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## Five Bandits

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Manoa

University of Hawai'i Press

Volume 27, Number 2, 2015

pp. 94-104

10.1353/man.2015.0041

ARTICLE

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**In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:**

## Five Bandits

*Kim Chi-ha (1941-)*

*Translated by Brother Anthony of Taizé (bio)*

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Five Bandits

Whoever writes poetry, you should be daring, not finicky-fussy.

Write straight, like this.

My writing brush had an untamed spirit, a rugged tip,  
and for that crime I was dragged off to jail, butt-flogged,  
but that was all a long time ago; now my joints and sinews itch,  
my rash lips tremble, wrists mutter and twitch,  
coercing me to write again no matter what; I can't stand it.  
Oh my god! What the hell? I don't care what happens to me.  
Even if my butt gets flogged again, beaten till it catches fire,  
I'm going to write an ever-so-strange story about some thieves.

Long ago, long long ago, Tan'gun founded a nation at the foot of  
Baekdu

☐☐ Mountain on the third day of the tenth month.

Among things seen by navels, heard by asses,  
was our foremost Eastern nation;  
it enjoyed perfect peace, the most prosperous peaceful peace since  
Tan'gun.

How could there be any poor people, any thieves then?

Farmers used to die of stuffing themselves till their bellies burst;  
bored with wearing silk, they went about naked, year in and year out.

True, Ko Chae-bong really was what you call a thief,

but after all, even in Confucius's days the bandit Dao Zhi arose;  
the world may be full of abuses, corruption, and crushing taxation,  
but even in the Golden Age of Yao and Shun, the Four Evils existed,  
so even wise kings and admirable ministers cannot fully control the

☐☐ stealing habit,

which starts at age three and stays with people till they're eighty years  
or more.

Once, five thieves were living in the heart of Seoul, the capital city.

To the South, you see, turds went bobbing down the Han River,  
which is nothing but sewage, with Dongbinggo-dong high beside it  
to the North, its treeless hills bare as a chicken's bald ass,

with Sŏngbuk-dong and Suyu-dong spiring aloft to the North again, **[End**

**Page 94]**

and in the space between South and North, packed tight, tight, tight,  
shacks are clustered,  
clustered like crab shells, clustered like snot, and above them soar  
Jangchung-dong and Yaksu-dong, where shacks are demolished  
helter-skelter to erect majestic gates.

Those gateways, soaring high as they please, gaudily glittering,  
lead to magnificent, luxurious palaces full of flowers.

There the music never stops, by night or day; the sound of rice cake  
being pounded never ceases, *tra-la-la, tra-la-la, thump thump  
thump*.

Oh, here's the den of the Five Bandits, by name ConglomerApe,  
AssemblyMutt, TopCivilSerpent, General-in-Chimp, and  
HighMinisCur, all ferocious under Heaven,  
guts swollen big as Namsan Hill, throats as tough as Dong Zhuo's navel.  
Ordinary folk have five viscera and six organs in their bellies,  
but these thugs have an additional thieving gland as big as an ox's balls  
inside their bellies, so they have five viscera and seven organs,  
and though originally they all learned thieving from one boss, now  
they each have a specialty.

As they engage in thieving day and night, their skills are god-given,  
pretty good.

One day the five thugs met together and said:

It's ten years since we went into the thievery business, sealing an oath  
in blood,

day in day out we've piled up mountains of know-how and gold, so  
what about staking a hundred thousand pounds of gold  
and holding a contest to show off the feats we've perfected all these  
years?

Having agreed, they hung up a banner with Theft written in big  
letters and held their thievery competition.

It's balmy springtime, weather sunny, breeze brisk, clouds wafting,  
and each thief firmly holds a golf club  
as they go rushing ahead, afraid of losing, boasting of the secrets of  
their craft.

The first thief comes forward, ConglomerApe's his name.

Wearing clothes made of money, the hat on his head made of money,  
the shoes on his feet made of money, the gloves on his hands made  
of money,  
gold watch, gold ring, gold bangle...

KIM CHI-HA  
(1941-)

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