

## 6. Yulgok and His Sister Maechang

Yulgok's sister Maechang was a spitting image of Saimdang under every aspect: virtue, art, knowledge, and wisdom. Hence, she had a profound influence on her younger brother Yulgok. Of course, Yulgok possessed sufficient knowledge and wisdom to be successful in everything that he touched, but it is highly probable that he consulted her wise sister.

When Yulgok(aged forty-eight) was the Minister of Military Affairs, the Orangkae army invaded the northeastern borders (Hamgyeong-do). This region was not stationed by the Joseon army, and thus no soldiers and horses were there to resist the invasion.

Yulgok, who held the position of the Minister of Military Affairs, set up a plan to gather seojas and private and government servants, and trained them as soldiers; then he sent them to the frontier in Hamgyeong-do. Among the target population, the weak and ill-suited for the battle were to be exempted by donating grains. At the same time, participating seojas may be given the opportunities to pursue a public career and servants, to be upgraded to commoners. Yulgok presented this plan to the King.

However, society was not ripe enough to understand such an innovative opinion. Many officials, who had been envious of Yulgok's reputation and achievements, took that opportunity to make a great fuss about this

opinion. Apart from its political content, Yulgok's opinion also reflected his conviction. Besides, there is an evidence of Maechang's influence on this plan.

The following story, which is included in *Giam-Japgo* [*Giam's Miscellaneous Writing*] authored by Jeong Hong-myeong, may have some fictional proportion, but it sounds credible. It reads therein: Seeing Yulgok worried about the Orangkae problem, his sister Maechang said, "The most urgent thing to do is to offer a policy that folks can follow gladly and voluntarily. When we look around, there are many talented soejas living in deep remorse for the lives, without any prospect of success. If they are given the opportunities to change the situation by donating grains, you can feed the soldiers and satisfy folks at the same time." Yulgok saw the good reasoning in his sister's idea and presented it in his plan to the King.<sup>51)</sup>

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51 *Supplementary Work of Yulgok, Vol. 5*



Maechang's painting