulties of life while escaping the ravages of war and the long path back to normalcy. Further, we can see her struggles to keep her household together and safe in the face of many adversities. Lady Chang's cookbook is a rather short work, but does contain some one hundred forty recipes for food and drink. In this we can see the importance of food to upper status families and also the time that went into preparation of meals. Finally, Lady Yi's encyclopedic work covers the gauntlet of managing a household ranging from food and drink, to needlework, to rural life and even to topics such as childbirth and first aid. A truly comprehensive work, it is probably the best example of scholarship by a woman in late Chosŏn.

By examining these three works together, it is hoped to bring about a better understanding of how women lived and how the use of writing allowed them to share their knowledge and experiences with others.