

Article

Reading in the Circle: Interpretive Communities and the Production of *Cheongbirok*

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Introduction

What does it mean to read socially across cultures and historical periods? Literary meaning emerges not through isolated acts of interpretation, but through shared conventions, collaborative frameworks, and transregional networks. While influential authors are often celebrated as singular geniuses, closer scrutiny reveals their creative processes are shaped by diverse social influences and interactions. This research seeks to reexamine Yi Deok-mu 李德懋 (1741–1793) through the lens of the “social reader.” Reading is not passive absorption, but an interactive process between reader and text, generating personal interpretations. These interpretations are then reshaped by the broader communities to which the reader belongs.¹ In this light, Yi Deok-mu’s *Cheongbirok* 淸脾錄 emerged from various interpretive communities, and its significance should be understood within this context. This study traces the construction and meaning-making process of *Cheongbirok* from the perspective of social readership.

Reader-response theory fundamentally reconceptualizes the relationship between text and reader, shifting focus from uncovering fixed textual meanings to understanding the dynamic process of interpretation. Louise Rosenblatt’s transactional theory provides a particularly useful framework for understanding Yi Deok-mu’s literary practice. For Rosenblatt (1946), meaning emerges neither exclusively from the text nor solely from the reader, but through their mutual interaction—what she terms a “transaction” (Clifford 1990). This theoretical perspective allows us to examine Yi not merely as a passive recipient of Wang Shizhen’s aesthetic ideas, but as an active co-creator of meaning who brought his own cultural context, literary background, and social positioning to his encounters with texts. Throughout *Cheongbirok*, we can trace how Yi’s “transactions” with Chinese texts produced new interpretations that were shaped by and simultaneously reshaped his various interpretive communities.

The late Joseon period, Yi Deok-mu’s era, was marked by a significant

1 This study draws on Stanley Fish’s (1980) concept of “interpretive community” to explore the interplay between individual reading and community influence. Fish’s paper “Is There a Text in This Class?” examines how a reader’s group affiliation affects meaning generation. Janice Radway (1997) further developed these ideas, offering an in-depth analysis of women readers’ practices and group solidarity.

influx of new literary information. Studies of *Yeonhaengnok* (*Beijing Travel Records*) document how Joseon scholars directly experienced contemporary Chinese cultural trends during diplomatic missions.² China's thriving print culture, particularly in the Jiangnan region, facilitated the transport of books to Beijing via canals. Beijing's bookstores served as information hubs for new publications and their distribution.³ Yi Deok-mu, nicknamed "Ganseochi" 看書痴 meaning "book-reading fool," was renowned for his extensive reading from youth. This paper examines how, from his 30s onward, Yi engaged with the literary ideas of Wang Shizhen 王士禛 (1634–1711), using his interpretations to innovate Joseon's literary style. This study argues that the reception of Wang's works by Yi Deok-mu was not merely a matter of personal taste; rather it was reinterpreted through interactions with various literary groups to which Yi belonged.⁴

This paper is organized around three interconnected dimensions of Yi's social reading practices:

(1) Social Agents in *Cheongbirok's* Creation: The study examines the various social influences involved in shaping *Cheongbirok*. While this compilation reflects Yi Deok-mu's personal literary assessments, it was also crafted with future "implied readers" in mind, contributing to its distinctive features.

(2) Yi's Literary Circles and Shared Values: The second part of the body investigates the literary groups Yi was associated with and the values they collectively held. Employing the concept of "interpretive community," it explores how literary interpretations evolved and their impact on

2 A vast number of papers have been submitted regarding *Yeonhaengnok*. Among these, particularly noteworthy are studies that extract articles about key exchange items such as books and paintings from the extensive *Yeonhaengnok* materials and that provide detailed explanations about them. These are helpful as they allow us to concretely identify the cultural artifacts that the Joseon literati actually experienced during their journeys to Beijing (Shin et al. 2014).

3 Research on how the flourishing print culture and new readership in the Jiangnan region during the late Ming period subsequently transformed intellectual society has been conducted in detail by Ōki Yasushi. While many existing studies have devoted considerable attention to the publishing culture of the Song dynasty, this book is noteworthy in that it deals with the explosive increase in printed materials after the late Ming period and the birth of a new type of intellectual. When the Joseon literati of the late period visited China, they directly experienced these socio-cultural changes (Ōki 2004).

4 Many studies have already been conducted on the works that Yi Deok-mu produced before his 30s, when he was fascinated by the Gong'an school. This paper focuses more on his later literary works, produced after he entered his 30s.

contemporary literary history. The study also analyzes *Cheongbirok's* structure and function as a form of miscellaneous writings (*pilgi* 筆記), focusing on how it deviates from traditional forms and was designed to engage with a broader readership.

(3) The Aesthetic of “Cheong” (clarity 清): This part examines the pervasive quality of “cheong” (clarity) in Yi Deok-mu’s poetry. This study explores how Yi’s extensive reading experiences shaped the unique aesthetic characteristics of his poetic works. Overall, this paper examines *Cheongbirok's* creation, its place within Yi’s literary community, and its influence on his personal poetic style. Having established the theoretical framework of social reading and interpretive communities, we now turn to the specific circumstances of *Cheongbirok's* creation.

By positioning Yi as a “social reader,” this study challenges traditional models of literary influence and individual genius. It reveals how *Cheongbirok* emerged through complex networks of interpretation, demonstrating that literary meaning is neither fixed in texts nor determined by individual readers, but continuously negotiated within and across interpretive communities.

***Cheongbirok* and its Implied Readers**

Wolfgang Iser’s concept of the “implied reader” offers a crucial theoretical lens for understanding *Cheongbirok's* distinctive features. Unlike reader-response theories that focus primarily on actual readers, Iser’s (1974) framework examines how texts themselves construct a hypothetical reader through their structure, content, and assumptions. This concept is particularly valuable for analyzing cross-cultural literary works like *Cheongbirok*, which was consciously designed to bridge different interpretive communities. As I will demonstrate, Yi strategically embedded within his text certain expectations, knowledge structures, and reading protocols that anticipated both the Joseon and Qing readers. The multiple editorial processes *Cheongbirok* underwent before reaching its Chinese audience—including revisions by Yi himself, Pan Tingyun, and Yi Seo-gu—further illuminate how the work’s implied readership evolved through collaborative negotiation. By examining these editorial decisions, we can observe in concrete detail how texts are shaped not by individual authors alone, but through complex interactions among

multiple interpretive communities.

This implied reader may not be an actual person but rather a set of assumptions and knowledge that the text implicitly expects to be possessed. The text itself creates this imagined reader through its content, style, and structure, as if the author envisions a specific reader while writing and designs the work to suit this imagined audience. This concept emphasizes the reader's active role in interpreting literature; it suggests that texts are not passive entities but actively guide how they are read and understood. Examining the concept of the implied reader provides us with understanding of a text's intended audience engagement strategies and the specific reading experience it seeks to produce. That is, the idea of the implied reader highlights the interactive nature of reading, wherein both the text and the reader contribute to the creation of meaning. The concept of the implied reader is integral to *Cheongbirok's* creation. Yi Deok-mu finished this work just before his 1778 journey to Qing China. Unlike his other writings, which were not aimed at a specific audience, *Cheongbirok* was purposely designed for presentation to the Qing literati Yi expected to meet. Yi's interactions with the Qing scholars predated his journey. He and his close friends—Yu Deuk-gong 柳得恭 (1748–1807), Park Je-ga 朴齊家 (1750–1805), and Yi Seo-gu 李書九 (1754–1825)—compiled a poetry anthology called *Han'gaekgeonyeonjip* 韓客巾衍集.⁵ In 1776, Yu Geum 柳琴, also called Yu Ryeon 柳璉 (1741–1788), a relative of Yu Deuk-gong, presented this anthology to the Qing literati like Li Tiaoyuan 李調元 (1734–1803) and Pan Tingyun 潘庭筠 during his Beijing visit. These scholars reciprocated by writing prefaces, and the book was published in China in 1777. Subsequently, Yi Deok-mu maintained correspondence with these Chinese literati, nurturing the indirect connections he had established:

Last winter, our friend Yu Geum went to Beijing with the *Han'gaekgeonyeonjip*, and my friends and I were looking forward to the days until his return. We were curious about what great people he might have met and what criticisms or prefaces he might have received for the works. We were excited and not able to put into words. When Yu Geum returned, he boasted of meeting the great

⁵ *Han'gaekgeonyeonjip* is particularly noteworthy as it includes a selection of Yi Deok-mu's early poems. This anthology provides insight into Yi's poetic perspective on nature and history before his China visit (Park 2010). That means it offers a valuable glimpse into Yi's poetic world prior to his direct engagement with Chinese literary circles.

literati in the world and showed us the *Han'gaekgeonyeonjip*. The red ink on it was dazzling, and we were greatly impressed. The prefaces and poetry critiques were elegant and respectful. It is a truly special connection in the world and a great event for all time.

去年冬，友人柳彈素，齋韓客巾衍集，入燕京也。不佞輩日屈指待其歸來，不知遇何狀名士，以評以序，心焉懸懸，無以爲喻。彈素之歸，自詔遇天下名士，仍出巾衍集，使不佞輩讀之。果然朱墨煌煌，大加嘉獎，序文評語，爾雅鄭重。眞海內之奇緣，而終古之勝事也。⁶

Yi Deok-mu's correspondence with Li Tiaoyuan provides a vivid account of how *Han'gaekgeonyeonjip* was received by Chinese scholars. Yi and his associates were thrilled when they sent the anthology to China, and their enthusiasm intensified upon receiving Li Tiaoyuan's critiques and preface. This positive response not only delighted them but also inspired a desire to nurture this newfound literary connection. Motivated by this successful exchange, Yi Deok-mu compiled *Cheongbirok* the following year. He created this work specifically to present to the Qing literati during his upcoming journey to Beijing. From its very conception, *Cheongbirok* was designed as a means of literary introduction and exchange with the Qing scholars. This sequence of events highlights the intentional nature of Yi's literary efforts. *Cheongbirok* was not merely a personal project, but a deliberate attempt to engage with and contribute to the broader East Asian literary community. It represents Yi's strategic approach to fostering intellectual connections across national boundaries.

Cheongbirok is a comprehensive anthology of poetry criticism (*sihwa*), spanning from ancient to contemporary works, accompanied by Yi Deok-mu's personal reflections.⁷ Notably, it includes numerous entries on the Qing dynasty poets and poems, which were generally neglected in Joseon at that time. Of the total 1778 entries, 28 are dedicated to the Qing poets and their

6 *Cheongjangwan jeonso* 青莊館全書, Vol. 11, Book 19, Ajeongyugo 雅亭遺稿, "Iuchonjowon" 李雨邨調元, a257 266a. The translation is the author's own, unless otherwise mentioned.

7 Yoo (2018) provides a comprehensive summary of *Cheongbirok's* various editions and their locations. Unlike Yi's other works, which were posthumously collected and circulated (often undergoing changes), *Cheongbirok* was personally curated by Yi during his lifetime. Different versions exist in Japan, China, and the U.S. (Harvard and UC Berkeley), with varying content. The current Shanghai guji chubanshe edition is based on Li Tiaoyuan's published version.

works.⁸ While this may seem a relatively small number, these entries occupy a substantial portion in terms of volume and the author's interest. Interestingly, around 1777, concurrent with *Cheongbirok*'s creation, Yu Deuk-gong compiled *Jungju sibil-ga siseon* 中州十一家詩選, an anthology also featuring the Qing poetry.⁹ This anthology similarly selected and critiqued poems by the Qing dynasty poets, and many passages overlap with *Cheongbirok*, sometimes almost verbatim. This similarity suggests that Yu Deuk-gong and Yi Deok-mu were fully aware of each other's writings. Furthermore, it tells that the collection and study of the Qing dynasty poetry were shared interests between them and that they collaborated in both collecting this material. It is remarkable that *Cheongbirok* features many poems by Yi Deok-mu's contemporaries, such as Yi Hui-gyeong 李喜經, Yi Hui-ji 李喜之, and Byeon Il-hyu 邊日休. Rather than exclusively selecting poems traditionally considered "canonical," Yi Deok-mu included works that were not widely known as well as contemporary pieces from poets who shared his time. This emphasis on "contemporariness" demonstrates Yi Deok-mu's literary awareness and reflects his opposition to the reverence and imitation of traditionally transmitted literary canons. He advocated for the equal literary value of works by contemporary literati of his time.¹⁰

Another notable characteristic of *Cheongbirok* is that it underwent several rounds of editing before publication. Initially, Yi Deok-mu's first draft was shaped by his editorial decisions. After that, Pan Tingyun, who received the book as a gift in Beijing, edited it again. Since Li Tiaoyuan was in Guangdong 廣東 at the time and could not be met in Beijing, Pan Tingyun sent the edited *Cheongbirok* to Guangdong for Li. Before it was sent to Li, Yi Seo-gu undertook extensive collation of the text again. Considering the intended readership among Chinese literati, Yi Seo-gu added detailed biographical information about the individuals in the book and specified the years when the works were composed to help readers' understanding. He

8 The structure of *Cheongbirok* is well analyzed in Gim Yeongjin's bibliographic notes on the edition held by the National Library of Korea (한古朝45-가108-1-2).

9 As Hur and Qian (2009) point out, "the significance of Yu Deuk-gong's *Jungju sibil-ga siseon* 中州十一家詩選 has been discussed along with his *Byeongsejip* 並世集."

10 Sharing Yi Deok-mu's consciousness of contemporariness, his friend Yu Deuk-gong later compiled the *Byeongsejip* 並世集. This anthology not only included poems by contemporary Joseon poets but also assigned equal value to the poetry of foreign literati living in the same era (Hur and Qian 2009).

also removed content deemed politically sensitive in both Joseon and Qing, considering the political climates of both countries. After this process of multiple editing, *Cheongbirok* was delivered to Li Tiaoyuan and included in *Xu Hanhai* 續函海 published in China. The original *Cheongbirok*, created in Joseon, contained 177 pieces of poetry and prose, while the version included in *Xu Hanhai* (1801) featured 130 pieces.¹¹ The book's content changed significantly through these edits, reflecting considerations for multiple layers of readership. These editorial processes reveal how *Cheongbirok* was shaped not by Yi alone, but through collaborative negotiations that anticipated diverse readers across cultural boundaries.

While the previous section examined how Yi and his associates tailored *Cheongbirok* for specific audiences, we now shift our focus to the broader interpretive communities that shaped Yi's literary perspectives. These communities provided the intellectual context within which Yi encountered, interpreted, and ultimately transformed the literary concepts he encountered in his reading. By examining the social dimensions of Yi's reading practices, we can better understand how literary meaning was collectively constructed within his circles and how new aesthetic values emerged through these shared interpretive activities.

Shared Values across Interpretive Communities

Yi Deok-mu's reading practices exemplify what Stanley Fish (1980) terms the "situated" nature of interpretation. According to Fish, readers never approach texts as isolated individuals but always as members of "interpretive communities" that share certain interpretive strategies, assumptions, and reading conventions. These communities establish "what counts" as a valid interpretation and provide readers with the interpretive tools they employ, often unconsciously. This theoretical framework helps us understand Yi's engagement with Wang Shizhen's aesthetic concepts not as a matter of individual preference or genius, but as a socially embedded practice

11 This is a woodblock-printed book containing a number of different works. A version of *Xu Hanhai* is currently preserved in the library of University of Chicago, and in 2013 I had a chance to view this copy through the inter-library loan with the help of Harvard-Yenching Library.

operating within and across multiple overlapping communities. Three distinct but interconnected interpretive communities shaped Yi's reading of Wang Shizhen: his immediate circle of Joseon intellectuals (including Yi Seo-gu and Yu Deuk-gong); the transnational network of literati fostered through correspondence with the Qing scholars like Pan Tingyun; and the imagined community of readers created through the emerging print culture of late eighteenth-century East Asia. Each community brought different interpretive strategies to bear on texts, and Yi's innovation lay in his ability to navigate among these communities, translating concepts across contexts, and synthesizing diverse interpretive approaches. This analysis extends Fish's framework by examining how interpretive communities function across cultural and national boundaries, revealing the socially constructed nature of cross-cultural literary exchange.

Literati often create group identities through shared experiences and cultural references, which in turn affect each member's personal reading habits. Janice Radway's (1997) work demonstrates how members of such groups develop a sense of "solidarity" through common activities and shared reading experiences. These interpretive communities can actively express collective meanings and even shape new trends in literary history.

In Yi Deok-mu's case, his primary intellectual exchange occurred with close friends in Joseon. Prior to his Beijing journey in 1778, he had already familiarized himself with popular Qing dynasty literature, gaining insight into contemporary Chinese literary trends. He was particularly drawn to Wang Shizhen's works, such as *Dai jing tang ji* 帶經堂集 and *Jing hua lu* 精華錄, which he read and discussed with Yi Seo-gu and Yu Deuk-gong:

In the clear autumn, the spirited trees are the first to know,
 Forgetting both warmth and cool, I became a fool.
 The wall is quiet, all insects diligently chirp,
 The curtain is empty, a single bird peeps in.
 I discard the desire for money as if facing dirt,
 And don't mind if they call me a reading fool.
 In vain, I envy the great things of China:
 Wang Wan's writings and Wang Shizhen's poetry.
 沈寥秋令樹先知, 任忘暄涼做白痴。壁靜萬蟲勤自語, 簾虛一鳥慣相窺。

拋它錢癖如將浼，呼我書淫故不辭。好事中州空艷羨，堯峯文筆阮亭詩。¹²

The appreciation for Qing dynasty literature was not unique to Yi Deok-mu but was a sentiment shared among his peers, particularly Yi Seo-gu and Yu Deuk-gong, as evidenced in their literary works. Yi was particularly passionate about introducing and popularizing Wang Shizhen's writings in Joseon, a mission that received support from his fellow scholars. Yi's intellectual connections were not confined to Joseon; he cultivated relationships with literati across national boundaries. As previously noted in this research, Yi actively participated in poetic dialogues with the Qing scholars. A notable illustration of these transnational literary exchanges is his correspondence with Pan Tingyun. In one such interaction, Yi composed and sent a poem to Pan that succinctly expressed his views on the contemporary state of literature.

Blind imitation of Han and Wei works corrupts the true spirit,
As a contemporary, I embrace the literature of our time.
You note how Late Song and Late Ming forged new literary paths,
Your insight resonates deeply with my own thoughts.
專門漢魏損真心，我是今人亦嗜今。晚宋晚明開別逕，蘭公一語托知音。¹³

This exchange exemplifies how Yi Deok-mu engaged with the Qing literati in critiquing contemporary literary trends, fostering a transnational interpretive community. Yi's *Cheongbirok* particularly emphasizes Wang Shizhen's work, aiming to recontextualize it for Joseon readers and inspire new literary directions. In "Reading Wang Shizhen's Poetry" 漁洋論詩, Yi criticizes those fixated on Han and Wei poetry while dismissing Yuan and Ming works: "Foolish people only discuss the Old-style Poetry of the Han and Wei, and reject the poetry of the Yuan and Ming. When asked what the characteristics of Yuan and Ming poetry are, they become blank and cannot answer" 癡人談古詩，喜斥元明代。何如是元明，茫然失所對。¹⁴ This critique

12 *Cheongjanggwan jeonseo*, Vol. 2, Book 10, Ajeongyugo, "Chuildokdaegyongdangjip" 秋日讀帶經堂集, a257 171a.

13 *Cheongjanggwan jeonseo*, Vol. 3, Book 11, Ajeongyugo, "Jehyangiopyeongbisigwon" 題香祖評批詩卷, a257 189b.

14 *Cheongjanggwan jeonseo*, Vol. 1, Book 32, Cheongbirok, "Eoyangnonsi" 漁洋論詩, a258 015a.

demonstrates Yi's effort to reinterpret Wang Shizhen's poetic sensibility within Joseon's literary context, challenging prevailing literary attitudes.

After turning 30, Yi Deok-mu's literary output demonstrates a significant impact from Wang Shizhen's writings. The concept of "clarity" 清 in *Cheongbirok's* title exemplifies Yi's interpretation of Wang's literary philosophy. At the age of 28, Wang Shizhen compiled an anthology of Tang poetry, emphasizing the concept of "shenyun" 神韻. As many research findings have pointed out, this concept derived from the idea of "clear enlightenment" mentioned in Yan Yu's 嚴羽 (1185–1235) *Cang lang shi hua* 滄浪詩話 from the Song dynasty, and this is often introduced as comparable to the "state of enlightenment" spoken of in Buddhism.¹⁵ Contrary to the general tendency of many scholars who understand *Cang lang shi hua* in the context of Zen Buddhism, I argue that Yan Yu's position is closer to that of Cheng Yi 程頤.¹⁶ The notion of "enlightenment" is closely associated with Neo-Confucian self-cultivation proper, and as a discipline, the act of writing poetry itself is understood as an act of self-cultivation. Wang's *shenyun* and the image of "lucidity and distance" 清遠 reflect this Neo-Confucian ideal of a tranquil, selfless mind mirroring reality. The perfect intuitive control over poetry occurs when the mind reflects things as they are. The *shenyun* in Wang's poetry means the poet's intuitive vision of the world around him as well as his intuitive control over the poetic form. The image of "lucidity and distance" is the poetic representation of the *shenyun*. The concept of "lucidity" means pure landscape, untainted by the poet's personality, thought, or emotions, and the "distance" signifies a transcendental tone with which some poems are charged. On the surface, the "distance" conveys an otherworldly atmosphere, but depending on the position of the poet, the exterior scene can be fused with the poet's interior mood. That is, the "lucid and distant"

15 Research on the relationship between Yi Deok-mu and Wang Shizhen has mainly centered on Yi's reception of Wang's key literary concept of "shenyun" (Lee 1993, 2004; Park 2008). Particularly, Yi explained the reception of Wang Shizhen in late Joseon and details of the cultural situations of the day. On the other hand, Choe (2005) has analyzed the literary terms of Yi Deok-mu which not many scholars have paid attention to. My understanding of *shenyun* differs from theirs in terms of its origin and connotation.

16 For the literary terms in the context of Wang Shizhen, the following works were very helpful: Lynn 1975; Owen 1996. These studies suggest that while the concept of "enlightenment" may appear to have been established under the influence of Buddhism on the surface, a closer examination reveals that it should be interpreted as reflecting a Neo-Confucian worldview.

image can manifest not only the poet's transcendental intention but also the more complicated relationship between the poet and the world.

Yi Deok-mu's understanding of *shenyun* was not just his personal aesthetic view, but a fundamental concept shared within his literary community. Given this collective approach to literary ideas, a question arises: how could knowledge be effectively shared and developed? Traditional formal writing styles were inadequate for summarizing new readings, exchanging ideas with peers, and generating fresh insights through these interactions. A more flexible approach was necessary. This study focuses on the *pilgi* 筆記 style, or miscellaneous writings, arguing that it played a crucial role in knowledge dissemination. The *pilgi* format facilitated the spread of new ideas and fostered the creation of new intellectual networks. Moreover, this writing style established unique epistemological frameworks characteristic of that era. By adopting the *pilgi* approach, Yi and his contemporaries could more freely discuss and develop literary concepts like *shenyun*, contributing to the evolution of literary thought in their time.

As previously mentioned, Yi Deok-mu's reading approach was characterized by its breadth and speed, favoring an "extensive" rather than "intensive" style. Unlike traditional readers who might deeply engage with a limited number of texts through repeated reading, memorization, and discussion, Yi consumed a wide range of literature voraciously. His knowledge spanned from the late Ming to his contemporary Qianlong era, encompassing the Shunzhi, Kangxi, and Yongzheng periods. Yi developed his own interpretations of numerous literati works. During his Beijing journey, he actively sought out new books, compiling lists and reading extensively. His appetite for knowledge extended to comprehensive works like the *Gu jin tu shu ji cheng* 古今圖書集成 when it became available in Joseon. Yi's extensive reading influenced his writing style. As Yi Deok-mu himself humbly describe *Cheongbirok* as "merely scattered writings without order," Yi Deok-mu recorded his reading experiences and shared them with others through the *pilgi* style. He wrote descriptions and reflections in a somewhat discontinuous manner for new taxonomies to rearrange knowledge. The composition of his miscellaneous writings, unlike a canon or a full essay, has no continuity among various sections or categories, as in a continuous narrative or argument. Nor is there any apparent order of logical connection among various jottings within a single category or a section.

Yi Deok-mu's writing style can be understood in the context of Korea's *pilgi* tradition. Free-form writings like *pilgi* were also called *manpil* 漫筆 or *jamrok* 雜錄.¹⁷ The oldest known *pilgi* in Korea is typically considered to be *Pahanjip* 破閑集 by Yi In-ro 李仁老 (1152–1220) of the Goryeo period, while Yi Je-hyeon's 李齊賢 (1287–1367) *Yeogongpaeseol* 櫟翁稗說 greatly influenced later Joseon dynasty *pilgi* works.¹⁸ The development of *pilgi* in the Goryeo period can be understood in the context of cultural relations with China. As a large number of books entered Korea through active exchanges with Song China, Goryeo intellectuals needed to organize new information in new ways, and the *pilgi* style was suitable for this situation. In other words, the active publishing culture of Song China was closely related to the development of writing styles and the formation of new knowledge in Goryeo. Woodblock printing technology, which greatly developed in the Northern Song dynasty, had a significant influence on the development of Song dynasty *pilgi*, or *biji*. Interestingly, woodblock printing did not reinforce traditional orthodoxies but had the opposite effect. In the process of organizing and re-editing the increased amount of information through *biji*, existing orthodoxies and canons were re-interpreted and their positions in literary history were re-adjusted (Fu 2007). Yi Deok-mu's use of *pilgi* can be understood in light of historical pattern. The publishing culture of contemporary China's Jiangnan region and the trans-border influx of books developed the *pilgi* style. Through this flexible format, knowledge could be re-arranged, new knowledge could be produced through exchanges with

17 Depending on the researcher, there are cases where the concept of *pilgi* is seen as encompassing other writing styles such as *manpil* and *jamrok*, while others distinguish between *pilgi* and *paeseol* 稗說 types. See, for this, Lee 1996. While there are many differing opinions on how to define the *pilgi* style as a genre, there is a general agreement on its common characteristics. That is, *pilgi* is often completed and organized while the author is still alive, and authors often use this style when they want to express new knowledge that differs from existing knowledge. In this paper, we will examine the writing characteristics of Yi Deok-mu's *Cheongbirok* and take a closer look at the *pilgi* characteristics that appear in this work. In Chinese academia, these writings are often collectively referred to as *biji*. Chen Bixiang classified *biji* as a type of prose style. See, for this, Chen 1986. Daiwei Fu divided Song dynasty *biji* into three categories from a structural perspective: (1) short stories, anecdotes, or biographies, (2) miscellany, and (3) jottings on a single subject. See, for this, Fu 2007.

18 Depending on how we understand the genre of *pilgi* and its authorship, the origins of *pilgi* in Korean literary history can be interpreted differently. For example, works such as Kim Daemun's 金大問 "Gyerimjapjeon" 鷄林雜傳 from the Silla period, although not extant, can be classified as *pilgi* based on existing records. Therefore, the origins of *pilgi* in Korean literary history can be traced back to the Unified Silla period. See, for this, Lee 1996.

colleagues, and communities of shared interpretation could develop. The *pilgi* style thus provided both the material structure and the social context for Yi's distinctive literary assessments to emerge.

Having examined the social and textual conditions that facilitated Yi's reading and writing practices, we now turn to the specific aesthetic concepts that emerged from these interpretive communities. At the center of Yi's critical vocabulary was the quality of "lucidity" 清, which appears in *Cheongbirok's* title and permeates his literary evaluations. This concept was not merely borrowed from Wang Shizhen but was actively reinterpreted through Yi's engagement with specific poems and poets within his Joseon context. By analyzing Yi's application of this concept across various poetic works, we can observe how shared aesthetic values developed within his interpretive community and how these values guided both critical assessment and poetic practice.

Images of "Lucidity" 清 and "Distance" 遠

The concept of "lucidity" 清 that pervades *Cheongbirok* represents what Hans Robert Jauss would term "horizon of expectations"—a shared framework that guides how members of an interpretive community approach and evaluate texts. Jauss's reception theory, which complements Fish's concept of interpretive communities, emphasizes how these expectations evolve historically through readers' ongoing encounters with texts (Jauss and Benzinger 1970). Yi's development of "lucidity" as a critical concept demonstrates this evolution, showing how an aesthetic category initially associated with Wang Shizhen's "shenyun" was recontextualized within the specific horizon of expectations of Yi's Joseon interpretive community.

The critical vocabulary Yi develops around "lucidity"—terms like "cheong-jin-dam-won" 清真澹遠 and "cheong-won-yu-dam" 清遠幽澹—functions as what Jauss calls "concretizations" of the aesthetic experience, allowing readers to articulate shared interpretive strategies. By examining Yi's application of these terms to specific poems, we can reconstruct the interpretive conventions that governed reading practices within his community and trace how these conventions both preserved and transformed Wang Shizhen's aesthetic framework. This approach reveals Yi

not merely as a passive recipient of Chinese literary theory but as an active participant in the ongoing historical dialogue through which aesthetic categories evolve across interpretive communities.

In interpreting the meaning of this “cheong,” Yi Deok-mu was influenced by the Qing dynasty poets he admired, such as Wang Shizhen, while also reinterpreting its meaning within the context of his immediate surroundings.¹⁹ Yi’s critical vocabulary revolves around the notion of “lucidity” 清, incorporating terms like “cheonghwa” 清和 and “cheongjin” 清真. These compound words, formed by pairing different characters with “cheong” 清, offer subtle variations on the theme of lucidity. The work’s title itself, combining “cheong” 清 and “bi” 脾, exemplifies this approach, suggesting a harmony between cosmic clarity and the poet’s inner world as expressed in verse. By creatively combining “cheong” 清 with other characters, Yi Deok-mu explores and expresses multiple facets of lucidity in his analysis of poetry.²⁰

(1) “Cheong-jin-dam-won” 清真澹遠

Yi highlights several poems by Lu Fei 陸飛 (1719–?), describing them as “lucid, genuine, placid, and distant” and suggesting that Lu could be considered an excellent disciple of Wang Shizhen 清真澹遠, 洵為漁洋嫡派.²¹ The four-character phrase “清真澹遠” (cheong-jin-dam-won) combines distinct imagery qualities. Within this compound, each character enriches the others’ meanings, and their interrelationship defines the overall category. To illustrate this category, Yi cites Lu’s poem “Mountain Walking” 山行:

Ascending the azure-rocked mountain slowly, stick in hand,

19 As Yi Deok-mu mentions in his preface of *Cheongbirok*, the title is from a poem by Guanxiu 貫休 (832–912): “The serene and lucid energy of the heaven and earth / it is penetrating into the poet’s mind / Among the thousands of people / only one or two people would understand this 乾坤有清氣, 散入詩人脾, 千人萬人中, 一人兩人知. 此唐僧貫休詩也. 余性不工詩, 而頗喜談藝 (*Cheonggianggwan jeonseo*, Vol. 1, Book 32, *Cheongbirok*, “Jaseo” 自序, a258 005a).

20 In *Cheongbirok*, Yi Deok-mu left critical commentaries on 43 works. Among the terms used to evaluate each poem, concepts centered on “lucidity” 清 appear 13 times, occupying the largest proportion. The next most frequently used characters in his evaluations were “Jeong” 精 and “myo” 妙 (Choe 2005). This paper focuses on examining Yi Deok-mu’s poetic world, through the conceptual terms using “lucidity” 清, and how he interpreted this concept from his own perspective.

21 *Cheonggianggwan jeonseo*, Vol. 1, Book 32, *Cheongbirok*, “Yuksoeum” 陸籛飲, a258 017c.

Fallen leaves desolately threaten to fill my hood.
 The woodcutter's path twists beyond where birds fly,
 White clouds, ocean-like, stretch where no one is met.
 翠屏徐上杖扶身, 落葉蕭蕭欲墊巾. 樵磴縈紆飛鳥外, 白雲如海不逢人.²²

The narrator climbs a path amid sapphire rocks, relying on a walking stick. Fallen leaves accumulating in his hood pause his ascent. His gaze shifts from the ground skyward, from close to distant. The winding path ahead stretches beyond even a bird's flight. The sky, filled with clouds, resembles a vast ocean. He realizes he has encountered no one on his journey, emphasizing his solitude in the mountains. This poem captures a brief moment during a mountain hike. Despite the narrator's stillness, the surroundings are dynamic: leaves fall, a bird flies, the path meanders, and clouds billow like ocean waves. Amidst this activity, he becomes aware of his prolonged solitude. Although he did not expose his feelings or emotions, by describing the realistic appearances of the scene and their active images, the speaker contrasts the isolated image of himself who remains alone deep in the mountain, static and feeble.

Yi Deok-mu's use of the terms "jin" 眞, "dam" 澹, and "won" 遠 in his commentary aptly captures the various effects of the poem's imagery. "Jin" 眞, meaning "genuine" or "realistic," accurately describes the poem's depiction of the speaker's surroundings. Like a silent film, the verse portrays subtle movements observed from a single vantage point on the mountain path. The speaker refrains from directly expressing loneliness or fatigue. Instead, his state of mind is implied through contrasting images. This restrained approach is characterized by the term "dam" 澹, signifying serenity or tranquility. While "dam" can denote simplicity in poetic imagery, in this context, it likely refers to the speaker's mental state.

The interpretation of "won" 遠 can be more nuanced. While it may simply denote distant objects within the speaker's view, it can also represent the speaker's mind or spirit traveling alongside moving or distant objects. In this poem, the reference to a bird flying in the sky might convey the speaker's state of mind or aspirations. However, we should be cautious about hastily concluding that the poet is expressing a desire to escape the mundane

22 *Cheongjangwan jeonseu*, Vol. 1, Book 32, Cheongbirok, "Yuksoeum," a258 017c.

world, or interpreting “won” 遠 as a yearning for otherworldliness. Such interpretations would require additional context from either the poet, Lu Fei, or the critic, Yi Deok-mu. The qualities conveyed by “jin” 眞, “dam” 澹, and “won” 遠 provide more concrete meaning to the concept of “lucidity” 清 as presented by Yi Deok-mu. Yi articulates the poem’s lucidity through three elements: (1) realism (*jin*), (2) indirectness (*dam*), and (3) evocation of longing (*won*). These elements collectively define the poem’s lucid nature, as interpreted by Yi Deok-mu.²³

(2) “Cheong-won-yu-dam” 清遠幽澹

Yi Deok-mu sometimes combines “cheong” 清 with “won” 遠 to form the compound “cheongwon” 清遠, meaning “lucid and distant.” While in the “Mountain Walking” 山行 poem mentioned above, “won” 遠 represented the intense desire of the poetic speaker, in this poem, “won” 遠 combines with “yu-dam” 幽澹 or “deep and placid,” to depict a more tranquil landscape. He applies this term, along with “yu-dam” in his commentary on Kim I-gon’s 金履坤 (1712–1774) poem, “On the Way Back from Jahadong” 紫霞洞歸路:

Winding paths through wooded valleys,
Solitary walk calms my mind.
Spring water’s source eludes me,
Perhaps somewhere between high tower and setting moon.
林溪多曲折, 獨往意逾閒。不識泉鳴處, 樓高落月間。²⁴

Kim I-gon’s “On the Way Back from Jahadong” shares a similar setting with Lu Fei’s “Mountain Walking,” featuring a solitary walker on a winding forest path. However, the speaker in Kim’s poem appears less isolated. The scene is set near the lively Jahadong district, with the poet likely returning from a social gathering. The poem’s third line introduces an auditory element: the sound of a stream, more noticeable at night. This sound could be nearby or distant, filling the dark woods where the view is limited. The

23 Interpretations of the “won” 遠 used by Yi Deok-mu in this poem can vary among researchers. For example, it could be interpreted as “describing the scenery without revealing one’s own intentions” (Choe 2005). However, this paper interprets it as the author expressing his desires more intensely through the landscape.

24 *Cheongjanggywan jeonseu*, Vol. 3, Book 34, Cheongbirok, “Bongnok” 鳳籠, a258 040c.

speaker imagines the sound originating between a high tower and the setting moon, connecting him to the town and friends he has just left.

Yi Deok-mu does not use “jin” 眞 in his commentary on this poem, possibly due to its limited visual descriptions. Instead of depicting a realistic natural scene, the poem conveys the speaker’s longing indirectly through the water’s sound and the distant image of the tower under moonlight. These oblique expressions and the speaker’s focus on distant imagery align well with Yi’s use of “won” 遠 and “dam” 澹 in his critique. The poem subtly evokes the speaker’s state of mind through sensory impressions and spatial relationships, rather than through explicit description or emotion.

(3) “Cheong-gak-bal-sok” 清刻拔俗

Contrary to many traditional interpretations, *Cheongbirok* does not associate the term “cheongwon” 清遠 with “otherworldliness.” When Yi Deok-mu wants to indicate an author’s desire to escape the mundane world, he adds characters like “bal” 拔 or “balsok” 拔俗 to form new compounds. For instance, Yi describes Wang Ping’s 王苹 (*jinsshi* 1706) poem as having the quality of “cheongbal” 清拔:

Through this gurgling spring, who’d drag their slippers?
Amid yellow leaves, I will simply write my book.
亂泉聲裡誰通屐，黃葉林中自著書。²⁵

The poem depicts a space isolated from the outside world, enclosed by the sound of rushing water, deterring visitors. The speaker, surrounded by yellow foliage, prepares to write, immersed in a world of sound and color. This solitude is not portrayed as loneliness, but as a satisfying, uninterrupted state of creativity. Yi uses “bal” 拔 to denote “escape from the mundane world,” giving “lucidity” 清 a more specific meaning when combined with “escaping the mundane” 拔俗. The environment of freshwater and autumnal trees creates both a pure, natural image and a sense of otherworldliness.

It is important to note that the term “balsok” 拔俗 does not always refer to the actual mundane world of human life. In poetry, it can sometimes indicate an unconventional technique or extraordinary use of imagery. For

25 *Cheongjanggwan jeonso*, Vol. 1, Book 32, *Cheongbirok*, “Gangwirimbo” 江爲林漣, a258 016d.

instance, Yi describes the late Joseon poet Yun Chi's 尹治 "Autumn Night" 秋夜 as "lucid, precise, and extraordinary" 清刻拔俗:

From an old tree on a barren hill, a distant sound echoes.
 Deep in the night, restless dark clouds form frost.
 In the reeds, geese flock as if in conversation,
 The cold peak bisects the moon.

老樹荒岡響遠聞，夜深霜意亂黃雲。蘆洲羣鴈如相語，月在寒峯缺半分。²⁶

This poem does not reveal its speaker. Each line presents various objects without a direct human voice. It portrays an autumn night scene with dynamic, auditory, and visual images. Each object has its own intention and motion: the old tree whistles, clouds move to make frost, geese converse, and a mountain peak cuts the moon. These elements, each with its own vitality, interconnect within the larger landscape.

Yi's use of "lucidity and precision/ornamentation" 清刻 aptly describes the poem's descriptive quality. However, the term "balsok" 拔俗 is more complex here. Unlike Wang Ping's earlier poem, which clearly showed the speaker's satisfaction in natural isolation, Yun Chi's "Autumn Night" does not hint at any human intention. It captures a moment in nature, depicting the vital energy of objects without considering human concerns. In this context, "sok" 俗 likely refers to "ordinary, banal expression," and "balsok" 拔俗 to freshness or originality in describing nature's details. This interpretation suggests that "balsok" can indicate poetic innovation to depict freshness or originality in describing the details of nature, rather than a desire to escape the mundane world. Through these nuanced applications of terms centered on "lucidity," we can trace how Yi and his interpretive community developed a distinctive critical vocabulary that both drew upon and transformed Chinese literary concepts to address the specific aesthetic concerns of Joseon poetry. The analysis of Yi's critical terminology reveals not just his personal preferences, but how aesthetic judgments were formed and articulated within his broader literary circles. This brings us back to our initial framework of social reading and interpretive communities, demonstrating how Yi's individual encounters with texts were mediated through collective

²⁶ *Cheongjanggwajeonseo*, Vol. 2, Book 33, Cheongbirok, "Hyeonpo" 玄圃, a258 023a.

interpretive strategies shared with his contemporaries.

As evident from the book's title, "cheong" 清 is the central concept in Yi Deok-mu's aesthetics. This can be understood as an aesthetic category of interpretation that the reader comprehends and feels after reading a poetic text. This "cheong" is combined with other Chinese characters to create compounds, through which Yi expressed specific characteristics of each poem. For example, in the poems introduced above, he used "jin" 眞 to convey the sense of reality in the actual world, "won" 遠 to express poetic aspiration, and "balsok" 拔俗 to impart the specific meaning of being not trite or commonplace.

The practice of using evaluative terms to concisely express the aesthetic characteristics of poetry has a long tradition. For example, Choe Ja's 崔滋 *Bohanjip* 補閑集 and Yi I's 李珣 *Jeongeonmyoseon* 精言妙選 are representative collections of poetry criticism in Korean literary history. Interestingly, even when the same words are used, they do not necessarily carry the same meaning. For instance, when evaluating a poem using the term "cheongjeol" 清絶, depending on the critic, it could mean "transcending the mundane world" or "exceptionally excellent" (Choe 2005, 166–67). In other words, the meaning of a poem can vary depending on how the readers interpret it. In the case of *Cheongbirok*, it can be interpreted that Yi Deok-mu did not simply follow existing poetry criticisms but created original evaluations based on his own reading experiences, subjective impressions, and the actual landscape of Joseon.

Conclusion

This study has reexamined Yi Deok-mu as a social reader and explored the formation of his *Cheongbirok* through the lens of interpretive community activities. Moving beyond traditional narratives of individual genius, this research demonstrates how literary history emerges through complex networks of social interaction, material conditions, and collaborative meaning-making. The creation of *Cheongbirok* reveals the intersection of Yi's personal reading habits, his intellectual circles in Joseon, his cross-border networks with the Qing scholars, and the flourishing publishing culture of eighteenth-century East Asia. Through the flexible *pilgi* writing style, Yi

was able to reinterpret new knowledge and effectively convey his personal reflections to others within his interpretive communities. This analysis reveals how Yi's engagement with Wang Shizhen's *shenyun* aesthetic was not merely passive reception but an active process of cultural translation and recontextualization. Rather than being solely Yi's personal aesthetic principle, *shenyun*—reinterpreted through the concept of “lucidity” 清—became a central framework shared among his literary circle, demonstrating the fundamentally social nature of literary interpretation.

The implications of this research extend beyond Yi Deok-mu and late Joseon literature in several important directions. First, it contributes to a more nuanced understanding of cross-cultural literary exchange in East Asia. Traditional models of influence often posit unidirectional flows from China to Korea, but Yi's creative reinterpretation of Wang Shizhen's aesthetics demonstrates how literary concepts were actively transformed as they crossed cultural boundaries. This suggests we should reconceptualize East Asian literary relations not as hierarchical transmission but as dialogic negotiation among multiple interpretive communities. Second, this study offers methodological insights for applying reader-response theory to non-Western literary traditions. While concepts like Fish's “interpretive communities” and Iser's “implied reader” emerged from Western literary theory, their application to Joseon literary practice reveals both their analytical power and the need to adapt them to different cultural contexts. Yi's case demonstrates how interpretive communities operated across linguistic, cultural, and national boundaries in ways not fully accounted for in Western theoretical frameworks. Future research might further develop these concepts to better address the complex reading networks of premodern East Asia. Third, this research has implications for understanding the material conditions of knowledge production in the eighteenth century. The emergence of the *pilgi* format as a vehicle for new forms of literary assessment coincided with significant changes in book circulation and reading practices across East Asia. Yi's case illustrates how new textual formats facilitated new modes of interpretation and how changes in the material basis of reading shaped the formation of interpretive communities. This suggests productive avenues for future research connecting literary history with book history and material culture studies. Finally, this study invites us to reconsider contemporary assumptions about authorship and originality. Yi's collaborative approach

to creating *Cheongbirok*—involving multiple editors, cross-border correspondence, and collective interpretation—challenges modern notions of the solitary author. Instead, it reveals authorship as a distributed process embedded in social networks and interpretive communities. This historical perspective offers valuable insights for current debates about collaborative creativity, intertextuality, and the social dimensions of literary production.

By positioning Yi Deok-mu as a social reader and *Cheongbirok* as the product of multiple interpretive communities, this research not only enriches our understanding of late Joseon literary history but also contributes to broader scholarly conversations about reading practices, cross-cultural exchange, and the collective nature of literary innovation. It demonstrates that literary meaning emerges not from individual genius alone, but through complex social processes of interpretation, negotiation, and shared meaning-making that shape the evolution of literary traditions across time and space.

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Abstract

This study reexamines Yi Deok-mu (1741–1793) as a “social reader” and analyzes the formation of his work *Cheongbirok* through the theoretical lens of “interpretive communities.” While traditional literary history often emphasizes individual genius, this paper argues that literary innovation emerges through complex networks of social interaction, material conditions, and collaborative meaning-making. By tracing how Yi’s personal reading practices intersected with his various interpretive communities—including his immediate intellectual circle in Joseon, cross-border networks with the Qing literati, and the broader East Asian publishing culture—this study reveals the profoundly social nature of literary production in late Joseon Korea. The research makes three primary contributions. First, it demonstrates how Yi’s reinterpretation of Wang Shizhen’s *shenyun* aesthetic was not merely passive reception but an active process of cultural translation mediated by multiple interpretive communities. Second, it analyzes how the flexible *pilgi* (miscellaneous writings) format facilitated new modes of knowledge dissemination and literary interpretation within these communities. Third, it examines Yi’s distinctive critical vocabulary centered on “lucidity” (*cheong*), showing how his aesthetic framework developed through dialogic engagement with both Chinese literary concepts and local interpretive contexts. By examining the social dimensions of literary development in late Joseon, this study challenges conventional models of literary influence and contributes to broader scholarly conversations about reader response theory, cross-cultural literary exchange in East Asia, and the material conditions of knowledge production. It reveals *Cheongbirok* not as an isolated achievement but as the product of an interconnected network of readers, writers, and texts that collectively shaped new directions in Korean literary history.

Keywords: social reader, implied reader, interpretive community, reader response theory, *Cheongbirok*, Yi Deok-mu, Wang Shizhen, *pilgi*, *shenyun*