

The Eminent Koryŏ Monk: Stele Inscriptions as Sources for the Lives and Careers of Koryŏ Monks

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Introduction

In the course of the last twenty years or so, the field of Buddhist studies has finally shed its fixation with doctrinal issues, turning its attention to economic, social, cultural, and historiographic aspects of the tradition.¹ This is especially true for the study of Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, as witnessed by the appearance of a wide range of English-language scholarship that has virtually redrawn the landscape of East Asian Buddhism. The study of Korean Buddhism, however, still has some catching up to do. Although there are now good studies available on such towering figures as Wŏnhyo 元曉 (617-686)² and Chinul 知訥 (1158-1210),³ as well as other figures in the Korean Buddhist tradition, very

1. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Soirée d'études coréennes in 1998; at the Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch, in 2007; and at the Kyujanggak colloquium, also in 2007. I would like to thank Yannick Bruneton and Elisabeth Chabanol, as well as the two anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback, and the Kyujanggak Institute for Korean Studies for its financial support of this research.

2. See for example Robert E. Buswell, Jr., *The Formation of Ch'an Ideology in China and Korea: The Vajrasamādhi-Sūtra, a Buddhist Apocryphon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) and *Cultivating Original Enlightenment: Wŏnhyo's Exposition of the Vajrasamādhi-Sūtra (Kŭngang sammaegyŏng non)* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007).

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little has been done on other areas of the field, such as its economic, political, and ritual dimensions.⁴ The reasons for this are varied; a core reason is that for many subjects – say, temple economy in medieval Korea – there are simply not sufficient source materials. Another reason is that some of the available source materials have been more or less ignored. A good example is epigraphic material: although inscriptions have been used extensively in Korean scholarship, and to some extent in Western scholarship,⁵ they have been used in a very limited way. That is to say, they have been used mostly for the primary data they contain pertaining to Buddhist monks, while the other information on Buddhist practices and beliefs has been virtually ignored.

This article aims to fill this gap by taking a systematic look at biographic stele inscriptions of eminent monks from the Koryŏ period (918-1392). To explore the possibilities of this type of source material, I will offer a broad introduction to its styles and peculiarities. What are its special modalities? Can stele inscriptions be regarded as a separate genre? What kind of information do they contain, and how does their format determine the information contained? Also, this article aims to bring to the fore the archetypical life of a Koryŏ monk: what did the average monastic career of an eminent Koryŏ monk look like? What elements were considered noteworthy or praiseworthy, and what do these things reveal about what people expected of Buddhism?

My approach is quite simple: since most stelae follow essentially the same format, I simply discuss each relevant part on the basis of one representative stele, that of the monk Chijong 智宗 (930-1018). The five main parts that are typically covered are (1) an introduction (usually on the greatness of a Buddhist school and the place of the master therein), (2) the monk's family background, (3) his birth and entry into the Buddhist order, (4) his career, and, finally, (5) his

3. See Robert E. Buswell Jr., *Tracing Back the Radiance: Chinul's Korean Way of Zen* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1991), 19, which contains a selection of Chinul's works. For translations of all his works, see Buswell's *The Korean Approach to Zen: The Collected Works of Chinul* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1983).

4. I am of course generalizing. On the one hand, the prodigious research output of Korean scholars can be consulted, and on the other, there is a growing corpus of material in Western languages, mainly English. But authoritative works in English are still hard to find. For a good overview of research trends outside Korea, see Kim Jongmyung, "Trends in Overseas Research on Korean Buddhism," *The Review of Korean Studies* 9, no. 1 (2006): 5-8, as well as articles by John Jorgensen, Richard D. McBride II, and Pankaj N. Mohan in the same issue. For an overview of European research trends, see Henrik H. Sørensen, "Trends in the Study of Korean Buddhism in Europe, 1968-2006," *Korea Journal* 47, no. 1 (2007): 212-234.

5. An exception to this is the research by Yannick Bruneton; see especially his Ph.D. thesis, "Les moines géomanciens de Koryŏ: Une étude critique des sources," Université Paris 7, 2002, which contains extensive translations of stele inscriptions.

death, burial, and other posthumous honors. To this could be added the title part, the eulogy, and the reverse inscription (*ūmgi* 陰記), but here I focus only on the main body of the text. To contextualize this discussion, I begin by looking at what previous scholarship can contribute to our understanding of Koryō epigraphy and its relation to other forms of Buddhist biography, and also assess the present state of research on Koryō epigraphy.

Stelae as a Form of Monastic Biography

Undoubtedly the most famous form of monastic biography in East Asia is the genre of “lives of eminent monks” (*kosŭng chŏn*, Ch. *gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳). The template for this was created by the monk Huijiao 慧皎 (497-550), who compiled a work with this title around 530.⁶ Although biographies of monks had been compiled before his time, he set a new standard in terms of accuracy, comprehensiveness, and quality of prose. While basically inscribing the genre of “lives of eminent monks” within the genre of biography established by historians such as Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145-86 B.C.E.), and thus making monastic biographies respectable in the eyes of the Chinese establishment, Huijiao’s main interest was in using these exemplary lives as an inspiration for others. They were meant to be a tool for propagating the faith. Hence, although his work is meticulous in its use of sources and verification of facts and dates, it also includes much material that is obviously not factual, such as miracles. Arthur Wright therefore notes an “ambivalence of purpose”: on the one hand, there is Huijiao the biographer, working within the conventions of Chinese historiography, and on the other, Huijiao the hagiographer, seeking to demonstrate the rewards of piety and faith.⁷ Huijiao’s work spawned many

6. The best introduction to Huijiao and his work is still Arthur Wright, “Biography and Hagiography: Hui-chiao’s Lives of Eminent Monks.” The version of this article that I used can be found in Arthur F. Wright, *Studies in Chinese Buddhism*, ed. Robert M. Somers (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 73-111. For more references to works on this book, see John Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk: Buddhist Ideals in Medieval Chinese Hagiography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1997), 151, n. 31. For a translation of the first three chapters (*juan*), see Robert Shih, *Biographies des moines éminents (Kao seng tchouan) de Houei-kiao* (Leuven/Louvain: Instituut voor Oriëntalistiek/Institut Orientaliste, 1968). For a criticism of Wright’s approach, see Koichi Shinohara, “Biographies of Eminent Monks in a Comparative Perspective: The Function of the Holy in Medieval Chinese Buddhism,” *Zhonghua Foxue xuebao* 7 (1994): 479-498.

7. Wright, “Biography and Hagiography,” 75. On the trickiness of separating fact from fiction in the biographies of eminent monks, see also Kieschnick who decides to set aside this question and focus instead on what these stories tell us about the monastic imagination.

imitations, the most famous of which are Daoxuan's 道宣 (596-667) *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 and Zanning's 贊寧 (919-1001) *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳.⁸ There are also other forms of biography that continued to exist (such as miracle tales) or that emerged later (such as the "Lamp Histories" of the Chan tradition), but these cannot be discussed within the scope of this article.

Huijiao's sixth century *Lives of Eminent Monks* also inspired at least one Korean version, namely, Kakhun's 覺訓 (fl. 1215) *Haedong kosŏng chŏn* (Lives of Eminent Korean Monks). Unfortunately, it has not been transmitted in its entirety, though more than enough of it is extant to see that it follows essentially the same format as Huijiao's *Lives*.⁹ To this could be added Iryŏn's 一然 (1206-1289) *Samguk yusa* (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms), which, although very different in nature, is also in some ways indebted to the *Lives* genre: this is obvious in its treatment of figures like Wŏn'gwang 圓光, where Iryŏn lifts the biography verbatim from the *Xu gaoseng zhuan*.¹⁰ In other cases, Iryŏn creates new biographies, based both on the Chinese version and on native sources. This can be seen in the case of Wŏnhyo's biography, which includes perhaps more legendary lore than would have been deemed acceptable in the *Lives* tradition.¹¹

Both these works deal almost exclusively with Silla monks; there is no comparable work for monks of the Koryŏ or Chosŏn dynasty.¹² Monks' stelae are therefore all the more valuable, but they may also be part of the reason why no further *Lives* were compiled as separate books. This needs some further elaboration. Usually, stūpa inscriptions are treated as mere sources to be used by compilers of *Lives*: that is, as short factual reports that were composed at a monk's death. In an enlightening article on the relation between these inscriptions and the *Lives*, Koichi Shinohara makes some very important points. He notes that the tradition of stūpa inscriptions originated with Chinese funerary

8. See Kieschnick, 4-11, for more on these two compilations.

9. See the translation by Peter Lee, *Lives of Eminent Korean Monks* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1968).

10. See *Samguk yusa*, HPC 6:340a-341b. For the original biography in *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, see T. 50, 2060:523c-524b.

11. See Robert E. Buswell, Jr., "Hagiographies of the Korean Monk Wŏnhyo," in *Buddhism in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 555. Actually this example shows that the *Song gaoseng zhuan* biography of Wŏnhyo is anything but exemplary, as Buswell demonstrates, for it merely uses the biography as a vehicle for a story on the recovery of the *Vajrasamādhi Sūtra*.

12. There are two late-Chosŏn compilations that somewhat approximate this genre: the *Tongguk sŏngninok* 東國僧尼錄 (HPC 12:857c-875b), and the *Tongsa yŏlchŏn* 東師列傳 (HPC 10:995-1074). Both in scope and in quality, however, only the *Tongsa yŏlchŏn* by the monk Kag'an 覺岸 (1820-1896) can in any way be compared with Huijiao's *Lives of Eminent Monks*.

customs but was also entwined with the compilation of official dynastic histories. When an important person died, his family made sure that an “account of conduct” (Ch. *xingzhuang*, *haengjang* 行狀) was made, after which an important literary figure was entreated to turn this basic account of the person’s life into polished prose. This embellished text was then inscribed on funerary monuments, while the account of conduct, together with other funerary documents, was sent to a central government office so that it could eventually be used in the compilation of the dynastic history.¹³

The reason for making these documents was thus to ensure not only that the deceased would not be forgotten but that his stock would increase posthumously by his being immortalized in history; this could then reflect back on his descendants, who would bask in their ancestor’s glory. Monks largely followed the same logic and process, with one important difference – their life stories were seldom included in official histories, only in works originating within the Buddhist world, such as the *Lives of Eminent Monks* compilations, for which stūpa inscriptions were one of the main sources. However, the inscriptions were not exclusively intended for either official or Buddhist histories – Shinohara points out that the reason for asking a famous literatus to compose the inscription, and a famous calligrapher to execute it, was simply to increase the chances of the text’s preservation over a longer period of time.¹⁴ This seems to be an important point, and a look at a few Korean cases confirms it. The inscription for the monk Haengjŏk 行寂 (832-916), for instance, was executed in the hand of the famous calligrapher Kim Saeng 金生 (711-791). Although the stele was erected in Ponghwa 奉化 (North Kyŏngsang) in 954, in 1509 the prefect of neighboring Yŏngju 榮州, an ardent admirer of Kim Saeng’s work, had the stele moved to his prefecture and had an appreciation of the calligraphy carved into it.¹⁵ Perhaps the Confucian prefect thereby unwittingly contributed to the

13. Koichi Shinohara, “Two Sources of Chinese Buddhist Biographies: Stūpa Inscriptions and Miracle Stories,” in *Monks and Magicians: Religious Biographies in Asia*, eds. Phyllis Granoff and Koichi Shinohara (Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1988), 123.

14. *Ibid.*, 125.

15. For an edition of the stele, composed by Ch’oe Ŏn-wi 崔彦謨 (fl. 909-946), together with the magistrate’s encomium, see KSPM 2-13:364-373. The stele is now in the National Museum of Korea. Of course, Kim Saeng could not have provided the actual calligraphy, but it seems that a monk collated all the characters needed for the stele inscription and traced them from pieces of Kim Saeng’s hand that were circulating at the time. One can speculate that similar factors were at play in the reconstruction of Chinul’s stele after it was destroyed during the Hideyoshi invasions. Though this project was undertaken by monks, they enlisted the support of officials, and their consent may have been influenced by veneration for the author and calligrapher of the original stele inscription.

preservation of a Buddhist monument!¹⁶ Many stele inscriptions were also included in literary collections; thus their comparatively high survival rate may be due to the factors suggested by Shinohara.

While similar factors were at play in China and in Korea, there are also marked differences. For instance, I am not sure that the distinction between factual inscriptions as reflections of official discourse and hagiographic reworkings in Buddhist literature is necessarily that strict in the case of Korea. Hagiographic elements are definitely present in the official inscriptions – a question I return to in the conclusion below. Korean inscriptions may also show other differences with their Chinese counterparts (in terms of style, composition, length, appearance, etc.). But because a comparative approach is beyond the scope of this article, all I can do here is list some of the main features of Koryŏ epigraphy and some preliminary observations as to where they may deviate from Chinese epigraphy.

As already mentioned, the survival rate of Koryŏ inscriptions is quite high: there are about fifty remaining stele inscriptions for eminent monks. It is, of course, impossible to establish how many stelae were originally erected, but I surmise that it cannot have been many more. If we look at the number of monks for whom inscriptions would typically be made, mainly the royal and state preceptors, the total number for the Koryŏ period cannot have been more than a hundred.¹⁷ Here it is important to distinguish between the several types of inscriptions: I am talking here about the monumental slabs, most measuring several meters in height, that were erected next to the funerary stūpa of a monk. They are therefore mostly known as *t'appimyŏng* 塔碑銘, or stūpa inscriptions. *T'ap* refers to the stūpa, *pi* to the stele, and *myŏng* to the inscription engraved on it: this has also come to mean the eulogy for the deceased. This eulogy, in verse form, actually comes at the end of a long narrative account of the deceased's life, which is sometimes referred to as the "introduction" (*sŏ* 序) even though it represents at least 90 percent of the total number of characters on the stele.

16. Despite the rhetorical antagonism against Buddhism, there is very little evidence of deliberate vandalism against Buddhist relics by Chosŏn yangban. The only example of vandalism I have come across was the destruction of Zhikong's stele at Hoeam-sa by the Confucian scholar Yi Ŭng-jun in 1821. However, he did this not out of spite against Buddhism but to make space for a grave for his parents. When the authorities found out, he was banished and the stele (by the late Koryŏ literatus Yi Saek) was restored. See Hŏ Hŏng-sik, *Koryŏ ro olmgin Indo ŭi tŭngbul* (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1997), 234-235.

17. Hŏ Hŏng-sik has found evidence for the existence of seventy royal and state preceptors in the Koryŏ period; see his *Koryŏ Pulgyosa yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1986), 428-434. Usually only one monk was invested as royal and one as state preceptor at any given time, so the total number of preceptors cannot have been much greater than seventy.

These funerary monuments are quite distinct from smaller plaques known as *myojimyŏng* 墓誌銘, which I translate as “epitaphs”: these were buried with the deceased inside the grave.¹⁸ Besides these two main categories, there is also a huge amount of other material that can be classified as inscriptions. To name but a few, there are monumental works that deal not with persons but with buildings (e.g., to commemorate the construction of a temple), events, and so on; dedicatory inscriptions carved on statues; short inscriptions on tiles; and others. In this article, however, I deal almost exclusively with the monumental inscriptions dedicated to monks. Whereas epitaphs usually stick to a very brief outline of key data, stele inscriptions are much lengthier, offering details that allow us to reconstruct their subjects’ religious and social significance.

There are a few more salient features of such stele inscriptions that should be pointed out. First of all, these monuments, although they commemorate Buddhist monks, were effectively erected under state supervision. No stele could be erected without state permission – often a lengthy process, but also one that conferred extra legitimacy on Buddhism. When the king endorsed a petition to allow the erection of a stele for an eminent monk, he also ordered the most gifted literatus of the day to compose the text. These two features – royal permission and composition by a famous literatus – are very consistent features, showing that the erection of a stele was a matter of state importance.¹⁹ Second, it is remarkable that all the remaining stelae of the Koryŏ period are related to Buddhism: there are no stelae for kings, high officials, or important events, although there is some evidence that these once existed.²⁰ Third, if we look at the

18. Because I have not yet come across any excavation report of a grave containing such an epitaph, I can only surmise that it was placed in or near the coffin of the deceased. Most, if not all, of the 308 or so epitaphs of the Koryŏ period are of unknown provenance, though the vast majority probably were unearthed together with the celadon that gravediggers were after. Among these 308 epitaphs, only twenty are for monks. This count is based on the edition of all Koryŏ epitaphs by Kim Yong-sŏn, *Koryŏ myojimyŏng chipsŏng – kaejŏngp’an* (Ch’unch’ŏn: Hallim taehakkyo ch’ulp’anbu, 1997).

19. These factors seem to play a lesser role in China: although the erection of a stele was probably supervised by local officials, as far as I am aware no imperial edict was needed. And although famous literati were asked to compose the text, not all of them were unanimously regarded as the most famous of their day. Of course, the number of remaining epigraphs in China is vastly greater; for the Song dynasty alone (960-1279), there are thousands of rubbings. To get an idea of the sheer volume of epigraphs available, see Valerie Hansen, “Inscriptions: Historical Sources for the Song,” *Bulletin of Song-Yuan Studies* 19 (1987): 17-25. In the Chosŏn dynasty, however, in many cases no permission seems to have been needed to erect the admittedly much smaller stelae for monks.

20. The *Tongmunŏn* (Anthology of Korean Literature, hereafter TMS) contains a few texts of inscriptions for high officials of the late Koryŏ period (see *kwŏn* 118, 119), but there is no evidence at all for any royal stele.

rough statistics of the remaining Koryŏ stelae, it is striking that the majority, about twenty, date to the tenth century, with only ten or less on average per century for the remainder of Koryŏ. Altogether, these fifty-odd stelae still outnumber the twenty remaining epitaphs of monks.²¹ One can speculate that this early surge in monumental stelae was connected to the Koryŏ dynasty's efforts to establish its authority: most of the stelae were erected outside the capital, Kaesŏng, in local temples that were granted to an eminent monk for his retirement. However, the trend toward constructing stelae started in the late Silla period: between 780 and 924, Silla is known to have erected eleven stelae, most (nine) dating to the period 872-924.²²

Although this material has been used extensively in secondary scholarship, very little research has been done on the specific value of epigraphy as a source or as a genre. Apart from the pioneering efforts of Katsuragi Matsui,²³ the only article on epigraphy (*kŭmsŏkhak* 金石學) that I am aware of is by Hŏ Hŭng-sik, who has also widely used this material in his research.²⁴ However, it deals largely with the development of major editions rather than, for example, stylistic features. Within the field of epigraphy – insofar as this exists as a recognized discipline – Kim Yong-sŏn has carved out a niche as a specialist in epitaphs. Yet although he has compiled an authoritative edition of Koryŏ epitaphs²⁵ and has also written a volume of studies based on his research of epitaphs,²⁶ again it is basically a statistical analysis of social data. Critical emendation of epigraphic texts is, of course, an important task, and although there is as yet no generally accepted critical edition of all Korean epigraphs, for most cases adequate

21. It is very hard to put an exact figure on the number of remaining stelae: I have analyzed fifty-two texts that I deem critically useful – in other words, reliable and fairly complete texts that have survived either in their original form (the stele) or in the form of a later edition. All these date to the Koryŏ period, but some of them were dedicated to masters from the Silla period, and in such cases the texts may be based on Silla originals. Epitaphs appear only from the mid-11th to the late 12th century. They are especially dominant in the early to mid-12th century, when they even seem to displace stelae. We know that in some cases both a stele and an epitaph were made, but the exact relation between these two sources and the question of how monks were buried remains unclear. For a detailed list of all remaining Koryŏ epigraphs, see the Appendix to Sem Vermeersch, *The Power of the Buddhas: The Politics of Buddhism during the Koryŏ Dynasty* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, forthcoming 2008).

22. See Yi Chi-gwan, KSPM 1.

23. Katsuragi Matsui, *Chŏsen kinseki kō* (Studies in Korean Epigraphy), (Seoul: Ōsaka yagō shōten, 1935).

24. Hŏ Hŭng-sik, “Kŭmsŏngmunhak ŭi siron,” *Koryŏ Pulgyosa yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1986), 550-572.

25. Kim, *Koryŏ myojimyŏng chipsŏng*.

26. Kim Yong-sŏn, *Koryŏ kŭmsŏngmun yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Ilchogak, 2004).

editions can easily be found.

I think that it is therefore warranted to look beyond stele inscriptions as mere recordings of data and reflect more critically on the image they present to us: what kind of reality do they project, what do they tell us about the medieval Buddhist imaginaire? While they have been mined extensively for facts, they also contain the stories of exemplary persons, and in their highly stylized and symbolic form tell us more about the ideals and values of the community than about the lives of those particular men.²⁷ This is clear from the stereotypical treatment of the monk's life in these inscriptions: not only is the ordering of key events nearly always the same but there are many recurring motifs, phrases, and ideals singled out for praise. In the scope of this article it is not possible to do more than introduce some of these motifs and conventions. Although I focus on Koryŏ inscriptions, by the late Silla period the conventions of the genre seem to have already been well established, with all stelae following the same sequence of information and showing a similar preference for the most sophisticated style of Chinese composition, heavy with allusion and references to Chinese classical literature. Yet one writer who can be viewed as a pioneer of the genre, Ch'oe Ch'i-wŏn 崔致遠 (b. 858), used the conventions more loosely than anyone: among his "four mountain stelae" (*sasan pi* 四山碑), at least one inscription uses a very different format to commemorate the life of his subject, Tohŏn 道憲 (824-882), structuring the biography according to a sequence of miracles and endeavors rather than the five main segments outlined above.²⁸ Also, although Koryŏ was undoubtedly the peak of Buddhist stele composition in Korean history, even during the Chosŏn period many stelae for monks were erected. Indeed, the tradition continues to this very day.

The edition I have used for this article is Yi Chi-gwan's six-volume compilation of all significant historical stelae and epitaphs of Korean monks. References in the text to a particular stele are given in parentheses, with the monk's name and the volume in which the text can be found; thus "(Chijong, KSPM 3-10:215)" refers to the stele for Chijong, which can be found as the tenth inscription in volume three of Yi Chi-gwan's *Yŏktae kosŭng pimun* (KSPM). For other editions used, see the list of abbreviations at the end of this article. Because Yi Chi-gwan's work is not widely available, I have also included

27. Here I borrow Albert Welter's insight into the function of monastic biography in China. See his *Monks, Rulers, and Literati: The Political Ascendancy of Chan Buddhism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 41.

28. For a good introduction to the four mountain stelae (stelae for three late Silla Sŏn masters and one temple), see Ch'oe Yŏng-sŏng, *Chuhae sasan pimyŏng* (Seoul: Asea munhwasa, 1987).

a table of all the monks mentioned in this article, their posthumous titles, and the major collections in which their stele inscriptions can be found.

The Stele for Chijong

As mentioned above, this article is structured along the main events outlined in the stele for Chijong, known also by his posthumous title, Wŏn'gong Kuksa 圓空國師, “State Preceptor Consummate Emptiness.” He was born in 930 and died at the age of eighty-nine in 1018. His life would appear typical of other eminent Koryŏ monks, and uneventful in terms of his impact on history. Although he is an important figure in the Pŏb'an (Ch. Fayan 法眼) school, he was not particularly renowned as a religious teacher, and we do not even know whether he left behind any writings. Yet he is important for the institutional history of Koryŏ Buddhism: Chijong is the first known monk to have passed the monastic exam, and also the first to receive all the ranks and appointments that typify a Koryŏ monk's career. He therefore stands at the crossroads between the remnants of the Silla tradition and the mature Koryŏ tradition: although more than twenty stelae were erected before him in Koryŏ, these belong mostly to monks who had been ordained during the Silla period and were still steeped in the Silla tradition. We could therefore say that his career provides the template for all later Koryŏ monks, and in this sense his inscription can serve as a useful model in discussing the Koryŏ tradition of stele composition.

The stele inscription – or, more precisely, the stele inscription for his stūpa – was erected in 1025 and still stands on the site of what used to be Kŏdon-sa 居頓寺 temple near Wŏnju. It is composed of roughly 2,500 characters and is in a good state of preservation, for all the characters are still legible. As is the case with nearly all East Asian stelae, it stands on the back of a turtle (*kwibu* 龜趺) and is topped by a capstone in the form of a coiling dragon (*isu* 螭首). The appearance and size of these animals varies from monument to monument, and though details such as the level of workmanship can offer additional clues to the stature of the stele's subject, such stylistic variations fall outside the scope of this article.

1. Introduction

Below a cartouche carved out inside the dragon-top in large seal-script letters (*chŏnaek* 篆額), the inscription proper starts with a title, identifying the temple, the title of the stūpa, and the person to whom it is dedicated. The next line

introduces the author of the inscription, Ch'oe Ch'ung 崔冲 (984-1068), and the line after that, the calligrapher, Kim Kŏ-ung 金居雄 (n.d.). The monk Chijong is identified with his posthumous title (*si* 諡), while the civil officials are also mentioned with their full ranks and the most important offices they occupied. Titles are an important indication of the respect a monk gained from the court: a monk was usually given several honorary titles during his lifetime, sometimes at the occasion of his promotion to a higher rank, but also on other occasions; thus three years after his investiture as royal preceptor, Chijong was given the title of Pohwa 普化 (Universal Conversion). The title line of his inscription contains a concatenation of all the titles he received, numbering sixteen characters in all! The famous Ch'ont'ae (Ch. Tiantai) propagator Üich'ŏn 義天 (1055-1101), given the posthumous title of Taegak kuksa 大覺國師, was thus also known as Use süngt'ong 祐世僧統 (Protecting the World süngt'ong; Üich'ŏn, KSPM 4-4:119), *süngt'ong* being the sixth and highest rank in the monastic hierarchy. Starting with the rank of *taedök* 大德 (great virtue), conferred on passing the monastic examination, a monk could work his way up a career ladder similar to the “nine grades” of civil officials. Although such ranks and titles may appear superfluous to modern eyes, clearly a great deal of importance was attached to this at the time. However, because the titulature is very complex, I do not delve any deeper into it here.²⁹

It may appear surprising that someone like Ch'oe Ch'ung was entrusted with writing this inscription. History books like to call him “the Confucius of the East,” and although this epithet may well date to his lifetime, it should not be seen through the lens of later Neo-Confucianism as something incompatible with Buddhism. With a worldview that may best be called “pluralist,” until well into the fourteenth century, Koryŏ society did not regard Buddhism and Confucianism as mutually exclusive systems.³⁰ Whether Ch'oe Ch'ung was really interested in Buddhism or merely complied with the decree to write is hard to say. In any case, he is known to have authored other Buddhist inscriptions, and certainly shows a firm grasp of various doctrinal issues and discourses.³¹ This is

29. For details on the ranking system and other formal aspects of the Koryŏ monastic career, see Hŏ, *Koryŏ Pulgyosa*, 356-390.

30. See Remco Breuker, “When Truth Is Everywhere: The Formation of Plural Identities in Medieval Korea, 918-1170” (Ph.D. diss., Leiden University, 2006), especially Chapter 10, “Pluralist Literati.”

31. For another stele, see *Pongsŏn Honggyŏng-sa kalgi* 奉先弘慶寺碣記, TMS 64:14a-20b; KSCM 189:468-472. Perhaps the mastery by literati of Buddhist tenets and jargon should not surprise us. In China, too, the familiarity of Confucian intellectuals with Buddhist discourse has been noted. For a recent study, see Mark Halperin, *Out of the Cloister: Literati Perspectives on Buddhism in Sung China, 960-1279* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006). Though it is possible that

especially obvious in the introduction, which, as is customary, sketches a few key tenets of the school to which the master belonged:

The Buddha's way is extremely subtle: when the one mind is grasped, the wellspring of Sŏn becomes tranquil, surpassing all dharmas. He who obtains it forgets about real and provisional; he who observes it has form and emptiness destroyed. However, the many causes [sown by karmic action] lead people to see a bewildering range of distinctions. Without a gradual approach, it is impossible to overcome their ignorance. Without nets and snares, it is impossible to get them to the other shore. If the divine ram locks its horns [to a tree], it is hard to pursue. Thus when the master instructs, he has to rely on skilful means. That is why there is an attempt to put into words what is ineffable, and people listening to what cannot be heard (Chijong, KSPM 3-10:214-215).³²

This reveals Ch'oe's mastery of Sŏn (Ch. Chan) hermeneutics: he alludes both to the inherent state of enlightenment as conceived in the Chan tradition (*ilsim* — 心, the pure enlightened mind) and to what makes us ignorant of this enlightened mind (dualism), and also mentions the key hermeneutical problem of using words to instruct on something that is beyond words. Following this passage, he sketches the transmission of Chan through a series of patriarchs, in the course of which the "light" of the transmission gets dimmer – until it gets passed to Chijong, who reignites the flame, as it were. This is a very typical introduction to the stele inscription of a Chan master. Early steles, such as the ones by Ch'oe Ch'i-wŏn, contain more details about the transmission of Chan lineages, and some also carry details about the lineage to which the master belongs, although specific lineage information is usually scant. Similarly, stelae for doctrinal monks of the Yuga 瑜伽 (Yogācāra) and Hwaŏm 華嚴 (Avataṃsaka) schools make reference to tenets of those traditions. There are exceptions, of course: Ŭich'ŏn's stele starts simply with the request by his disciples to erect a stele (Ŭich'ŏn, KSPM 4-4:117). Since this is the usual opening to most stele inscriptions of the Chosŏn period (monks come to an official's house to beg him to write the eulogy for their master), it might signify that the author was not too interested in Buddhism and used this mode to avoid eulogizing it. In some cases, the author would even profess his ignorance of Buddhism.³³ In this case, however, this

Ch'oe Ch'ung was privately opposed to Buddhism but complied because it was a royal order, this does not seem to be the case here.

32. "Nets and snares" is a metaphor for the skillful means (*upāya*) that are used to save people. "The divine ram" is a kind of sheep said to have locked its horns to the branches of a tree so as not to be snatched by predators at night. Here it is a metaphor for the elusive Buddhist truth.

33. See, for example, Yi Chŏng-kwi's 李廷龜 (1564-1635) inscription for Hyujŏng 休靜 (1520-1604), KSPM 6-9:214. In the late Koryŏ period, Yi Tal-ch'ung 李達衷 (d. 1385) tried to refuse the

assumption seems misplaced because the author, Kim Pu-sik 金富軾 (1075-1151), despite his reputation as a Confucian scholar, was certainly sympathetic to Buddhism.³⁴ Perhaps his reluctance to refer to specific doctrinal tenets has more to do with the fact that Ŭich'ŏn effectively represented two schools, Hwaŏm and Ch'ŏnt'a'e, and therefore had disciples belonging to these different schools. Given that several groups of disciples each claimed Ŭich'ŏn for themselves, Kim Pu-sik was perhaps loath to take an explicit position.³⁵

Despite Ch'oe Ch'ung's familiarity with Buddhist discourse, the style of his inscription for Chijong remains very urbane and sophisticated; there is little or no place for miracles or popular piety, although dreams play an important part in revealing karmic destiny. This contrasts sharply with inscriptions that were not composed by such highly educated literati. A rare example of this is the stele for Chinp'yo 眞表, an 8th-century monk who evidently inspired a kind of cult at Paryŏn-sa 鉢淵寺, the temple he had founded (Chinp'yo, KSPM 5-3). Apparently composed by a monk at the temple in the late 12th century, it reflects a very different world, one permeated by miracles and devotion. Unlike the officially endorsed stelae that are the main subject of this article, this stele – much humbler in size – reflects local devotion and popular concerns, and is thus much closer in tone and contents to the *Samguk yusa*, which actually cites this stele.³⁶

2. Family

This is usually the briefest section of a stele inscription, yet it is enormously important, for it provides the data that would normally be registered in the government census: details about household members, residence, and occupation. This reveals that Chijong's surname was Yi and that he came from Chŏnju; whether this was his clan seat (*pon'gwan* 本貫) or whether he was

order to write Pugu's 復丘 (1270-1355) stele on the grounds that monks are not supposed to seek fame. TMS 118: 31a.

34. See Breuker, "When Truth is Everywhere," 262-263, for evidence of Kim Pu-sik's Buddhist sympathy.

35. On this controversy, see Ch'oe Yŏn-sik, "Taegak kuksa pi ŭi köllip kwajöng e taehan saeroun koch'al," *Han'guksa yŏn'gu* 83 (1993): 37-55.

36. For the argument that this stele and the *Samguk yusa* belong to local discourse, see Richard D. McBride II, "Preserving the Lore of Korean Antiquity: An Introduction to Native and Local Sources in Iryŏn's *Samguk yusa*," *Acta Koreana* 10, no. 2 (2007): 1-38. For the adaptation of this stele in the *Samguk yusa*, see HPC 6:351b-352c. McBride shows that it was Hon'gu rather than Iryŏn who edited and included this inscription. Though McBride claims ("Preserving the Lore," 22, note 58) that Hon'gu is much more faithful than Iryŏn in following the language of the original, it is obvious that Hon'gu heavily abridged it.

actually born there is hard to say. Because this is the formative stage of the *pon'gwan* system, we can assume that the family still lived there, and that Chijong was thus related to the clan that would later bring forth Yi Sŏng-gye, founder of the Chosŏn dynasty. No mention is made of his grandfather or other ancestors; his father Yi Haeng-sun 李行順 is said to have practiced Confucian virtues and attained “the way.” Most inscriptions are much more detailed, giving the occupations of the monk’s father and grandfather. However, Chijong was born at the beginning of the Koryŏ period, when there was not yet a regular administration system to which people like his father could be recruited; moreover, it would have been inconvenient to mention that his father had worked for one of Koryŏ’s rivals, Silla or Later Paekche. This may well have been the case if Chijong hailed from Chŏnju, which in 930 would have been part of Later Paekche.

Such details about family background reveal that all Koryŏ monks to whom a stele or epitaph was dedicated came from elite backgrounds: either the capital elite, the people who worked in the central administration, or the *hyangni* 鄉吏, the local elites who were leaders of villages or counties. In the early Koryŏ period, eminent monks were either distant relatives of the Silla royal house (Kyerim Kim) or belonged to the *hojok* 豪族, the local elites that emerged in the breakup of Silla. As the dynasty progressed, members of the capital elite gradually became more dominant; toward the end of the dynasty, most eminent monks seem to have had fathers who were central officials. In the middle part of the dynasty, we also see many monks from the royal Wang clan or, conversely, monks from regional elites. Although monks from commoner families also existed, they never seem to have gained important positions in the monastic bureaucracy, and hence have left no funerary records.³⁷

3. *Entry into the Buddhist Path*

Invariably, the event of becoming a monk is represented not as a personal choice but as the result of karmic destiny. A common way of revealing this is through dreams: many inscriptions therefore mention the mother’s dream before the conception of her son. This topos harkens back to the legend of the Buddha himself, who was conceived after his mother dreamt of a white elephant.³⁸

37. For more on the social background of Koryŏ monks, see Vermeersch, *The Power of the Buddhas*, Chapter 4.

38. This event is a staple of all legends of the Buddha’s life and is also a common subject in temple paintings. It can be found in the earliest translations of the Buddha’s biography into Chinese, dating to the early third century C.E.. See Patricia Eichenbaum Karetzky, *The Life of the*

Chijong's case is no different: his mother dreamt of a temple with a very high flag pole, at the end of which floated a cloud; from there, a monk with bushy eyebrows pointed at her, asking, "Will you be able to protect this great and virtuous being?" After this event, she became pregnant. Dreaming about a foreign monk or another strange person seems to be one of the most common signs (Ch'anyu 璨幽, KSPM 3-1:19; T'anmun 坦文, KSPM 3-4:75; Hongbŏp kuksa 弘法國師, KSPM 3-7:160; Yŏngjun 英俊, KSPM 3-9:187; Chi'gyŏm 志謙, TMS 118:1b), but there are also dreams about dragons (Üch'ŏn, KSPM 4-4:118; Hag'il 學一, KSPM 4-12:261), the sun rays touching the mother's abdomen (Iryŏn, KSPM 5-8:191; T'aego Pou 太古普愚, KSPM 5-19:450-451), floods (Haerin 海麟, KSPM 3-15:349),³⁹ the big dipper falling in the mother's mouth (Sŏkch'o 釋超, KSPM 3-6:126), and birds pecking at the mother (Naong Hyeğŭn 懶翁惠勤, KSPM 5-13:350; Ch'ŏnhŭi 千熙, KSPM 5-21:490). This kind of dream is sometimes referred to as *hon'gyo* 魂交, literally, "meeting with spirits" (Hongbŏp kuksa, KSPM 3-7:170; Yŏngjun, KSPM 3-9:187). In a few cases, the mother actively prays to Buddhas or bodhisattvas to become pregnant (Sohyŏn 韶顯, KSPM 4-1:22; Kyŏrŭng 決凝, KSPM 3-11:265; Chŏnggyŏn 鼎賢, KSPM 3-12:301; Hon'gu 混丘, TMS 118:20b), but most often no evidence is given of whether the parents were Buddhist. In one case, the mother is told in her dream to avoid meat and strong-smelling plants (Yŏngjun, KSPM 3-9:187). *T'aegyo* 胎教, or "embryo education," was apparently practiced, too (Ch'anyu, KSPM 3-1:19), although it is not said whether this education was Buddhist.

Besides dreams, there are other signs that the child about to be born is destined to become a superior person. This could be a very long pregnancy: Tohŏn is said to have been in the womb for four hundred days (Tohŏn, KSPM 1-10:285), Sŏkch'o for ten months (Sŏkch'o, KSPM 3-6:126), and Hyesim 慧謚 for twelve months (Hyesim, KSPM 5-6:121). Sometimes the signs of imminent sagehood are manifested only after birth, for example, when a mysterious monk makes a prophecy about the newborn child (Nakchin 樂眞, KSPM 4-2:74) – also a topos harking back to the legend of the Buddha – or when a revelation is made

Buddha: Ancient Scriptural and Pictorial Traditions (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1992), 9: "The bodhisattva transformed himself, and riding a white elephant, descended on a ray of sunshine. Because his mother was asleep during the day, he manifested himself as a dream to her and entered her through her right flank." See *Taizi ruiying benqi jing*, T. 3, 185:473b.

39. The text interprets the dream of floodwaters as follows: "In the twenty-fourth year of King Ming, the source-lakes of the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers overflowed. This was an omen of the Buddha's birth. In the case of our master, it is exactly like this – a sign of his [divinely] aided conception." This is an interesting variant on the famous legend of Emperor Ming's (r. 58-75) dream of a golden deity, which led to the introduction of Buddhism to China. Because of this dream, Haerin was called Sumong 水夢, or "Water-Dream," as a child.

in a dream after the baby's birth (Ch'önyŏng 天英, KSPM 5-7:165). Also, the physical features of the newborn are often said to be striking, again reminiscent of the Buddha, who is said to have had the thirty-two special marks of a superior being. Thus when Sŏkch'o was born, it is said that his ears reached to his shoulders and his hands dangled below his knees (Sŏkch'o, KSPM 3-6:126). There is only one case where parents make a vow to entrust the child to a temple in order to make him recover from illness (Chinul, KSPM 5-4:59), and a few where the child makes up his own mind, notably in response to the death of a friend or relative. Naong Hyegŭn, for instance, kept pestering everyone with the question "What is death?" after his friend died (Naong Hyegŭn, KSPM 5-13:350).⁴⁰ T'anŏn 坦然 (1070-1159) is another case in point: he was trained to become an official, and was called to the palace at the age of fifteen because of his talent, but he "had no mind for the world of dust, saw the body as a fleeting cloud, and discarded fame like an old shoe." Thus when one of his friends joined a monastery, he secretly followed suit, and was tonsured at the age of nineteen – quite late by Koryŏ standards (T'anŏn, KSPM 4-23:399). In the late Koryŏ there are also a few cases of officials who became monks shortly after passing the examination.

Even in his infancy, it is clear that Chijong was different from others: "Just as one can tell from a small pine bough whether it will be fit to become a rafter; just as one can tell from a stream when it emerges whether it will fill the vast expanse," so one could tell the boy was destined to become a great monk. Such signs are tropes that one finds throughout Buddhist literature: they also include indications such as the memorization of sūtra passages heard by chance and the unconscious construction of stūpas while playing with sand or mud. It therefore comes as no surprise that at the mere age of eight, Chijong "throws away his toy horse to ride the True Vehicle" – in other words, he joins the monastery. Other examples of precocious behavior include T'anmun, who as an infant looked devotedly at golden statues (of Buddhas) and put his palms together whenever he passed a temple gate (T'anmun, KSPM 3-4:75), and Chongnin 宗璘, who paid reverence every time he saw a stūpa and would get sick just at the smell of meat (Chongnin, KSPM 4-26:472). Hon'gu always made little pagodas with pebbles when playing and sat facing a wall when resting. His relatives therefore took to calling him "little Amitābha" (Hon'gu, TMS 118:21a). Generally, as children these boys are said to be different from other youngsters, being more serious and not interested in games; some are described as *sintong* 神童 (divine children) able

40. To be sure, Naong Hyegŭn's mother had dreamt of a golden bird dropping an egg that fell into her bosom; but this kind of dream is probably not specific for monks.

to memorize passages at sight, as was the case for Cha'an 子安 (Cha'an, KSPM 5-11:325). There are cases – very few – where parents object to their child's religious calling, but of course they fail in the end. Usually the parents remember the mother's dream and know that their son is destined to become a monk, as was the case for T'anmun – moreover, his father also experienced a dream auguring his birth (T'anmun, KSPM 3-4:75). In the case of Hyesim, his widowed mother opposed ordination to the end, but shortly after she died, he organized a Buddhist ritual for her and became ordained. Thanks to these acts, his mother ascended to heaven, as revealed in a dream his uncle had (Hyesim, KSPM 5-6:121).

The transition from lay life to that of a monastic usually follows a number of stages. In Koryŏ, there were two important steps: first tonsure (the symbolic cutting of the ties with the former life), and then full ordination (the acceptance of all the rules that regulate the monk's life and guide him in his vocation). Chijong was only about eight when he decided to enter the monastery. The monastery of his choice was Sana-wŏn 舍那院, a Sŏn monastery founded by Wang Kŏn in 919 in the capital, Kaesŏng. It so happened that an Indian monk had come to this temple in 938, and perhaps it was his reputation, or the mere fact that he came from the heartland of Buddhism, that inspired the young boy (or his parents) to seek him out.⁴¹ The conventional phrasing of this event is that the young boy “submitted” (*t'u* 投) to the monk, who accepted and then tonsured him (*ch'ebal* 剃髮, also *ch'ukpal* 祝髮 and many other variant expressions).⁴² Since the Indian monk soon returned to his homeland, Chijong transferred to another temple, Kwanghwa-sa 廣化寺, to study with another master, the monk Kyŏngch'ŏl 景哲. Neither the temple nor the monk appears in any other source. In 946, he went to the official ordination platform (*kwandan* 官壇) at Yŏngt'ong-sa 靈通寺 to receive full ordination (*kujokkye* 具足戒). There were only a few places in the country where ordination could take place (as is still the case today), and Yŏngt'ong-sa, a Hwaŏm temple located just north of the

41. On the founding of Sana-wŏn, see the entry on T'aejo Wang Kŏn in the genealogical tables (*wangnyŏk*) of the *Samguk yusa*. The Indian monk is identified as Hongbŏm 弘梵 in the inscription. *The Koryŏsa* (2:13a-b) specifies that he came to Koryŏ in the third month of 938, that his name was Chillibuilla (啞哩嚩日羅) and that he hailed from the Tae Pŏmnyun pori-sa 大法輪菩提寺, “the Great Enlightenment temple where the Dharma Wheel was set in motion” in Magadha. This most likely refers to the Mahābodhi temple at Bodhigayā, where the Buddha attained awakening.

42. In this case the expression used is actually “like a [mustard seed] thrown [from Heaven] hitting a needle,” to emphasize how rare this meeting was. This expression is used in the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* to express the difficulty of meeting a Buddha. See *Da banniepan jing*, T. 12, 375:612b; I am indebted here to Yi Chi-gwan's annotations, see KSPM 3-10:320, n. 85.

Kaesŏng city walls, was one of the most famous of these.

Chijong's young age of "going forth" (*ch'ulga* 出家) and being ordained was certainly not unusual: some boys were even younger than he was when they first went to live in a monastery, although in such cases the aspirant monks sometimes lived in the monastery for a while before getting the tonsure. On average, Koryŏ monks were barely eleven when they took tonsure and thirteen when taking full ordination. This was very young, especially in view of the fact that the Vinaya specifies that you should be adult to receive full ordination, which is around twenty in most traditions. This was the case for Silla, too. The lowering of the ordination age in Koryŏ may have been due to state regulations: strict ordination rules were in force, stipulating, for example, that only the fourth (in some cases the third) son in a household could ordain. The young ordination age may also be seen as part of this legislation, which was intended to prevent people from becoming monks to avoid their (tax and corvée) obligations to the state. Since people became liable for services at the age of sixteen, novices were probably required to commit fully to the monastic vocation before reaching this age.⁴³

Although a monk would of course get instruction from numerous people throughout his career, effectively it seems that his choice of first preceptor (the senior monk who tonsured him) determined which school or branch of Buddhism he belonged to. Chijong is somewhat unusual in that he first turned to an Indian master who was then residing in the capital, so he had to transfer to another temple, something for which official permission was likely needed. That monks were registered when they were tonsured rather than when they were ordained was first suggested by Kim Yŏng-su. It is also possible that monks simply followed a tradition in staying loyal to the original preceptor, something which can still be observed in modern Korea. However, there is some evidence that changing one's affiliation to a sect other than that of one's first preceptor was very difficult and happened rarely.⁴⁴ Chijong's case seems somewhat exceptional, as he is usually thought to belong to the Pŏb'an (Ch. Fayan,

43. For more on the state regulations concerning entry to the monkhood, see Vermeersch, *The Power of the Buddhas*, Chapter 4.

44. For the original thesis, see Kim Yŏng-su, "Ogyo yangjong e taehaya," *Chindan hakpo* 8 (1937): 77, who offers no evidence. For some supporting evidence, see Vermeersch, *Power of the Buddhas*, Chapter 3. On the lifelong association with the home monastery and one's vocation master (*ŭnsa* 恩師) in modern Korea, see Robert E. Buswell, Jr., *The Zen Monastic Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 77. Kim Yŏng-su uses the term *tūktosa* 得度師 for the senior monk who first accepts and tonsures the aspiring monk. Neither this term nor *ŭnsa* appears in any Koryŏ sources, so I do not use them.

“Dharma Eye”) school, in which he received transmission in China. However, after ordination he traveled to Hŭiyang-san 曦陽山 in 953, the center of one of the foremost of the Nine Mountain Schools of Sŏn, where his insight was revealed in a dialogue with the Sŏn master of that temple. When he arrived, another monk was sprinkling and sweeping the Dharma hall. However, he forgot to sprinkle one part, and the master asked him, “There is one spot not touched by the water. What do you do for a living?” The monk was without answer, but Chijong replied in his stead, “There is no need to sprinkle any more, only to entrust someone with the sweeping.” This passage and similar ones in other stelae are interesting for their glimpses of the use of “encounter dialogue” in Koryŏ. More will be said about this below, when discussing Chijong’s Dharma transmission in China.

One interesting anecdote is recounted immediately after the sentence about his ordination to illustrate his adherence to the Vinaya. Chijong once passed through a provincial shrine, where an acolyte offered him rice that had been stored in a meat chest. As soon as he had done so, the acolyte fell over and spoke as if possessed: “I am the mountain spirit, protecting this superior person. How can you so lightly offer something that is of impure flavor?”⁴⁵ This emphasis on a strict avoidance of meat has already been noted in a few other passages, to make it unambiguously clear that the monks upheld their precepts.

4. Career

After ordination, Chijong clearly wandered around for a while, seeking further instruction from eminent monks. While this is not unusual, most often Koryŏ monks (at least the elite monks about whom we are informed) did not just wander from temple to temple, nor did they stay in a single temple immersed in meditation for the rest of their lives. Instead, there was a strict system of rotation, in which abbots were dispatched from the center to temples across the country for certain periods of time, five to six years on average. This system was clearly modeled on the civil bureaucracy, in which magistrates were also posted to localities for certain periods of time. And just as in the civil system, in the monastic bureaucracy an examination provided the passport that gave one access to such appointments. Though the bulk of this part of the inscriptions

45. Mostly spirits appear only in dreams, not to monks personally. This is the only example I have found of spirit-possession. Also, the spirit is not usually identified. The mountain spirit (*sansin* 山神) appears only in a few cases. See also the inscription for Chigyŏm: while he was staying in Tobong-sa on Samgak-san, the mountain spirit appeared in a dream and told him to change his name (Chigyŏm, TMS 118:2a).

deals with such administrative matters (appointments, examinations, rituals at court), I do not cover these aspects systematically here, since they have been the focus of my other research, but merely point at a few of the most salient features – the examination, the investiture of the royal preceptor – as well as at two aspects more typically associated with Buddhist monks: the business of securing a place in a lineage, and their numinous power.

Chijong was the first known graduate of the monastic examination. Although it is usually regarded as an innovation introduced by King Kwangjong (r. 949-975) at around the same time the civil examination was first given in 958, there are strong indications that Kwangjong merely streamlined a procedure already in existence during the reign of the Koryŏ founder, King T'aejo (r. 918-943). As I have shown elsewhere, there is compelling evidence that the monastic exam Kwangjong introduced predated the civil examination first held in 958.⁴⁶ Although the selection of monks (the most commonly used term in the sources is *sŏngsŏn* 僧選) was clearly modeled after the civil examination, the format was different: whereas the civil exam was written, the monks' exam was in the form of a debate – thus Chijong is literally said to have entered the “discussion arena”:

In the beginning of the Xiande era (954-959), Great King Kwangjong established the imperial [system]. He greatly esteemed Buddhism and recruited Sŏn [masters] of the highest repute. To attract talent from every corner, he selected “Buddhas like Danxia”⁴⁷ and clearly displayed the roster of successful candidates [as in the civil exams]. Valiantly the master [i.e., Chijong] strode into the discussion arena (*ŭlwi* 議圍) and took the lead in exploring the hidden truth. Endowed with multiple exquisite talents, he outshone a hundred eminent and famous [monks]. (Chijong, KSPM 3-10:216)

Although this description is somewhat indirect, other stelae show that the examination was often a place for fervent debating and was also used to settle doctrinal issues. Those who passed the examination were given a rank, that of “great virtue” (*taedŏk* 大德), which effectively qualified them to become the abbot of a temple. Chijong, however, did not immediately embark on such a career. At the time, both the government and the monastic system were still

46. For more on this examination system, see Vermeersch, *The Power of the Buddhas*, Chapter 4.

47. Danxia Tianran (739-824) originally intended to become an official. On his way to the examination he met a monk who told him that the selection of officials was nothing compared to the selection of Buddhas. Thereupon Danxia became a disciple of Mazu Daoyi (709-788). See *Chuandeng lu*, T. 51, 2076:310c.

under construction, with Kwangjong attempting to institute a centralized imperial system. It is probably against this background that Chijong decided to travel to China between 959 and 971. This was somewhat unusual, as most monks traveled to China during their formative years, whereas Chijong was already thirty. Kwangjong is known to have sent many monks to the kingdom of Wu-Yue, probably to learn from them in terms of the administration of monastics, the integration of disparate sects, and the use of Buddhism in strengthening imperial rule. Chijong is said to have felt satisfied in Korea while many other fellow monks were sent to China, but then he had a “spiritual encounter” with the monk Ch’anyu (869-958), who told him, “If you don’t climb the [East] Mount, how do you know Lu is small? If you haven’t seen the sea, how do you know a river is narrow?”⁴⁸ Waking up, Chijong thought of the sacrifices earlier beings had made to obtain the Dharma and made up his mind to go to China. After obtaining permission from King Kwangjong in the summer of 959, he set sail for Wu-Yue, a small independent kingdom located along the coastal area south from the Yangtze River.

Chijong first went to visit Yongming Yanshou 永明延壽 (904-975), eminent leader of the Fayen (Pōban) school, which advocated a syncretist approach, embracing, for example, Pure Land Buddhism within the Chan school.⁴⁹ Seeking his approval, Chijong had the following exchange:

Yanshou asked, “Have you come for the Dharma or for other affairs?”

Chijong said, “For the Dharma.”

Yanshou: “There are no two Dharmas. It covers this whole world we live in, so why do you take so much trouble in crossing the ocean to come here?”

Chijong: “Since it covers the whole world, I might as well come here [to find it].”
(Chijong, KSPM 3-10: 216)

48. A paraphrase of Mencius 13.24: “When he climbed the East Mount, Confucius felt that Lu was small; when he climbed Mount Tai, he felt that the world was small. Therefore one who gazes at the sea has difficulty discerning the water.” Ch’anyu is here identified by his honorary title Chūngjin taesa 證眞大師. According to his stele, he was awarded the title by King Kwangjong. After he died in 958, he was given the posthumous title of Wŏnjong Kuksa. Conferral of this posthumous title must have occurred after his revelation to Chijong, otherwise he would have been identified by it. It is not known whether Chijong had studied with Ch’anyu. It is probably because of Ch’anyu’s status as the most eminent monk of the time – he was state preceptor when he died in 958, and the first known successor as state preceptor is Hyegŏ in 968 – that he is here invoked as an authority to justify Chijong’s decision to go to China. For Ch’anyu, see KSPM 3:18-27. Ch’anyu later also advised Chijong to return to Koryŏ.

49. See Albert Welter, *The Meaning of Myriad Good Deeds: A Study of Yung-ming Yen-shou and the Wan-shan t’ung-kuei chi* (Boston: Peter Lang, 1996).

Impressed by this answer, Yongming passed on the so-called mind-seal (*sim'in* 心印) to Chijong, indicating that he had become part of the Fayen lineage. Thus Chijong is counted as a member of this school. As related above, he may also be viewed as a disciple of Kyōngch'ōl or of the Hūiyang school, but in those cases it is not specified that he was accepted as a Dharma heir. Following the introduction of the Hongzhou school of Chan Buddhism to Silla in the early 9th century, many Silla monks traveled to China and received transmission in Mazu Daoyi's (709-788) lineage, and after returning to Silla founded their own branches of this lineage – these became known as the Mountain Schools of Sōn. Sometime in the second half of the 9th century, the trend reversed: many Korean monks still traveled to China, but they had already received transmission in one of the mountain schools in their own country and remained loyal to their Korean lineage. Chijong is therefore somewhat of an exception: although he had ample instruction in Korea, he chose to be included in the lineage of Yongming Yanshou after traveling to China. He must have known that this would be authorized by King Kwangjong, who was clearly interested in the Fayen school as a vehicle for integrating all Buddhist schools, and probably encouraged monks like Chijong to study this school and transmit it to Koryō. After Chijong's death, the school continued to exist at least until the founding of Ch'ōnt'ae/Tiantai in Korea by Ŭich'ōn, but it did not produce any other eminent monks.⁵⁰

Among the other monks Chijong met was Zanning, a towering figure in the history of Chinese Buddhism. Zanning advocated the full integration of Buddhism within the Chinese literati tradition, and undoubtedly Chijong returned from this encounter with many valuable ideas. Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere, Zanning's ideals came closest to being realized in Koryō.⁵¹ He also met with monks of the Tiantai sect, and according to the inscription, his influence was such that many eminent Chinese monks came to attend his lectures.⁵²

Upon his return to Koryō in 971, Chijong was rewarded with increasingly

50. On the Fayen/Pōb'an school in early Koryō, see Kim Tu-jin, "Koryō Kwangjong tae Pōb'an-jong ŭi tūngchang kwa kū sōngkyōk," in *Koryō ch'ogi Pulgyosa non*, ed. Pulgyo sahakhoe (Seoul: Minjoksa, 1986): 273-360; see especially pp. 312-318 for an analysis of Chijong's thought. On the absorption of the Pōb'an school into Ch'ōnt'ae, see Ch'oe Yōn-sik, "*Taegak kusa pi*," 51.

51. Sem Vermeersch, "Koryō Buddhism: A Distinct Tradition?" in *The Proceedings of the Korean Conference on Buddhist Studies* (The Committee of the Korean Conference on Buddhist Studies) 3, no. 2 (2006): 1038-1050. See <http://kr.buddhism.org/~skb/download/papers/082.pdf>

52. One wonders whether Chijong was proficient enough to lecture in Chinese. However, he is said to have lectured in a temple established earlier for another Korean monk, Ŭit'ong; thus there seems to have been a sort of expatriate community of Koryō monks in Wu-Yue, and perhaps interpreters were at hand. See Kim, "Koryō Kwangjong Pōb'an-jong," 317.

important ranks and increasingly important temples. This culminated in the rank of “great Sŏn master” (*taesŏnsa* 大禪師), granted by King Hyŏnjong (1009-1031), and an appointment as abbot of Kwangmyŏng-sa 光明寺, arguable the foremost Sŏn temple in the capital, the venue for monastic exams of the Sŏn school. In 1013, at the age of 83, he was awarded the title of royal preceptor (*wangsa* 王師), a rare privilege usually conferred on only one monk at a time. The position was largely of a symbolic and ritual nature, yet that does not diminish its importance – on the contrary, since the symbolism of the investiture, for example, put Chijong on an equal or even higher plane than the king. In the inscription, this procedure begins with an edict proclaimed by King Hyŏnjong:

“We have heard that from the Yellow Emperor until King Wu of Zhou, all [rulers] relied on a teacher-protector to make the country prosperous. This is more than admiring virtue – one cannot merely rely on the ruler’s rank but must also rely on the virtue and experience [of the instructor]. Now I see that the great Sŏn master [Chijong]’s knowledge surpasses the ordinary and his mind embraces all, sprinkling the sweet dew [of his blessings] in all the fields. Revealing the hidden light, supporting the highest principle, bringing enlightenment to the deluded masses – how can I not take him as my master?” The ministers agreed and sent high officials to call on the master. After refusing three times, he finally accepted. (KSPM 3-10:218)

Again, this is a very standard description one finds frequently in the inscriptions. It is interesting that the appointment of a Buddhist preceptor is justified almost completely by reference to Chinese antiquity and the need for a model and teacher a king could look up to. This may be embellishment by the Confucian officials who wrote this, but it may also be an expression of the syncretism that characterized the Koryŏ dynasty’s approach to religions.⁵³

Although it is not specified here where the investiture ceremony took place, it was usually held in the palace, either in the king’s private rooms or in a temple in the palace compound. Later on, the customary venue for this ceremony became Pongŏn-sa 奉恩寺, a temple in Kaesŏng that functioned as T’aejo’s memorial shrine. Undoubtedly this was meant to underline the strong link between the dynastic founder and his preceptors. In the presence of ministers and high officials, the king donned his official regalia and then went through a ceremony making him disciple to the monk. In King Hyŏnjong’s case, this was expressed by taking the triple refuge (in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha), but usually it was expressed not in Buddhist but in Confucian terms. Thus the king would

53. This problem is explored further in Sem Vermeersch, “Representation of the Ruler in Buddhist Inscriptions of Early Koryŏ,” *Korean Studies* 26, no. 2 (2002): 216-250.

“perform the ceremony of avoiding the seat” (*p’isōk chi ūi* 避席之儀, i.e., stand up in the presence of the teacher) or “perform the ceremony of putting aside the zither” (*sasūl chi ūi* 捨瑟之儀), just as Confucius’s disciples interrupted whatever they were doing when the master entered. Sometimes it is explicitly said that the king would kowtow, while other inscriptions specify that the king prostrated himself nine times. After this the new preceptor would sometimes give a lecture to the king, but this is only mentioned in early Koryŏ inscriptions. After all the ceremonies were finished, an official letter of appointment was drafted.

Usually the new preceptor stayed in a temple near the palace for a few years before requesting to return to the mountains. After more ritual refusals on the part of the king, the preceptor was granted a special temple in which to spend his last years, sometimes even with a generous grant of land and slaves.⁵⁴ Later it would become customary to promote the royal preceptors to the rank of state preceptor before retiring them to a provincial temple. In some cases the monks retired to their home regions, but in general it is not possible to establish any previous connection between the temple and the monk.

This emphasis on the formalistic aspects of a monk’s career should not deceive us into thinking they were seen completely as bureaucrats. Eminent monks were almost always thaumaturges as well, and were called upon to perform propitiating rites. Especially in times of drought, they were asked to perform rain-making rituals. These usually consisted of the chanting of or lecturing on sūtras, one of the most important being, of course, the *Sūtra for Humane Kings* (*Inwang kyōng*, Ch. *Renwang jing*), which specified that in times of emergency one hundred seats were to be prepared for monks to lecture. One monk renowned for his rain-making abilities was Hag’il; after successfully obtaining rain in 1123, he was called on for any calamity: “If there were floods, drought, fire, or other calamities, none of his prayers would remain unanswered” (Hag’il, 4-12:263). And Chigyŏm was simply called “rain monk” (*hwasang u* 和尚雨; Chigyŏm, TMS 118:2b). Sometimes monks also performed miraculous cures, but mostly their services were called on to influence the weather or the astral bodies.

5. *Final Nirvāṇa*

Just as birth was seen not as an accident of nature but as the result of previous causality, so death was viewed from a Buddhist perspective. The goal of Buddhism being to put an end to all causality, the death of an enlightened master

54. See Hō, *Koryŏ Pulgyosa*, 400-404, for details on the ceremony of investiture.

serves as an example of the extinction of all causality. Since he has gained insight into the fundamental process of *samsāra* and moved beyond it, there is no more ground for rebirth; shedding the physical body is merely a last teaching device.

Thus monks are always precognizant of the time of their death and, in spite of illness, are always bright and aware to the last minute, usually conveying some final instructions in the form of a *gāthā*, or Buddhist verse, before passing on, seated erect in the lotus position (e.g., Ch'anyu, KSPM 3-1:23). When the master's body did not change after death (e.g., Hag'il, KSPM 4-12:265), or when cremation yielded a number of *śarīra* – the crystalized remains of the master's spiritual essence (see below) – this was interpreted as further evidence of enlightenment. Chijong, we are told, felt that he was at death's door in the fourth month of 1018. He immediately asked for permission to leave the capital and set out “into the blue yonder.” Arriving at Kōdon-sa on Hyōngye-san near Wŏnju, he predicted that he had less than twelve days to live and gave his final orders to his disciples:

Long ago, the Buddha passed on the great eye of the Dharma to his disciples, thus transmitting it up until the present day. Now I am also entrusting this Dharma to you; you should uphold it and not let it be interrupted. After I become extinguished, you should not seek to upset the order by using funerary condolences to petition [for posthumous honors]. (Chijong, KSPM 3-10:219)

Having spoken thus, he passed away on the seventeenth day of the same month (May 5, 1018), at the age of eighty-nine, and at the “monastic age” (*nap* 臘) of seventy-two (counting from his ordination). One can only wonder whether someone at this advanced age could really make the arduous trip from Kaesŏng to Wŏnju (about 150 km) just weeks before his death.⁵⁵ And although it is not explicitly stated here, most likely Kōdon-sa was not an accidental stop but a temple that had been especially granted by the king, as can be seen in most other stelae. The moment of death is mentioned in nearly all the inscriptions, and while all monks show amazing composure and awareness, their final preparations and their final instructions do show some variation.⁵⁶

Interestingly, no mention is made of cremation in Chijong's stele inscription, in fact, cremation of any sort is rarely mentioned before the late eleventh

55. This is all the more puzzling because many aristocratic monks are known to have spent their last years in special compounds within capital temples. Sem Vermeersch, “Buddhist Temples or Political Battlegrounds: Kaesŏng Temples in Relation to Court and Aristocracy,” *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient* (under evaluation).

56. This is mainly the case for Sŏn monks. Monks of the doctrinal schools, such as Ŭich'ŏn, generally did not hold any dramatic last teaching session immediately before dying.

century. Most tenth- and early eleventh-century inscriptions indicate that the body of the deceased monk was placed in a kind of mausoleum or given a temporary burial.⁵⁷ With the more widespread use of cremation, *śarīra*, (the jewel-like relics that remain after the body has been consumed by fire), became important objects of veneration, and thus many later stelae mention the number of *śarīra* recovered. Especially in the late Koryŏ, this became very prominent. T'aego Pou's stele mentions that countless *śarīra* were recovered. Hundreds were presented to the court and the remainder was divided over no less than three stūpas (T'aego Pou, KSPM 5-19:452; see 5-20 for an inscription for one of the remaining stūpas). Erecting different stūpas for the same master is a custom unique to the late Koryŏ. Also unique to this period is the fact that some funerary monuments have the shape of the tiered pagodas that are normally reserved for the remains of the Buddha.⁵⁸ These are referred to as *t'ap* 塔 in Korean, whereas the oval monuments normally containing the remains of monks are referred to as *pudo* 浮屠. The former are usually at the center of the temple complex, while the latter are always outside the main precinct.

A *pudo* for Chijong once stood to the south of Kōdon-sa, but was removed during the colonial period and now stands in the grounds of the National Museum of Korea.⁵⁹ According to his inscription, he was buried five days after death to the southeast of the temple. Since the stūpa was only erected later, probably around the same time as the stele (i.e., in 1025), perhaps this was a temporary burial, and the bones may have been placed in the stūpa later. A liturgical text composed by the Ch'ŏnta'e monk Ch'ŏnin 天因 (1205-1248) on the occasion of the completion of a stūpa for his master Yose 了世 (1163-1245) says that the bones were placed in the stūpa.⁶⁰ In the absence of any firm archeological evidence, it is difficult to form a conclusive argument about the exact burial practices for monks. Recent North Korean research suggests that the tomb of Ŭich'ŏn may have been located near Yŏngt'ong-sa, and although the evidence presented seems inconclusive, it does show that monks were sometimes

57. Based on Sem Vermeersch, "Funerary Practices in the Koryŏ: The Buddhist Legacy," presented at the Association for Asian Studies annual meeting, 2001.

58. See, for example, the twin stūpas erected for Naong Hyegŭn at Yŏngjŏn-sa 令傳寺 in 1388 (Treasure no. 358), now in the grounds of the National Museum of Korea.

59. Chijong's monument has been designated Treasure no. 190. Basic information about this monument can be found on the website of the National Heritage Administration, <http://info.cha.go.kr> (accessed November 22, 2007).

60. *Ip pudo an kol munje*, TMS 109:23a-24a. See also TMS 109:24a-25a for a liturgical text composed on the occasion of the erection of the stele. "Bones" could also refer to the bones that remain after cremation.

buried in the same way as secular people.⁶¹

Despite Chijong's plea not to make a fuss about his funeral, his disciples took the utmost care to select a geomantically auspicious place. Once all the funerary rites had been finished, they alerted the throne by sending a petition (usually referred to as *chumun* 奏聞), presumably also signaling thereby that they sought recognition of their master in the form of a posthumous title and permission to construct a stūpa and stele. King Hyŏnjong showed his grief when appraised of Chijong's death and appointed officials to convey his condolences. He also bestowed a posthumous title, ordered the construction of a stūpa, and ordered Ch'oe Ch'ung to compose the inscription. In some cases, portraits (*chinyŏng* 眞影) were also commissioned, presumably for portrait halls dedicated to the memory of deceased masters (Ch'anyu, KSPM 3-1:23; T'anmun, KSPM 3-4:82), but apparently not in Chijong's case. After professing his complete incompetence for the task,⁶² Ch'oe ends the "introduction" with an apparent nod to the genre of "lives of eminent monks," hoping that it would not put his own work to shame.⁶³ Then follows a eulogy (*myŏng* 銘) in nine couplets, and a brief statement to the effect that the stele was erected on the twenty-seventh day of the seventh month (August 22, 1025).

The whole procedure of taking care of a late monk's memory could be regarded as a kind of beatification or sanctification process. Together with a petition, disciples provided a *haengjang*, or "account of conduct" of the master, for scrutiny. Since there are no examples of what such an account of conduct looked like, it is not certain how much of the information from it matched the contents of the stele inscription. Judging from examples of non-monastic

61. For this, see *Ryŏngt'ong-sa yujŏk palgul pogo* (Pyongyang: Sahoe kwahagwŏn kogohak yŏn'guso, 2004), 48. Also Saitō Tadashi, "Kaijō-si Reitō jiteki no Daigaku daishi-hi no genjā ni tsuite: fu Daigaku daishi no boiki no sin hatsuken," *Chōsen gakubō* 176-177 (2000):182. Henrik Sørensen suggests that graves may have been the preferred way of disposing of the bodies of monks of royal or noble descent: see his "An Investigation of Two Buddhist Tomb-Inscriptions from 12th Century Koryŏ," in *Association for Korean Studies in Europe: Proceedings of the 30th Anniversary Conference*, eds. Isabelle Sancho et al. (Dourdan, 2007), 75. However, even though Ŭich'ŏn seems to have been buried in a conventional way, his epitaph mentions that he was cremated.

62. This is a ceremonial refusal, not a reflection of any self-doubt. Just as monks ceremoniously refused an important appointment three times, so officials ordered to write an important text seem to have done the same. See TMS 30:12a-b for a letter, drafted by Kwŏn Chŏk 權適 (1094-1147), stating that Kim Pu-sik's refusal to draft the stele for Wŏngyo kuksa 圓教國師 (= Ŭich'ŏn?) has not been accepted.

63. This passage, as many others, is obscure – it could simply mean that Ch'oe Ch'ung wanted the master's legacy to endure – but the use of the phrase *sok kosŭng chi chŏn* 續高僧之傳 does seem an allusion to the genre of monastic biography.

haengjang, we can assume that they are similar in content but that the final product contains significantly more embellishment and allusion.⁶⁴ In many cases the author of the inscription probably had met the master, so that he could draw from his own experience, too. I have come across only one example, however, where it is actually known that the author of the stele inscription was acquainted with the monk about whom he was writing: Yi Saek 李穡 (1328-1396) had traveled to China with Ch'ŏnhŭi (1307-82) in 1364 (Ch'ŏnhŭi, KSPM 5-21). It is difficult to assess to what extent a monk's disciples could influence the process of veneration. Since virtually all eminent Koryŏ monks had spent their entire careers in the service of the state, the petition by their disciples probably played a more ceremonial than practical role, for the decisions to grant a stele and posthumous title were likely based on the king's personal appreciation of the master in question.

Conclusion

Even more than Chinese hagiographical literature about monks, the representative genre of which is the “lives of eminent monks” (*gaoseng zhuan*), Korean stele inscriptions adopt a standardized format that buries the personalities of their subjects under details of appointments and procedures. Of course this may be due in large part to the fact that the inscriptions were written by literati – Confucian scholars who, though sympathetic to Buddhism, were interested mainly in its official representation. They did not focus, for example, on edifying Buddhist believers or impressing on them the efficacy or power of Buddhism but, rather, represented the monks as exemplary servants of the state. Moreover, whether one looks at biographies in the Confucian-historical tradition or hagiographies in the Buddhist-popular tradition, the objective is never to convey something of the subject's inner life or personality, but to show how much he conformed to certain ideals. As Peter Lee points out in a recent article on biographies of Chosŏn officials, one needs to look at alternative sources to get a glimpse of the subjective behind the formalized exterior.⁶⁵

64. Many but not all stelae mention the *haengjang*; see, for example, Ŭich'ŏn, KSPM 4-4: 117, which starts with the mention of a *haengjang*, and Hyujŏng, KSPM 6-9: 215, which seems to quote one. Although a few examples of the *haengjang* of officials dating to the late Koryŏ period can be found in the *Tongmunsŏn* (*kwŏn* 116-117), none of monks have survived from that period. We can infer, however, that the part of the stele inscription starting with the family background was very similar to the *haengjang*.

65. Peter Lee, “Images of Society in the Early Chosŏn Literary Miscellany,” *Sungkyungwan*

And yet, as Ch'oe Ch'ung himself seems to suggest, in the case of Koryŏ stele inscriptions, there does not seem to be an absolute distinction between the inscriptions as factual accounts and the various *Lives of Eminent Monks* compilations as sources of religious inspiration and edification. Enough of the beliefs and customs of the day seep through the format of the inscriptions to see that Buddhist beliefs and legends were deeply engrained – even though they also coexisted with other beliefs, as stories in the inscriptions about dream encounters confirm. If we use as a yardstick the three categories John Kieschnick has singled out for his analysis of Chinese Buddhist biography – asceticism, thaumaturgy, and scholarship – we can perhaps better grasp the function of these stele inscriptions for eminent monks. While none of these three themes is very prominent in the inscriptions – the emphasis is, after all, on the relation between the monk and the court – such elements are nevertheless present.

Although ascetic feats are not canvassed in any great detail – there is no parallel here to Chajang putting himself in a cell surrounded by thorns to prevent his nodding off⁶⁶ – such practice is occasionally lauded: Chongnin is thus praised for his discipline, which was all the more remarkable for someone belonging to the royal family, the inscription notes (Chongnin, KSPM 4-26:47).⁶⁷ Some stelae also contain references to the long periods of isolation that monks subjected themselves to, often eschewing the official monastic career altogether. Chich'ŏn 智泉 (1324-1395) is an example of the Chan ideal of staying aloof from the ordinary world: he learned to meditate before reading sūtras and, after receiving transmission from Naong Hyegŭn, mostly engaged in solitary practice. It was only after he died that the amount of *śarīra* relics he left behind revealed his greatness (Naong Hyegŭn, KSPM 6-3:66). Whereas Naong Hyegŭn had sat in meditation day and night to obtain insight (ibid., 5-13:350), T'aego Pou worked for more than ten years on the *hwadu* “The myriad dharmas return to the one” (T'aego Pou, KSPM 5-19: 451).⁶⁸ Even though *hwadu* meditation practice is known to have been introduced by Chinul, and may have been known before him, actual *hwadu* practice is only mentioned in fourteenth-century inscriptions, after Koryŏ monks resumed interaction with Chinese counterparts during the

Journal of East Asian Studies 6, no. 2 (2006): 137-175.

66. As described by Daoxuan in the *Xu Gaoseng zhuan*; see T. 50, 2060:639a.

67. Perhaps this is a veiled criticism inserted on behalf of the military rulers who were in power at the time; they were aggrieved by the indulgence of the court and the aristocrats at their expense, and likely also felt antagonistic toward eminent monks from these classes, who sometimes continued their life of luxury despite their monastic vows.

68. In *hwadu* practice (Ch. *hua-tou*, J. *wato*; literally, “word-head”), the focus is the point, or key line, of a *kongan* (Ch. *kung-an*; J. *kōan*; “public case”).

Mongol period.⁶⁹ In early inscriptions, the strict adherence to the Vinaya is emphasized rather than more eye-catching ascetic feats: especially interesting is the strict avoidance of meat, something that is stressed in several inscriptions.⁷⁰ The problematic category of “trickster” monks who transgress established norms is entirely absent in the inscriptions. It would have been interesting to see how stele inscriptions dealt with someone like Wŏnhyo, whose biography in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* and the *Samguk yusa* paints him as someone who has transcended the conventional rules of abstinence, but unfortunately a stele to his memory erected in 1190 only survives in a fragmentary state (Wŏnhyo, KSPM 5-1).

As for thaumaturgy, again the more typical aspects we know from the *Lives* – accounts of marvels, such as encounters with bodhisattvas – are absent here. One of the few areas where the monks profiled in the inscriptions could employ their thaumaturgic capacities was within the confines of state-sponsored Buddhist rituals, especially those held to pray for rain. A few stories of monks misleading the masses into thinking they had miraculous curative powers suggest that perhaps eminent monks were popularly regarded as powerful wonderworkers.⁷¹ But the main avenue for expressing the supernatural capacities of monks is dreams, especially the birth dreams of their mothers, although there are many other instances as well. T’anmun, who prayed for King Kwangjong’s birth and also for his accession, was cured thanks to his actions in a dream (T’anmun, KSPM 3-4:79), while Ch’ŏnhŭi encountered Mengshan Deyi (1231-1308) in a dream (Ch’ŏnhŭi, KSPM 5-21:490-491). Perhaps the dream, as a trope present both in Indian Buddhist stories and in Chinese lore, was a convenient way of connecting the two traditions and subsuming the elements that were deemed unsuitable for historical edification. Ch’oe Cha 崔滋 (1188-1260), in his inscription for Yose, gives a long list of dream encounters before

69. Kongan-like exchanges are mentioned much earlier. See, for example, the exchange between Chigyŏm and a disciple in TMS 118:4a. However, the systematic investigation of a *hwadu* is only mentioned in late inscriptions such as T’aego Pou’s.

70. Compare this with the less flattering descriptions in the *Koryŏsa* of monks abusing their power, flaunting their influence, and violating every rule in the book. There are stories of drunken chaplains, womanizing, and even murder. Interestingly, there is one mention of a monk to whom a stele was dedicated. Unfortunately, the stele for the monk Ch’unghŭi, a son of King Injong, is too much damaged to allow for a contrast with the *Koryŏsa*’s allegations of sedition and womanizing. For the stele, see KSPM 5-2. For the allegations, see *Koryŏsa* 90: 30a-b. For more evidence of transgressions, see Sem Vermeersch, “The Status of Monks: State Regulations concerning Buddhist Monks in the Koryŏ Dynasty,” *Buddhist Studies Review* 20, no. 2 (2003): 145-168.

71. See, for example, *Koryŏsa* 107:18a-19a.

adding, “This is not appropriate for a Confucian scholar to talk about, therefore I cannot relate them all” (Yose, TMS 117:14b). Despite these reservations, however, Ch’oe clearly felt that dream encounters were more acceptable than other Buddhist miracles. Dreams also had a legitimating function: by foretelling an event, they made it seem inevitable.⁷²

Scholarship is also less prominent than one would expect. Koryŏ monks probably did not write many works, but the inscriptions certainly do not make a point of being comprehensive. Thus Chinul, whom we know compiled at least ten works, is credited with only four (Chinul, KSPM 5-4:61), and Hyesim, who also left behind a few works, is credited with none (Hyesim, KSPM 5-6). Iryŏn is said to have compiled more than 100 *kwŏn*, but only works numbering 79 *kwŏn* are listed, not including the *Samguk yusa* (Iryŏn, KSPM 5-8:195). Whereas there is thus very little evidence of scholastic work, prodigious feats of memory and copious learning in early life (before entering the monastery) are emphasized, suggesting that, to the authors, scholarship was really the domain of Confucianism. Thus learning is only shown in the monastic debates that took place at the examination: the pan-sectarian debate of 1370 is mentioned in several stelae, each detailing the protagonist’s role therein (Naong Hyegŭn, KSPM 5-13:349; Ch’ŏnhŭi KSPM 5-21:490; Honsu 混脩, KSPM 6-2:33). One exception is printing: several stelae – most prominently, of course, Ŭich’ŏn’s (Ŭich’ŏn, KSPM 4-4:122) – record the master’s involvement in the compilation, editing, and publishing of Buddhist texts.

Whether or not these monastic inscriptions can be regarded as a separate genre cannot be settled within the scope of this article. However, the conventions they follow and the recurrence of certain themes show that they are self-consciously part of a tradition stretching back to the late Silla period. Moreover, they show a keen awareness of other traditions, and intertextual elements show that they draw from several genres, including Buddhist sūtras, histories, and treatises from other traditions. For instance, there is frequent reference to paradigmatic Buddhist masters in Chinese history, and evidence that these references are drawn from Huijiao’s *Gaoseng zhuan*.⁷³ While they may appear blander than the more hagiographic *Lives*, they are more structured, and more consistent in their information, while retaining the representation of their subject as a holy person, someone who could enhance the established order through his

72. See Bernard Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 221.

73. See, for example, KSPM 2-6:166, where Kang Senghui’s entry to the palace is invoked; see *Gaoseng zhuan*, T. 50, 2059:325c18. For more examples, see Vermeersch, “Representation of the Ruler,” 236.

liminal position.⁷⁴ Therefore, they obviated the need for drafting any additional biographies of Koryŏ monks, and may thus help to explain the lack of efforts towards compiling such works.

Drafted by the most talented scholars of the day, the inscriptions are not incidental pieces but carefully elaborated masterpieces that offer a synthesis of the best of contemporary learning. Copious resources went into the compilation of the text and the carving of the stele, so that the whole process usually took years. The reverse inscription on Ŭich'ŏn's stele details how thousands of people were involved (Ŭich'ŏn, KSPM 4-4:128-131). This is no doubt more than usual, since in his case additional buildings were erected, too.⁷⁵ How the finished monuments were viewed is not clear: most people would not have been able to read them, so monks perhaps passed on the contents orally to lay believers or fellow monks. Nevertheless, even when the texts are all but erased, the monuments themselves live on as a symbolic imprint of their subjects' importance.

Table 1. Source Texts for the Stele Inscriptions Cited in This Article

Dharma name	Highest title	KSPM	KSCM	CKS	Other
Chinp'yo (fl. 8th c.)	—	5-3	369	184	
Tohŏn (824-882)	Chijŭng taesa	1-10	133	38	
Haengjŏk (832-916)	Nanggong taesa	2-13	156	58	
Ch'anyu (869-958)	Wŏnjong taesa	3-1	164	63	
Sŏkch'o (912-964)	Chin'gwan sŏnsa	3-6	171	—	
T'anmun (900-975)	Pŏbin kuksa	3-4	169	66	
? (fl. 930-1009)	Hongbŏp kuksa	3-7	179	70	
Yŏngjun (932-1014)	Chŏgyŏn kuksa	3-9	186	—	
Chijong (930-1018)	Wŏn'gong kuksa	3-10	188	75	
Kyŏrŭng (964-1053)	Wŏnyung kuksa	3-11	197	82	
Chŏnghyŏn (972-1054)	Hyeso kuksa	3-12	200	83	
Haerin (984-1067)	Chigwang kuksa	3-15	212	86	
Sohyŏn (1038-1096)	Hyedŏk wangsa	4-1	231	92	
Ŭich'ŏn (1055-1101)	Taegak kuksa	4-4	243	96	

74. I here follow Shinohara, who argues that the *Lives of Eminent Monks* lack coherence, and that their subjects can be seen as “holy men” in the same vein as saints in the Catholic tradition. Here he follows the lead of Peter Brown’s research on the lives of saints. See Shinohara, “Biographies of Eminent Monks,” 485, 488-493.

75. According to Ch'oe Yŏn-sik’s research, the current stele for Ŭich'ŏn at Yŏngt'ong-sa, erected twenty-four years after his death, is actually not the first one. Thus both the length of time that elapsed between his death and the erection of the stele, as well as the scale of the construction work, are peculiar to this case. Ch'oe Yŏn-sik, “*Taegak kuksa pi*.”

Table 1. (continued)

Dharma name	Highest title	KSPM	KSCM	CKS	Other
Nakchin (1047-1117)	Wŏngyŏng kuksa	4-2	242	—	
Hag'il (1052-1144)	Wŏnŭng kuksa	4-12	273	107	
Chongnin (fl. 1120-1172)	Hyŏno kusa	4-26	368	—	
Chinul (1158-1210)	Puril Pojo kuksa	5-4	—	296	TMS 117
Chig'yŏm (1145-1229)	Chŏnggak Kuksa	—	—	<i>pu</i> 22	TMS 118
Hyesim (1176-1234)	Chin'gak kuksa	5-6	449	162	TMS 118
Yose (1163-1245)	Wŏnmyo kuksa	—	—	—	TMS 117
Ch'ŏnyŏng (1215-1286)	Chajin Wŏno kuksa	5-7	467	<i>pu</i> 32	
Iryŏn (1206-1289)	Pogak kukchon	5-8	472	164	
Hon'gu (1251-1322)	Pogam kuksa	—	—	—	TMS 118
Cha'an (1240-1327)	Chajŏng kukchon	5-11	513	173	
Pugu (1270-1355)	Kakchin kuksa	—	—	<i>pu</i> 75	TMS 118
Naong Hyegŭn (1320-76)	Sŏn'gak wangsŭ	5-13	537	178	
T'aego Pou (1301-1382)	Wŏnjŭng kuksa	5-19	542	183	
Ch'ŏnghŭi (1307-1382)	Chin'gak kuksa	5-21	543	184	
Honsu (1320-1392)	Pogak kuksa	6-2	—	—	
Hyujŏng (1520-1604)	Sŏsan taesa	6-9	—	—	

Note: The names have been ranked according to the monk's year of death rather than according to the year the stele was erected.

Abbreviations

- CKS Chŏsen sŏtokufu, ed. *Chŏsen kinseki sŏran*. Seoul: Chŏsen sŏtokufu, 1919.
- HPC *Han'guk Pulgyo chŏnsŏ*. Seoul: Tongguk taehakkyo, 1990.
- KSCM Hŏ Hŭng-sik, ed. *Han'guk kŭmsŏk chŏnmun*. Seoul: Asea munhwasa, 1984.
- KSPM Yi Chi-gwan, ed. and tr. *Kamju kyoyŏk yŏktae kosŭng pimun*. Seoul: Kasan mun'go, 1993?1999.
- TMS Sŏ Kŏ-jŏng et al. *Tongmunson*. Reprint. Seoul: Kyŏnghŭi ch'ulp'ansa, 1967.