

Anti-Buddhist Polemics in the *Yongbiöch'ön'ga*

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1 Introduction

The Odes of the Dragons Flying to Heaven (*Yongbiöch'ön'ga* 龍飛御天歌) is one of the most momentous literary accomplishments of pre-modern Korea. This study aims at reviewing the anti-Buddhist discourse within the *Yongbiöch'ön'ga* by carefully and critically examining the original source while taking into account the socio-political and religious climate of early Chosŏn 朝鮮 (1392–1910). After tersely discussing the historical background of the scripture, the sources and its structure and content, the investigation proceeds to the major part of the study elucidating the Neo-Confucian polemic towards Buddhism.

2 Historical Setting of the *Yongbiöch'ön'ga*

The year 1392 marks a turning point in the history of the Korean peninsula. General Yi Sŏng-gye 李成桂 (1335–1408) ascended the throne as King T'aejo 太祖 (*reg* 1392–1398) and put an end to more than 450 years of Buddhist predominance during the Koryŏ dynasty 高麗 (918–1392). The *coup d'état* of Yi Sŏng-gye heralded the birth of the Neo-Confucian kingdom of Chosŏn.¹

Notes on Romanization and Style: Romanized Korean terms and names are given according to the McCune-Reischauer system. The phonetic transcription of Chinese is given according to the *Hànyǔ Pīnyīn* 漢語拼音 system. Japanese is transcribed using the modified Hepburn system. The indigenous notation—*Hanja/Hànzi/Kanji* 漢字, *Han'gŭl* 한글 or *Hiragana* ひらがな—is added to Romanized terms and names where they are mentioned first. Korean and Chinese names are written according to the East Asian custom: family name precedes personal name. For Romanizing Korean given names, hyphens are included between syllables. Pen names or honorary titles are given in the brackets. The translation of the *Yongbiöch'ön'ga* is based on the Middle Korean verses. Still one of the best scholarly works on the *Yongbiöch'ön'ga* available is Hŏ Ung

Around half a century later, in 1446, the Korean vernacular script (Kor. *Hunminjeongeum* 訓民正音) was promulgated under the auspices of the fourth *Chosŏn*-King Sejong² 世宗 (reg 1418–1450, 1397–1450). The invention of the alphabet, which is—after some modification—still in use today, is presumed to be the heyday of an era of cultural prosperity and the starting point of a revolution of the Korean *sprachkultur* ('language culture', *ŏnŏ munhwa* 언어문화).³

Sejong's predecessor King T'aejong 太宗 (reg 1400–1418, 1367–1422) was capable of stabilizing the foundation of the kingdom for the very first time. Hence, it was his son, *Sejong*, who was supposed to successfully legitimize the regal succession, thereby literarily dignifying the virtuous merits of his ancestors. The *Yongbiŏch'ŏn'ga* is such a textual legitimization and recognition of the agnatic ancestry. In addition, the final part of the epic indicates an admonition for the current ruler urging him to be constantly aware of the merits and the virtuousness of the 'six dragons'⁴: [Mokcho] Yi An-sa [穆祖] 李安社 (d1274), [Ikcho] Yi Haeng-ni [翼祖] 李行里, [Tojo] Yi Ch'un [度助] 李椿 (d1342), [Hwanjo] Yi Cha-ch'un [桓祖] 李子春 (1315–1361), [T'aejo] Yi Sŏng-gye and [T'aejong] Yi Pang-wŏn 李芳遠.

Next to the *Hunminjeongeum*, the *Yongbiŏch'ŏn'ga* is the literary creation of the most learned Neo-Confucian literati during the regency of King Sejong. In the spring of 1445 the literati scholars [Chijae] Kwŏn Che [止齋] 權蹏 (1387–1445), [Hag'yŏkche] Chŏng In-ji [學易齋] 鄭麟趾 (1396–1478) and [Kŏun] An Chi [阜隱] 安止 (1377–1464) handed over a first draft of the *Yongbiŏch'ŏn'ga* to King Sejong.⁵ Sejong was delighted and entitled the work personally in reference to a text passage in the *Yijing* 易

허웅, *Yongbiŏch'ŏn'ga* 龍飛御天歌 [Odes of the Dragons Flying to Heaven] (Sŏul: Chŏngŭmsa 정음사, 2nd ed. 1986).

- 1 John B. Duncan, *The Origins of the Chosŏn Dynasty* (Seattle; London: University of Washington Press, 2000), 204–265.
- 2 His birth name was Yi To 李禔.
- 3 Kim Mu-rim 김무림, *Kug'ŏ'ŭi yŏksa* 국어의역사 [A History of the Korean Language] (Sŏul: Han'guk Munhwasa 한국문화사, 2nd ed. 2006), 118.
- 4 The 'six dragons' (*yungnyong* 六龍) point to six eminent personalities of the Yi clan: “海東 六龍·이느락·사·／海東六龍飛。” YG (see List of Abbreviations at the end of this article), 1: 1a, 110.
- 5 Lee argues that the first draft most likely included Chinese verses only. Explanatory notes and the Korean translation have therefore been brought forward in 1447 by seven prominent scholars namely [T'aehŏjŏng] Ch'oe Hang [太虛政] 崔恆 (1409–1474), [Ch'wigŭmhŏn] Pak P'aeng-nyŏn [醉琴軒] 朴彭年 (1417–1456), [Injae] Kang Hŭi-an [仁齋] 姜希顔 (1417–1464), [Pohanjae] Sin Suk-chu [保閑齋] 申叔舟 (1417–1475), Yi Hyŏl-lo 李賢老 (d1453), [Maejukhŏn] Sŏng Sam-mun [梅竹軒] 成三問 (1418–1456), and [Paeg'okhŏn] Yi Kae [白玉軒] 李塏 (1417–1456). See Peter H. Lee, *Songs of the Flying Dragons: a Critical Reading* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 26–27. The postscript of the *Yongbiŏch'ŏn'ga*, however, mentions Sin Yŏng-sŏn 辛永孫 as being the eighth editor of the manuscript. YG Postscript 1b, 373.

經 (Book of Changes).⁶ For the sake of a better understanding, the King initiated a revision and supplementation of the text. The printing of the enhanced and final version was executed in 1447, only one year after the publication of the *Hunminjeongeum*. Consequently, the *Yongbiŏch'ŏn'ga* is the oldest literary work authored in Korean letters.

3 Sources, Structure and Content

From the 550 copies of the woodblock edition of 1447 only one fragment remains. The so-called Karam edition (*Karambon* 嘉藍本), containing the first two cantos, is preserved in the estate of the writer [Karam] Yi Pyŏng-gi [嘉藍] 李秉岐 (1892–1968) at Seoul National University.

The Kop'an edition (*kop'anbon* 古板本), which probably dates back before the *Hideyoshi* 秀吉 wars (Korean: *imjinwaeran* 壬辰倭亂; Japanese: *bunroku keichō no eki* 文祿·慶長の役) of 1592–1598, is the oldest almost completely preserved edition of the *Yongbiŏch'ŏn'ga*. Two copies of this woodblock edition with dimensions of 25.4 cm by 18.7 cm are archived in the Kyujanggak 奎章閣, which is maintained by Seoul National University.

The Mannyŏk edition (*Mannyŏkpon* 萬曆本) of 1612 with dimensions of 25.9 cm by 18.4 cm is also printed from woodblocks. The two remaining copies—now held at the Kyujanggak—were originally kept at T'aebaeksan 太白山 and Odaesan 五臺山. Accordingly, they are sometimes referred to as T'aebaekpon 太白山本 and Odaesanbon 五臺山本. The Mannyŏk edition was edited in consideration of the linguistic change from the mid-15th century.

The woodblock edition of 1659 with dimensions of 26.2 cm by 18.5 cm is largely based on the Mannyŏk edition with several emendations. Two copies of the so-called Sunch'i edition (*Sunch'ibon* 順治本) are preserved at the Kyujanggak. The Kŏnnyung edition (*Kŏnnyungbon* 乾隆本) of 1765 in turn is based on the *Sunch'i* edition but with some tonological amendments. Copies with dimensions of 26 cm by 18.6 cm are available at the Kyujanggak.⁷

The study at hand is based on a photolithographic reproduction of the Mannyŏk edition, the oldest completely preserved edition of the *Yongbiŏch'ŏn'ga* obtainable.

Among the fairly small number of documents authored in what we call today 'Late Middle Korean' (*hugi chungse kug'ŏ* 後期中世國語/후기중세국어), the *Yongbiŏch'ŏn'ga* is

6 “時乘六龍以御天。” YJ 1 Exposition, 122–123.

7 Cho Hong-ok 조홍옥, »*Yongbiŏch'ŏn'ga*« e taebayŏ <용비어천가>에 대하여 [On the *Yongbiŏch'ŏn'ga*] <www.korean.go.kr/nkview/nklife/2003-2/13_14.html> (last retrieval Sep 28, 2010); Kim Sang-ŏk 金尚億, *Yongbiŏch'ŏn'ga* 龍飛御天歌 [Odes of the Dragons Flying to Heaven] (Sŏul: Ŭryu Munhwasa 乙酉文化社, 2nd ed. 1988), 4–7; *A Bibliographical Guide to Traditional Korean Sources*, ed. by Kim Tai-jin (Seoul: Korea University, 1976), 129–130.

one of the most significant in terms of linguistic and historical research. Syntax, lexis and pronunciation differ considerably from Modern Korean. Apart from the use of some obsolete letters (e.g. ㆍ, ㅅ, ㅆ, ㅈ, ㅊ, ㅌ, ㅍ, ㅑ, ㅓ, ㅕ, ㅗ, ㅛ, ㅜ, ㅠ, ㅡ, ㅟ, ㅠ, ㅢ, ㅤ) one particularly notices the tonal marks (*paŋjŏm* 傍點) for designating the proper accentuation of a syllabic unit. The tonal system of Middle Korean comprises three tones: a ‘departing tone’ (*keŏsŏng* 去聲) indicated by one mark, a ‘rising tone’ (*sangsŏng* 上聲) indicated by two marks, and an ‘even tone’ (*p’yŏngsŏng* 平聲) indicated by omitting the tone marker.⁸

The scripture includes—next to 125 Korean and Chinese cantos—a vast number of annotations written in Classical Chinese (Korean *hanmun* 漢文) and depicting the historical framework of the individual cantos. From a poetological perspective the *Yongbiŏch’ŏn’ga* is in most cases classified as *Akchang* 樂章,⁹ however, some scholars such as James Hoyt categorize this particular genre as a hybrid of *Kasa* 歌辭 and *Kyŏnggihayŏga* 景幾何如歌.¹⁰

Other than the introductory first and the appealing last, all cantos can be divided into two units of parallel phraseology. The opening verse reads: »Their every deed has the favor of Heaven, it tallies with those of the ancient sages.«¹¹ This passage sets the pace and implements the metrical structure of the *Yongbiŏch’ŏn’ga*. The ‘favor of Heaven’ (*ch’ŏnbok* 天福) for the ‘six dragons’, i.e. six worthy ancestors of Sejong, has to be displayed by drawing parallels to events, individual deeds and achievements in Chinese history. Cantos 110 to 124, finally, represent an admonition reminding King Sejong always to act pursuant to the virtuousness of his dignified ancestry. The *Yongbiŏch’ŏn’ga* was composed under concerted Neo-Confucian authorship by royal decree. Thus, it was to some extent designed to serve as a memorial for *Sejong* and his successors to uphold the Confucian way and to be wary of Buddhist malpractices and heterodox teachings.

4 Uphold Confucianism and Resist Buddhism

The exhorting element of the anthology to be wary of Buddhist malefaction and deceit is based on twofold reasons. On the one hand, by condemning Buddhist misdoing during Koryŏ, the authors attempt to further legitimize Neo-Confucianism as the one

- 8 Yi Ki-mun 李基文, *Sinjŏngp’an kug’ŏsagesŏl* 新訂版國語史概說 [Newly Revised Edition: An Introduction to the History of the Korean Language] (Sŏul: T’aehaksa 태학사, 15th ed. 2006), 120–193; For a thorough investigation of Middle Korean tonology see Lee Sang Oak, »Middle Korean Tonology« (PhD dissertation, Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois, 1978).
- 9 *Han’guk munbak taesajŏn* 韓國文學大事典 [Encyclopedia of Korean Literature], ed. by Kim Tong-ni 金東里 & al. (Sŏul: Kwangjo Ch’ulp’ansa 廣曹出版社, 1980), 841–842.
- 10 James Hoyt, *Songs of the Dragons Flying to Heaven: a Korean Epic Translated with an Introduction by James Hoyt* (Seoul: Korean National Commission for Unesco: Royal Asiatic Society, Korea Branch, 1971), 34–35.
- 11 “:일:마다天福·이시·니。古聖·이 同符·호시·니。[...] 莫非天所扶, 古聖同符。” YG 1:1a, 110.

and only doctrine to be facilitated by the political ruling class in Chosŏn in order to prevent yet another loss of the ‘Heavenly Mandate’ (*chŏnmyŏng* 天命), i.e. downturn of the state due to Buddhist maladministration and atrocities. On the other hand, bearing in mind the affection of *Sejong* and his predecessors for Buddhism, particularly in the context of private piety, *Kwŏn Che* and his circle of devout Neo-Confucians seek to directly address the king, advising him to dissociate himself from such heterodox beliefs. Martina Deuchler elucidates the Neo-Confucian stance towards Buddhism in early Chosŏn:

To the Confucians, Koryŏ society had lost its basic order and had ceased to function properly. They blamed this breakdown on the pervading influence of Buddhism: it had eroded the primary controls of society; social status had become meaningless because of social mobility; human relationships had collapsed because of detrimental customs; and correct social behavior (*ye*) clearly had disappeared. To the new Confucian elite, Buddhism lacked the pragmatic standards necessary for social control and had caused the disintegration of Koryŏ society.¹²

In addition, Buddhism was occasionally linked not only to personal moral decay but also to individual mischief and social calamities. The Veritable Records of T’aejong (*T’aejong sillok* 太宗實錄) for instance give an account of the nexus of the emergence of Buddhism during the rule of emperor Míng of Hàn¹³ (*Hàn Míng dì* 漢明帝, 28–75) and subsequent disasters in Chinese history.¹⁴ Neo-Confucian officials exerted increasing pressure on the sovereign by repeatedly submitting memorials requesting the expropriation or nationalization of Buddhist properties including slaves, temples and soil.¹⁵ It was said to be the only means of restoring a harmonious society and letting the Confucian *to* 道 (Chinese *dào*) prevail.¹⁶ King T’aejong finally acquiesced and issued the order to seize most Buddhist landholdings, disestablish or destroy religious edifices and secularize and/or conscribe large numbers of monks and nuns. Canto 107 of the *Yongbŏch’ŏn’ga* recounts the events that took place between 1405 and 1406: »Though the whole country enjoyed [Buddhism], in his sagely nature he deemed it false. In a morning he removes a hundred thousand Buddhist temples.«¹⁷

12 Martina Deuchler, *The Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1992), 103.

13 Born Liú Yáng 劉陽.

14 “一，佛者，去君臣無父子，乃以浮誕之事，妄托報應之說，惑世誣民，而傷風敗俗。吾道之害，孰甚於此。在昔唐、虞三代之時，歷年多而享壽長，此固非佛氏之致然也。漢明帝時，始有佛法，而明帝以後，亂亡相繼，運祚不長，降及梁、陳、元魏之際，事佛尤勤，而年代尤促，至使持戒之主，終有臺城之禍，事佛求福，果可信歟。” TJS 24: 18a.

15 See TJS 1: 3a–1: 4b, 3: 23a–3: 24a or 10: 26b–10: 28a.

16 “今非釋氏之害，一國之人，何知聖上用夏變夷之大德大功乎。其亨屯拯溺，排患釋亂之道，則前聖後聖，如合符節。嗚呼盛哉。” TJS 10: 27b.

17 “滿國·히·즐·기·거·늘·聖性·에·의·다·터·시·니·。百千佛刹·을·一朝·에·革·ᄃᆞ·시·니·。[...] 滿國酷好，聖性德關，百千佛刹，一朝革之。” YG 10: 34a–10: 34b, 363.

Buddhism had flourished on the Korean peninsula for more than a millennium. It continued to be the dominating faith among the people even after [T'aejo] Yi Sŏng-gye had conquered the throne and proclaimed the advent of the Chosŏn dynasty. T'aejo, though eager to reform and to eliminate Buddhist wrongdoing, did not let Neo-Confucian orthodoxy get the upper hand. Like his son [Chŏngjong] Yi Pang-gwa [定宗] 李芳果 (*reg* 1398–1400, 1357–1419), he adhered to Buddhist teachings and patronized the faith despite keen opposition at the court. Eventually, it was King T'aejong, the fifth son of T'aejo and third ruler of Chosŏn, who inaugurated the suppression of Buddhism. Canto 107 praises his royal edict drawing on an analogy to King *Gāozǔ*¹⁸ 高祖 (*reg* 618–626, 566–635) of the Táng 唐 (618–907), who in spite of heavy opposition at the imperial court is said to have stipulated and thus minimized the number of Buddhist clergy and temples after being continuously prompted by one of his officials named Fù Yì 傅奕 (555–639): »Though the whole court stands [in opposition], he upholds his righteous subject. In one blow he disbands a hundred thousand Buddhist monks.«¹⁹

Later Neo-Confucians extolled T'aejong's administrative measures. The land reform of 1391 signifying the final blow to Koryŏ²⁰ left the issue of Buddhist temple lands for the most part unresolved. Tax exemption and a vast number of land donations dramatically increased the portion of national resources belonging to Buddhist monasteries. This became a serious threat to the late *Koryŏ* and early *Chosŏn* economies. By confiscating lands and slaves and reducing the number of temples, the authorities faced a significant rise in revenue.

T'aejong complied with the postulations put forward by his court officials and is therefore highly esteemed in Canto 124 of the *Yongbiŏch'ŏn'ga*: »Because the right teachings of Su 洙 and Sa 泗²¹ shine in his sagely nature, he condemns heterodoxy.«²²

T'aejong is depicted as a well-versed patron of Confucian scholarship successfully fighting off the baneful teachings of Buddhism. The authors remind Sejong of his father's erudition and adherence to Neo-Confucianism. T'aejong is claimed to resemble a Confucian scholar who had refined his virtues and his learning to the utmost. Cantos 91 and 92 exemplify his outstanding sense of filial piety portraying him as an image of Confucian virtuousness:

When seeing his father, [people on] the left and right grieve over his tears for his mother.
And his father praises him.²³

18 Born Li Yuān 李淵.

19 “滿朝·히·두쇼·셔커·늘正臣·을·올·타·히시·니。十萬 僧徒·를 一舉에 罷·히시·니。／滿朝請置，正臣是許，十萬 僧徒，一舉去之。” YG 10: 34a–10:34b, 363.

20 See Lee Ki-baik, *A New History of Korea*, tr. by Edward W. Wagner with Edward J. Shultz (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1984), 164.

21 Chinese *Zhū* 洙 and *Sì* 泗. Names of the rivers where Kōngzǐ 孔子 (*tr* 551–479 BCE) taught.

22 “洙泗正學·이聖性·에 불 마·실·씨異端·을 排斥·히시·니。／洙泗之正學，聖性自昭晰，異端獨能斥。” YG 10: 51b, 372.

[...]

His great filial piety is such: The clothes others take off, he does not take off. He follows the *Yegyŏng*²⁴ 禮經.²⁵

Both episodes evidence T'aejong's extraordinary reverence for his parents, giving a glimpse of his remarkable Confucian nature. In fact, unlike orthodox images such as those given in the *Yongbiŏch'ŏn'ga*, T'aejong was neither a zealous and grim apologist of Neo-Confucian beliefs and regulations nor a relentless adversary of the Buddhist tradition. After conceding to the anti-Buddhist requests of his ministers, T'aejong publicly resumed his inclination towards Buddhist orthopraxis. Unsurprisingly, Confucian voices expeditiously generated resentment and exhorted the king to despise Buddhist rituals and to unremittingly follow the *Mungong Karye* 文公家禮²⁶ as a means of promoting Confucian etiquette.²⁷ T'aejong did not perceive the two traditions as utterly distinct or antagonistic. Rather, he acknowledged that Buddhist and Confucian teachings both provide needful assistance in the process of self-cultivation.²⁸

In this regard, King Sejong shared his father's view while personally being even more involved in working towards the advancement of Buddhist culture²⁹ in spite of his apparent patronage of Neo-Confucianism. Canto 124, after revisiting T'aejong's sagehood, proceeds to admonish Sejong of the impudence of the Buddhist faith: »If depraved teachings of Western barbarians threaten with guilt and bliss, do not forget this, Your Majesty.«³⁰

23 “아·바·님·뵈·스·복·쌌·제·어·마·님·여·회·신·눈·믈·를·左·右·|·슬·겨·바·아·바·님·일·크·락·시·니·。 / 來·見·父·王·戀·母·悲·淚·左·右·傷·止·父·王·稱·謂·。 “ YG 9: 43b–9: 44a, 340. Whenever leaving his mother's gravesite to have an audience with his father, he shed tears over his deceased mother. The whole court bemoaned T'aejong's agony while T'aejo glorified his son's filial piety.

24 Book of Rites (Chinese *Lǐjīng*).

25 “大·孝·|·이·리·하·실·씩·나·만·맞·는·오·슬·아·니·바·사·。 禮·經·을·從·하·시·니·。 / 大·孝·如·此·人·脫·之·衣·我·獨·不·脫·禮·經·是·依·。 ” YG 9: 44b–9: 45a, 340–341. Upon the passing of his father, T'aejong defied the opposition at court and donned mourning clothes for three years in accordance with the *Lǐjīng*. From the 'Three Kingdoms' Period (*samguk sidae* 三國時代, 57 BCE– 668) it was not customary for a king to conform to this traditional Confucian precept.

26 Family Rites of *Wéngōng* (Chinese *Wéngōng jiālǐ* 文公家禮). A less common name for the *Zhuzi jiālǐ* 朱子家禮 or Family Rites of Zhuzi (Korean *Chuja karye*) authored by [Hui Àn] Zhū Xī [晦庵] 朱熹 (1130–1200).

27 “伏望殿下特命攸司，喪祭之儀，一依文公家禮，痛禁佛事。” TJS 24: 19a.

28 TJS 34: 28a–34: 28b.

29 *Sejong* for instance permitted the publication of several sutras, ordered translations of Buddhist texts and personally authored a comprehensive biography of the Buddha entitled *W'ŏrin ch'ŏn'gang chigok* 月印千江之曲 (»Songs of the Moon's Reflection on a Thousand Rivers«), WCC.

30 “裔戎邪說·이·罪·福·을·저·히·습·거·든·이·쁘·들·닛·디·마·르·쇼·셔·。 / 裔·戎·之·邪·說·怵·誘·以·罪·福·此·意·願·毋·忘·。 ” YG 10: 51b, 372.

The king shall remember his father's valued and vigorous battle against the perverted doctrines of Buddhism. He is cautioned against the perilous nature of these alien teachings that thwart Neo-Confucian orthodoxy with destructive beliefs such as karmic retribution. The authors of the *Yongbiöch'ön'ga*, being aware of Sejong's complaisant attitude towards Buddhism, likewise prompt him to abjure his royal succor. Like his father, he did not treat Buddhist and Neo-Confucian teachings as two opposing but mutually instrumental forces in the context of personal self-cultivation. In fact, Sejong frankly displayed his dedication to Buddhism even after being sharply criticized by some of his officials for upholding the Buddhist faith,³¹ stating: »I have already been a king who was fond of Buddhism.«³²

The anti-Buddhist reproaches in the *Yongbiöch'ön'ga* adjust to a great amount of Confucian polemics and proscription during the reign of Sejong, continuing the *zeitgeist* among the literati scholars at court from the regency of T'aejong and T'aejo. In respect to the political and economic realm, the king betimes yielded to his minister's memorials and regulated or tightened the laws concerning Buddhist affairs. Particularly in the early years of his rulership, Sejong put intensified administrative pressure on Buddhism.³³ Notwithstanding the permanent opposition and severe slander by the Neo-Confucian establishment,³⁴ Sejong—himself a devoted Neo-Confucian—was keen to strike a balance coping with his official's insistence. As exemplified in cantos 80 and 82, the *Yongbiöch'ön'ga* suggests that the favor of Heaven³⁵ is upon anybody whose deeds are consonant with and/or pay tribute to Confucian learning:

He not only values military merit, he knows the [Confucian] scholars and sets up the work of erecting the tripod.^[36] Subjugating the thieves does not leave him leisure, but he loves the [Confucian] scholars, and the work of pacification shines.^{[37]38}

31 “今上崇信佛法。” SJS 114: 7a.

32 “予既好佛之君。” SJS 114: 8a.

33 See for instance SJS 22: 4a or SJS 24: 2b–24: 3b. Similarly to his father, Sejong's patronage of Buddhism increased in the later part of his life.

34 A recurring criticism referred to the otherworldly agenda of Buddhism losing track of mundane affairs: “其為教也，本以清淨寂滅為宗，而外天下國家者也。” SJS 12: 20a.

35 See canto 1.

36 [Xuándé] Liú Bèi [玄德] 劉備 (*reg* 221–223, 161–223) was the founding emperor of *Shǔ Hàn* 蜀漢 (221–263) during the Three Kingdoms' Period (*sānguó shídài* 三國時代, 220–280). Apart from his military skills, he relied on the wide learning of his two Confucian mentors [Kāngchéng] Zhèng Xuán [康成] 鄭玄 (127–200) and [Yuánfāng] Chén Jì [元方] 陳紀. He honored both scholars for instructing him how to govern rightfully. Thanks to their sagely advice, he was able to lay the foundations of *Shǔ Hàn* that was becoming one part of the Three Kingdoms (*sānguó*), i.e. the 'tripod' (Korean *chōng* 鼎).

37 Even when fighting the enemies of Koryŏ, Yi Sŏng-gye was striving to study Confucian writings and debating with scholars. He held Confucian scholars in high regard. One day, when hearing a strange voice, he discovered a naked man in a pitiable condition who turned out to be a literati scholar named

[...]

He sees minor [Confucian] scholars and rises from the imperial throne. How about that: his heart and mind respecting the Confucians?^{39]} He sees an old [Confucian] scholar and kneels down out of proper conduct. How about that: his virtue esteeming scholarship^{40]}?

Composed in the spirit of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy, the literary revilement of Buddhism in the *Yongbiöch'ön'ga* is the result of the belief that the »Mandate of Heaven« can only be gained and maintained by devotedly upholding Confucianism while intrepidly resisting any dissenting teachings such as Buddhism.

5 Concluding Remarks

Beyond doubt, the Middle-Korean epic *Yongbiöch'ön'ga* is a product of its age concisely revealing the general anti-Buddhist resentment among the Neo-Confucian officialdom in early Chosön. It clearly reflects the Neo-Confucian claim to exclusive authority within the political, axiological and soteriological sphere. One must not deviate from the Neo-Confucian way always repudiating divergent doctrines and practices in order to set up individual, familial, social and cosmic harmony. Being the literary legitimization of the Yi-rulership, the *Yongbiöch'ön'ga* saliently expresses its authors' efforts to additionally put down an admonition for King *Sejong* and all his regal successors to espouse Neo-Confucian orthodoxy. However, in spite of serious criticism, the *Yongbiöch'ön'ga* is

Bài Zhù 拜住 (Korean: Paeju) from Yuán 元 (1271–1368). Yi Söng-gye immediately handed over some clothes and recommended him to King Kongmin 恭愍 (reg 1351–1374, 1330–1374), who, eventually, offered him a position at court. This is considered a stunning example of Yi Söng-gye's affection for Confucianism and is supposed to prove the righteousness and glory of his actions pacifying the peninsula.

38 “武功·뿐아·니爲·ᄃᆞ·샤·선·빅·를·아·락·실·씨·鼎峙之業·을·세시·니이·다·討賊·이거·를·업·스샤·딕·선·빅·를·ᄃᆞ·스·실·씨·太平之業·이·빛·나시·니이·다·／匪直爲武，且識儒生，鼎峙之業，肆克樹成。不遑討賊，且愛儒士，太平之業，肆其光輝。” YG 9: 30a–9: 30b, 333.

39 When the two Confucian tutors of the heir apparent of King Ch'ungnyöl 忠烈 (reg 1274–1308, 1236–1308), later crowned as King Ch'ungsön 忠宣 (reg 1298/1308–1313, 1275–1325), were sent for an audience with Kublai Khan (Chinese *Hubilü* 忽必烈, 1215–1294), he stood up from his throne, putting up his headdress to honor their erudition. King Sejong is directly addressed to pay attention to the deferent demeanor of the Great Khan towards Confucian scholarship.

40 When the Confucian scholar [Mogün] Yi Saek 〔牧隱〕 李穡 (1328–1396) was attended upon by Yi Söng-gye after returning from exile in 1391, Yi Söng-gye knelt down before him while drinking. King Sejong is reminded that even a virtuous ruler like his grandfather greatly respects profound Confucian learning.

41 “ᄃᆞ·근·선·빅·를·보시·고·御座·애·나·르시·니·敬儒之心·이·엇더·ᄃᆞ·시·니·늘·근·선·빅·를·보시·고·禮貌·로·우·르시·니·右文之德·이·엇더·ᄃᆞ·시·니·／引見小儒，御座遽起，敬儒之心，云如何已。接見老儒，禮貌以跪，右文之德，云如何已。” YG 9: 33a–9: 33b, 335.

paradoxically pervaded by several verses dedicated to supernatural phenomena and popular beliefs that are related to astrology, onomancy, belomancy, ophiomancy, etc.⁴² This paradox seems to culminate in canto 21, where we learn about a Buddhist miracle that enabled [Ikcho] Yi Haeng-ni, after praying to the bodhisattva Kwansŏm 觀世音 (Chinese Guānyīn 觀音), to pray to father [Tojo] Yi Ch'un and thus give continuance to the Yi lineage.⁴³ These inconsistencies are likely to have appeared in the *Yongbiŏch'ŏn'ga* due to the fact that Korean and Chinese early historiography—which the authors massively relied upon - was heavily influenced by Buddhist and Daoist elements and topoi as well as folk beliefs. Notwithstanding this discrepancy, the *Yongbiŏch'ŏn'ga* at its core was supposed to be a memorial praising Confucianism as orthodoxy while branding Buddhism as heterodoxy.

List of Abbreviations

- SJS *Sejong sillok* 世宗實錄 [Veritable Records of Sejong]. In *Chosŏn wangjo sillok* 朝鮮王朝實錄 [Veritable Records of the Chosŏn Dynasty] <sillok.history.go.kr> (last retrieval Sep 29, 2010).
- TJS *T'aejong sillok* 太宗實錄 [Veritable Records of T'aejong]. In *Chosŏn wangjo sillok* 朝鮮王朝實錄 [Veritable Records of the Chosŏn Dynasty] <sillok.history.go.kr> (last retrieval Sep 29, 2010).
- WCC *Wŏrin ch'ŏn'gang chigok* 月印千江之曲 [Songs of the Moon's Reflection on a Thousand Rivers]. In *Wŏnbon kug'ŏ kungmunhak ch'ongnim 11: Wŏrin ch'ŏn'gang chigok. Wŏrin sŏkpo* 原本 國語國文學叢林 11 : 月印千江之曲. 月印釋譜 [Collection of Sources of the National Language for Studying Korean Literature 11: Songs of the Moon's Reflection on a Thousand Rivers. The Moon's Reflection on the Genealogy of Buddha]. Sŏul: Taejegak 大提閣, 1985. 3–146.

42 See Hoyt, *Songs of the Dragons Flying to Heaven*, 40.

43 “하·늘·히·글·히·이·시·니·누·비·중·아·닌·들 海東黎民·을·니·즈·시·리·잇·가· / 天方擇矣, 匪百衲師, 海東黎民, 其肯忘斯。” YG 4: 7b, 191.

- YG *Yongbiöch'ön'ga* 龍飛御天歌 [Odes of the Dragons Flying to Heaven]. In *Wönbon kug'ö kungmunbak ch'onnim 6: Hunminjông'üm. Yongbiöch'ön'ga. Hunmongjaboe* 原本國語國文學叢林 6 : 訓民正音. 龍飛御天歌. 訓蒙字會 [Collection of Sources of the National Language for Studying Korean Literature 6: Proper Sounds for the Instruction of the People. Odes of the Dragons Flying to Heaven. Collection of Characters for the Instruction of the Uneducated]. Söul: Taejegak 大提閣, 1986. 103–373.
- YJ *Yijing Lái zhù tújiě: Zhèng Càn dìngzhèng* 易經來註圖解：鄭燦訂正 [Book of Changes, Annotated and Illustrated by Lái (Zhīdé), Revised by Zhèng Càn]. Chéngdū: Bā-Shǔ shūshè 巴蜀書社, 1989.

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