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Titolo:

**From Hwan'in to Yöngdŭng through Chesök: a case
study**

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1 Introduction

“The most powerful among the gods, Indra,” this is the meaning of the name Śakra devānām Indra. Originally, he was the Vedic king of the *devas*, the destroyer of the cosmic snake Vṛtra, the owner of the *vajra*, the magic thunder-maul, the enemy of the *asuras* and lover of the *soma*, the magic, intoxicating juice. Then, Indra was soon adopted among early Buddhists as protector of the Law (Dharma), and its cult spread outside India.

In China, Indra was adopted within the local cosmology: as the king of the heavens and ruler among the gods, he took the same place of the Jade Emperor (Yuhuang Shangdi 玉皇上帝), head of the “Celestial Bureaucracy”, judge of human action, the god who ensures rain at the proper time. A sage king, far away from the drunkard warrior deity of early times.

Koreans in ancient times already had their heavenly ruler in their pantheon, and they had no difficulty in syncretizing these gods. This deity was particularly important during the so-called Middle Ages, as he was the patron god of the royal clan, worshipped by Confucians, Daoists, Buddhists and native shamans alike as protector of the kingdom.

Then, how is it possible that the modern Korean myths around Chesŏk 帝釋, the Sino-Korean name for Indra, tell a story about a strange monk, an unfortunate mother, three brothers and their apotheosis as childbirth gods? Is he really the same deity?

We must not assume that there never was one, single Chesŏk: this is not about authenticity, a nonexistent “original”. The problem is: what are the functions, patronage and mythical structures of modern-day Chesŏk, and what is the relationship with his ancient “forefathers”?

The main object of study will be the Tanggŭm’aegi myth, the story of the three brothers mentioned before, and the method of study will be the structural analysis.

Tanggŭm'aegi myth exists in many versions, with ties with other deities: every deity in polytheism is always both one and many, as Marcel Detienne (1935-2019) illustrated in his works. This multiplicity could confuse us, but it is the strength of the structural analysis: every deviation from the perceived “canon” can enlighten us even more on the problem “who is Chesŏk”.

Concretely, this work will take in exam both rites and narratives together as a continuum, searching for every possible interaction with other Korean gods. “Both one and many” also implies, in fact, that there are no fixed boundaries between related deities, therefore every possible interaction matters in this research. Here, the main question will be how a heavenly deity is perceived within the other narratives; and which network of mythemes, rituals, patronages connect them with Chesŏk. The analysis methods will be recalibrated to the Korean cultural landscape, very distant from the Ancient Greek one object of Detienne studies. Two limit cases will be also included to test the boundaries of this methodology: the Korean god of Death, Hallakkung'i, and the Mongol-Buryat Sky Father Khormusta: the first for the specular, opposite patronages; the second for his cultural distance yet identical origins.

In sum, this work will try to further the knowledge about these three questions:

- the transformation of Buddhist Indra into Chesŏk,
- the relationship between the modern and the ancient Chesŏk
- the position of Chesŏk within Korean pantheon.

We will use the historical analysis to explain why the modern Chesŏk is as it appears now, its contexts and characteristics, as well as Detienne's method to place Chesŏk within the broader Korean pantheon, its relationships and functions.

We have not the pretense of solving these problems once and for all, but we hope that this study and this method could help us to better understand how an Indian, snake-slayer warrior god ended up becoming three young deities in charge of childbirth within the Korean Peninsula.

2 Methods and Instruments

The present study will use the comparativist structural analysis detailed by Marcel Detienne, though adapted to the peculiar situation of Korean culture. The method described by Detienne has three major advantages: first, it is highly systematic, considering both the mythemes and the material culture and their interactions; secondly, its “structural analysis” may help to overcome one difficulty presented by Korean shamanism, which is the lack of a systematised narrative and (which is almost the same) the scarcity of interactions between deities within such narratives; finally it was never used to analyze the Korean mythology before, as far as we know. Furthermore, within the study of Tanggŭm’aegi and Chesŏk faith in general, this analysis presents one key advantage: they are one of the most studied deities in the field. Thus, there is no lack of resources needed for a structural analysis.

This study will also take into consideration the historical aspects of Korean Shamanism to highlight some obscure elements within the modern-day rituals and narrative elements. The aim is not to point to an “original version”, nor to find an “origin” – pursuits that Detienne rightfully denounce as irrelevant and even harmful in Anthropology, but to clarify, articulate and problematize the interaction between the ancient Korean thought and the modern Shamanism. Even more, since every major study on the Tanggŭm’aegi myth stress the connection with the ancient Korean founding narratives. For this reason, we will focus on Koryŏ and early Chosŏn culture, postulating that the modern-day Shamanism is more akin to that of those periods, and so is the Chesŏk faith.

This work is divided into four sections: a theoretical framework, aimed at detailing the methodology and defining the terms of the problem; a historical analysis of Korean religion, aimed at exploring the web of mutual influence in Korean Shamanism during the Middle Ages and the Early Chosŏn period; a connecting section, focused on the nature of lecto-orality in this period, from which we can explain some recurring elements; and the myths comparison section, analyzing the elements of Chesŏk myths both synchronically and diachronically.

Thus, we will proceed as follows:

- Overview of the framework: how we will proceed and why. What are the theoretical bases, procedures and sources' selection.
- Definition of the term of the question:
 - Shamanism and shaman, making an overview of the definition problem, starting from Eliade
 - the cases of Chinese protohistoric Shamanism, whose terminology is often used for the Korean case.
 - Korean Shamanism, its characteristics and pantheon.
 - Korean shamanic songs, object of this study, and their relationship with written culture
 - Syncretism, the definition of which can be problematic in East Asia's context.
- Historical overview of the medieval period
 - The official, royal house narrative
 - The myth among the various religion and ideological systems of the time: Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and Shamanism.
- Analysis of song's transmission in medieval period. What were the most likely situation among Korean shamans of the time.
- Comparative analysis of the myth

2.1. How we proceed

Main focus and object of study of the present work is the Tanggŭm'aegi myth, with a secondary focus on the other Chesŏk cults. Tanggŭm'aegi myth is a myth diffused in all Korean Peninsula, in a form or another, concerning the origins of the Three Chesŏk, gods of birth and abundance. Chesŏk is another deity present in all Korea, patronages of which are wealth and abundance. This work will analyze these and other related deities. In particular, the main theme is how a heavenly, kingly deity is perceived in Korean Shamanism.

Other authors took in consideration this myth, particularly Sŏ Taesŏk (1980, 2001), Cho Hungyun (1997), and Lee Ji-young (2000), showing the connection of this myth with the older Tan'gun and Ch'umong myths. These scholars have compiled, classified and analyzed shamanic songs concerning Chesŏk, reconstructing its general

archetypal form, also making other consideration regarding general cultural aspects such as the ties with the creation myths. On the other hand, how and why the myth has certain (usually Buddhist) elements, as well as what is the interaction with other deities, are aspects not taken in enough consideration by these studies. This work, therefore, has two aspects:

The first one is historical, in order to understand the reason of cultural elements not present in the ancient Tan'gun and Ch'umong myths; to gather more data not available from ethnographical works; and to obtain the context and methods of the myth transmissions in pre-Chosŏn period.

The second one is comparativist, in order to understand the relationship between the Three Chesŏk, Tanggŭm'aegi and other deities; what mythemes, rituals and other cultural aspects the myth has, as well as their configurations and networks.

The theoretical and methodological framework chosen here is that described by Jack Goody's *Myth, Ritual and the Oral* (2010), and by Marcel Detienne in *The Creation of Mythology* (1983) and *Comparing the Incomparable* (2008).

As a general, theoretical premise, Detienne carefully describes polytheism: "a complex system of relations between a variety of supernatural powers and entities" structured as "a society", where every god is "already plural". Which means that the gods are non-static, and their actions not univocal and always embedded in a relationship with other deities, human, animal, objects et cetera. A system where there's daily "experimentations" within the accepted cultural boundaries, expressed through transmission, either oral or written. We have mentioned before at Goody and Detienne's positions on cultural and oral transmission, when addressing the problem of shamanic songs, here we can give a slightly longer description of their system: as inevitable mechanism of memory and communication, every repetition of a story is also a variation, an act of reinvention. Therefore, as Marcell Mauss emphasized, for the myths it is "useless to search for an original, it doesn't exist". Neither in oral nor written culture can fixate a narrative once and for all, and the borderlines are blurred: before writing, it is the tradition that permits the existence of censorship. At the same time, writing and oral transmission can coexist, creating longer narratives by means mechanical, mnemonic techniques, otherwise impossible without a text. This is the example of the epics and of every bard-like figure collecting them. But even in society

with writing, reading was usually made aloud (silent reading is a very recent habit), while daily communication is necessarily oral in every epoch. In any case, even with diffused literacy, a part of the population will remain illiterate by social exclusion. Finally, as Detienne point out, even the “writing memory” continuously transforms what it “believes” to repeat. In all this, concerning the mass diffusion of any kind of narrative, cultural context of delivery remains important in both oral and literate societies¹.

The general description of comparative analysis, in Detienne terms, is that of critique and experimentation, akin to a chemical experiment. The aim is to understand of which “being” the myth is a “figure of” (in Marcell Mauss terms). Propaedeutic to this is to know what it already known, bringing to the surface what it is not known yet. thus, learning to “think like a savage (*penser comme un sauvage*)” i.e. familiarize with other ways thinking. In this, comparison with geographically or culturally close societies is indifferent, not recommended even. Either encyclopedic knowledge or a collaborative effort is highly recommended. In this experiment, the starting point is choosing a category, both generic and specific enough to be useful. For example, “foundation”. The point is not the exhaustiveness nor modelling another classification system, but the accuracy, for which multiple variations of the same data are required. The discrepancy here is a spur: the incoherence or absence of data must stimulate an inquiry into the meaning of the categories used. For this process, deconstruction is used: splitting an idea into a discrete number of cases and searching for similar but not quite identical schemes. These schemes are a particular type of thought mechanism, the “localized plates of quasi-casual connections”: mental habits which become significative characteristic of a cultural configuration, linked to other cultural and thought mechanisms in a non-random, relatively coherent way. Once these configurations are found, one must search for boundaries, i.e. how these thought microsystems organize their elements.

On a more practical level, Detienne uses a particular form of the analytic method used by Georges Dumézil (1898-1986) in his studies on Proto-Indo-European cultures:

¹ Detienne (1983), 35-59, 152-163; Detienne (2008): 1-40, 57-79; Goody (2010)

Dumézil Analysis of polytheisms

1. start from groups of deities
2. give attention to:
 - a. visible structures such altars, festivities, rituals dedicated to more than one deity, the deities' contrasts, varieties and their meaning ("raw material")
 - b. types of structures: complementarity, opposition, hierarchies, relationships
3. identify all "positions" of a deity, along with what makes them "clearly manifested" i.e. associations, contrast (even implicit ones) derived from the theology
 - a. distinct place-field and modality of action: the first is the occasion when the god acts ("manifests") and the link with other deities, the second one is how the deity acts "in a constant way"
 - b. patronages: active functions and activities in those fields
4. define a deity:
 - a. what are their positions within the pantheon as a whole
 - b. study mythical and religious groups and associations of two or more deities in order to understand their relationships, first in familiar and then in unfamiliar contexts.

Detienne expansion of Dumézil analysis:

Premise: in polytheism, distribution of patronages, fields etc. is never univocal nor unambiguous.

1. start from groups of gods, how they are made and how they react with other, highly contrasting deities
2. instruments: material objects as "litmus test" in gods' comparison by "symbolism": concrete objects, concrete acts and situations associated with the deity

- a. compare with what it is known by the ethnographic context, the material cultural aspect (flora, fauna, plays, hunting methods, warfare etc.)
3. taking an isolated object, analyzing it and its different states (changing the variables' number)
4. draw up an identity card of the deity in order to recognize their orientation within the "domains", which usually overlaps with the field of action of other deities (regularly or occasionally, depending on the case)
5. a particular configuration is chosen. Then, one has to search for the reason for the grouping / interconnections meaning, testing all that is known about its purpose within society
 - a. it is preferred proceeding in couples or triads of gods, rather than mass groups
6. two complementary methods used to discover implied relationships:
 - a. internal analysis on the meaning of the respective powers within the context of stories, rituals etc., powers that, at the same times, create both conjunction and contrast between the two gods (this is the structural analysis)
 - b. study of these couples in relationship with other small groups of deities, usually these groups are those more explicitly correlated.
Usually, one starts from the closest ones
7. reassembly of the "partial logics of thought": instead of choosing two robotic representations of a single deity (the explicit and the implicit), elements of both are broken up, analyzed in detail, discovering more and more differences between similar entities
8. it is possible to link one deity to other deities of the explicit configuration, both mythical and "theological". However, these are tied by a complex micro-network of relationships within the cultural field

Detienne particularly emphasizes the analysis of deities' groups as a method that gives freedom of action. In fact, he classifies as a perspective error the vision of the gods in polytheisms as several individuals, and by extension the idea that the cultures are

monothematic. Detienne method is modelled over his experience in his academic field, the Ancient Greek Religion, where the geography, the cultic sites, the altars and the deities' modes of representations have a significant cultural weight. Hence his choice of his examples for concrete material elements in his analysis².

As for the specific analysis of rituals, Goody describes rituals as standardized formal act, means-ends relationship of which are not “intrinsic” (neither irrational nor non-rational), and without a “purpose” (like the civic rituals and etiquette). Goody stresses that three points must be taken in consideration when analyzing an oral narrative: the context of recitation, particularly the target audience; the general fact that, in mythology, the target audience is the children; the fact that the “oral literature” is a standard form / genre in society without writing, a standard used to describe several traditions. Another element is the existence of “lecto-oral”, which is the “difference that writing makes to oral memorization”: writing make possible the development of longer, more coherent narratives, encouraging the orality. This is particularly true in religious contexts, where the accuracy in memorization and recitation is an essential element in the perpetuation of the “real knowledge”. In a way this also applies to non-religious context, particularly in traditional societies, for example the Confucian Classics were memorized the Confucian literati³.

The source material selected for this study are historical documents, shamanic songs and text, and collections of folkloristic materials. The shamanic songs and texts are of the outmost importance, since they are the primary sources of the Korean mythological narratives. However, Both Detienne and Goody methods must be carefully adapted for the Korean case.

As we will see in the chapter about the shamanic songs, the Korean shamanic culture clearly belongs to a “lecto-oral” type, and the Korean shamanic songs (*muga* 巫歌) can even be compared to epics. Shrines are clearly less important than the rituals in Korea, as demonstrated by the fact that some shamans don't even possess a personal one, and also by the fact that a mass ritual is made possible by an assembly of people (shamans, folk entertainers and clients) rather than by a particular configuration of buildings, this can be seen in the cases of the Kangnŭng Tan'o-je 端午祭 and the Cheju

² Detienne (1983), 1-79, 128-52; Detienne (2008): 1-40, 57-79

³ Goody (2010), 13-40, 153-61

Yöngdŭng-je 靈登祭. An exemption from this general rule may be the importance given to the mountain: a mountain can be a sacred landscape by itself, and so a place of religious activity. At the same time, a mountain can be the home of a Buddhist temple, temple that usually includes a shrine to said mountain gods, as we have seen.

A unified pantheon is also a mirage: out of few narratives where gods interact, the deities are apparently “soloists”, personal pantheon exists and so deities worshipped together during mass rituals, however we lack of an official, standardized narrative even for a single deity. In fact, the anthropologies were likely the first ones to carefully systematize the hierarchies, types and functions of several different, recurring regional deities.

As for the rituals, this is also a divergence from what Detienne experiences, as a Korean shamanic rite (*kut*) is segmented, modular: every different type is a composition of different rituals, and each ritual can recur from *kut* type to *kut* type. Moreover, a *kut* segment or element could even be performed alone in particular conditions.

Regionalism is clearly one of the few possible parallels with the Ancient Greece studies by Detienne: we have seen that each region (or even city or village!) has its kind of variation of shaman, ritual, deity, and customs tied to them. This is no surprise, as each region has its history and culture, like in any part of the World.

Knowing that, the method clearly needs re-calibration:

- The mythical narrative sources material are primarily the shamanic songs, secondarily the ethno-folkloristic and historical materials. Other sources will be taken as secondary.
- Each significant variation in narrative and myth has to be put in its regional context, particularly considering the landscape, the history and type of shamanism of that area. This work was partially already made by Sö Taesök and Cho Hungyun.
 - Adapting Detienne methodology, problematize the regional discrepancies and absence within the cultural data.

- Adapting Goody methodology, problematize the Buddhist, Daoist and Confucian ritual elements within the shamanic rituals and their ties with the songs' content.
- Less importance should be given to where the *kut* is performed rather than when and how it is conducted: to which agricultural element is tied? To which major festivities can be associated? What are the offerings? What are the garments worn by the shaman?
- When it comes to *kut* segment, importance should be given to the ritual purpose within the *kut* of that particular ritual concerning that particular form: why a certain deity is invoked and what it does.
- Links between deities can be clearly assured by a structural analysis, as most relationships are implicit. Particular elements taken into consideration are mythemes and the ritual devices.

Beside the Sō Taesōk and Cho Hungyun works on Chesōk and Tanggŭm'aegi, these points take inspiration also from the Yang Yong-jun work on the flower element in the Hallakkung'i myth, as well as from Kim Heonsun and Lee Chang-yoon analyses of the Korean creation narratives.

The group chosen as object of study for the current experiment are, for the most, gods already recognized as having some connection to Tanggŭm'aegi and the Chesōk cult in general, plus two as limit cases:

- Tanggŭm'aegi and the Three Chesōk: gods of birth and prosperity.
- Chesōk: pan-regional generic deity of wealth, rain, ancestors, house etc.
- Yōngdŭng: regional deity of wealth, rain, fishing, house etc.
- Mirŭk (Maitreya): creator deity in the northern creation narratives.
- Ch'ōnji-wang / Ch'ōnju-wang: father of the creator gods in the Cheju *Ch'ōnjiwang-bonp'uri*.

The two limit cases are:

- Hallakkung'i: Death deity, guardian of the Western Paradise's Flower Field in the Cheju *Igong-bonp'uri*.

- Khormusta Tengri (Qormusta Tngri): Mongolian and Buryat king of the gods, a local adaptation of the Vedic and Buddhist Indra.

Some parallels between of these deities have can already be spotted and so can be already grouped in couples and triads: Yöngdüng and Chesök (almost identical patronages), Mirük and Ch'önji-wang (same type of narrative), the Three Chesök and Chesök (related patronages). Hallakkung'i was chosen as another parallel of a god offspring of a heavenly deity, like the Three Chesök. The case of Khormusta Tengri, though particularly interesting, will be addressed more briefly, due to language barriers, and need of further study.

This study will first start analyzing the historical context of the Chesök, then will analyze the narrative of Tanggüm'aegi and the Three Chesök, then make a comparison with these other gods, and then return to the analysis of the Tanggüm'aegi myths with the new data.

Summarizing:

- Main focus and object of study of the present work is the Tanggüm'aegi myth, with a secondary focus on the other Chesök cults.
- The main goal is to understand how the discrepancies between the Tanggüm'aegi and the Chesök myths on one side, and the Ch'umong and Tan'gun myth on the other, came into being; the general theme taken in consideration can be exemplified by the question “how a kingly heavenly deity is perceived in Korean shamanism?”
- The mythical narrative sources material are primarily the shamanic songs, secondly the ethno-folkloristic and historical materials.
- Main secondary sources are the works of Sö Taesök (1980, 2001), Cho Hungyun (1997), and Lee Ji-young (2000).
- The two main methods are the historical analysis and the structural comparative analysis:
 - The goals of the historical analysis are: understand the reason of cultural elements absent in the ancient Tan'gun and Ch'umong myths; gather more data not available from ethnographical works; and obtain

the context and methods of the myth transmissions in pre-Chosŏn period.

- The adopted comparativist method is an adaptation of that described by Marcel Detienne (in itself an expansion of Dumézil one) and that of Jack Goody framework regarding the lecto-oral tradition.
- The Detienne's comparativist method will be adapted to the Korean cultural landscape:
 - Each significant variation in narrative and myth has to be put in its regional context, particularly considering the landscape, the history and type of shamanism of that area.
 - Regional discrepancies and absence within the cultural data will be emphasized and problematized.
 - Buddhist, Daoist and Confucian elements within the shamanic rituals and their ties with the songs' content will be emphasized and problematized.
 - Importance is given on how and when a *kut* is performed: purpose, time, materials etc.
 - Importance is given to the purposes of the *kut* segments within the whole *kut* context: why a certain deity is invoked and what it does.
 - Links between deities can mainly be discerned through structural analysis, including both material elements (mainly ritual devices) and mythemes, as most relationships are implicit.
- The deities taken into consideration for the comparison are:
 - Tanggŭm'aegi and the Three Chesŏk.
 - The pan-regional Chesŏk.
 - Yŏngdŭng.
 - Mirŭk (Maitreya) of the Northern creation narratives.
 - Ch'ŏnji-wang / Ch'ŏnju-wang of the Cheju creation narratives.
 - Hallakkung'i.

- Khormusta Tengri (Qormusta Tngri) of the Mongolian and Buryat mythologies.
- The analysis will follow these steps: historical analysis of the Chesök cult → analysis of the narrative of Tanggüm'aegi and the Three Chesök → comparison with the other gods → re-analysis of the Tanggüm'aegi myths with the new data.

2.2. Defining Shamanism(s)

Defining shamanism is not an easy task: the terms “shamanism” and “shaman” are often defined too broadly or too specifically depending on the author. This chapter will be a summary of the state of the art, with the intent of creating a working definition of these terms that could encompass the difficult case of Korean shamanism, object of this work.

The most influential, historical definition of shamanism among academics is that of Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), who wrote in his 1951 work *Le Chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase*, translated in 1964 as *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Eliade took a historical and comparativist point of view on the theme, reporting a considerable number of ethnographic data with the aim of situating the shamanism within the larger landscape of world religions. Many aspects of shamanism are considered in this book, here we summarize the most useful for the current research:

General definition of “shamanism”: Eliade defines shamanism as a “technique of ecstasy”, ecstasy during which it is believed that the shaman’s soul is separated from the body. The controlled possession is listed as a separate technique. Shamanism is *strictu sensu* a Siberian and Central-Asian phenomenon, as intended by Eliade. A shaman is a priest, a sacrificing official, a mystic, a poet, a wizard / witch, a psychopomp, and a *medicine man / woman* at the same time. In this sense, Shamanism is a “magic specialization” that includes all the previous categories but is distinct from them. The shaman possesses the abilities of controlled trance and spirits’ direct experience. However, a shaman can control only few of them. Shamanism, in Eliades’s terms, is a “primitive” phenomenon, encapsulated into the local religions without being a religion itself: neither rites nor mythology are fruits of the shamans. On the contrary, a shaman adapts to them and vice versa. Shamanism is characterized by the “vocation” that make shamans a sort of élite that look after the community’s souls, object of the shamanic knowledge. A shaman’s recruiting methods in Siberia and North-East Asia are either by hereditary transmission, by spontaneous vocation through a “call” or “election”, by a spontaneous choice or by clan’s will. The most powerful shamans are those who received a “call”, and even in the case of a clan’s

will, the choice is determined by the presence of an ecstatic experience of the candidate⁴.

According to Eliade, shamanic initiation rituals involve a symbolic death-rebirth / killing-rebirth cycles, traumatic or ecstatic. Ascetism, visions, dreams and-or “melancholy” are part of the process. In any stage of a shamanic career, a shaman experiences the appearance of gods-spirits and the souls of the departed, often overlapped⁵. The main shamanic powers are bestowed by “shamanic ancestors” and major divinities. As both spirits-gods and “assistant spirits” may have an animal form, the shamans must imitate the aspect and behavior to evocate or invoke these entities. In Shamanism the “helper animal spirits” are the direct messengers and instruments of the spiritual world, accessible through the trance. The ecstasy felt during the shamanic session, or *séance*, is the “concrete experience of the ritual death”. Shamanic ceremonial instruments such costumes, masks and drums are a manifestation of the spiritual world and powers (“hierophany”), a symbolic compendium of the religious cosmology. Among cultures with shamanic ties there is shared cosmology: the universe is divided into three realms: the heavens (seven, nine or more), the mortal world, and the underworld. All these realms are connected by an *axis mundi* i.e. a tree or a mountain. This cosmic structure is used by the shamans during the “ecstatic flights / climbing” and by the gods to “descent to Earth”. Likely, the material model of this “primitive” cosmology is a tent, with the *axis mundi* being the central pole. The realm of the dead is specular to our world (when here is day, there is night etc.), while the heavens are the home of the major deities and the “heavenly creator”. In Siberia and Central Asia, this “heavenly creator” is often called “Sky”. This deity has some traits of a *deus otiosus* but was originally a creator god helper of mankind – Eliade believed that the multiplication of deities was an innovation. Shamans did not create their rituals: they “interiorize” and “live” their mythology in a mystical sense⁶.

As for China, Eliade saw in the Daoist traditions a continuation of the ancient Chinese shamanism, particularly for what concerns the “(flying) feathered immortals” *feixian* 飛仙, the “far-off journey” poetry (*yuanyou* 遠遊), describing a Daoist-shamanic “ecstatic journeys”, and the Steps of Yu (*Yubu* 禹步). The closest thing to a shamanic

⁴ Eliade (2005), 21-6; Deng Qiuju (2014), 5-16; Seo Jinseok (2019), 28-31

⁵ “Seeing the spirits” “seeing the dead”.

⁶ Eliade (2005), 21-168, 228-238, 283-303

tradition in China is the *wu* 巫, pre-Confucian spiritual officiants, mostly of which are women. *Wu* were given the power by a spirit (*shen* 神) possession and so were an aberrant, vestigial form of former Shamanism already in ancient times. With the centuries, the *wu* become an exorcist, the title hereditary and the role generally dominated by males. This transformation gave rise to the institutionalized *sai-kong* 師公 / 司公 or “Daoist master” *daoshi* 道士. Eliade disregards these figure as “not true Daoist”. The importance given to the ancestor worship gradually discontinued the “ecstatic descending journeys to the underworld”. However, some reminiscence can be found in the stories of Xiwangmu 西王母 on the Kunlun Mountain 崑崙山 and the Buddhist saint Mulian (Skr. Maudgalyāyana, Pali: Moggallāna) 目連 rescuing his mother from the hells. In China the animals, particularly the bear, were associated to the dance. Mongolian Shamanism is described very briefly: Shamanism among Mongols is heavily mixed with Tibetan Buddhism, particularly among the Xining’s Monguor. The reason of this mixture lies in the many attempts by the lamas of destroying the Shamanism in the seventeenth century. Therefore, Eliade believes that Mongolian Shamanism lost its character. Korea Shamanism is ascribed by Eliade partly to Siberia and partly to the Turks, but the prevalence of female shamans indicates a deterioration of the tradition. Japanese Shamanism is primarily based on the possession by the dead and being almost exclusively practiced by women. Some reminiscences of a male shamanism are found in the custom of weaving bows and the horse element. The practice of Japanese female shaman of hierogamy seems the result of an institutionalization. Some elements of Japanese Shamanism are found in the *Kojiki* 古事記 and the *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀, however the general phenomenon in Japan is believed being a “tardive form”⁷.

2.1.1 *After Eliade (1980-2023)*

Eliade’s work is recognized as seminal. However, many of his theories did not pass the test of time. New data, methods and criticism corrected Eliade’s work shortcomings, either extending or narrowing his definitions, finding new data, and building entirely new theoretical frameworks.

⁷ Eliade (2005), 455-493

One of the first criticism of Eliade's theories came indirectly from Walther Heissig's *The Religions of Mongolia* (1980). This work focuses on Mongolian Shamanism in general, while Eliade made a geographical distinction between Buryats and other Mongolian populations. According to Heissig, the roles of the Mongolian shaman⁸ are:

- Having a positive influence on the sick and holders through the veneration of the *ongod* (*onγod*), shamanic protective spirits and *genii loci* widely worshipped by the population. This practice has two forms: the "shamanizing" *bögelekü*, which is the invocation of the deity, and the "prophecy" *üjmerlekü*.
- Exorcism of the illness' spirits, banished by a substitute figurine or animal.
- Expulsion of bad luck from objects and people, this activity is distinguished from exorcism.
- Recitation of blessings in form of magic spells.
- Divination by means of scapulimancy.

The protective features are also shared with Buryat shamans. Thus, the Shamanism among Mongols is primarily a magical defense against illness and calamities. From the Shamanic songs, it seems that Mongolian Shamanism's birth is tied to the ancestor worship, specifically to the protection given by the ancestors for the livings. Due to this tie with the ancestors, it is likely that ancient Mongolian chieftains and shamans were almost identical figures (both could see the spirits). However, the shaman does not take part in rituals performed by the householders, clan chiefs and generally where a social group is involved. Mongolian Shamanism did not "lost its character", as Eliade wrote, but struggled, adapted to, and in turn transformed the Tibetan Buddhism in Mongolia. Even before the persecutions that followed the fall of the Yuan dynasty 大元 (1271-1368), Mongolian shamans were open to syncretism with Buddhism and even popular Daoism, Mazdeism, Manichaeism, Christianity, and Islam. It was Buddhism that gave Mongolian Shamanism an otherworldly vision of an afterlife: before, the spirits of the dead were tied to the tombs⁹. This work on Mongolian shamanism raises the question on many Eliade's theories: first, the claim about the role of the shaman as an élite focused on the "soul wellbeing" but unnecessary for the physical illnesses. As seen, Mongolian shamans' role is to magically protect humans from illness; second, the separation between shamanic ideology and native religions.

⁸ Called *böö* (*böge*) if male, and *udgan* (*iduyan*) if female.

⁹ Heissig (1980), 5-44

This is seen in the origin of Mongolian shamans, their ties with ancient chieftains and the *ongod* faith; third and last, the tie between the “ecstatic journeys” and specific, “primitive” beliefs about the cosmology and the afterlife. In the Heissig’s reconstruction, in the ancient Mongolian Shamanism there was no distinction between this world and the dead-spirits world¹⁰.

Later, Winkelman studies from 1986 to 2023, and of Roberte Hamayon from 1990, updated again the Eliade’s theoretical framework, analyzing the role of shamanism in relation to society’s means of subsistence. Hamayon brought to light the differences, in Siberia, between Shamanism among hunting societies and societies practicing husbandry:

- Hunting societies are generally patrilinear, exogamic, loosely organized in moieties based on a cooperating labor division (either hunting or bush-beating). The relationship between humans and nature is conceived as a horizontal alliance. The forest is the realm of game animals, provided by the Spirit of the Forest (“master of riches”), this Forest Spirit has daughter, whom humans must seduce to secure a good hunting. Therefore, the shaman is a wife-taker and structurally male. Both the Forest Spirits and the shaman’s “helpers” are theriomorphic, and, during the sessions, the shaman himself acts like a deer or a reindeer.
- In husbandry societies, the relationship with nature is vertical, with the human clan ancestors as “master of riches”. Ancestors must be revered and prayed to secure the wellbeing of the herds. Therefore, the focus of belief is the ancestral sacrifices, during which the shaman is marginal, sometimes limited to ritual cleansing, sometimes even substituted by old men. In husbandry societies, the shaman takes the role of the healer who performs for individuals, usually behind remuneration. Shaman “helpers” in this societies are the shaman’s own ancestors, even with some vestigial ferine traits.

These two kinds of societies and Shamanisms are not mutually exclusive nor is one “evolution” of the other, but they coexist in the same area at the same time. An analysis reflecting these distinctions among Tungusic people’s mythology was then made by

¹⁰ Curiously, Eliade himself reports a similar “absence” among Tungus, Yakuts, Nanai, Teleuts and Yugurs: Eliade (2005), 228-238. However, this did not prevent the Romanian scholar from ending the same paragraph with the statement about the shamanic contribution on the “infernal” maps.

Tatiana Sem (2022)¹¹. Following Hamayon and Boileau, Winkelman (2023) made a systematic division between Shamanism in foraging societies and Shamanism in agricultural societies, also clearly separating the shamans from other categories like healers, mediums, priests, and sorcerers / witches:

Ritualist type	Forager shaman	Agricultural shaman-healer
Principal activity	• Healing • divination • protection from malevolent spirits and magic • hunting magic • causing illness and death	• healing • divination • protection from malevolent spirits and magic • hunting magic and agricultural rites • minor malevolent activities
Selection and training	• dreams, illness, signs of spirit request • ASC¹² induction • individual, solitary vision quest in the wilderness	• vision quest, dream, illness, and spirit requests • training by group • ceremony for status recognition
Sociopolitical power	• high social status • charismatic, communal and war leader • makes sorcery accusations • ambiguous moral status	• moderate social status • informal political power • moderate judiciary decisions • predominantly moral status
Professional characteristics	• predominantly male, secondary female • part-time • no practice with community • status recognition from clients	• predominantly male • part-time • collective practices and ceremonies • specialized role
Motive and context	• acts at client request for client or community	• acts at client request for client or community

¹¹ Roberte Hamayon (1990), *La chasse à l'âme, esquisse d'une théorie du chamanisme sibérien*, Société d'anthropologie, in Boileau (2002), 350-4; Sem (2022)

¹² Altered states of consciousness

Ritualist type	Forager shaman	Agricultural shaman-healer
	community-wide ceremonies at night	performance in client group
Powers	- animal spirits, spirit allies - spirit power usually controlled	- animal spirits allies and impersonal power (mana) - spirit control, spells, charms (exuvial and imitative) - power controlled
ASC⁹ Conditions	- ASC⁹ in training and practice - death-and-rebirth - soul flight / journey - animal transformation	- ASC⁹ in training and practice - shamanic and mystical ASC⁹ - soul flight (some) - animal transformation (some)
ASC⁹ Techniques	- isolation - austerity, fasting - chanting, singing, drumming, and dancing - collapse / unconsciousness	- isolation - austerity, fasting - chanting, singing, drumming, and dancing - collapse and unconsciousness
Practices	- soul loss - spirit aggression - sorcery - physical manipulations, blowing, massaging and extraction - plant medicine	- extraction and exorcism - countering spirit aggression - sorcery - physical manipulation, massage - plant medicine

In this framework, the simpler definition of a shaman is a ritualist who employs ecstatic magic¹³. This clear distinction was made to address the issue raised by Boileau Gilles (2002), who noticed how, in the academia, the term shaman is “so widely employed to describe a vast array of religious beliefs, behaviours and types of society that it is not easy to use them for sociological purposes and comparisons”. Thus,

¹³ Winkelman (2023), 2-8, 30-1

Winkelman rejects the theoretical position of addressing shamanism as a plural entity determined by the groups object of the study, preferring an empirical data-based approach to the question¹⁴. Both Hamayon and Winkelman analyses make it more difficult to consider Shamanism a separate entity within a culture, pointing instead toward codependence if not to a direct derivation.

Further studies questioned other characteristics of Shamanism as described by Eliade. The most controversial aspect challenged by the ethnographic data are the practice of “soul journey” as the primary shamanic technology: this definition is very difficult to apply to Korean shamanism and Liaoning shamans (*chuma xian* 出馬仙), where the main technique used during ritual is the “possession”.

2.1.2 Testing Boundaries – Shamans in East Asia

As Bruno and Walraven (2006) pointed out, Eliade very definition of Shamanism as “technique of ecstasy” is popular but empirically ill-founded, and how the term “shaman” itself can be used is a practical issue. If the shaman is a “religious specialist to whom is given authority from a personal, direct connection with divine powers, obtained by the means of ecstasy”, so the Korean ones are shamans. Therefore, according to Bruno and Walraven, a wider definition of Shamanism is more useful for transcultural studies. Bruno (2018) also noticed that the lack of a “shamanic flight” does not implies, in Korean shamans, any negative effect on the charisma. Korean Shaman, on the other hand, is integrated with other, classically Siberian characteristics such as the “gods’ call” as dream and illness and the symbolic death of the neophytes¹⁵. Kim Staci (2022) also reports how in the late Chosŏn period 朝鮮 (1392-1910), the Korean shamans were appreciated for artistic capacities and hired for specific rituals. Staci frames this fact in the theory of Stevens and Stevens (1998) who saw in Shamanism a form of art divided into four categories: healing, access to lost knowledge, capacities development, prophecies, and predictions¹⁶. The artistic and

¹⁴ Boileau (2002), 350-4; Winkelman (2023), 2-8, 30-1

¹⁵ Bruno & Walraven (2006), 2-24; Bruno (2018), 466-471

¹⁶ Stevens, J., Stevens L. (1998) *Secrets of Shamanism*. Harper Collins Publishers in Kim Staci (2022), 140

entertainment aspect of the Korean shamans is emphasized by the cultural studies¹⁷. Entertainment is another aspect that Eliade seemingly ignored.

As for the Liaoning's *chuma xian*, Deng Qiuju (2014) shows this is another case of Shamanism mainly using "spirit possession" instead of "shamanic journey". In the case of Liaoning folk religion, possession can be used by the shaman to perform exorcism of malevolent deities or ancestors' spirits. In both cases, in fact, the practice-phenomenon is the same, but with different characterizations: one positive and one negative. In this case, Eliade's idea of Siberian Shamanism as preferred framework is insufficient. Deng also questions the definition of Shamanism as a "technique of ecstasy": this definition is problematic because the same technique can be used with different functions, as in the case of possessions in the Liaoning region, while some practices-phenomena have different techniques, as in the case of "soul flight" and "possession" in Shamanism. Listing the *chuma xian* phenomenon as a form of Shamanism, Deng gives two possible definitions of it: either a shaman is who offers to the community an exclusive mediation with the supernatural world through an altered state of consciousness, or Shamanism is a practical religion, born through a selection based on efficacy of its practices¹⁸.

A revision of Eliade description on Siberian and Central-Asian Shamanism was made in 2009 by Marazzi. In his preface of *Testi dello sciamanesimo siberiano e centro-asiatico* (Texts of Siberian and Central-Asian Shamanism), Marazzi outlines an updated description of the regional Shamanism taken by Eliade as the phenomenon *strictu sensu*. According to Marazzi, the ideological premise of Shamanism is the search for a relationship, a contact with the supernatural world. Therefore, a shaman is a professional intermediary which uses ecstasy as mean. The role of the shaman is intrinsically benefic, as he has the role of solving concrete problems through ecstatic contact with the supernatural. In this sense, a shaman is both a supernatural protector and a mediator for their interests. In a broader sense, Shamanism is a complex beliefs system, an ideology, and a worldview. In this system, the shaman is both a *medicine-man* and a priest (i.e. cult leader) with many duties:

- medic: cures crises ("soul losses") and possessions with an extracorporeal "journey".

¹⁷Saeji (2012); Koudela & Yoo (2016), 93-8; Nelson (2019), 57-8

¹⁸ Deng Qiuju (2014), 1-54, 77-82

- diviner: can obtain knowledge of past, present and future.
- psychopomp: guides the soul of the deceased.
- animal diviner and animal charmer: they are the hunting sorcerers of the group.
- priest: oversees the sacrifices in exceptional occasions.

According to Marazzi, in the Siberian Shamanism there are multiple ecstasy's techniques: along with the trance (the "soul journey") there is the "enlightenment", which an *in loco* "journey" obtained with the "assistant spirits". In both cases, the depth of the trance depends on the shamanic action, and it is recognized by those present. Marazzi also mentions the possession, which in Siberia and Central Asia is mostly benign and approved, however voluntary possession is rare. It is also noted that in Siberia there is a lack of distinction between natural and supernatural, animated, and unanimated worlds: all things have two kinds of soul, one is the alter-ego of the person, the other is a group of corporeal and vital souls. After the death, these souls can either fly to the Sky or wander on the Earth¹⁹. In this new definition, Eliade's framework is critically reformulated. However, the "technique of ecstasy" is reframed as a mean to an end: a shaman is not who master a practice, but a mediator with the deities. The very signature art of the shaman, the "soul journey", is one tool among others, though the most important. Moreover, the role of the shaman as a "spiritual elite" protecting the "group soul" is partially undermined by the definition as supernatural intermediary and the emphasis on the concrete tasks.

Another, alternative revision can be found "Outlines of Korean Shamanism" (2019) by Jinseok Seo. Seo synthesizes various past approaches and definitions, particularly those of Merete D. Jakobsen, Thomas DuBois, Richard McBride, and Anna-Leena Siikala. These definitions were listed as follows:

- Jakobsen: the shaman is a master of spirits in traditional societies, in charge of communication with spirits.
- DuBois: the shaman is an expert guide or authority in cosmic journeys, acts at client or community requests, negotiates or effects cures, divinations, psychopomp's activities, secures luck or misfortune.

¹⁹ Marazzi (2009), 9-24

- McBride: Shamanism is a belief in an imperceptible world inhabited by supernatural beings, responsive only to the shaman. The shaman is a religious specialist who uses magic for curing sickness, performs divination and to control events.
- Siikala: the basis of Shamanism is the belief system according to which the human difficulties are caused by representatives of the spirit world and can be eliminated with the help of benevolent spirits. The Siberian shaman is a mediator with the supernatural world, the classic Northern Asian shaman is characterized by an ecstatic technique based on an altered state of consciousness reached through drumming, rhythmic singing. This trance is needed to contact the spirit helpers and communicate with the spirit world. A shaman may also take the helpers' form to journey to the supernatural world.

The common points pointed by Seo are the ability to communicate with the spirit and being the messengers for the other world. Trance and possession are not the ends but a mean, tools, and not so essential: in the Korean case, the trance can be also described as “extreme excitation”, and it is experienced by the client too. The difference between a shaman, a priest, a witch, a healer, and other roles tied to magic depends on social agreements, the main difference between a shaman and other practitioner is that a shaman acts on behalf of other people or the whole society. Another difference is recognition: while a sorcerer is usually ordained and given some sort of authority, a shaman may either lack one or fulfill other roles in absence of an official religion. It is the shaman's authority given by the initiation that leads the community to seek for their help, and this leads to another shaman's characteristic: a religious charisma. Making a final summary of the question, Seon concisely defines a shaman as “an individual with religious charisma authorized by the technique of ecstasy who conducts rituals and ceremonies in the traditionally acknowledged way”²⁰. Despite the common start from Eliade's work, Seo's definition is broader and more comprehensive than the Marazzi's one. Here too the shaman is a role (charismatic, supernatural mediator) whose “technique of ecstasy” is a mean-tool, which grants him or her a religious status, and this accords the Eliade's description of the shaman as a “spiritual

²⁰ Seo Jinseok (2019), 28-49

élite”. However again, ecstasy is a way of achieving an end, only indirectly source of authority, and not a core characterization as Eliade intended.

2.1.3 *Testing Boundaries – Archaeology*

Another date update came with further archaeological studies. In her *Shamanism and the origin of states*, Sarah Nelson (2019) conducted a study on the relationship between Shamanism and statecraft. Nelson defines as shaman a specialist who serves the community, has access to spirits, can contact them (by “journey” or possession), and practice healing and divination. A shaman has either an ecstatic vision of the spirits or a direct knowledge of them. Nelson identifies *wu* and shamans, hypothesizing that most Chinese shamans were female for linguistic reason: the term *wu* is both female and unmarked. She identified many elements such mask, costume, burial, and animal figures in the neolithic East Asia which are attributable to shamans. The trance was given by rhythm and dancing, and maybe alcohol too, extending Eliade’s theory on drums and music. Nelson claims that female shamans had access to power by kinship (ancestor cult), ideology, charisma, “theatre of power” (spirit control, divination, ritual war) and wealth (sacrifices). While Shamanism is tied with the environment, animism, totemism, and ancestor worship are variable: frequently paired but independent aspects²¹.

This reconstruction was then updated by Graeber and Wengrow in *The Dawn of Everything* (2022), which fundamentally is a summary of state of the art in Anthropology’s field. Graeber and Wengrow primarily address hierarchies and States, but touches other arguments like the gender roles, the labor division, the perception of diversity etc. Graeber and Wengrow report the case of paleolithic fancy burial, hosting “extreme individuals”: both male and female figures characterized by physical or psychological deformations (“eccentricity”), which was the basis of their charisma. During the hunting season, these figures were likely shamans, both respected and feared for their powers. However, it is unlikely that they may have gained any durable authority²².

²¹ Nelson (2019) 3-5, 51-138

²² Graeber & Wengrow (2022), 101-143, 240-452. A similar observation was also made by Bruno and Walraven: Bruno & Walraven (2006), 2-11

In these last cases, Eliade definition was again expanded to be more comprehensive. Nelson, however, freely translates the term *wu* as “shaman”, where Eliade accepted the designation with many reserves²³. Another divergence is the problematization of mental illness and its relationship with Shamanism: while Eliade rightly pointed out that Shamanism may have had a liminal relationship with Shamanism, but this does not authorize to pathologizes the phenomenon²⁴, Graeber and Wengrow point out how the, in prehistoric societies, divergence from the norm was valorized in specific contexts / conditions. Therefore, while Eliade had the merit of challenging the stigma, the issue was framed in a problematic way, largely due to the lack of adequate evidence.

Summarizing the state of the art on definition of shaman into a briefer definition we have:

A shaman is a spirit mediator, a specialist or a ritualist who employs altered states of consciousness for the client or the community, using a range of ecstatic techniques, as well as spirit control, exorcism, and magic.

Shamanism is either a kind of polytheistic belief system, or an activity, probably dating back to the Prehistory.

This definition seems comprehensive enough. However, the variations are many, and cannot be ignored: for example, the same cultural aspect of “spirit mediation” is classified either as a social role (a shaman *is the spirit mediator* for the community), as social duty (a shaman is he or she *who performs spirit mediation for* the community) or even a tool-technique (a shaman is he or she who does this and that *by the mean of spirit mediation*). The definition of the entire phenomenon, Shamanism, is even more problematic: in the case of Korean Shamanism, Seo analyzed a range of possible designation, including religion²⁵, while, for the Siberian societies, Boileau also used the description “activity that can be exercised by everybody”²⁶. Even aspects like ancestor worship and totemist are either listed as strictly linked belief systems, or independent cultural-religion aspects, depending on the author and the case.

²³ Other scholars outright rebuke the definition: see the next paragraph.

²⁴ Eliade (2005), 42-52

²⁵ Seo Jinseok (2019), 33-50

²⁶ Boileau (2002), 352-4

According to the comparativist method described by Detienne (2008), if there is a discrepancy within a category, the nature of the said category must be problematized²⁷. This kind of analysis was made by Michael (2015), who made both a genealogy and a deconstruction of use of the term “shaman” in his comparativist study on the *wu* phenomenon.

In his methodological analysis, prof. Michael rejects the vision of shamanism as a “unitary and unchanging category throughout all societies in archaic times”, preferring a more flexible definition. Shamanism *per se* is a useful term, but not a comprehensive frame, as local terminology for addressing local phenomena (*angatkutism*, *payeism*, *wuism* etc.) should be preferred. Being that now unpractical, a viable method should at least be the recognition of the Shamanism’s diversity, as well as stop referring to a “mysterious, timeless” shaman and focus to the “specific”, real shamans. He concludes saying that the presence of shamanism in a society is recognizable by “their representations of a séance event of direct contact (possession) or face-to-face communication (spirit journey) between human beings and bodiless beings for the benefit of the community”²⁸.

This final assessment is not shared by Winkelman (2023): the scholar sees the definition as too broad. Moreover, he rejects the “cultural relativism” which “might suggest that it makes sense to let each society define shamanism”. His alternative is the cross-cultural analysis: “cross-cultural research found a consistent pattern of characteristics associated with the ritualists in foraging societies, and these features correspond closely to the core concepts identified by diverse scholars researching the nature of shamanism”. It must be noted that the Winkelman stresses the difference between a “shaman” and other roles: “While each category shows variation, the differences among them are clear and useful [...] the differences between Shamans and Priests are clear, not arbitrary.”²⁹.

While it may be true that Michael’s general definition of Shamanism is too broad, he never proposed to let each culture define what is and is not a “shaman”, taking it away from the academic inquiry. On the contrary, he even recognizes the phenomenon as transcultural (“Shamanism therefore is not culture specific”). Thus, Michael’s stance

²⁷ Detienne (2008), 22-79

²⁸ Michael (2015), 658-666

²⁹ Winkelman (2023), 28-30

cannot be properly qualified as cultural relativism. His position about the usefulness of strict definition may be problematic (“It does not exist as a natural piece of human behavior demonstrating essential qualities to be discovered and cataloged, as if the burden of interpretation dissipates of itself by simply calling something shamanism”), however his solution to this “anti-nominalism” is not renunciate to the burden of definition (“shamanism exists as a conceptual space in which are placed collected representations of various activities and beliefs expressing specific relationships between humans and bodiless beings, and it is precisely these representations that demand interpretation”)³⁰. In this sense, Michael’s position is justified even in Winkelman’s terms.

Winkelman’s definition demands multiple ad hoc qualifications to account for cases that do not neatly fit within his categorizations. In fact, the reasons why he refuses to classify the ancient *wu* as even as a derived, borderline form of shaman can be partially applied to Korean shamans too: absence of soul flight/journey, soul loss, animal transformation and death-and-rebirth. At the same time, he had to admit that *wu* has some feature of a shaman (“The *xi* did maintain some of the Shaman’s core ASC activities”), but, since they are not exactly the ones listed before, he refuses again to recognize the aporia. At the core, this strict definition is based on the Siberian Shamanism’s model³¹: an approach clearly derived from Eliade and shared with Boileau but rejected by Michael. Thus, while the approach of defining a shaman in contrast to other figures is reasonable, and the will of clarification is useful and correct, the main definition of shaman is problematic. This raises the methodological question of how such an impasse might be resolved.

We can again unpack the problem in three categories:

- **General minimum definition:** what a shaman is transculturally and in contrast to other figures.
- **Specificities recognition:** what a shaman is within each culture, both in academic terms and in each culture’s term. This is a way to comprehend even those cases of Shamanism that are borderline within Shamanism itself, e.g., we can take two sides of the spectrum³²:

³⁰ Michael (2015), 665

³¹ Winkelman (2023), 13-4

³² For a discussion about these two cases, see the next paragraphs.

- some cases of *wu*, probably not strictly shamans but with clear shamanic characteristics.
 - some cases of Korean shaman's sub-categories, technically shamans or borderline shamanic-like ritualists but not recognized as such by Korean shamans' themselves.
- **Borderline / limit cases:** if there are limit cases in a definition, such as a contextual overlap of roles and figures, what can those cases tell us about the general definition? Can it improve the comprehension of the phenomenon?

The first point is an acknowledgment of Winkelman's call for clarity and distinctness, in shared by Michael too ("Coming to an understanding of the archaic shaman, it is first of all necessary to grapple with the contours and limits of who can qualify for inclusion in the category")³³. The second point is the acknowledgement of the challenge raised by the two scholars: formulating a comprehensive category that could be flexible enough to encompass the variety. The addition of the "culture's own terms" caveat is a consequence of taking the problem as a whole: while it useless let each culture decide what a shaman is and is not, this does not mean that is useless taking those definitions into account. In fact, is a duty and a key method of the anthropologists to "think like a savage"³⁴. The last point is a way to maintain a methodological flexibility, avoiding the problems that prof. Michael pointed out.

We can therefore reformulate the definition of what a shaman is in these new terms:

A shaman is a socially recognized figure who employs altered states of consciousness for the client or the community, using a range of ecstatic techniques, as well as spirit control, exorcism, and magic. Contextually, a shaman may contrast or overlap with other figures like the healer, the priest, a sorcerer, or the witch (if present). Each culture has its own form of shaman and Shamanism, defined by their cultural traits. The definition of a shaman within each society is a tool that could be used to recognize borderline cases within Shamanism itself.

Summarizing:

³³ Michael (2015), 658

³⁴ Detienne (2008), 36-40

- A shaman is a socially recognized figure who employs altered states of consciousness for the client or the community, using a range of ecstatic techniques, as well as spirit control, exorcism, and magic.
- A shaman generally contrasts with other figures like the healer, the priest, a sorcerer, or the witch. However, depending on the specific culture and period, overlaps are also possible.
- Each culture has its own form of Shamanism, within the general category of Shamanism.
- Borderline case of Shamanism can be underlined using the definition of what a shaman is and isn't given by both each culture and the general definition.

2.3. *Wu, Fangshi and the like*

We will now test the precedent definition with the case of the Chinese culture. Because the Chinese term *wu* 巫 is found in both endonym and the academic definitions of the Korean Shamanism, this excursus helps us for our specific case as well. Defining what a *wu* is, therefore, is both a limit-case test and a propaedeutic step in this study.

As prof. Michael succinctly outlined³⁵, there are four main academic positions on the Shamanism's phenomenon and the Chinese History:

1. Shamanism is “a pervasive and archaic feature”, central in the “formation of Chinese religion and politics”.
2. Shamanism as a “non-systematic and eclectic” tradition, outside of “the formation of Chinese religion and politics”. Religion and politics “that may or may not have roots” in Shamanism.
3. Shamanism did not ever “played a substantial role in Chinese religion and politics”, but “it may have existed in archaic times”.
4. Agnosticism: neither a fully affirmation nor denial of the existence of Shamanism in China.

These positions are particularly focused on the *wu* figures and the like from Shang dynasty 商 (c.a 1600-1045 BCE) to Han dynasty 漢 (202 BCE-220 CE). However, here other, later phenomena will be considered as a further litmus test.

³⁵ Michael (2015), 674-5

First, what is the etymon of *wu*? There are several proposals³⁶, we can summarize as follows:

- As for the *Shouwen jiezi* 說文解字 by Xu Shen 許慎 (ca. 58-148 CE): an invoker / ritualist posturing to make gods descend, with the character itself resembling a human figure dancing, agitating their sleeves.
- “To possess”, “to dance”, hence “invoker”, “imprecator” (= 舞).
- “To divine with achillea”, hence “(a type of) diviner” (= *shi* 筮).
- originally designated a tool of divination, made by two pieces of jade.
- Depiction of an instrument used to draw circles and squares, figures with magical meaning (see the depictions of Fuxi 伏羲 and Nüwa / Nügua 女媧). Thus “mathematic who understand the heaven, sages, wise men”.
- Depiction of the altar stand possessed by the spirit of the four quarters.
- An early borrowing from Old Persian *maguš*.

Etc, In the end, the etymology is unclear and functions more as a Rorschach test for scholars rather than a useful data³⁷. The question with the archaic *wu* and its male counterpart (*xi* 覡) is usually divided in *wu* in Shang dynasty and *wu* in Zhou and Han dynasties.

Shang dynasty *wu*: the term in this period is ambiguous and has a variety of meanings. In the oracular scripts it either designates a spirit, a kind of sacrifice, a form of divination using achillea (巫 = 筮), a region, or a population, or king of diviner. They are described as court ritualists with high intelligence tasked in divination and some form of sacrifice, likely tied to the said divination. It is disputed if they ever utilize altered states of consciousness: later texts describe a *wu* activity as a possession and, because of this familiarity with the gods, it is likely they had a high social status. In this period the *wu* is subordinated to the king. However, the monarch does not seem having *per se* the role of a shaman or a priest³⁸.

³⁶ Boileau (2002): 354-6; Nelson (2019), 5-7; Williams (2020), 161; Winkelman (2023), 9-11.

³⁷ Michael (2015), 652-3; Nelson (2019), 5-7

³⁸ Ruth H. Chang (2000), 1-10; Boileau (2002), 354-5; Michael (2015), 671-7; Nelson (2019), 81-99; Graeber & Wengrow (2022), 423-452; Winkelman (2023), 11-5

Zhou and Han dynasties *wu*: in this period the *wu* became more specialized, both depending on the functions and on the genders. In *Guoyu* 國語 they appear as positive figures:

Guoyu 國語, Discourses of Chu B 楚語下

古者民神不雜。民之精爽不攜貳者，而又能齊肅衷正，其智能上下比義，其聖能光遠宣朗，其明能光照之，其聰能聽徹之，如是則明神降之，在男曰覲，在女曰巫。

In ancient times, people and gods did not intermingle. [At that time] there was people who were so bright, loyal, and were able to act in reverence and rectitude that their understanding enabled them to sight what lies above and below, and their sanctity enabled them to illuminate what is distant and profound, their clarity to enlighten it, and their hearing to penetrate through it. Therefore, the gods (*mingshen*) descent into them³⁹. [Those people,] if male, they were called *xi*, if female, they were called *wu*.

Then, the author explains how other figures came from the employment of these *wu* and *xi* in the court: the “invocators” *zhu* 祝 by a specialization in State rituals, and the “official of the lineage rites” *zong* 宗 by a specialization in family rituals. However, this text mostly reflects the thinking of the Warring State period 戰國時代 (c.a 475-221 BCE) and must not be taken as historically fateful. Other texts from the Spring and Autumn period 春秋時代 (c.a 770-481 BCE) to Western Han dynasty 西漢 (202-8 BCE) does not share this favorable attitude. In any case, the *wu xi* function seems to be closer to that of officers rather than of a Siberian-type shaman⁴⁰.

³⁹ Or “respond to them”: *jiang* 降 could also have the specific meaning of a deity response to or within a ritual, not necessarily a body possession *scriptu sensu*. See Schimmelpfennig (2024), also cf. Kósa (2003), 280-4 and *ivi* §§5.1 and 5.4.

⁴⁰ Ruth H. Chang (2000), 2; Boileau (2002), 356-8

Other information can be gathered from the *Rites of Zhou* or *Zhouli* 周禮 and other commentaries. According to these texts there was a role distinction between *wu* male and female:

- The *xi* (“male *wu*” *nanwu* 男巫 in the *Zhouli*) had the following roles: head of sacrifices for the mountain and river gods; in winter, they make offering for the great temple hall, maybe linked to exorcisms; in spring, they protect the Country from disease; when king offers his condolences, they precede him along with “invocators” *zhu*. The commentaries add that a “male *wu*” oversaw healing with their unique abilities, different from those used by physicians (*yi* 醫).
- The *wu* (“female *wu*” *nüwu* 女巫 in the *Zhouli*) had the following roles: head of ablutions and anointing during exorcisms; when queen offers his condolences, they precede her along with “invocators” *zhu*; in case of great calamities, they pray, sing and wail.

Both male and female *wu* were probably hired depending on the performances, as their number in rituals varies in the *Zhouli*. Their activity was under the supervision of the *siwu* 司巫 and the *shiwu* 師巫, who likely were not *wu* themselves. During the sacrifices to mountain and river gods, they were under the *xiaozongbo* 小宗伯 and the *dazongbo* 大宗伯 officials. According to Boileau (2002), in both cases their activities seem inauspicious and followed this scheme:

	Inauspicious event	Disease	Funeral
<i>Wu</i>	Performs exorcism / prays / get sacrificed	Expels evil spirits	
King / kingdom / patient	Kingdom is protected	Patient is healed	King / king’s family is protected

This scheme is more evident in the *Classic of Rites* or *Liji* 禮記, and in the *Commentary of Zou* or *Zuozhuan* 左傳, according to which a cripple and a female *wu* were sacrificed

to end the droughts⁴¹. This may be tied to the other female *wu* activity: sexually enticing the water god to bring rain. Inauspiciousness is what links droughts, diseases, and funerals, and *wu* were considered themselves a source of inauspicious events. This is exemplary demonstrated in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, chapter *Yingdiwang* 應帝王, when it is said that a *wu* in the state of Zheng 鄭 (806-375 BCE) made people run away by telling them their future⁴².

The tie with the droughts and inauspiciousness seems derived from their habit of dwelling in the wilderness, and in mulberry trees' field specifically. The wilderness is the territory out of civilization, but why mulberries? This tree is associated with death in the *Book of Etiquette and Rites* or *Yili* 儀禮, while in other context is clearly linked with droughts⁴³, and, in the *Shijing* 詩經, there is a connection to sexual disorder too. This last element shows again how the female *wu* were tied with the sexual enticing of the water gods using their nudity, a characteristic later censored by the new moral codes⁴⁴.

Winkelman (2003) offers another reconstruction based on the social functions⁴⁵:

- The “official” or “bureaucratic *wu*” *siwu* 司巫: emerged with symbiosis with the tribal élite during the Zhou dynasty, to which followed an institutionalization into priestly roles. Thus, “official *wu*” is a category that includes many professional *wu*: “male *wu*” *nanwu* 男巫; “female *wu*” *nüwu* 女巫; “manager of *wu*” *siwu* 司巫; “officer” *shiwu* 師巫; “instructor of *wu*” *wushi* 巫師; “medium” *wuheng* 巫恆 / *wushu* 無數; “temple official” *zong* 宗; “invocator” *zhu* 祝 and “great invocator” *dazhu* 大祝. Their role was managing the ancestral rituals using sacrifices rather than altered states of consciousness. They were paired with other officials, tasked with the ritual vessels. They also accompanied other ritualists with dancing during the rainmaking rites. They also participated in rites against calamities. They were appointed by the government and attached to the royal clan and their rituals were heavily

⁴¹ Probably an old Shang ritual.

⁴² Boileau (2002), 358-369, 371-5; Michael (2015), 671-7; Kim Staci (2002), 140-2

⁴³ E.g.: the foundation myth of Shang, the Fusang “Fu mulberry” 扶桑 tree in the Ten Suns myth etc.

⁴⁴ Boileau (2002), 369-375

⁴⁵ Winkelman (2003), 11-24

systematized. Their position depended on natural skills and knowledge, derived from study and training⁴⁶.

- The “commoner *wu*” *minwu* 民巫: professional class of the late Zhou period, involved in healing, praying, blessing and in protection against disasters. They were also skilled in divination, used to determinate the cause of illness and other misfortunes. They took part in ritual for the ghosts, animals, and natural forces for the sake of the families. It was a family profession, in which members were selected by a “divine illness”. They had prestige but not political powers, organizations, or privileges.
- The “female *wu*” *wuwang* 巫尪 appeared during the Warring States and lasted until the Han dynasty. They were involved in rainmaking rituals, funerals, healing, and divination, and were appointed by the royal court. Their power came from the descend of the gods in them, and their contribution to the court depended on their divination activities. Despite this, they were usually of low social status. They had organizations and their training was done in groups.
- The “wicked *wu*” *wugu* 巫蛊: this malevolent characterization emerged during the centralization under Qin 秦 (221-206 BCE) and Han dynasties, as *wu* were more frequently opposed by official ritualists mainly Confucians and Daoists. Because of these persecutions, the *wu* of this period were relegated to low social classes. Witchcraft and poisoning to harm others was possible for other *wu*, but not their primal task, as in the *wugu* case. Their malevolent activities were performed during the nighttime and dependent on personal interests of the client (revenge, search for wealth or power). *Wugu* magic was illegal and these *wu* were usually executed if captured.

Prof. Michael too noticed how the distinction between “bureaucratic” and “commoner” *wu* holds until the end of the Han dynasty. However, he partially contests the very category of “bureaucratic *wu*” as a specialization of a single shamanic-like role: “If one assumes the universal presence of shamans in archaic societies, then the next step in the developmental path posits the emergence of other religious functionaries directly derived from the shaman [...] There is also a more insidious version of this developmental line: shaman → shaman-priest → priest, or even shaman

⁴⁶ This description is clearly based on the *Guoyu*: see before.

→ shaman-king → king.” In general, prof. Michael is skeptical the existence of a inherit connection between Shamanism and political power⁴⁷.

The Chu 楚 (c.a 1030-223 BCE)’s *wu*:

Following prof. Michael position, we will take the Chu culture and polity as unique and distinct from their northern counterpart, the Zhou dynasty. In fact, this southern kingdom was virtually an empire of its own, having absorbed sixty smaller kingdoms. This situation lasted until religio-cultural imperialism of Zhou took over the region. Therefore, the depiction of the “Chinese” religion as a monolith was made by the Zhou (and the Han) *a posteriori*⁴⁸.

A glimpse of the religious culture of these regions is considered being preserved in the “Nine Songs” (*Jiu Ge* 九歌) of the *Chuci* 楚辭 anthology. These songs were compiled by Han literati and, probably because of this, they generally resemble Han sacrificial hymns⁴⁹. Except for the last two songs, this text narrates the relationship between a *wu* and natural spirits as well as ecstatic flights to heaven and the underworld⁵⁰.

Mark of these poems is their ambiguity: many ancient commentators such as Wang Yi 王逸 (89-158) and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) already noticed how difficult is to tell apart when it is a *wu* speaking and when it is the spirit speaking, and if the recurrent term *ling* 靈 refers either to a deity, the *wu* possessed by them, or even the power that allows the *wu* to be possessed. “Great Unity, Lord of the East” *Donghuang Taiyi* 東皇太一, the very first song, is an example of this ambiguity that puzzled ancient and modern commentators alike. The third song, “Great Controller of Destinies” *Da Siming* 大司命, adds some nuances: here too it is unclear if it is the *wu* or the god speaking, however, it could be in pair with the following poem “Lesser Controller of Destinies” *Shao Siming* 少司命, as both gods are birth-and-death deities. In this song appear the term “*ling* rope” *lingyi* 靈衣, glossed by commentaries as “cloud rope”

⁴⁷ Michael (2015), 658, 670-7

⁴⁸ Michael (2015), 667-8. This position is shared with Williams (2020), 148-9

⁴⁹ Williams (2020), 147-150

⁵⁰ Kósa (2003), 278-280; Michael (2015), 652-5

yunyi 雲衣: this may look confusing, but in other poems clouds and divinities are strictly associated. In the poem “Lord of the East” *Dongjun* 東君 appears a term that will be very influential in the later times: “protector of the *ling*” “*ling*-guardian” *lingbao* 靈保. Ancient commentaries make it in pair with the exorcist figure of the “(master) who sees the directions” *fangxiang(shi)* 方相(氏), while modern commentators also see a parallel with the “protector of the dead soul” “representative of the dead” *shenbao* 神保. The relationship with this last figure is unclear: Kósa (2003) states that the *shenbao* represented the spirits of the dead while the *lingbao* the natural spirits; on the other hand, Andreini, Scarpari (2009), and Paolillo (2014) identifies both with the “representative of the dead”⁵¹. Some elements share more similarities with the Zhou Warring States period beliefs, such as the conceptions of soul-spirit: in the “Nine Songs” appears many technical terms like *shen* 神, *hun* 魂, *po* 魄 and *gui* 鬼, with *ling* associated to them. In this context, the *ling* is either as an aspect of the *shen* or designating a mountain-rain god⁵². Some sort of *hun-po* duality seem to exist in the songs, but not as systematic as in the later Han period. Inside the *Chuci*, out of “Nine Songs” chapter, it is also reported a song that parallels with the *fu* 復 ritual of the *Classic of Rites*: the “Summons to the Soul” *Zhaohun* 招魂, where the “thearch” Di 帝 is prayed for the return of a dead soul⁵³.

We can now make a preliminary summary on the ancient *wuism*: are these examples of “Shamanism”? Again, this depends on the author:

Regarding Zhou and Han *wu*, Boileau notice how these figures are, like Siberian shamans, “seducers of the forces of nature responsible for the well-being of the group”, however the hierarchical position regarding both society and nature (rain gods) and the overall association with misfortune make them closer to sorcery-witchcraft; Michael identifies Zhou *wu* as shamans, competing with central authorities. Then, the shamanic element was gradually lost with institutionalization. In this description, “bureaucratic shamans” were an intermediate stage of *wu*, “whose activities are not subject to liturgical systematization under priests or rulers”; Winkelman categorically refutes any

⁵¹ Kósa (2003), 280-6; Andreini & Scarpari (2009), 85; Paolillo (2014), 55-9; Williams (2020), 149-161

⁵² In the song “The Mountain Spirit” *Shangui* 山鬼, the mountain spirit is Lingxiu 靈脩

⁵³ Kósa (2003), 280-6; Williams (2015): 157-161. For a panoramic on the “thearch” Di in Zhou and Han dynasties, see Ruth H. Chang (2000), 12-21

comparison: *wu* were religious ritualists, more specifically “Medium, Healer, Priest or even Sorcerer/Witch”. Only in the case of the “commoner *wu*” the specific definition of “agricultural shaman” can be accepted⁵⁴.

On the other side, regarding Chu *wu*, Kósa (2003) identifies the *wu* with the *ling(zi)* 靈(子) within the “Nine Songs”, a role associated with rainmaking, magical drums and other “shamanic activities”, thus, fundamentally accepting the identification of *wu* and shamans; Williams (2020) identifies the *wu* in the *Chuci* as a different kind of *wu* from those of Zhou dynasty, as the second ones are a generic ritualists, while the first ones are closer to the practices of shamans. He also argues that “perhaps the shamanistic interplay of human and divine is exactly the purpose of the poems, and the fluidity of speakers ought to be seen as a feature of the poem and its religious context”, a feature that gains “significance in light of the belief in a multiplicity of souls”⁵⁵.

Here, we can resume the definition of “shaman” of the last section:

A shaman is a socially recognized figure who employs altered states of consciousness for the client or the community, using a range of ecstatic techniques, as well as spirit control, exorcism, and magic. Contextually, a shaman may contrast or overlap with other figures like the healer, the priest, a sorcerer, or the witch (if present). Each culture has its own form of shaman and Shamanism, defined by their cultural traits. The definition of a shaman within each society is a tool that could be used to recognize borderline cases within Shamanism itself.

The first fundamental feature, the altered states of consciousness, is clearly present in the average Chu *wu*, while it may lack in some cases of Zhou *wu*. Therefore, it seems that *wu* is a generic term for a range of ritualists, and the term was clearly used with great flexibility, as Williams and Winkelman claim. However, part of these ritualists *do* seem to share many features with shamans, and this cannot be ignored.

The other feature is the relationship between the hypothetical shaman and authority: *wu* seem to have been related to institutional roles. This points out to an even more generic ritualist role, and at the same time to consider more carefully each case. In fact,

⁵⁴ Boileau (2002), 374-8; Michael (2015), 669-685; Winkelman (2023), 27-31. Winkelman position is shared with Paolillo (2014), 22.

⁵⁵ Kósa (2003), 278-291; Williams (2020), 149-168

if in some cases the employment of “shamanic” techniques is out of question, it is not the integration of these figures within a bureaucracy.

The third element, the internal perception, is here the culprit of this confusion: due to this free use of the term *wu* in ancient sources, it is sometimes difficult to point out when and where an institutionalized *wu* is not a *wu* anymore. Boileau is more “gradualist”, accepting an ephemeral intermediate stage, while Winkelman reframes the problem, seeing other ritualist roles within the general *wu* category.

Making a preliminary summary:

- From the Shang to Han dynasties, *wu* designed a generic category of ritualists who partly shared some core shamanic features, depending on the period and type. Some types of *wu* can be classified as shaman, other ones cannot. Within the Chu states, these shamanic features were more evident.
- A *wu* may be institutionalized, depending on the period and the role.
- Ancient sources are opaque regarding how and when an institutionalized *wu* isn’t regarded as *wu* anymore. This makes more problematic formulating a distinction between shamans and *wu*, shamanic *wu* and non-shamanic *wu*, or even between *wu* and non-*wu*.

A way to get around this impasse is stretching the definition to its limit. Therefore, in the next section we will encounter two limit case pairs: the first are undoubtedly non-shamans who had close ties with shamanic techniques, the second one are clearly shaman-like ritualist embedded within non-shamanic institutions.

2.2.1 *Who is a shaman? / Who is NOT a wu?*

The first case is that of the *fangshi* 方士, a term translated in many ways: “masters of techniques”, “master of methods”, “master of recipes”, “masters of directions” and so on. *Fangshi* were central figures in the proto-Daoism, particularly for the birth of the Huanglao Daoism 黃老 between the Qin 秦 (221-206 BCE) and Han dynasty. Seiwert (2003) states they were precursors of many Daoist practices like “leaving the corpse and attaining a transformed immortal body (*xing jie* 形解)”, alchemy, recalling spirits of dead. They were also experts of the yin-yang cosmology and the Five Phases (*wuxing* 五行). During the frequent visits to the court, many famous *fangshi* presented

texts which became fundamental for Daoism: during the Han dynasty, Gan Zhongke 甘忠可 presented the *Scripture of the Great Peace* or *Taipingjing* 太平經, allegedly transmitted to him by the “Master of Vermillion Essence” Chijing zi 赤精子 and Gong Chong 宮崇 presented the *Scripture of the Great Peace with Green Headings* or *Taiping qing ling shu* 太平清領書, transmitted by his master Gan Ji 于吉 (d. 200). The Yellow Turban Rebellion (184-205) and the Way of the Celestial Masters (Tianshidao 天師道) will later come from this movement. According to Seiwert, the origins of *fangshi* doctrines lays in immemorial time, among popular shamans and priests. This last position is even expanded by Andreini and Scarpari (2009) who defines *fangshi* practices as “pseudo-shamanic” due to their ability to directly communicate with the Immortals. This description is shared by other scholars like Paolillo (2014) and Pregadio (2018)⁵⁶.

Lingbao school 靈寶派 is another example of non-shamanic movement which may have some shamanic roots. This ritualist school centered around the recitation of scriptures, talismans, fasting, and meditation. Lingbao school synthesizes doctrines from Way of the Celestial Masters, Way of Highest Purity (Shanqing 上清) and Buddhism. The school lineage comes from the Ge Xuan 葛玄 (164–244)’s Ge clan. Many innovations were brought by this school: the adoption of the title “Ritual Master” *fashi* 法師 from Buddhism (Skr.: *dharmabhāṇaka*); the systematization of Daoist monasticism and Daoist monasteries (*daoguan* 道觀/ 道館), from previous Celestial Masters’s practices; the shift in fasting (*zhai* 齋) from prerequisite for sacrifices to a standalone ritual, based on the Buddhist *uposatha*; a heavy use of Buddhist terms, formulae, structures and concept within the sacred text of the school, text akin to sutra even in their conception and use, etc.⁵⁷ Despite this heavy institutionalization, the name of the school (“Numinous Treasure”) likely came from the “*ling*-guardian” “representative of the dead” of the Chu State that we have seen before⁵⁸, however this affiliation is no longer recognizable out of few practices.

⁵⁶ Seiwert (2003), 15-80; Andreini & Scarpari (2009), 13-55; Paolillo (2014), 22; Pregadio (2018), 295

⁵⁷ Zürcher (1980); Seiwert (2003), 52-80; Andreini & Scarpari (2009), 85; Bokenkamp (2011); Pregadio (2013), 663-9; Paolillo (2014), 55-9; Lü, Pengzhi (2022); Sun Qi (2024)

⁵⁸ Kósa (2003), 284-5; Andreini & Scarpari (2009), 85; Paolillo (2014), 55-9

What can be deduced from these examples? First is that, in ancient China, the employment ecstatic technique is a necessary but not sufficient criterium for defining the local Shamanism (and when a *wu* is a shaman), as such techniques may have been used even by non-shamans. Second point is the importance of institutionalization, which acts as a clearer barrier between a shamanic figure and a non-shamanic figure. When a shamanic-like figure no longer recognizes their peers, a division already happened: Celestial Masters actively persecuted popular, local shamans when they gained power, while, in a similar situation, Mongolian *böö-nar* and *udgad* did not persecute other shamans, or other cults in general⁵⁹. On the other hand, this barrier does not exclude the coexistence of shamanic-like figure *within* the same Chinese institutions, as long it is perceived as an organic part of the whole⁶⁰. These last elements will be shown with the next cases.

The Redheaded masters (*hongtou daoshi* 紅頭道士) are non-ordained folk Daoist ritualists, contrasting but pairing with the Blackheaded masters (*wutou daoshi* 烏頭道士), who are the regular Daoist priests. A Redhead master performs exorcisms, healing, and other rites for the living, but not for the dead, and claims to follow the Zhengyi school 正一道 lineage. This figure partly overlaps with the spirit medium (Tongji 童乩 or Jitong 乩童), which employs trance and possessions. However, usually the Tongji is a separate role, subordinate to that of a Redheaded master. The rituals of this category are not secret, in contrast to their Blackheaded counterparts, on the contrary, their exorcisms have all the characteristics of a theatrical piece set up for the public. Redheaded masters use a secret language for their ceremonies (“voice of the Dao” *daoyin* 道音) and emphasize purity, needed to bring benefits to their clients. It is important to notice that the Redheaded masters often receive a smaller pay compared to their Blackheaded counterparts, and their pantheon seems no older than the Song dynasty 宋 (960-1279) period⁶¹.

The last figure is the Northeastern folk ritualist, particularly of the Liaoning region: “(those who) rides for the immortals” *chuma xian* 出馬仙. These ritualists perform

⁵⁹ Heissig (1980), 1-36; Andreini & Scarpari (2009), 32-55. This criterium is derived from the Graeber and Wengrow’s theorizations about the schismogenesis: Graeber & Wengrow (2022), 69-70

⁶⁰ The perceived coherence criterium is derived from the Detienne synthesis of the Dumezil’s comparative framework: Detienne (2008), 22-79

⁶¹ Pregadio (2013), 145-150, 488-490 & 964-6; Paolillo (2014), 207-215

healing, divination, and exorcism while possessed by animal spirits. This practice is embedded within the so-called “(faith) of the Five Great Families” *wu da jia* 五大家 or, during the Republican Era (1911-1949), “(faith) of the Four Great Clans” *si da men* 四大門. In the first case, the spirit animals (*xianjia* 仙家) are: the fox (*hu* 胡), the weasel (*huang* 黃), the viper (*chang* 常), the hedgehog (*bai* 白), and the grey rat (*hui* 灰); in the second case, the viper is excluded. The nature of the animals is tied to hyper-local customs and beliefs and so is not fixed. Apart from the animal deities, other two kinds of deities are the “heavenly gods” *shangfang shenxian* 上房神仙 and the “underworld gods” *yinxian* 陰仙: the first are the classical Daoist deities, possessing the *chuma xian* to help the people, while the second ones are deceased that became gods through self-cultivation. Along with the “heavenly gods”, there is also a cult of buddhas and bodhisattvas, in fact all these ritualists consider themselves Buddhist. In the practice of the *chuma xian*, the spirit possession and the “soul journey” are the same practice with different specializations: communicating with ancestors is called “passing to the underworld” *guoyin* 過陰, is tied with exorcisms, and few people are now able to do that, while the second practice is the trance, tied with healing. There are two kinds of possession: the “complete unconsciousness” *quanmeng* 全蒙 and the “semi-unconsciousness” *banmeng* 半蒙. In the first possession, the *chuma xian* is completely unaware, in the second one he or she retains some little awareness. While possessed, the *chuma xian* is called “disciple” *dizi* 弟子 and communicates with the ancestors. Communication through dreams is also possible. Each *chuma xian* is selected by the gods through a “divine illness”, either physical or psychiatric, after which the future “disciple” needs to agree to borrow their body to the spirits, usually after consulting another medium. After accepting the role, the *chuma xian* will establish their “shrine” *xiantang* 仙堂 and will take care of the clients’ requests, and the client will pay them as a reward for their ability (there is no fixed prices). This folk belief system is the fruit of a syncretism between the belief of immigrants to the China Northeast and the local Manchu beliefs, as result of the Qing dynasty 大清 (1636-1912) policies. The most evident Manchu elements are the type of ancestor worship (*bolongzi*), the animal-possessed shaman’s figure (*wuwate*), and the fox cult⁶².

⁶² Deng, Qiuju (2014)

2.2.2 *Power and Institutions, a Preliminary Assessment*

These last limit cases show that, in China, a way to tell if a shaman-like figure is closer to a shaman proper is the relationship with the authorities. As said before: institutionalization is a barrier. These two cases also show how, even within a systematic hierarchy, shaman-like figures can survive: in the case of the Redheaded masters, by pairing and being complementary to recognized Daoist priesthood; in the case the *chuma xian*, configuring itself as a grassroots localism independent from any central State authority, if ever present⁶³. This position also allows us to infer two more characteristics: the greater pragmatism of the practices as opposed to the State organized rituals, and some form of marginalization or even liminality as in the case of the Redheaded masters (lack of ordination, lesser pays, intermingling with spirit mediums) and the *chuma xian* (hyper-localism, syncretism, hybridization).

We can now draw the conclusions of this section:

- *Wu* is the terminology traditionally used to describe the shamanic phenomenon in ancient China, however the definition is not always clear.
- Analyzing the ancient sources, it seems that, from Shang to Han dynasties, *wu* designed a generic category of ritualists who partly shared some core shamanic features, depending on the period and type. Some types of *wu* can be classified as shaman, other ones cannot. Within the Chu states, these shamanic features were more evident.
- A *wu* may be institutionalized, depending on the period and the role.
- Ancient sources are opaque regarding how and when an institutionalized *wu* is not regarded as *wu* anymore. Therefore, it is necessary to understand what is to be a shaman in China out of the ancient *wu* case.
- In China, the relationship with the institutional authorities is a way to tell if a *wu* and the like are shamans:
 - When institutionalized, a shaman-like figure tends to gradually lose its shamanic features and to no longer recognize other shaman-like

⁶³ Deng, Qiuju (2014), 81: “In the case of *chuma xian*, the practice represents the locale as being opposed to centralized authorities. The *chuma xian* practice has been prevalent at the grassroots level and never achieved legitimacy on the state level. Hence, it represents a way through which the locals can express and exercise their power as individuals.”

figures. However, some shamanic figures may be retained. The ancient *fangshi* and the Daoist Lingbao school are an example of this process.

- A shamanic-like figure may be integrated within a non-shamanic institution either by pairing or active contrast. The first is the case of the modern Redheaded masters, while the second is the case of the *chuma xian*. These integrated figures are also characterized by marginalization and even liminality.

Now that the existence and condition of Chinese Shamanism are settled, we will discuss the definitions, terms, and characteristics of Korean Shamanism. A shamanism which was compared to the Chinese *wuism* from the ancient times.

2.4. Korean Shamanism

The use of the term *mu* 巫⁶⁴ for translating the native concept of “shaman” in Classical Chinese texts is a practice well attested both in the Peninsula and abroad since ancient time. For example, it is praxis in the *Koryŏsa* 高麗史⁶⁵. As discussed in the previous section, this use was likely flexible, generic and pragmatic. Other native terms for referring to a shaman exist, but they will be discussed later.

In Korean-speaking academia, this use gave rise to two expressions to refer to this phenomenon: *musok* 巫俗, and *mugyo* 巫教.

- *Musok*, “shamanic folklore”, gives more emphasis on the folkloristic aspects. It is a conceptualization of the Korean Shamanism as a set of practices and-or culture, part of the traditional customs and folklore of the Korean people. It is also seen as a different type of culture out the traditional folk education, as in the case of Confucianism or Buddhism.
- *Mugyo*, “shamanic religion, *muism*”, gives more emphasis on the religious aspect. It is used in contrast with Confucianism, highlighting the religious role of the ancient monarchs and the use of the theology inherited by the traditional religions.

⁶⁴ Sino-Korean for the Chinese *wu* 巫 (Middle Chinese *m^{vu}u)

⁶⁵ Suh Young Dae (1992)

These⁶⁶ are the broad definitions. Outside this terminology, there are many other descriptions of Korean Shamanism that works as wider definitions:

Inscribing inside his wider definition of the Shamanism, Eliade was unsure about the collocation of this type of Shamanism, seeing in it both elements of “northern” (Siberian) and “southern” (Chinese, Japanese) elements. He also stressed on the female prevalence among the shamans and the habit of wearing female costumes by male shaman as either a “deterioration” or a “southern influence”⁶⁷.

Bruno and Walraven (2006) see in the Korean Shamanism a particular type of Siberian Shamanism: a Shamanism without a “soul journey” but characterized by the “possession” practice, where the “godly vocation”, in the first phase, is considered a misfortune that could bring death upon candidate’s loved one, if the said candidate is too reluctant. Not to mention that it is also a form of Shamanism that persists in urbanization and State centralization and acts as a cultural undercurrent with influences among all social strata⁶⁸.

Bruno (2018) expanded this definition, enumerating more specificities:

- Female prevalence among both officiants and clients
- Altered state of consciousness (ASC) through dance and music
- Years-long apprenticeship
- Division in “hereditary” and “elective” shamans
- Diffusion within a modern, urban and cosmopolitan society
- Political contradiction: the phenomenon is considered both an expression of the native cultural identity and persecuted as “superstition”

Bruno also problematizes the relationship with Siberian Shamanism, reporting three points of view among Korean scholars:

- Korean Shamanism as an autochthon phenomenon, distinct from the main Siberian Shamanism. This position is motivated by four major points: 1) non-mandatory ectasis among “elective” shamans 2) absence of benign-evil deities’

⁶⁶ Bruno (2018), 466-471; Seo Jinseok (2019), 36-8 & 55-6

⁶⁷ Eliade (2005), 489-490. Eliade was likely mistaken by a male-centric prejudice about the shamans and by the ritual costumes use in Korea, as, during the rituals, female shaman may wear male costumes and act “manly” and vice versa for the male shamans. See the following pages.

⁶⁸ Bruno & Walraven (2006), 2-24

dichotomy 4) spatial orientation (“the other world is not here nor there, nor above nor below, neither on the left nor on the right”)

- Korean Shamanism as both part of East Asian Shamanism and a variation of the Siberian Shamanism, this particularly for the cultural affinities with Mongols, Manchu and Yellow Sea populations.
 - Variation on this position is the point of view of seeing in Korean Shamanism as a middle ground between Siberian and Japanese Shamanism. This position is motivated by five major points: 1) presence of both male and female shamans 2) presence of both “hereditary” and “elective” shamans 3) “godly illness” and 4) vision during such illness as common elements 5) “descending” of Korean gods vs “magic flight” among Tungus.
- Korean Shamanism as embedding of both “northern” and “southern” elements: the “elective” shaman has Siberian traits, while the “hereditary” shaman has “priestly” traits. However, the archetype for both is the Siberian shaman, as both share the following elements: symbolic “sex change”, nightly rites with drums, “black” shaman as a term for those who practice malicious magic.

In all three cases, the Eliade’s model is the main framework⁶⁹.

Probably, the most complete definition was given by Seo Jinseok (2019): after dismissing the definitions of “technique of ecstasy” and “Siberian Shamanism” as non applicable and problematic, respectively, these are the most useful description found by the scholar.

- Folklore: here means the set of practice and-or culture, part of the cultural grammar of the people. Korean Shamanism has aspects of folklore: it pertains spiritual and mental life, it is a knowledge transmitted through generations. It is also folklore intended as the traditional and non-institutional, non-official part of the culture that comprehends “knowledge, understandings, values, attitudes, assumptions, feelings, and beliefs transmitted in traditional forms by word of mouth or by customary examples” (in the terms of Jan Harold Brunvand). As a folklore, Shamanism uses innovation for its own survival.

⁶⁹ Bruno (2018), 466-471

- Religion: quoting Kim Chongsuh, Seo Jinseok defines Korean Shamanism as “the symbolic system of the fundamental teachings that Koreans believe and according to which they act and lead their lives”. Korean Shamanism never became the official religion, even if there was some complementarity between the shaman-priest and the king in ancient Silla 新羅 (57 BCE-935CE). On the other hand, no persecution against it succeeded so far, because it was part of the culture.
- Folk religion: here means the totality of practices and vision existing among the people in parallel to the official ones. In this sense, the popular religion is a spontaneous, creative reimagining of the official culture with both ecclesiastical faith and unorthodox elements. Because the Korean Shamanism has the character of a “religious system composed of collective elements commonly shared among the nation on the basis of human experience” (in the terms of Im Seokje), it can be said has elements of folk religion. Specifically, these characters are:
 - Orally transmitted religious rituals
 - Polytheistic objects of veneration
 - Physical good luck in this world as the most important goal
 - Sorcery as a mean to the end
 - Mixed religious rituals with a multilayered doctrinal structure
 - Emphasis on the personal effort, significant participation to the rituals
- Primitive religion: this definition comes from outdated Positivist viewpoints, and contrasts with eschatological, salvationist and moral “higher religions”. Despite being surpassed per se, this vision highlights some peculiar aspects of Korean Shamanism: it is an earthly belief system which favors any mortal life over the afterworld; its implicit ethics is the maintenance of the social order and welfare; the relationship with the ancestor is a guarantee for this welfare; “salvation” (crisis resolution) is made transcending the individual for the community, as it is in Confucianism; no tension is seen between the worldly and otherworldly, nor the otherworldly is ethically-morally characterized, as its mark is arbitrariness; finally, it is put a great value on popular practice, which is the root of the syncretism within this system.

- Vernacular religion: it is a religion in its historical, contemporary context as an “individual art”, (re)interpretation and (re)negotiation of the sources. It is not based on institutional truth; however, it is different from folk religion: this definition gives more emphasis on the individual, active role rather than on spontaneous communal activities, labelled as tradition a posteriori. Korean Shamanism has these traits, counter-reaction against them, and original contents as well.

The Korean shamans, experiencing themselves alienation from both human and spirit realms, had always a relationship with alienated classes, offering reconciliation with the Heaven, the Earth and the Humans through equality. So, Korean Shamanism stresses solidarity among the oppressed and philanthropy among the oppressors, i.e. a sense of identity and conflict mediation. Shamans are not separated from hierarchies but act together with common people within the ritual, creating an ideological platform for common fights against authorities⁷⁰. This definition is clearly very broad and multifaceted, addressing more aspects of the same cultural phenomenon.

In all these definitions and descriptions, the relationship with authorities takes a considerable role, as it is in the case of the Chinese *wu*. There is a debate about how much were the shamans important in ancient Korean Peninsula, this too in parallel with the *wu* figures in China. However, the contentious point is not *if* they had any active political power (they had), but the relationship with prehistoric and protohistoric kingship. This also gives us an excuse to briefly mention the history of Korean Shamanism:

Eliade was unsure about the origins of Korean Shamanism, seeing in it both “northern” and “southern” elements, as we have seen before⁷¹. A Siberian origin was then proposed by Lee Jung Young (1973), who pointed at the similarities between the native term for native female and male shaman (respectively: *mudang* 巫堂 and *p'ansu* 判數 / *paksu* 博數) and their Siberian and Central Asian counterparts (*udgan* and *baksi*, *balsi* or *bahsih*), however he too was uncertain about the origins. In fact, he said, the term *mudang* could also come from the Chinese *mu* (*wu*) 巫 and *paksu* from “scholar,

⁷⁰ Seo Jinseok (2019), 31-55, 68-72

⁷¹ Eliade (2005), 489-490

academic” *paksa* 博士⁷². The hypotheses evolved, as shown before with the Bruno (2018) study: either the Korean Shamanisms is an autochthon phenomenon, or it is an East Asian variation of the Siberian Shamanism or a form of Siberian Shamanism embedding both “northern” and “southern” traits⁷³. Whatever the exact origin, many Central Asian, Siberian, and even Southeast Asian motifs were found in the ancient foundation myths accounts of the Korean Peninsula⁷⁴.

2.3.1 A Brief (Pre)History

There are few to no sure information about Shamanism in the Korean Neolithic. Allegedly, the mythical king Tan’gun 檀君 / 檀君 may have lived during the Mumun Pottery Period 無文土器時代 (1500-300 BCE), close to the agriculture introduction and the Bronze Age⁷⁵. First documents about this belief and its relationship with power come from the Proto-Three Kingdoms 原三國時代 (trad.ly 108 BCE-57 CE) and Three Kingdom Periods 三國時代 (trad.ly 57 BCE-68 CE), mostly concerning the mythical formation of local royal clans: a common conception is that the fourth mythical king of Silla, Sök T’arhae 昔脫解 (r. 57-80), was a shaman, as demonstrated by one his royal titles, *ch’ach’aung* 次次雄, often translated as such. Therefore, Seo Jinseok (2019) hypothesizes a complementarity between kings and shamans; Bruno and Walraven (2006) hypothesize that the first Korean chieftains-kings were also shamans; and Lee Jung Young (1973) that the first female shamans were princesses of the Three Kingdom period, as reported by the shaman ancestor’s tales. In all these cases, the political power of Shamanism diminished with power centralization and adoption of foreign culture and religions, particularly Buddhism and Confucianism. However, traces of the old shamanic ideology survived until ninth century CE, after the unification. There was some visible alienation from Shamanism among the medieval bureaucrats, but the real collision occurred during the Chosŏn period and the rise of Neoconfucian orthodoxy, at least *de jure*: *de facto*, shamans continued to take

⁷² Lee Jung Young (1973), 135-8

⁷³ Bruno (2018), 466-471; Seo Jinseok (2019), 34-6

⁷⁴ An Byungmin (2021)

⁷⁵ Nelson (2019), 33-7. For an analysis of this nationalistic reimagining of the myth, see Xu Stella (2016), 46-102

part in rainmaking State rites until seventeenth century, and any law against local or private shamans' employment was fruitless⁷⁶.

If the validity of the reconstructions from the middle Three Kingdom period to the Koryŏ kingdom period are out of question, the problem arises when the stories about the mythical kings are taken too seriously: it has to be remembered that the mythical kings' biographies exist nearby many accounts about ancient confederacies (Samhan 三韓, Yemaek 濊貊, Okchŏ 沃沮...) and, even in the founding myths, it happens that the future divine ruler meets these polities (Pak Hyŏkkŏse and the six village chieftains, Chumong and the Modun valley tribes...).

What does that mean, is that, in Korea, the centralized monarchy model arrived later than in China. Therefore, the founding myths involving royal clans' ancestors were likely a renegotiation of the serving specific clan agendas. In fact, we have many sources testifying the collegiality of power among Korean aristocracies in the north, within Koguryŏ 高句麗 (37 BCE-668 CE), and in the south, within Silla. So, if the case of Sŏk T'arhae demonstrates anything about the proto-historical Silla confederacy, is that the Wŏlsŏng Sŏk clan 月城昔氏 was likely tied to Shamanism and had access to the role of temporary ruler, while competing with the Miryang Pak clan 密陽朴氏 and the Kyŏngju Kim clan 慶州金氏 for the same political role. In Koguryŏ, we see the same kind of competition between the many principalities (*pu* 部) that composed the confederacy, such as the Sono 消奴部, the Hwanna 桓那部, the Chuna 朱那部, the Kyeru 桂婁部 and the Yŏnna 椽那部. In both cases, therefore, the king and the shaman were clearly not the same figure, simply because there was neither a unitary nor a hereditary monarchy yet. In the case of Koguryŏ, it is even easier to assume that the role of supreme officiant in the confederal rituals was conflated with the ruler's role by political necessity, but the first role clearly preceded the latter⁷⁷. In a way, this

⁷⁶ Lee Jung Young (1973), 139-159; Walraven (1991); Bruno & Walraven (2006), 2-24; Seo Jinseok (2019), 38-41

⁷⁷ Pankaj (1995), 16-7, 50; Lee Soyoung & Denise Patry Leidy (2013), 31-2; Noh Taedon (2014), 13-122; McBride (2018), 3-32. See also Detienne (2004) and Graeber & Wengrow (2022), 101-143, 240-452. Likely, there were comparable situations within Puyŏ 夫餘 / 扶餘 (c.a. II BCE-494 CE), Paekche 百濟 (18BCE-660CE), Kaya 加倭 (42-562) and T'amna 耽羅 (c.a. 58BCE-1404CE) as well.

demonstrates the Nelson (2019) theory about shaman access to power⁷⁸, at least in Korea.

Another important historical aspect to consider is the relationship between Korean Shamanism and imported religions, mainly Daoism and Buddhism. For simplicity's sake, we can divide at least three stages of development within this relationship:

1. Circa from the Proto-Three Kingdoms to early middle Three Kingdoms periods (second century BCE-fifth / sixth century CE): Shamanism primacy. Foreign religions adopted a shamanic appearance, while Shamanism started adopted foreign gimmicks, especially folk Daoist ones. When Buddhism was adopted by a kingdom, Buddhist sites were built over shamanic sites without necessarily a real change in the object of cult.
2. Circa from the middle Three Kingdoms period to Unification and North-South States periods (fifth / sixth century-ninth / tenth century): early syncretism. Buddhism became native and more autonomous, shamanic deities and practices started being either ancillary or subsumed to Buddhism through identification and replacements with Buddhist ones. However, the process worked in both ways, as shamans started actively adopting Buddhist, Daoist deities and practices too.
3. Circa from Unification and North-South States periods to the end of Koryŏ and early Chosŏn (ninth / tenth century-1392): heavy syncretism, subordination and renegotiation. Shamans gradually lost all their official political power in favor of Buddhist, Daoist and Confucian institutions, but keeping an influence in all social strata. Adoption of Buddhist and Daoist deities and practices became widespread.

Because the lack and ambiguity of the sources, the first approach with Daoism is not entirely clear. Surely, the first wave of Daoism in Korea can be described as "Shamanistic Daoism". As for the Buddhism, it must be kept in mind that the first Buddhism approached by Koreans was the Silk Road's Buddhism: a popular, magic wish-fulfilling, and good fortune-oriented faith not far from what the monk Fotudeng / Fotucheng 浮圖澄 / 佛圖澄 (Buddhaciṅga, ca. 232-348) brought in the Later Zhao

⁷⁸ Nelson (2019), 6-7, 31-8

kingdom 後趙 (319-52). Therefore, there was a competition with shamans, and the adoption of shamanic traits helped the “koreanization” of the foreign religions. A good example of this early encounter are the mountain deities of Silla: either nominally identified with Daoist deities, as the Holy Mother of the Sōndo (“Peaches of Immortality”) Mountain 仙桃聖母, clearly Xiwangmu 西王母, or with Buddhist deities, as in the case of the mountain goddess of the Yōngch’wi-san 靈鷲山, identified with Pyōnjae-ch’ōnnyō 辯才天女, i.e. Sarasvatī⁷⁹.

The second phase shares some continuity with the first one. For example, in Silla, the substitution of native shamanic mountain deities with Buddhist ones became more systematic. Both common and esoteric Buddhism (Milgyo 密教) were heavily used for protection of the State, especially rituals and temple construction involving mandalas, so both subsuming shamanic deities into Buddhist rites and employing Buddhism for shamanic aims. As result, we see the emergence of hybrid deities like the Prince Allakkuk (Sukhāvati) 安樂國太子, whose story is modelled after Buddhist tales, but also presents clearly shamanic features like a heavenly descent and the control over the Flower Fields of The Eastern Paradise (Sōch’ōn-hwajōn / Sōch’ōn-kkotpat 西天花田), an afterlife place tied with the life-death cycle. This tale is still narrated in Cheju’s *Igong-bonp’uri* (二公本풀이), with Allakkuk name corrupted in Hallakkung’i⁸⁰.

The last phase, Buddhism and Daoism gained the primacy in the upper class, shaping the practices of the other social strata. Shamans had some residual political power, as they were appointed by the State and attached to specific State shrines and temple, but they will eventually lose this formal power with the emergence of Neoconfucianism among the palace élites. In this period, we see some ambiguous “blind” or “ignorant monks” (*maengsŭng* 盲僧) expert in wizardry and fortunetelling, clearly shamanistic figures (e.g.: *KRS* XCI, biographies 4, royal clan 2: Prince Wōnjong, Duke Sunan), some shaman venerating a cult leader “as a Buddha” (*KRS* CXIX, biographies 20, officials: Kwōn Hwa) and other one practicing Daoist alchemy (*Tongguk-isangguk-chip* II, Old-style Lüshi, “Lay of the Old Shaman” *Nomu P’yōn*). Reflexes of this

⁷⁹ Grayson (1984); Grayson (1996), 122-4; Lim Seungbeom (2006); Bruno (2013), 178-9; Chačatran (2015); 178-9; Seo Jinseok (2019), 55-60

⁸⁰ Cho Hung-Youn (1999), 53-8; Pak A-ram (2014); Chačatran (2015)

period can be seen in contemporary shamans in the use of Buddhist terminology, veneration of Bodhisattva, and the employment of Buddhist ritual attires and Daoist-like talismans⁸¹.

The relationship with Confucianism is more difficult to untangle, since ancient and medieval sources were filtered by a strict, official Neoconfucian view during the Chosŏn period. Though it is generally true that Shamanism tends to resist against ritual and doctrinal codifications, and therefore is incompatible with a centralized State⁸², however, a relationship clearly existed. Not least because Confucian officials existed in the same cultural environment and, therefore, may have shared some beliefs with Shamans and the Shamanism-following common people.

During the Koryŏ period, shamans were employed in many rituals, courtly, national and local. Confucian ritualists often assisted them and vice versa. However, if we look the *Koryŏsa*, it will appear that there clearly was a discrepancy between what the central bureaucracy and the local administration thought about the shamanic practices. Especially during the twelfth century's shamans' persecutions, it seems that central authorities regarded the shamanic practices as "inappropriate" and "backward". Despite this, it is also evident that the same central authorities invited shaman into the royal palaces for rainmaking rituals. In fact, the Confucian officials' position was ambivalent: on one hand, they did not object to shamans having official roles in some rituals and even some control over the city god's shrines (*chenghuangtang* / *sŏnghwangdang* 城隍堂), sponsored by the State; on the other hand, they deemed shamans as "ignorant" people who practices "licentious rites". The link between these two contradictory positions is that Confucians recognized the shamanic gods and powers but did not always accept the validity of their practices. It was a pragmatic approach. The local officials were more open to shamans for the same reason and were likely the cause behind the failure of the anti-shaman's policies⁸³.

During the Chosŏn period this apparent coexistence deteriorated over time. Until the seventeenth century, Neoconfucian officials employed shamans for royal rites for the good fortune, the "special prayer for mercy" *pyŏl-kiŭn* 別祈恩, and the rainmaking

⁸¹ Grayson (1992), 202-214; Suh Young Dae (1992); Bruno (2013), 178-9; Seo Jinseok (2019), 55-60. For further details about the Shamanism in the Koryŏ period, see §5.4.

⁸² Walraven (2009), 75-6

⁸³ Walraven (1991); Suh Young Dae (1992); Suh Young Dae (2021), 184-196. For further details about this relationship with Confucianism in the Koryŏ period, see §§5.1 and 5.4.

rituals. However, shaman ritual continued to be described as “licentious” and shamans as “ignorant” among the high-ranking officials. This animosity was due to a sort of competition: shamans performed rites for whom died for abrupt death, violent circumstances and-or without descendants, a practice prescribed in Neoconfucianism as well; like shamans, Chosŏn scholar-officials believed in ghosts and spirits too, but they disagreed on how to deal with them; lastly, Confucians and shamans shared the belief in a symbolically interconnected cosmos, for Confucians this connection was primarily ethical and moral, while for shamans was ritualistic. Again, this competition was less present in the local level, where shamans continued to be employed in the daily rites. Like in the Koryŏ period, there were many exchanges in this relationship: to pass the State exams, candidates often prayed the Big Dipper, a deity shared by the Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist and Shamanic pantheons; if they passed, street entertainers (*kwangdae* 廣大) opened the parades for them, street entertainers who were shamans’ husbands; similarly, in the first period, the kingdom sponsored local theatrical drama through the institution of “Commission of Rites and Spectacles” *Sandae Togam* 山臺都監, theatrical dramas originated in Shamanism and with heavy shamanic motifs an sometimes even ran by street entertainers; the very shamanic music was influenced by the official upper culture, for example the musical ensemble used in the central-wester regions’ styles of shamanic music is derived from the eighteenth century’s courtly ensembles⁸⁴.

Making a preliminary summary:

- Korean Shamanism can be generally defined as both religion and folklore. Korean Shamanism has also aspects that make it possible to define it as folk religion, vernacular religion and “primitive” (immanentist, pragmatic) religion as well.
- Korean Shamanism has elements and is often included within the Siberian Shamanism. However, it has its specificities too: presence of both “elective” and hereditary types of shamans, both male and female, a unique relationship with the “ecstasy”, symbolic “sex change”, the “descent” of the gods.
- In antiquity, Korean shamans likely had political power, but it is unlike that they were the source of that power nor that they were behind the emergence of

⁸⁴ Walraven (1991); Bruno & Walraven (2006), 15-7, 22-4; Saeji (2012), 149-153; Koudela & Yoo (2016), 100-2; Kim Staci (2022).

the monarchies. As in China, in Korea the shaman's figure has a near-total incompatibility with centralized institutions.

- The relationship between Confucian institutions and Shamanism was transactional at least. Local Confucian officials were always pragmatic in employing shamans for the State rites, while high-ranking officials were mostly against it, at least vocally.
- Even with the mostly anti-shamanic environment of the Chosŏn period, a cultural exchange between official upper culture and shamans resisted.
- With the introduction of foreign faiths, native Shamanism gradually syncretized with those faiths, particularly Daoism and Buddhism. This syncretism was bidirectional, as both Buddhism and Daoism started adopting Shamanic elements, at least in the first phases. During this long renegotiation process, it lost most of its political power.

So far, we have broadly defined what Korean Shamanism is, but what a Korean Shaman does?

2.3.2 *Regions, Rituals, “Styles”*

For the “elective” (or “charismatic”) shamans, the fundamental function of the rite is the *kongsu*, the prophecy-divination utterance; while for the “hereditary” shamans, the central point is the mediation between gods and clients through ritual entertainment. This distinction is not fixed: the “elective” shamans in the Kyŏnggi region gives more importance the theatrical aspects. On the other hands, “hereditary” shamans can make the ritual participants experience a possession, even though the said “elective” shaman is not possessed themselves or, as in Cheju, if the possession is very light. It is also worth noticing how both “charismatic” and “hereditary” shamans adapt the ritual to the customers' requests, needs and tastes, adding or shortening ritual times, usually inserting improvisations and variations⁸⁵.

⁸⁵ Yi Ch'angsik & An SangKyung (2002), 1-17; Bruno & Walraven (2006), 2-24; Yoo & Koudela (2014), 431-2; Chačatran (2015); Koudela & Yoo (2016): 88-100

Both types of shamans prepare charms and amulets, the *pujök* 符籙, and the employment of specific rituals depends either on the response of the *kongsu* (“elective” shamans) or on the occasion (“hereditary” shamans). This is usually made under the client’s payment, but in more ancient times this was on the entire client’s community, with the remaining offerings then returned and consumed by the village. The shaman offers advice and eventually a cathartic experience through these rituals, acting as a “psychotherapist”. The nature of a ritual generally depends on its function and context, and the functions of these different rituals are almost everywhere the same: bringing good fortune and prosperity, exorcise the misfortune and the evil spirits, curing illnesses and accompanying the dead’s souls. In the “hereditary” type, the exorcisms (*ch’uksa* 逐邪) seem to take a more central role. Moreover, the employment of shamans in local agricultural festivities is widespread, with the clear aim of ensuring good luck of the community. During the performances, the shaman is at the same time a master of ceremony, an actor / actress and the supernatural entity object of the rite⁸⁶.

Thus, these rituals, called *kut*, have the role of ensuring and preserving the social order and welfare. In this sense, the Korean shamanic ceremonies are “human oriented”: in case of a crisis, it is necessary to know the family, community and the ancestors’ context of that case, to understand the story of that problematic spirit. Similarly, the offerings to the deities are a feast for both them and the participants. The Korean shamans tend to resolve the individual issues transcending individuality through identification with a larger community, a tendency reflected in their worldview of a cosmos-deities-human interconnection accessible through rituals. In this, they are very similar to the ancient Confucian scholars. It is also not unusual for a Buddhist monk to have a role in a *kut*: the rituals have also folkloric aspects are adapted for and by the community that participate in them, making syncretism unavoidable⁸⁷.

The *kut* is not the only expression of this interconnection between the world, the gods and the humans, as the same connection is represented by the shamanic instruments and paraphernalia. Some ritual objects interact directly with the supernatural entities as the Cheju “gods’ knife” *sink’al* and the Ch’ungch’öng’s “iron nets” *ch’ölgang* 鐵網

⁸⁶ Yi Ch’angsik & An SangKyung (2002), 1-17; Bruno & Walraven (2006), 2-24; Yoo & Koudela (2014), 432-8; Chačatran (2015); Koudela & Yoo (2016), 98-100; Bruno (2018), 466-486; Kendall (2021), 2-12

⁸⁷ Walraven (1991); Bruno & Walraven (2006), 2-24; Yoo & Koudela (2014), 437-8; Chačatran (2015); Koudela & Yoo (2016), 88-9; Seo Jinseok (2019), 42-9

, used to repel evil spirits. Other objects need to be “ensouled” by the shaman, as in the case of the deities’ portraits (*t’aenghwa* 幀畵) of Hwanghae region, the widespread “effigies” *sinch’e* 神體 (usually jars), and the “altar-platforms” *tae* 臺 of the “hereditary” shaman regions. In the last case, particularly during the Ch’ungch’öng’s rituals for gods’ descent, it can also happen that who hold the “altar-platform” could be possessed and tell prophecies (*kongsu*) like an “elective” shaman. This “ensoulment” is used in exorcisms as well: again, in the Ch’ungch’öng region, wicked spirits can be forcefully relegated in a little “altar-platform” called *nallaemi*, then ritually sealed in a jar and buried into the ground⁸⁸. Clearly, a huge share of these objects belongs to the shaman but are not forever tied to them. Examples of shaman-to-shaman passages are the paraphernalia of dead shamans given as a gift to another shaman, gift called *kuöbi*, *kuyöbi*, or *kuaebi*⁸⁹; another example are three ritual instruments (*mengdu*) inherited by the Cheju shaman apprentice from their teacher. Traditionally a shaman receives many of the ritual instruments from the clients. However, even the very objects are somehow actors in the process: “mistreating” an effigy, “disrespecting” gods’ portraits, or even making ancestor jealous with too colorful cloths can cause troubles with the supernatural world⁹⁰. This is not strictly animism: the “ensoulment” is always needed, otherwise inanimate things remain inanimate. This characteristic is also seen in the case of sacred natural places and objects: a particular quality is needed to become a god’s dwelling, usually this quality is tied to the concepts of *ki / qi* 氣, the Five Elements (*ohaeng / wuxing* 五行) and the geomancy (*p’ungsu / fengshui* 風水). Thus, a good cosmic disposition easily attracts the gods, and shamans and clients with them⁹¹.

So far, we have taken for granted the division between “elective” and hereditary shamans in Korea. But in reality the situation is more fluid. With a closer look, in fact, we can distinguish at least four types of Korean shamans: “elective” shamans

⁸⁸ Chang Chu-keun (2001), 29-35; Heo Yong-ho (2005), 36-9; Lim Seungbeom (2006), 46-61; Walraven (2009), 55-6, 59-75; Nam Hyang (2010), 307-315; Chačatran (2015); Seo Jinseok (2019), 30-54; Kendall (2021)

⁸⁹ Likely from from “old karma” **kuöp* *舊業

⁹⁰ Chang Chu-keun (2001), 29-35; Walraven (2009), 55-6; Kang So-jeon (2012), 44-65, 87-153; Seo Jinseok (2019), 30-54; Kendall (2021)

⁹¹ Seo Jinseok (2019), 30-54; Kendall (2021)

(*kangsinmu* 降神巫), “hereditary shamans” (*sesŭmmu* 世襲巫), “scriptures reading” shamans (*tokkyŏngmu* 讀經巫) and the Cheju Island’s “hereditary” shamans.

	<i>Kangsinmu</i> 降神巫	<i>Sesŭmmu</i> 世襲巫	<i>Tokkyŏngmu</i> 讀經巫		<i>Cheju</i>	
			<i>kangsin</i>	<i>Haksŭp</i>	<i>Simbang</i> (神房)	<i>Somu / Somi</i> (小巫)
definition	“elective / charismatic”	“hereditary”	“charismatic text-reading”	“scholarly text-reading”	“hereditary with elective elements”	“ <i>simbang</i> apprentice”
apprenticeship	“deity’s call” (often a parent or an ancestor), then education from a “spiritual mother”	education from family, extended family and clan	Sometimes “deity’s call” (often a parent or an ancestor); ambiguous teacher-student relationship	background in Buddhist temples reading scriptures and learning practices; strong teacher-student relationship (in Taejŏn city area)	shamanic instruments heredity, designation by the family, sometimes “deity’s call”, then education from another shaman	
medium of trance	song, music, dance	song, music, dance, rituals (trance felt only by the clients)	music (percussions), scriptures reading	scriptures reading	song, music, dance, shamanic instruments	
communication with gods	<i>kongsu</i> , divination	divination, rituals	during the “ensoulment” of an effigy, the client may be possessed and tell <i>kongsu</i> ; spiritual power	divination, scriptures reading	divination, rituals	

	<i>Kangsinsu</i> 降神巫	<i>Sesŏmmu</i> 世襲巫	<i>Tokkyŏngmu</i> 讀經巫		<i>Cheju</i>	
			<i>kangsinsu</i>	<i>Haksŏp</i>	<i>Simbang</i> (神房)	<i>Somu / Somi</i> (小巫)
pantheon	celestial gods, terrestrial gods, mountain gods, human gods, Buddhas	celestial gods, ancestral gods, mountain gods, terrestrial gods, Buddhas	celestial gods, ancestral gods, mountain gods, Daoist gods, Buddhas		celestial gods, ancestral gods, mountain gods, human gods, evil spirits (<i>aek</i>), Buddhas	
deities' effigies	paintings, bronze mirrors (<i>myŏngdu</i>), small blades' ladder (<i>chaktu</i>)	gods' name written on paper, paper figures, "effigies" (<i>sinch'e</i>), "altars" (<i>tae</i>)	gods' name written on paper, printed figures, "altars" (<i>tae</i>)		paintings, wooden statues, flags, bells, shamanic brass instruments (<i>mengdu</i>), ceremonial canopy (<i>tangk'ŭl</i>)	
rituals' structure	many types, divided in sections (<i>kŏri</i>), performed while standing		"sitting ritual" <i>anjŏn'gut</i> , divided in sections (<i>kŏri</i>) corresponding to different scriptures		mass rituals (<i>k'ŏn-gut</i>) and regular rituals (<i>chag'ŏn-gut</i>), these divided in "standing" and "sitting"	"prayer" (<i>pinyŏm</i>), then regular rituals (<i>chag'ŏn-gut</i>)
area of activities	Absent	present but obsolete	Absent		absent (but ties with the village's shrine)	
shrines	present, individual	often absent, once present	hall for scripture reading / shrine (often)		present: regional, of the village	
regions	P'yŏngan, Hwanghae, Kyŏnggi, Chŏlla	partly Kyŏnggi and South Kyŏngsang, Chŏlla, Kwangju city area,	North Ch'ungch'ŏng, Kyŏnggi's Anŏng city area. Formerly also in Chŏlla and Kangwŏn		Cheju Island	

	<i>Kangsin mu</i> 降神巫	<i>Sesŭmmu</i> 世襲巫	<i>Tokkyŏngmu</i> 讀經巫		<i>Cheju</i>	
			<i>kangsin</i>	<i>Haksŭp</i>	<i>Simbang</i> (神房)	<i>Somu / Somi</i> (小巫)
		South Ch'ungch'ŏng, Chindo Island				

Elective or Charismatic Shamans: they are concentrated in the center-northern and northwestern area, in the inland areas and by the coasts (P'yŏngan, Hwanghae, Kyŏnggi, Chŏlla). During the Korean War period (1950-3) some of these shamans emigrated from the north to Inch'ŏn, Kyŏnggi region, bringing with them the Hwanghae-style Shamanism. Hwanghae shamans are known for their intensity of ecstasies and the particularly shocking animal sacrifices. Other types “elective” shamans are the *myŏngdu*, *t'aeju* or *set'ani*, possessed by a spirit of a child died before turning seven years old, and the Seoul “bodhisattvas” *posal* 菩薩, who performs ritual without showing any shamanic power, distinguished from their Ch'ungch'ŏng's homonyms. For the elective shamans, the divination (*kongsu*) is seminal, and they can adapt their rituals depending on the interpretation of it. Elective shamans undergo a “divine illness” *sinbyŏng* 神病, after which they are expected to be trained for several years by a “spiritual mother”, to whom they build a quasi-family relationship after the initiation. This apprenticeship is necessary to acquire a tutelary spirit (“master of the body” *momju*), a personal pantheon, and to learn the rituals and the techniques. It is believed that the shamanic powers diminish over time and must be compensated with technical skills. However, these shamans lack musical training to perform the rituals alone and relies on non-religious professionals (*aksa* 樂士). Is the music that make deities “descent” into the shaman, and the shaman impersonate the gods with costumes and acting during the rituals. In these occasions, a client can be possessed too. Aside from the costumes, the gods are also represented via portraits and shamanic devices, such as the small blade's ladder (*chaktu* 斫刀) and the bronze mirrors (*myŏngdo* or

myōngdu 明斗 / 明圖). The gods' portraits are particularly important in the Hwanghae-style Shamanism⁹².

Hereditary Shamans: they are concentrated in the southern, southwestern and eastern areas (partly Kyōnggi ad South Kyōngsang, Chōlla, South Ch'ungch'ōng, Chindo and Cheju Islands). Ch'ungch'ōng and Cheju shamans have unique features that make them a separated category or sub-categories within Korean Shamanism. For this type of shamans, there is no "divine illness", however, it is believed, if someone did not follow the shaman's duties, their parents could fall sick. Because of this, they are believed to be weaker than the "charismatic shamans". The hereditary transmission usually goes thus: the shamanic powers go to the daughters, while the sons become the supporting musician for their wives. The instruction of the shamanic arts starts from adolescence, encompassing general knowledge about the spirits, musical techniques, etiquette, ritual food preparation etc. Marriages were made within shamans' group, and, when married, the bride learns the rites from the mother-in-law, while the husband could also perform as **street artists (*kwangdae*)**, eventually leading groups for the *p'ungmul* 風物 / *nong'ak* 農樂 (rural musical plays) and the ensembles in Confucian rituals and banquettes, in ancient times. To each couple or family, there was, an area of activity, called "shaman's board" *tan'gol-p'an*: a territory where the family had the exclusive over the rites, paid two times a year by the villages, usually in money or wheat, or rice and fabrics, for the special occasions. This area was transmitted to both the spouses, but, in case of divorce, it was the woman who had to emigrate. On a higher level, there was the clan area of activity, academically called "same shamanic zone" *tongil muōpkwōn* 同一巫業圈, an area where shamanic families gathered in occasion of collective rites, exchanging goods and knowledge. In these events participated of the "beggars" *kōlkung* 乞窮 groups too, itinerant autonomous ritualists who perform with percussions. These *tongil muōpkwōn* were characterized by an internal cultural homogeneity, distinct from that of another area⁹³. Lacking an "ecstasy", Korean hereditary shamans emphasize the artistic skills, as they were associated with the *kisaeng* 妓生⁹⁴, poetry and the birth of *p'ansori*⁹⁵. Rituals are focused on giving

⁹² Bruno & Walraven (2006), 11-17; Walraven (2009); Bruno (2013), 188-191; Koudela & Yoo (2016), 88-103; Bruno (2018), 479-486

⁹³ E.g.: the musical pace.

⁹⁴ Chosōn entertainer-courtesans.

⁹⁵ Theatrical storytelling set to music.

blessings and the clients, not the shaman, can feel the presence of the spirits during them, e.g. with a shaking of a bamboo stick representing the dead. The custom and ritual setting vary greatly among regions: tendentially, there is only one costume, but in the past there were more. Here a compendium of the Lee Young-Geum (2022) study on the matter, focused on Chŏlla region:

Region		Shamanic Costume	Ritual setting
Chosŏn era (1407)'s East Chŏlla 全羅左道	Kŭm River, Man'gyŏng River, Tongjin River basins (including Ch'ilsan)	Colorful: sleeves with multicolored stripes, red or blue belt, red or blue <i>kāṣāya</i> (monk ropes) put on the shoulders. Attire for special occasions: long, navy blue sleeveless jacket (<i>k'waeja</i> 快子); sleeves with multicolored stripes; scarlet belt; red and blue <i>kāṣāya</i> (monk ropes) put on both shoulders. White costumes for funerals.	Ceremonial space is delimited by a long straw rope, to which are attached colored paper ornament, such as paper flowers (<i>nakhwa-yusu</i> 落花流水), paper lanterns, clubs, drawings of pagodas, human world (<i>musanggye</i> 無常界), and the Eight Bodhisattvas ⁹⁶ .
	Yŏngsan River Basin (including Western Namhae)	Generally simple and monochromatic, often consisting in a white <i>changsam</i> 長衫 (monk jacket). For rituals: a white <i>chŏgori</i> (traditional jacket), white <i>ch'ima</i> (traditional skirt), <i>kokkal</i> (monk paper hat). For the rite to Chesŏk: white <i>changsam</i> and <i>kokkal</i> . White costumes for funerals.	Ceremonial space delimited by a folding screen, to which many shamanic paper devices are hanged: two dragons' effigies, the Eight Bodhisattvas ⁹³ ; drawing of pagodas; the <i>Anityatā Sūtra</i> (<i>Musang-gyŏng</i> 無常經); the names of the Ten Underworld Kings; and the Eight Bodhisattvas, joss papers (<i>chijŏn</i> 紙錢).
Chosŏn era (1407)'s West Chŏlla	Sŏmjŏn River Basin	Colorful: plain white clothes with a white <i>changsam</i> 長衫 (monk	Ceremonial space is delimited by a long straw rope, to which are attached ten lanterns made in

⁹⁶ These are: Mañjuśrī (Munsu-posal 文殊菩薩); Samantabhadra (Pohyŏn-posal 普賢菩薩); Avalokiteśvara (Kwanseŭm-posal 觀世音菩薩); Vajrapāṇi (Kūmgangsu-posal 金剛手菩薩); Ākāśagarbha (Hŏgongjang-posal 虛空藏菩薩); Kṣitigarbha (Chijang-posal 地藏菩薩); Maitreya (Mirŭk-posal 彌勒菩薩); and Sarvanīvaraṇaviṣkambhin (Chŏngjeŏpchang-posal 淨諸業障菩薩). Usually, Vajrapāṇi is identified with Mahāsthāmaprāpta (Taeseji-posal 大勢至菩薩).

Region		Shamanic Costume	Ritual setting
administration 全羅右道	(including west-central Namhae)	jacket); sleeves with multicolored stripes, navy blue sleeveless jacket (<i>k'waeja</i> 快子). For the rite to Chesök: white <i>changsam</i> over a plain white rope; for other ceremonies: navy blue sleeveless jacket (<i>k'waeja</i> 快子). White costumes for funerals.	yellow, red, blue, green and white paper, put in in two lines of four each; paper figures of the Eight Bodhisattvas ⁹³ , which can be substituted with the Ten Underworld Kings' names; joss papers hung on the rope's ends.
	Nam River Basin (including east-central Namhae)	Fancy, distinguished in normal and colorful: usually a red <i>ch'ima</i> (traditional skirt); sleeves with multicolored stripes; navy blue sleeveless jacket (<i>k'waeja</i> 快子). In some regions: a floral hat (<i>k'ŭnmōri</i>) and-or a <i>kokkal</i> . Colorful costumes are used for special ceremonies.	Very sophisticated. Case of the <i>Ogwisaenam-gut</i> : screen folder at the center of the stage, to which are hung the names of dead spirits; <i>genii loci</i> 's "altar-effigies" (<i>sōnang-dae</i>) and small bamboo boats (<i>pan'ya-yongsōn</i> 若龍船) are put on the house pillars or on the main entrance; bright colorful paper flowers are put in two pots; paper stripes are hung, representing the Ten Underworld Kings, here called the "Thirteen(sic!) Kings" <i>Yōlsi-wang</i> .

Deities' effigies usually consist in the god's name written on a paper strip (*sin'wi* 神位), but paper figures can also serve the same purpose. Other ritual devices are the "gods' knife" *sink'al*, a cymbal (*para* 唸囉), and a bell ("Jade Emperor's bell" *okhwangjong* 玉皇鐘). Nowadays, these shamans lack of personal shrines, but Jin-a Choi (2012) demonstrated that, in Chōlla region, "elective" shamans' aniconic-style shrines are inherited from them⁹⁷.

Scriptures reading shamans: they are concentrated within the Ch'ungch'ōng region, particularly in the North Ch'ungch'ōng. They exist also in the Kyōnggi region's Ansōng city area, alongside regular "hereditary" and "charismatic" shamans: Ansōng is a commercial hub, formerly part of Ch'ungch'ōng region. In past times, they were also found in Chōlla and Kang'wōn, This kind of shaman are called "bodhisattva"

⁹⁷ Park Kyeung-sin (2002); Bruno & Walraven (2006), 11-17; Jin-a Choi (2012); Yoo & Koudela (2014), 429-436; Hong Tachan (2016), 388; Bruno (2018), 479-486; Lee Young-Geum (2022), 191-215

posal 菩薩, if female, and “Daoist master / Buddhist monk” *pōpsa* 法師 or *p’ansu* 判數, if male. Scripture reading shamans are often considered by other shamans the weakest one, or even not real shamans, despite being recognized as such by their communities. Technically, they are all “hereditary shamans”, but among them two sub-categories can be distinguished: the **“charismatic” scriptures reading shamans** and the **“scholar” scripture reading shamans**. The first category experiences a form of a “deities’ call”, often one deceased parent or ancestor, before study the scripture and the techniques under a master; the second category is more reliant on the scripture and can make its apprenticeship in Buddhist temples. In the first category, the master-apprentice relationship is less emphasized, while it is very important in the second category, especially in the Taejŏn city area. In both cases, apprenticeship is necessary to learn how to properly read the sacred texts, forging the ritual paper devices and talismans, and eventually perform with the drum. Reciting the shamanic scriptures is the most important part of any ritual, and it is done while sitting, hence the academic definition of “sitting rituals” *anjŭn-gut*. There is only one shamanic costume: plain white clothes with a hat, either *kat* or a *kokkal*, and white jacket (*turumagi*). The recitation is very solemn but not theatrical: sitting in a composed posture, the shaman will chant the various texts with a slow, uniform pace, playing the drum with the left hand and the gong with the right hand. The drum wards off the malign spirits, the gong invites the gods. Every ritual is very systematized with its specific sequence of recitations, offerings and ritual objects. In theory, within the recitation, the importance is given to the clarity of the voice, the music and the content of the texts, in this order (*il-ch’ŏng*, *i-gojang*, *sam-munsŏ* 一清二鼓杖三文書); in reality, the sacred texts are the most important part, as a “scripture reading shaman” takes their prestige from their possession. The most ancient of these scriptures were probably written at least in the late-Koryŏ period – this is very likely the case of the “Scripture of the Jade Pivot” *Okch’u-gyŏng* 玉樞經. The scriptures’ content spaces from cosmology to theology, magic theory, astrology, ritual procedures, ethics, and talismans. These texts are written in a particular literary style, showing a visible influence of Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist philosophies, with an extensive use of technical terms:

“Origins’ Tale of the Three Gods” *Samsin-p’uri* 三神पुरी

東方을 바라보니 富貴功名 마련하고
 南方을 바라보니 壽命長壽 마련하고,
 西方을 바라보니 子孫昌盛 점지하고
 北方을 바라보니 牛馬六畜 번성이라
 太昊 伏羲 神農 黃帝 堯 舜 禹 湯 文武
 朱公의 장한 도덕 좋은 터를 널리 닦아
 山水間에 집을 질 제 仁義禮智
 立柱하고 八條目으로 도리하고
 三綱으로 大樑 엮고

Looking westward, we arrange wealth and fame; looking southward, we arrange health and long life; looking westward, we pray for numerous offspring; looking westward, there is an abundance of herds and domestic animals. Generously establishing as fundamentals the moral of Fuxi, the August Shepherd, Shennong, the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi)⁹⁸, Yao, Shu, Yu, Tang [of Shang], the Wen and Wu emperors [of Zhou], and [Tao] Zhugong [of Qin]⁹⁹; and when we build (our) houses between the mountains and rivers, let’s live according to the virtues¹⁰⁰, following the Eight Duties¹⁰¹, laying the Three Bonds¹⁰² as the main pillars

Other, frequently used texts are the aforementioned “Scripture of the Jade Pivot” *Okch’u-gyŏng*, the “Protecting Scripture of Great Oneness” *T’aeŭlposin-gyŏng* 太乙

⁹⁸ The Three Sovereigns 三皇 of the *Diwang Shiji* 帝王世紀.

⁹⁹ The Emperor Yao and Shun are the Confucian morality examples par excellence, and they are also part of the classical Five Emperors (五帝) list. Wu and Wen are the first Zhou emperors, and a constant morality models in Confucianism; Tang is the first emperor of Shang dynasty according to classical historiography, while Zhugong is likely an early Qin official deified as a wealth’s god.

¹⁰⁰ Part of the Mencius’ “Five Constants” *Osang (Wuchang)* 五常. Literally: “benevolence”, “justice”, “etiquette”, and “wisdom” *in-ŭi-rye-ji (renyilizhi)* 仁義禮智. Curiously, “trustworthiness” *sin (xin)* 信 is missing.

¹⁰¹ They are listed in the *Daxue* 大學: “investigation” *kyŏngmul (gewu)* 格物; “purse of knowledge” *ch’iji (zhizhi)* 致知; “acting sincerely” *sŏngŭi (chengyi)* 誠意; “rectification of one’s heart-mind” *chŏngsim (zhengxin)* 正心; “practicing self-cultivation” *susin (xiushen)* 修身; “managing one’s household” *chega (qijia)* 齊家; “governing the kingdom” *ch’iguk (zhiguo / chiguo)* 治國; and “bringing peace to the world” *p’yŏngch’ŏnha (pingtianxia)* 平天下.

¹⁰² The fundamental human relationships according to Confucianism, listed in the *Hanshou* 漢書: ruler-subject, father-son, and husband-wife.

保身經, the “Writing for Wishes’ Invocation” *Ch’ugwŏn-mun* 祝願文, and the “Sutra of Eight Principles of Heaven and Earth” *Ch’ŏnjip’ar’yangsiju-gyŏng* 天地八陽經, i.e. the “Divine Mantra-sutra of the Eight Principles of Heaven and Earth as Spoken by the Buddha” *Pulsŏl-ch’ŏnjip’ar’yangsiju-gyŏng* 佛說天地八陽神呪經 [T85.2897]. Among these shamans, the deities are represented by their names written on a paper strip, *wimok* 位目, and the “altar-platforms” *tae* 臺, manufactures made from wood (or bamboo) and paper, where the deity descends into. Almost all ritual devices are paper-made, and it is usual for every Ch’ungch’ŏng shaman to carry a bag with scissors, papers and stationery. Among these paper devices, there are the “iron nets” *ch’ŏlmang* 鐵網, big etched papers hanged from the ceiling, and the “row of golden locks of the eight doors” *p’almungŭmsajin* (*p’almungŭmswaejin*) 八門金鎖陣, a similar object hanged in line from the ceiling, sometimes with little knives added. Both these devices serve to scare and-or capture evil spirits. Other devices are paper flowers used as offering, and the talismans. These devices (collectively: *sŏr’wi* 設位) are also found within every shrine, the “hall of scripture” *kyŏngch’ŏng* 經廳, which is a shaman house’s room converted for the purpose. The *sŏr’wi* are strictly dependent on the shamanic scripture, as they can take names and function from them, even with some interpretative freedom. In fact, it is likely that the *sŏr’wi* were originally sections of texts rewritten on paper sheets, and the fashion of adding iconic representation of deities is an influence from other styles of Shamanism¹⁰³.

Cheju Island shamans: they are found only in the Cheju Island, in the extreme South. A shaman is called *simbang* 神房 regardless of gender, while the shaman’s disciples are called *somi* / *somu* 小巫. If a distinction is needed, male and female *simbang* are respectively called “male *simbang*” *sonai-simbang* and “wife *simbang*” *yep’en* (女便)-*simbang*. It is believed that “female *simbang* practices shamanism, male *Simbang* gives blessing”. Famous shamans are called “great *simbang*” *k’ŭn-simbang*. Normally, these shamans have a deep understanding of the gods through intuition and divination,

¹⁰³ Yi Ch’angsik & An SangKyung (2002), 1-17; Park Kyeung-sin (2002); Ahn Sang-kyung (2002); An SangKyung (2004), 127-143; Heo Yong-ho (2005); Lim Seungbeom (2006), 46-61; Bruno & Walraven (2006), 12-5; Lim Seungbeom (2009), 84-100; Bruno (2013); Planning Team (2013), *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs*, 19-22, 49-50 & 240.

but lack of altered state of consciousness. The transmission of the role follows four possible paths, not mutually exclusive:

Divine illness

(*simbyŏng* 神病)

Possibly associated with a contact with the *mengdu*.

Family inheritance:

Within a shamanic family. Shamanic instruments are usually inherited by the older son or daughter. If there is no heir, a member is designated, obtaining the *somi* / *somu* title. It is believed that if nobody takes the shamanic role, a parent will get sick.

Shamanic inheritance:

Regardless of the bloodline, usually between a shaman and their *somi* / *somu*. Sometimes, even close friends and clients are admitted, similarly to “elective” shamans.

Chance:

Either as a gift or as a random discovery of the *mengdu*. In fact, the three instruments can be either buried in the ground after the death of a *simbang* or hid in auspicious natural places or even private house. It is believed that a random finding could be dangerous, and that one could discover them following a premonitory dream, or “divine intuition”.

Some *mengdu* are tied to specific village shrines. But what are these *mengdu*? The term refers to three brass shamanic instruments: the “divine knives” *sink'al*, used for divination, exorcisms and cut the paper to make altar decorations; the little bell, *yorang* (*yoryŏng*) 搖鈴, ceremonial musical instrument, used to communicate with the gods; a little custody with three coins, called either “divination board” *sanp'an* 算盤, “heavenly characters” *ch'ŏnmun* 天文, “divination cup” *sangjan* 算盞, or “divination

base” *sandae* 算臺. It consists of a small round box containing three coins used for divination. On these coins there are written a series of Chinese characters, which could be “gate of heaven and earth” *ch’ōnjimun* 天地門, “heavenly gate, Sun and Moon” *ch’ōnmun-irwōl* 天門日月, “heaven and earth, Sun and Moon” *ch’ōnji-irwōl* 天地日月, “great heavenly gate” *ch’ōndaemun* 天大門, “heavenly gate” *ch’ōnmun* 天門. To these instruments is attached a chain of transmission, which restarts with the finder if they were picked by chance. In fact, they are equal to a form of divine ancestors and receive the ancestral cult. On the mythical level, the *mengdu* are tied with the Three Brothers or “first princes” Ch’ogong 初公¹⁰⁴, seen as the first shamans. As said before, a *mengdu* could be obtained by inheritance, but in some cases a *somi* could dig near a shaman tomb to find it. For their construction, the shaman apprentice can ask the village community for almsgiving in brass, then a blacksmith requires a specific ritual for their construction, the “*mengdu* offering” *mengdu-gosa*. This ritual is usually very short and in a Confucian style¹⁰⁵. The time of apprenticeship may vary depending on the candidate, from two to three years or more. It is said that male *somi* are faster learners. During the apprenticeship, the apprentices help their master with the commissions and the ritual music. Usually a *somi* / *somu* starts with lesser rituals and then with normal rituals. There are three types of rituals: the first is the “prayer” *pinyōm*, very short and simple, conducted by the *somi* alone; the second is the “small ritual”, either conducted standing within a room (*san-gut*) or sitting (*ajin-je*) with only the shaman playing one drum and one two-headed drum; the third is the “great ritual”, during which many shamans gather together, with a leading one called *su-simbang*, while the other act as his *somi*. During a “great ritual” a canopy is built over the performance’s platform, this canopy made of wooden plates is called *tangk’ül*. During the “small rituals” there are also the **Cheb’i** (**Chaeb’i** in the mainland): professional musicians, male and female. These musicians have low prestige but high artistic skills. In case of the shaman shortcoming, a *cheb’i* can take the lead of the rituals, conducting it in a Confucian fashion. Some shamans did not distinguish *cheb’i* from the *somi*, while others have their husband or wife as ritual musician. Cheju shamans have a small number of costumes, depending on the rituals: the *kwandūi* (*kwandae*) 冠帶, a Chosŏn-

¹⁰⁴ Equivalent to the mainland Three Chesŏk.

¹⁰⁵ Kang So-jeon (2012), 14-74, 102-157; Chang Chu-keun (2001), 15-41; Yoo Yohan (2021), 334-341, 432-9

style Confucian uniform; the *kunbok* 軍服, a Chosŏn-style military uniform; the *turumagi* jacket; the *top'o* 道袍; and other cloths for special rituals. As for the common musical instruments, these are: a small gong (*ching* 鉦); a large gong (*sŏlswe*), similar to the mainland *kkwaenggwari*; a drum (*pok*) and a two-headed drum (*changgwŭi* 杖鼓); and cymbals (*parang* 婆羅) for Buddhist-style rituals. The *haegŭm* 奚琴 fiddle and the *p'iri* flute can also be used. Village shrines are typically recognizable by decorated sacred trees. Deity effigies are usually in the form of portrait, but wooden statues, little bells, flags and other objects can serve the purpose as well¹⁰⁶.

Male shamans: in recent times, male shamans became a minority, however their number was significantly greater in the past. They are transversal to all regional types and styles of shamanism, and depending on the place they are called *paksu*, *p'ansu*, *hwaraeng'i* and *yangjung* 兩中. Because there is some terminologically and role overlap between autonomous male shaman, a female shaman's husband and a shaman assistant and-or musician, it is likely that all these figures were originally one¹⁰⁷. The regional mobility of shamans and shamanic musicians in ancient times was underestimated until recently, in fact there are many attested cases of intra- and trans-regional travels, and cultural exchanges. An example of this are the two widespread terms: *yangjung* and *hwaraeng'i*. The first term is attested in both Cheju and Kyŏnggi region, and in the last case specifically indicates the shaman husband. Historically, the term is likely tied to another term for either a male shaman or a shaman husband: attested up to Hwanghae region, the term *hwaraeng'i* is clearly derived from the Silla's institution of *hwarang* 花郎 / 花娘. In fact, the term *yangjung* is attested in the *Samguk Sagi* as *nangjung* 郎中, referring to a group of *hwarang* (e.g.: *SMSG IX*, Silla chronicles 9: King Kyŏngdŏk, year 18). Later, in Chosŏn period, from late fourteenth to early sixteenth centuries, the terms *yangjung* designated male shamans of the Ch'ungch'ŏng, Chŏlla and Kyŏngsang regions as well as male shaman-musicians¹⁰⁸.

¹⁰⁶ Hyun Yongjun (1980), 9-23; Bruno & Walraven (2006), 15-7; Kang So-jeon (2012), 14-74, 102-157; Bruno (2018), 479-486

¹⁰⁷ There are, however, many exceptions: in Cheju the *yangjung* (another term for the *somi*) can be both male and female, while in Chŏlla shaman drum musicians are prevalently male, as they are also the shaman's husband too, but the in Seoul area's "hereditary" shamanic musicians are prevalently female, and historically a group of *hwaraeng'i* (*ssi-hwaraeng'i*) had their *tan'gol-p'an* in Kyŏnggi region: Chang Chu-keun (2001), Park Kyeung-sin (2002); 16-8; Bruno & Walraven (2006), 15-7

¹⁰⁸ Chang Chu-keun (2001), Park Kyeung-sin (2002); 16-8; Walraven (2009), 63-76; Bruno & Walraven (2006), 15-7; Kim Hwansoo (2013), 283-291; Yoo & Koudela (2014), 334-6; Bruno (2018), 479-486; Lee Young-Geum (2022)

It is highly probable that similar roles existed in some form during the Koryŏ period too.

Both these descriptions and categorizations must not be taken as monolithic, as many parallels can be seen, for example in the general presence of a “spiritual heredity” granted by the spirits of ancestors and parents (as in Hwanghae, Ch’ungch’ŏng and Cheju) or the use of similar shamanic instruments (Hwanghae and Cheju) or even ephemeral paper devices (Ch’ungch’ŏng and Cheju). Interesting, for the sake of this argument, is a particular Chindo Island musical instrument: Chindo Island is historically a “hereditary” shamans’ area, however this ritual instrument shares many elements in common with “charismatic” shamanic culture. Koudela and Yoo (2016) write¹⁰⁹:

Kim Hogarth writes about a rare instrument, called *jeongju*, usually practiced on the southern island of Jindo. This is a tiny brass bowl-shaped percussion with an attached string, which is beaten with a deer-horn stick. This instrument is renowned as the one mostly used for the *kut* of Buddha and of the Harvest Spirit. The bowl-like part of the instrument represents the rice harvest and the deer symbolizes the flight up to heaven, which proved to be a kind of syncretism of Siberian shamanism, Korean worship of Heaven and Buddhism.

We will deepen the investigation in the chapter “Myth transmission and Shamanic Institutions”, here we have given a brief mention.

Making a preliminary summary:

- Korean shamanism has a strong regionalism, with each part of the Country presenting a unique expression of the general phenomenon.
- Generally, there are four types / style of shamanism, more broadly classified as either “elective” or “hereditary”:
 - “Elective” shamans (P’yŏngan, Hwanghae, Kyŏnggi, Chŏlla).
 - “Hereditary” shamans (partly Kyŏnggi ad South Kyŏngsang, Chŏlla, Kwangju city area, South Ch’ungch’ŏng, Chindo Island).
 - “Scripture reading” shamans (North Ch’ungch’ŏng, Kyŏnggi’s Ansŏng city area), technically a “hereditary” shaman sub-type.

¹⁰⁹ Koudela & Yoo (2016), 89-93

- Cheju shamans, another “hereditary” sub-type with many “elective” elements.
- Regional differences concerns: mode of transmission of shamanic knowledge; the way of conducting rituals; deity representation; the medium of trance; and, to some extent, the pantheon.
- Shamanic musicians are a trait d’union of different type / style of shamanism. Other links between different regional shamanic communities are the sporadic collaboration and regional mobility.
- Common elements are the “spiritual hereditariness” (visit by an ancestor spirit which lead to shamanism’s career), and some ritual devices (knives, bells, bronze mirror, paper etc.).
- Other common elements are the aims of the ritual (*kut*), which is ensuring and preserving the social order and welfare, as well as other beliefs about *yin-yang* theory, object “ensoulment”, and deity’s effigies forms.

2.3.3 Gods, Buddhas and Spirits

Korean shamanism is polytheist, and its pantheon was classified in many ways by the scholars. The latest is that of Seo Jinseok (2019):

According to the functions and characteristics:	According to the origins:
Superior Gods in Heaven: e.g. Jade Emperor (Okhwang-sangje 玉皇上帝), King Yama (Yömma-daewang 閻羅大王), Ch’ilsöng 七星, Sun and Moon deity (Irwöl-söngsin 日月星神)	Buddhist and Daoist gods: e.g. Kṣitigarbha (Chijang-posal 地藏菩薩); Avalokiteśvara (Kwanseüm-posal 觀世音菩薩); Maitreya (Mirük-posal 彌勒菩薩); The Jade Emperor (Okhwang-sangje 玉皇上帝)
Spirits of Nature: e.g. “mountain gods” <i>sansin</i> 山神, “Dragon King” Yowang 龍王	
Life and Death deities: e.g. Paridegi / Pari-gongju, Samsin 三神, “grim reapers” <i>chösŭng-saja</i>	Deified historical people of historical importance: e.g. Kim Yusin 金庾信 (595-673); Nam I 南怡 (1443-1468); Im Kyöng-öp 林慶業 (1594-1646); Ch’oe Yöng 崔瑩 (1326-1388); King Tanjong 朝鮮端宗 (1441-1457)
Guardian spirits of the House: e.g. “kitchen god” Chowang 竈王; “rafters guardian god” Söngju 城主; “toilet god” Ch’ükkan 廁間; “garden guardian god” T’öju 土主	

According to the functions and characteristics:	According to the origins:
Deified historical people: e.g. Śākyamuni Buddha (c.a. 563-483 BCE); Guan Yu 關羽 (160-219); Ch'oe Yōng 崔瑩 (1326-1388)	Mythological and folkloric spirits from regional culture: • Paridegi / Pari-gongju, Samsin 三神 etc. (from songs, folklore etc.) • “General <i>Chaktu</i>” <i>chaktu-janggun</i> 斫刀將軍 etc. (from shamanic devices, phrasemes etc.)
Spirits and minor deities: e.g. <i>tokkaebi</i> (goblin-like creatures), “fairies” <i>sōnnyō</i> 仙女	

There are many other possible classifications, not mutually exclusive. For example, Bruno and Walraven (2006) distinguish between “vegetarian (Buddhist)” gods, which ensure fertility, offspring, good luck, and happiness; and the “non-vegetarian” gods, which ensure wealth, success and protection; the ancestor gods; and spirits of people dead of a violent or premature death. Yi Yongbeom made a triple distinction: the “territorial gods” are central, the “impersonal gods” are peripheral, and the “human gods” are in between the twos. On the other hand, Yang Jongseung distinguished strictly according to the function: gods related to the shamans; gods related to the people; related to nature; gods related to the afterlife¹¹⁰.

Widespread deities are the Sky deity, the Buddhas, the Buddho-Daoist Underworld Kings (“The Ten Kings” Siwang 十王)¹¹¹, and the “divine generals” *sinjang* 神將¹¹². However, it would be an error considering all these types of deities as having a uniform characterization in all the Peninsula.

In Hwanghae province, the traditional *sinjang* are deification of Chosŏn Confucian scholar-officials, and not warrior deities like in Seoul area and Ch’ungch’ōng. Moreover, in Hwanghae the *sinjang* are categorized along with the house and shamanic ancestor deities, the *sōngsu* 城帥 (corresponding to the other region’s *sōngju*) as “divine enthusiasm *sinjang*” *sinmyōng sinjang* 神明神將, at least in the ancestral rites.

¹¹⁰ Bruno & Walraven (2006), 2-24; Bruno (2013); Bruno (2018), 482-6; Jinseok Seo (2019), 55-72

¹¹¹ These are: Chin’gwang (Qinguang) 秦廣王; Ch’ogang (Chujang) 初江王; Songje (Songdi) 宋帝王; Ogwan (Wuguan) 五官王; Yōmna (Yanluo) i.e. Yama 閻羅王; Pyōnsōng (Biancheng) 卞城王; T’aesan (Taishan) 泰山王; P’yōngdūng (Pingdeng) 平等王; Tosi (Dushi) 都市王; and Chōllyun (Zhuanlun) 轉輪王 or Odojōllyun (Wudaozhuanlun) 五道轉輪王.

¹¹² Walraven (2009), 58-9; Bruno (2013), 178-9; Encyclopedia Planning Team (2013), *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs*, 36-7, 69-70, 196-7; Jinseok Seo (2019), 55-72; Yoo Yohan (2024), 3-4;

As other ancestral deity, the *sinjang* could also be at the same time a “shamanic ancestor” and a mountain god, for example. “Shamanic ancestor” deities, in Hwanghae have a great fluidity and could easily change category¹¹³.

On the other hand, Ch’ungch’öng shamans have a more Daoist-like system, based on the, “Scripture of the Jade Pivot” *Okch’u-gyöng*, in which the *sinjang* are subordinated to the Jade Emperor:

Ch’ungch’öng “Scripture reading” Shamans’ Pantheon:

Highest Heavenly Deity:	Jade Emperor (Okhwang-sangje 玉皇上帝)
Nine Ch’öñjon (Tianzun) Ku-Ch’öñjon 九天尊	Three Pure Ones 三清: 1. T’aech’öng-dodök-ch’öñjon (Taiqing Daode Tianzun) 太清道德天尊 2. Okch’öng-wönsi-ch’öñjon (Yuqing Yuanshi Tianzun) 玉清元始天尊 3. Sangch’öng-ryöngbo-ch’öñjon (Shangqing Lingbao Tianzun) 上清靈寶天尊 Other: 4. Sanch’öng-sanggyöng-ch’öñjon 三清上境天尊 5. Ch’ön’gan-byökpyöng-yaüng-bohwa-ch’öñjon 天干碧兵夜應普化天尊 6. Samsipsamch’ön-dosol-ch’öñjon 三十三天兜率天尊¹¹⁴ 7. Isi-söngjo-wönsi-ch’öñjon 爾時聖祚元始天尊 8. Puktudüngmyöng-daesöng-ch’öñjon 北斗證明大聖天尊 9. Kuch’ön-üñg’wön-roesöng-bohwa-ch’öñjon (Jiutian Yingyuan Leisheng Puhua Tianzun) 九天應元雷聲普化天尊

¹¹³ Walraven (2009)

¹¹⁴ Sanskrit: Trāyastriṃśa-tuṣita-bhagavānt. Amitābha? Maitreya?

Divine Generals <i>Sinjang</i> 神將	The most venerated one: 1. Ch'ōnbong-jisin-baekma-sinjang 天降地神白馬神將 a.k.a. Sogō-baengma-sinjang 素車白馬神將¹¹⁵ Others: 2. Akkwi-ch'angnae-roegong-sinjang 惡鬼捉來雷公神將¹¹⁶ 3. Irwōl-dongbang-sib'i-sinjang 日月東方十二神將 4. Chunghwang-yang'wōnsi-sinjang 中黃央元帥神將 5. Imgye-hyōnmu-illyuk-sinjang 壬癸玄武一六神將 Etc.
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In this system, the *sinjang* are warrior exorcist deities sent by the Yellow Emperor. They are also called “spirit generals” *sinsu-sillyōng* 將帥神靈 during the rituals. The Yellow Emperor himself almost never “descent” directly during the rituals but usually sends the Ch'ōnjon (Tianzun) in his behalf. The *sinjang* are important for the paper devices and talismans, and in fact specific talismans may take the name from a specific (group of) *sinjang*. Like in Hwanghae, there is some fluidity, and the name of *sinjang* varies from shaman to shamans, the total of which it is said being countless, as well as their designation: a shaman's *sinjang* is “demoted” to “great general” *daejang* 大將 among another shaman, or “promoted” to *Ch'ōnjon-sinjang* 天尊神將 and so on. Another regional specificity of “Scripture reading” shamans are their malevolent spirits, cause of illness, rarely found outside Ch'ungch'ōng: Malmyōng (or Manmyōng 萬明), Sangmun 喪門, and the Yōngsan 靈山. It is worth noticing that, of these, Yōngsan clearly are mountain gods, almost never associated with illness in the rest of Korea¹¹⁷.

In Cheju too the Sky deity Ch'ōnji-wang 天地王 / Ch'ōnju-wang 天主王 (a.k.a. Jade Emperor) is believed to be highest deity who sent other gods for the humankind wellbeing. The deities he sends are, however, mostly agricultural gods. Cheju shamans call the most important deities *sin'o* (*sin'wi*) 神位, *sinjōn* 神前 or *sin'o-sinjōn*

¹¹⁵ Believed to be deification of Spring and Autumn period's Chinese general Wu Zixu 伍子胥 (559-483 BCE).

¹¹⁶ Clearly a form of the Daoist thunder deity Leigong 雷公.

¹¹⁷ Heo Yong-ho (2005), 34-9; Lim Seungbeom (2006), 46-61; SangKyung (2004), 130-3, 139-143; Lim Seungbeom (2009), 94-7; Encyclopedia Planning Team (2013), *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs*, 172-4.

神位神前, and distinguish deified spirits of the dead by the time of permanence in the afterlife. The spirits of those who fell in war can either become warrior spirits-gods or generic spirits-gods (*chapkwi* 雜鬼). In Cheju, every village has its shrine and its gods, so it can happen that many gods have the same function. For example, the smithery god Ssoech'ŏr'i-adŭl, found in the pan-regional myth *Ch'ogong-bonp'uri*, can have his prerogatives shared with the three *tokkaebi* (goblin-like creatures) of the *Tokkaebidang-bonp'uri* from Nakch'ŏn village, near Jeju City. Similarly, Yŏngdŭng and the snake deity of many villages were originally both associated with fishery, before the latest became associated with actual snakes and wealth. Birds are regarded as inauspicious, which is a unique feature of Cheju. In fact, the generic “(spirits of) misfortunes” *ae* 厄 can be divided in two category: the “birds” *sae* (from “evilness” *sa* 邪) and the “falcons” *mae* (from “demon” *ma* 魔). To exorcise these spirits, there is a particular ritual called *aeng-magi*, when, until recent times, a chicken or a rooster were sacrificed as substitute for the *ae*'s victim. The ritual is also part of other rituals, such as the rite for the Ten Underworld Kings (*siwang-maji*) and includes offering as “bribes” for the spirits. It is attested in the invocations during such rituals that, in even more ancient times, cows and horses were either scarified or, more often, sent to grasslands as scapegoats¹¹⁸.

This variety is not unique to Korea, or any polytheism in the world. It must be remembered that any polytheism is a “a complex system of relations between a variety of supernatural powers and entities” and a “Penelope’s shroud” constantly unmade and remade by “daily experimentations”, to use the words of Marcel Detienne¹¹⁹.

Making a summary of this section:

- Korean Shamanism can be generally defined as both religion and folklore.
- Korean Shamanism has elements and is often included within the Siberian Shamanism. However, it has its specificities too.
- In antiquity, Korean shamans likely had political power, but they were unlikely the source of that power or behind the emergency of monarchies. As in China, in Korea the shamans have a near-total incompatibility with centralized

¹¹⁸ Hyun Yongjun (1980): 9-23; Encyclopedia Planning Team (2013), *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs*, 18-9, 26-7, 36-7 & 132-6; Nam-chun Heo & Lee Hyun-jeung (2018), 178; Yoo Yohan (2021), 340-1; Yoo Yohan (2024), 1-7.

¹¹⁹ Detienne (2004), 56-63; Detienne (2008), 57-79.

institutions. However, cultural exchange and transactional relationship with Confucian official persisted until the Chosŏn period.

- Korean Shamanism shows many syncretistic elements from Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism.
- Generally, there are four types / style of shamanism, more broadly classified as either “elective” or “hereditary”: 1) “elective” shamanism 2) “hereditary” shamans 3) “scripture reading” shamans 4) Cheju shamans. The last two are technically unique expression of “hereditary” shamanism.
 - Each type / style of shamanism is distinguishable by: mode of transmission of shamanic knowledge; the way of conducting rituals; deity representation; the medium of trance; and, to some extent, the pantheon.
 - Common elements are: the “spiritual hereditariness” (visit by an ancestor spirit which lead to shamanism’s career), and some ritual devices (knives, bells, bronze mirror, paper etc.).
 - Common beliefs are: the aim of the rites (*kut*), which is ensuring and preserving the social order and welfare; the *yin-yang* theory; the “ensoulment” of objects; and the presence of deities’ effigies.
 - Shamanic musicians are a trait d’union of different type / style of shamanism. Sporadic collaborations and regional mobility can also unite shamans from different places and style.
- Among shamanic deities, the most widespread are the Sky deity, the mountain gods, the ancestor deities, the house gods, the “divine generals” *sinjang*, the Buddhas and so on. However, the nature, understanding and functions of many of these (e.g. the *sinjang*) vary greatly from type / style of shaman, region or even single shamans. There are some deities are only found within specific region or even villages.

2.3.4 *Korean shamanic song, context, and genres*

Shamanic songs are the primary sources for mythography in contemporary Korean Shamanism’s context. These songs, collectively known as *muga* 巫歌, are used within the rituals, thus accompanied with music. Therefore, it should not be surprised that other cultural, folk expression like “masked dances” *t’alch’um*, folk play (*nong’ak* /

p'ungmul) and related folklore are strictly tied with both *kut* and *muga*. Even less, if we consider that, in many regions, traditional street artists are descendants of shamans. In fact, we have seen in the previous paragraphs how shamanic musicians are one of the links between Shaman's worlds and other realities. The shamanic songs in themselves are tied with other literary genres: the *p'ansori* is clearly a derivation of Chŏlla's hereditary shamans' performances and narrative songs. In fact, music over which the shamanic songs are chanted is strictly tied with ancient upper classes culture: while the narratives takes features from poetry and ancient historiography, the musicians can use the style of courtly music ("three chordophones and six flutes ensemble" *samhyŏnyukkak* 三絃六角)¹²⁰.

We have now described the cultural landscape surrounding the *muga*, but what are precisely, and how they work within the rituals?

First, it must be noted that *muga* is a generic term for a variety of different genres. In fact, are *muga*: "entertainment chants" *norae-karak*, "narrative shamanic songs" or "epic shamanic songs" *sŏsa-muga* 敘事巫歌, "ballads" *t'aryŏng* 打令, "invocations" *ch'ŏngbae* 請拜, "sung prayers" *ch'ugwŏn* 祝願 etc. The most studied one among these is the narrative song, for many scholars fundamentally indistinguishable from the god's origins narrative (*ponp'uri* 本풀이), and main focus of the present work.

These origin stories are basically epics about the god's whereabouts, but sometimes they extend the narrative on the deity's family – *Chesŏk-ponp'uri* tell the tale of Samsin's parents, *Igong-bonp'uri* about Hallakkung's mother's death and revenge by her son. Regardless of the type, the *muga* is chanted over music, and the ritual context is necessary for it to function: a *muga* cannot be separated from its *kut* (or section of it) and aim. These songs have several characteristics: a *muga* acts as a chanted magic formula; to some extent, it is play, an entertainment for both humans and deities; it comprehends elements from oral legends, heroic epics, folksongs, and fairytales; finally, a *muga* is orally transmitted from shaman master to shaman apprentices, following the local canons - dialects, stylemes, allowed variations and so on¹²¹.

¹²⁰ Saeji (2012), 158-161; Yoo e Koudela (2014), 436; Jinseok Seo (2019), 72-90; Koudela & Yoo (2016); Bruno & Walraven (2006), 18-24; Riotto (2021), 266-9 & 186-9

¹²¹ Bruno & Walraven (2006), 18-24; Koudela & Yoo (2016); Bruno (2018), 483-8; Sŏ Taesŏk (2011), 11-4, 125-130

Until recent times, a shamanic song could take several hours, up to an entire night. However, in modern times the duration was sensibly shortened to an hour circa. The main content of the song may be short, but it is adapted with repetition and variation, this is line with the practice of arranging the rituals for the client's needs. Similarly, the words can be altered according to the rhythm, tempo, pauses etc. as long as it is allowed by the shamanic tradition. We have mentioned before the strict link between *muga*, oral literature (fairytales, legends, folk songs) and written literature (poetry, epic, historiography): this last tie is stronger than one could though knowing that these chants are transmitted orally. In fact, it seems some contents have traces directly in the court documents, not merely in the Chosŏn-era literatis' culture: this is the case of the Cheju *Kun'ung-ponp'uri*, which has traces in the origin legend of Koryŏ's royal clan, reported by the *Koryŏsa*; in a similar fashion, the Hallakkung'i narratives are almost identical to that of *Wŏr'insŏkpo* 月印釋譜, chapter eight, commissioned by King Sejo 世祖 (1417-1468)¹²². Another tie with writing is found in the "scriptures-reading" shamans' texts, mostly of Daoist and Buddhist origins. Among these texts, many are named with the suffix "explanation" *haewŏn* 解冤, and their content is clearly the same of the oral origin narrative. Moreover, there is some general continuity of elements between the *muga* and the *mugyŏng*, i.e. deities, syncretism, and style¹²³.

As we have seen in the chapter about the *muga*, the shamanic culture clearly belongs to a "lecto-oral" type, and the narrative *muga* can even be compared to epics. Goody (2010) depicts, in fact, these kinds of situations as follows: in these societies, the writing is an additional method of communication, it implies fixation of the narrative forms and less spontaneity in recitation (reinvention, variation, adaptation). Thus, oral narratives tend to be longer and more coherent over time and space. The main difference here is not the length itself, but the coexistence of both length and coherence, granted by the presence of a text. The writing creates so a distinction between a literate and an illiterate subculture, as well as an oral culture's standardization:

¹²² See §§4 and 10 for further details.

¹²³ Yi Ch'angsik & An SangKyung (2002), 1-11; Bruno & Walraven (2006), 18-24; Sŏ Taesŏk (2011), 125-130; Pak A-ram (2014); Bruno (2018), 482-6; Koudela and Yoo (2016); Seo Jinseok (2019), 72-90

“In conclusion, while the refinement, even the existence, of writing does something to diminish the importance of oral tradition, it also sometimes encourages orality (the ‘lecto-oral’) in the context of a written one by continuing to view ‘real’ knowledge as knowledge which though in origin written has to be produced orally on demand. This is especially true of religious knowledge but includes the secular too in the context of school and college education.”

Therefore, having text as reference for memorization transforms the memory from “spontaneous” to “mechanical”. Detienne (1983, 2004, 2008) expands this vision, pointing how oral, “lecto-oral” and written tradition needs a consensus to spread and gaining variants; moreover, Detienne says, in polytheism there is a constant reinvention of myths, ritual and beliefs regardless of the presence of writing within the society¹²⁴. As we have seen, in the Korean case, the elements of “lecto-oral” culture are clear: the narrative *muga* are long, use mnemonic techniques (rhymes, pauses, *topoi* etc.), have influences from purely written material (historiography, poetry) and parallel in “sister” religious texts (*mugyŏng*). More oral features are clearly the rite-dependency and the relative importance of the client-audience; however, it is not practically possible to separate these features from the rites themselves, even less addressing it to a merely oral culture: even in Buddhism and Daoism some precise texts have a precise function within a precise ritual for a precise desiderated effect. A general conclusion could be that Korean shamans are less illiterate than previously thought, and probably in ancient times *mugyŏng* were more widespread – and some scholars believes so. The disappearance of *mugyŏng* in almost all Korean Shamanism’s styles left some traces: mainly, a relative, structural coherence in many narratives, that thus can be philologically reconstructed. In any case, the “lecto-oral” nature of Korean mythology allows us to access to further material on Korean mythology out of the pure orality.

Summarizing:

- The Korean shamanic songs, *muga*, are the primary source for Korean mythography. They exist in a context that comprehends like “masked dances”

¹²⁴ Detienne (1983), 35-59; Detienne (2004), 56-63; Detienne (2008), 32-79; Goody (2010), 117-161

t'alch'um, folk play (*nong'ak* / *p'ungmul*) and *p'ansori*, which share some rituality and narrative contents with.

- The *muga* is a general term for any Korean shamanic song sung during the rite (*kut*) on music. The most studied one among these is the narrative song (*sōsa-muga*), fundamentally indistinguishable from the god's origins narrative (*ponp'uri*).
 - The main characteristics of a *muga* are: working as chanted magic formula; being an entertainment for both humans and deities; having elements of oral legends, heroic epics, folksongs, and fairytales; being orally transmitted from shaman master to shaman apprentices, following the local canons - dialects, styles, allowed variations and so on
 - Therefore, a *muga* cannot be separated from its *kut* (or section of it) and aim, as the nature of the ritual depends by the content of the song.
 - The origin stories *muga* are basically epics about the god's whereabouts, but sometimes they extend the narrative on the deity's family.
- The *muga* have connections with written literature:
 - Chōlla *p'ansori* and *muga* shares the same origin.
 - *Muga* have influences from Chosŏn-era literatis' culture: historiography, poetry, musical ensembles.
 - Some *muga* narratives can be traced back at least at Koryŏ official narratives, such as the origin legend of Koryŏ's royal clan, reported by the *Koryŏsa* and the but the "Prince Sukhāvātī" narrative, derived from a forged sutra of the late Silla period and then rewritten in the eighth chapter of *Wŏr'insŏkpo* 月印釋譜.
 - There is an overlapping between the origin's narrative genre of *muga* (*ponp'uri*) and a sub-genre of the Shamanic scripture (*mugyŏng*), along with general style and contents.
- Therefore, the *muga* are a "lecto-oral" literature, and the narrative *muga* can be understood as epic i.e. oral literature influenced by the writing, characterized by its length and a relative coherence, coherence granted by the presence of a text. In case of Korea, in most of the case the text is now lost (except for "Scripture reading" shamans), however the literary elements persist.

2.5. *Syncretism*

In the previous paragraphs we have seen many overlaps between Korean Shamanism and other religions / philosophies: a Buddhist attire is present in any regional type, and so is the belief in the Buddho-Daoist Underworld Kings, potentially many *kut* can be conducted in a Confucian way and so on. In the case of the Ch’ungch’ŏng “scripture reading” shamans, the Daoist influence on their pantheon is so evident that its origin it can be easily pointed¹²⁵.

This situation is commonly defined as “syncretism”. However, academically, precisely describing what syncretism is, is not a simple task, since every author has his / her own terms due to specialization. Therefore, the aim of this paragraph is to synthesize a working definition for this term. Such definition must be broader, to avoid easy convenience, but without any claim to be exhaustive.

In Anthropology, syncretism is classically defined as: the situation in which a “previously closed-off religion undergoes the influence of a dominant culture”, from which takes especially in the material aspects. However, in the religious studies, a more common conceptualization is the following: “the borrowing by one religion of elements from another, or in the fashioning of a new religion on the basis of (fragments of) other religions”. Both definitions have the advantage of simplicity: the first is limited to the material culture, despite addressing the balance of powers; the second is excessively essentialist in defining what religions are, an inadmissible axiom in both Anthropology and Sociology¹²⁶. Here, we will provisionally adopt the first definition while, at the same time, we will also take into the account the second one.

A more precise definition, though, may include cases’ record. In his definition, Timothy Brook (1993) gives us an array of phenomena that are usually mistaken for syncretism: ecumenism: truth is universal, different religions permit to access to that truth in their own way inclusivism: one religion is explained in the terms of another religion, explained as a “partial revelation” or “inferior methods” or similia (the first

¹²⁵ More precisely, the Daoist pantheon comprehensive of the Three Pure Ones and Jiutian Yingyuan Leisheng Puhua Tianzun can be retraced on the late Song dynasty to the early Yuan, precisely within the Shenxiao 神霄, Qingwei 清微, Quanzhen 全真, Leifa 雷法 and New Wudang (Xin Wudang) 新武当 schools. See: Todd (2007), 19-22; Li Yuanguo (2012).

¹²⁶ Vermeersch (2020), 2-5

religion is typically subaltern); compartmentalism: each religion has its own “field of specialization”, not mutually overlapping with that of the other ones; eclecticism: will to adopt elements from another religion, as far as these elements are regarded as useful. However, Sem Vermeersch (2020) contests the premise that these cases cannot be syncretism, and views them instead as “distinct forms of syncretism”. It is noticeable here how these distinctions assume an analysis of balance of powers and cultural hegemony, i.e. another useful analysis’ level.

William Chu (2006) offers us another perspective: between the extreme of total separation and synthesis / fusion, there are two possibilities. The first one is the “syncretism” proper; the second one is the “unequal ecumenism”. In the latter, is a situation in which one religion’s adherents simulate tolerance and openness, thus masking their claims of superiority¹²⁷. This distinction too considers the existence of power imbalance, despite it is notoriously difficult to ensure the sincerity of any part, in these cases.

Grayson (1992) gives another distinction. The first type of syncretism pointed out by this author is the “low” syncretism: a situation when a universalistic religion adopts elements from a local cult without changes in its core values; the second one is the “high”, “weak” or “reverse” syncretism: a situation when a local cult adopts core values of a universalistic religion, while other elements remain unchanged. In this case too is evident the importance of force balance.

In these descriptions there is clearly a tacit, common element: the force balance, meaning political power or cultural hegemony¹²⁸. On the other hand, all these descriptions miss a point: what is the outcome? How can we distinguish between an adaptation from a syncretism in Grayson’s terms? Is there a barrier between synthesis and “unequal ecumenism” in William Chu’s theory? Of the four Brook’s variations, what makes syncretism? Going back to the classical definition, according to religious studies, the focus is the formation of a new situation: either a creation of a new state (original religion plus foreign elements) or a creation of a new cult *ex novo* (new syncretic religion). This element is clearly the least problematic and unambiguous. However, other difficulties remain, such as the fact that this distinction is not completely clear and more akin to a spectrum, even in this case. In fact, an even more

¹²⁷ William Chu (2006), 63-5, 68-79

¹²⁸ Grayson (1992), 200-7; William Chu (2006), 63-5; Vermeersch (2020), 5

rigid distinction would accept only the creation of a new cult into the category of syncretism. In general, including or excluding a case within the category nevertheless remains an arbitrary choice.

Another question could finally be raised: hegemony is strictly tied with ideology. Unfortunately, this is not always so simple to point out, with a figure declaring the official faith position regarding the other ones. This is a problem for the Chu and Vermeersch (2020), case studies, focused on ancient élite approach. In fact, many cases these scholars analyze can be described having three characteristics: involving high ranking Confucian bureaucrats or prominent Buddhists patriarchs; existing without a situation of competition if not crisis; reported by official channels (historiography, epigraphy, official writings).

The only two exceptions Brook and Grayson works, which are more focused on the problem from a grass-root point of view. In fact, the difficulty rests in the case of which we have no written trace but clear knowledge, such as the temple consecrated to Laozi, Confucius and Buddha in Ming China, as reported by Grayson, and the spontaneous shamanic religious complex of Seoul (the In'wang-san Kuksa-dang 仁王山國師堂), reported by Brook.

In fact, public declaration can be recollected into the Detienne (1983, 2004, 2008) description of “official narrative / agora discourse” and “theology”: polytheist religions and cultures are constantly remade by its adherents, without any inherent necessity of always clarifying their position, and when one high-status individual does it, it is not guarantee that there is not some socio-political motivation behind it. Moreover, among possible motivations, clarifying one position can be surely aimed at distance oneself or one's group from other individuals, being that other social strata, cultures, organized religions and so on. However, Detienne also points out that any variation, split and disagreements are possible without a culture as long as they are coherent within such culture: two “adversaries” can coexist. This complicated situation is so evident when considering popular beliefs that is problematized by Brook himself, for China (“it rests nonetheless on a social base of believers for whom syncretism was a natural tendency”), and, as we will see, by Walraven (1991), for Korea (“[scil. low rank] Confucians were closer to shamanism than their vociferous denunciations of the *mudang* might have us believe”).

Therefore, we can say that some way of syncretism described above can be either “silent” or “declared”, which means: either undeclared and possibly spontaneous; or ideological, as a part of a discourse with an audience, a target and possibly adversaries or enemies. Clearly, both possibilities can coexist and even clash against each other, as in Ming China.

Now, we can draw a definition of syncretism that summarize what we have found before:

Syncretism refers to a situation in which, given a power disbalance or hegemony, a religion adopts practical or doctrinal elements from another religion, changing its state of its local tradition or, either, when elements from different religions are collected together into a new autonomous tradition. This transformation can be declared or silent, part of an active rhetorical-ideological discourse or not, depending on the socio-political situation of the actors involved.

We can also synthesize within a chart the different rhetorical-ideological strategies that we have seen before:

	Hegemony		Subalternity	
	Unequal power balance	Equal power balance	Equal power balance	Unequal power balance
Ecumenism	unequal ecumenism			weak syncretism
Inclusivism	unequal ecumenism			weak syncretism
Compartmentalism	unequal ecumenism			
Eclectism				weak syncretism
Notes:	In the case of the Chinese Cultural Sphere, the unequal ecumenism, when ideologically declared, express itself in two rhetorical strategies: 1. “Three teachings, one source” <i>sanjiao tongyuan</i> 三教同源 2. “Different routes, one goal” <i>shutu tonggui</i> 殊途同歸 And for the compartmentalism: 1. “Labor division is complementarity” <i>hufu gongcheng</i> 互輔共成 2. “Different traditions, one effort” <i>yiqu tonggong</i> 異曲同工 Moreover, it is easy to see in the practice of “categorizing concepts” <i>geyi</i> 格義 found within the first Sinitic Buddhism a form of			

	inclusivism in a subalternity situation, even though not necessarily a form of weak syncretism too ¹²⁹
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We can finally summarize what we have found so far:

- Syncretism refers to a situation in which a religion adopts practical or doctrinal elements from another religion, changing its state of its local tradition or, either, when elements from different religions are collected together into a new autonomous tradition
 - An important element in this interaction is the imbalance of power (economical, political, social etc.) and, therefore, cultural hegemony.
- Various forms of syncretism strategies can be enumerated. These strategies can either be declared as part of a rhetorical-ideological effort or undeclared as part of the spontaneous interaction between (popular) religions. Moreover, they can be strategies only tangential to syncretism, if they do not end in a noticeable transformation in status of the religion took into exam.
 - ecumenism: truth is universal, different religions permit to access to that truth in their own way
 - inclusivism: one religion, typically subaltern, is explained in the terms of another religion, explained as a “partial revelation” or “inferior methods” or similia
 - compartmentalism: each religion has its own “field of specialization”, not mutually overlapping with that of the other ones
 - eclecticism: will to adopt elements from another religion, as far as these elements are regarded as useful

¹²⁹ William Chu (2006), 68-70

- If there a religion has the political upper hand, any of these strategies is defined as “unequal ecumenism”: simulated tolerance and openness, masking claims of superiority
- On the other way, if the religion is subordinated, the situation is defined as “weak syncretism”: when a local cult adopts core values of a universalistic religion, while other elements remain unchanged
- In Chinese Cultural Sphere, specific rhetorical strategies were adopted for specific situations:
 - Compartmentalism:
 - “Three teachings, one source” *sanjiao tongyuan* 三教同源
 - “Different routes, one goal” *shutu tonggui* 殊途同歸
 - Unequal ecumenism:
 - “Three teachings, one source” *sanjiao tongyuan* 三教同源
 - “Different routes, one goal” *shutu tonggui* 殊途同歸
 - (Subaltern) inclusivism / weak syncretism – specific for Buddhism-Daoism relationship:
 - “Categorizing concepts” *geyi* 格義

3 Predecessors in the Northern Kingdom Mythologies

So far, we have discussed the cultural hummus of Chesök and Tanggüm’aegi. Now we must search for the historical background of these deities.

As many other study on Korean mythology, we start with Tan’gun myth 檀君神話 of Kojosön 古朝鮮 (d. 108 CE):

***Samguk Yusa* 三國遺事 I, prodigies 紀異 1: the king of Old Chosön and Chosön 古朝鮮王儉朝鮮**

魏書云, “乃往二千載有壇君王儉立都阿斯達 [...] 開國號朝鮮, 與高同時.” 古記云, “昔有桓圉[謂帝釋

Thus reports the *Book of Wei*: “Tan’gun Wanggöm lived two thousand years ago. He built the capital city of Asadal and founded the kingdom called Chosön, this

也]庾子桓雄數意天下貪求人世。父知子意下視三危太伯可以弘益人間，乃授天符印三箇遣往理之。雄率徒三千降於太伯山頂 [...] 神壇樹下謂之神市，是謂桓雄天王也。將風伯·雨師·雲師，而主穀·主命·主病·主刑·主善惡凡主人間三百六十餘事在世理化。時有一熊一虎同穴而居，常祈于神雄願化爲人。時神遺靈艾一炷蒜二十枚曰，‘爾輩食之不見日光百日，便得人形。’熊虎得而食之忌三七日熊得女身，虎不能忌而不得人身。熊女者無與爲婚故每於壇校勘樹下呪願有孕。雄乃假化而婚之。孕生子號曰壇君王儉。

during the time of emperor Yao.” The *Ancient Chronicles* says: “In ancient times there was Hwan’ung, son of Hwan’in [also called Chesök / Śakra], he desired to come down from Heavens and see the human world. Knowing the desire of his son, the father, examined three peaks, the thought that the T’aebek mountain was the best one for the benefit of the mankind, then he gave the son three heavenly sigils and sent him down to the earth to rule the human world. Followed by three thousand followers, Hwan’ung came down to the mount T’aebaek in a place where there was a sacred tree on an altar he called ‘city of gods’, he himself was indeed the Prince of Heaven. He led the Count of Wind, the Master of Rain and the Master of Cloud, and he was in charge of every human activity, including good and evil, farming and lifespan, illness and punishments, thus he civilized the world. In that time a bear and a tiger lived together in a cavern, praying Hwan’ung so they could become humans. The god then send them a sacred mugwort branch and twenty cloves of garlic saying: ‘If you’ll eat this and stay hundred days without seeing the sunlight, you’ll take the human shape’. The two animals took and aet as said and, after twenty-one days the bear obtained a human body, while

the tiger was unable to follow the prohibitions and did not become human. The woman-bear (Ungnyō) did not have a husband and therefore she prayed under the tree for a child, Hwan'ung then disguised his appearances and married her, the son they had was called Tan'gun Wanggōm"

Chesōk is what we are searching for here. Therefore, the identification with Hwan'in, the god king of the heavens, would be enough: it is explicitly said in the notations of the text, after all. Unfortunately, this would not explain the heavy Buddhist themes surrounding the various cults of Chesōk, nor the presence of other two deities in these cults, maybe reminiscences of Hwan'in and Tan'gun, and even less how an official State cult ended up becoming a variety of popular, regional and seasonal festivals.

There is for sure no lack of interpretations of this foundation myth, as it was a point of interest for scholars and ideologues for a long time. Among Confucian literati, those first who interested in Tan'gun myth in itself were perhaps Yi Chonghwi 李種徽 (1731-1791) and Tasan Chōng Yagyong 茶山丁若鏞 (1762-1836): Yi equated the mythical king to his Chinese counterparts Fuxi 伏羲 and Shennong 神農, stating, along many of his contemporaries, that he was a historical sage ruler, bringer of civility; noteworthy, on the other side, Tasan dismissed the Tan'gun birth and rule narratives as lacking of sufficient data to be accepted as a historical figure, and therefore only his successor Kija 箕子 was viewed as such¹³⁰. When Confucian interpretations about Mandate of Heaven and legitimacy faded out of fashion, during the Colonial Period, it was the turn of ethno-nationalistic historiography. The major exponents of this reading school surely were Sin Ch'aeho 申采浩 (1880-1936) and Ch'oe Namsōn 崔南善 (1890-1957): Sin, the true father of Korean nationalist historiography, saw all Korean History as a History of Nations¹³¹, and this as a dialectic progression of interaction between "self" *a* 我 and "not-self" *pi-a* 非我, which is:

¹³⁰ Xu Stella (2016), 71-88

¹³¹ Fundamentally indistinguishable from "race", by his definition

Chosŏn against foreign invaders. Chosŏn here stays for Tan'gun Chosŏn, founded on T'aebaek mountain by Tan'gun as a novel incarnation of Shangdi 上帝 and a ruler over various populations, such as: Sushen / Suksin 肅慎, Malgal 靺鞨, Chinese, Chosŏn 朝鮮, Puyŏ / Fuyu 扶餘, Yemaek 濊貊, Samhan 三韓 and even Jurchen-Manchus. These are the “major races” 主族, “core” of which the ethnic is the Han people 韓. The geographic center of Chosŏn was Manchuria and its religion was monotheistic. Similarly, Ch'oe Namsŏn saw in Tan'gun not a politician but a shaman, even though he believed it was also the king of Chosŏn, kingdom stretching from China's east coasts to Manchuria and the center of the “Purham Cultural Sphere” *Purham Munhwa kwŏn* 不咸文化圈 i.e. the area where Tan'gun was venerated: from mount Paektu to Balkans, Caspian and Black Sea, Central Asia, Mongolia, Korea, Manchuria, Ryukyu and Japan.¹³² So far, it's evident why “ideologues” addition was needed alongside with “scholars”: such kinds of narratives clearly served political agendas. These tendencies are not quite defunct, not even for some non-Korean scholars, as Stella Xu (2016) explains. More recent scholars saw in the story of Tan'gun either a narrative about the initiation path of the shamans;¹³³ or another iteration of the Siberian shared myth about a sky bear-god likely influenced by proto-historical Chinese customs;¹³⁴ or one form of shamanic narrative about the meeting of Heaven and Earth, granting blessings and fulfilling wishes;¹³⁵ or a narrative of the encounter between the Sky Father, the Mother Earth who gave birth to an ancestor;¹³⁶ or again a myth of “solar fecundation” and of a *deus otiosus*;¹³⁷ or even a narrative about the creation of humanity tout court.¹³⁸ To better understand these analyses and find out about their validity, we should not ignore the context: it's hardly debatable that an “autochthony myth” of any kind was intended as it seems a posteriori,

¹³² Xu Stella (2016) 98-102; Pai Hyung Il (2020), 63-5 and 67-97. It is noteworthy that both ideologies mirrored the Japanese Empire's official narrative(s), and in case of Ch'oe Namsŏn, one could even see in the *Purham Munhwa kwŏn* 不咸文化圈 an ethno-nationalistic mythical version of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere *Dai Tōa Kyōeiken* 大東亞共榮圈

¹³³ Cho Hung-Youn (1999), 51-3; partly Grayson (1984), 186-8

¹³⁴ Janhunen (2003)

¹³⁵ Chačatryan (2015)

¹³⁶ Grayson (1984), 186-8; Choi Moon-Hyoung (2009)

¹³⁷ Riotto (2017)

¹³⁸ Schipper et al. (2011), 279-323

especially those myths part of the “official narrative” of a group, nor that any narrative had a fixed canonic form in ancient times.¹³⁹

To better understand this mythological narrative, we must wander on the surroundings of Korean Peninsula and Manchuria, searching for clues in the myths of other populations. The 2003 work of Janhunen turns out to be handy. Janhunen and colleagues collected and analyzed the importance of the bear figure in the Siberian context: the bear is believed to understand human language, and it is coherently worthy of a proper funeral as, in fact, killing a bear is no less than a homicide, according to almost every myth of the area. This is much of a good point to start searching, but the study goes further: in Siberia there are myths involving a “bear wife”, for example among Sakhalin Udege, where the woman is the sister of the shaman-hunter hero, or either the husband or father of the said woman and sometimes she is directly a she-bear, as among the Amur Nivkh people, where the bear is also a sky deity; in another version, such that of the Evenks, the bear is also implicitly a shaman himself capable of granting good hunting as the “king of animals”: a godly-totemic beast powerful enough to be object of veneration.¹⁴⁰

All these myths may point to an archaic, pre-husbandry pre-agriculture version where Ungnyō 熊女 had a greater role or even where our sky deities were bears themselves,¹⁴¹ nonetheless it suggests another important point: this foundation myth may not have been originally a “foundation” myth, but rather a myth involving other, crucial aspects of human life within the so-called Kojosōn, such hunting and, later, harvesting.

However, our analysis is for now taking for granted that the first version we had thanks to Iryōn 一然 (1206-1289) is the only one available, which is clearly an untrue premise. In fact, many later versions exist, with some notable variations. We can take the Yi Sūnghyu 李承休 (1224-1300) account as an example, the version chronologically closest to that of Iryōn:

¹³⁹ Detienne & Cuniberto (1983); Detienne (2004); Goody (2010). This chapter is heavily influenced by the Detienne’s analysis of the foundation myths.

¹⁴⁰ Janhunen (2003), Sem (2022), 121-3 cf. with Boileau (2002), 352-4 and Winkelman (2023), 2-8 for the differentiations in hunting and husbandry societies

¹⁴¹ About husbandry, see again Boileau (2002), 352-4

遼東別有一乾坤，斗與中朝區以分。
洪濤萬頃圍三面，於北有陵連如線。
[...] 中方千里是朝鮮，江山形勝名敷天。
耕田鑿井禮義家，華人題作小中華。
初誰開國啓風雲，釋帝之孫名檀君。
[本紀曰，‘上帝桓因，有庶子，曰雄云云。謂曰，
“下至三危太白，弘益人間歟。”故雄，受天符印三箇，率鬼三千，而降太白山頂神檀樹下，是謂檀雄天王也云云。’令孫女飲藥，成人身，與檀樹神婚而生男，名檀君。據朝鮮之域，爲王。故尸羅，高禮，南北沃沮，東北扶餘，穢與貊，皆檀君之壽也。理一千三十八年，入阿斯達山，爲神，不死故也] 竝與帝高興戊辰，經虞歷夏居中宸。於殷虎丁八乙未，入阿斯達山爲神。享國一千二十八，無奈變化傳桓因。却後一百六十四，仁人聊復開君臣。

In the region of Liaodong there is another distinct world, suddenly separated from the area of central dynasties (i.e.: China), surrounded by huge waves for countless hectares on three sides, while northward tall hills are joined like a string. [...] In the center of this, for thousand *li* there was Chosŏn, landscape's name of which spread to the Heavens. Its people plow fields, build wells and honor the family with virtues. The Chinese people (or "the cultured people") call this land "The Little China". Who was the first to build a kingdom and so created the world? It was the grandchild of Sŏkche ("Emperor Śakra"), called Tan'gun [in the *Chronicles of the Origins* it is said: "Shangdi-Hwan'in had a child from a concubine named Ung, the child said: 'I'll come down to the three peaks of T'aebaek for the benefit of the mankind!', thus he received three heavenly sigils and the command over three thousand deities and come down under the sacred *Tan* tree on the peak of the T'aebaek, so it was called Tan'ung Prince of Heaven. Hwan'in then gave a potion to his granddaughter, changing her into a human, and marrying with the god of the *Tan* tree a male was born, whose name was Tan'gun. He took possession of the lands of Chosŏn, becoming its king. Silla, Koguryŏ, Okchŏ,

Puyō and the Ye and the Maek tribes were all descendants of Tan'gun, who lived for 1038 years and went to the Asadal mountain to become a god, without dying"]. He ruled at the time of emperor Yao, he build the State in the Wuchen year, ruling through the time of Yu and Xia dynasties. In the eighth year of reign of emperor Wuding of Yin dynasty, year Yinwei, he came to the Asadal mountain becoming a god and after other 1028 years of rule there how couldn't be no changes to report to Hwan'in? Only after 164 years a benevolent person reopens the king-subject relationship.

This version had its share of interpretations too: Stella Xu sees in there an ethnogenetic myth, with Hwan'ung as the (deity of the) migrant group, the tree's *genius loci* the (deity of the) local group and in Tan'gun as the founder (of the new polity).¹⁴² Sin Jong-won preferred an anthropologic interpretation, instead: Hwan'in is a sky deity, as both explained by his titles Shangdi / Sangje 上帝 and Sökche 釋帝 (variation of Chesök 帝釋) and his name is likely a rendition of the native Korean term for “sky” *hanül*; Hwan'ung or the Heavenly King Tan'ung is no less than a double of his father, a repetition needed to portray the generative power of the sky god as well as his dwelling on mountains; as for the tree spirit and Tan'gun, it indicates an altar, since by ancient altars were also sacred trees, like in the Ch'angsöngdan 塹城壇 of Paekche, and thus the use of 檀 instead of 壇, as for the sacred trees themselves, or *tangnamu* “*tang*-trees”, those are residence of ancestors' souls. The *tangnamu* also explain why is used the characters 壇 and 檀, both read *tan*.¹⁴³

Then, there is the more sober version of the *Sejong sillok chiri chi* 世宗實錄地理志 (1342), where any heavenly kinship is lacking, and our ancestral king is no more than

¹⁴² Xu Stella (2016), 55

¹⁴³ Sin Jong-won (2016)

a title. A strange miss, since the source is nonetheless than a record about Tan'gun himself (*Tan'gun Kogi* 檀君古記):¹⁴⁴

Sejong sillok chiri chi 世宗實錄地理志, P'yŏng'an-do, P'yŏngyang-bu

唐堯戊辰歲, 神人降于檀木之下, 國人立爲君, 都平壤, 號檀君, 是爲前朝鮮

In the Wuchen year of emperor Yao, a godly human¹⁴⁵ came down under the *Tan* tree, the people of the region proclaimed him their king and establish P'yŏngyang, his name was Tan'gun, and his (kingdom) became Former Chosŏn.

However, later it is mentioned another variation from the same source, a version more akin to that of *Chewang Un'gi* and less to that of *Koryŏsa* (KRS LIIX, annals 20,3):

《檀君古記》云：上帝桓因有庶子，名雄，意欲下化人間，受天三印，降太白山神檀樹下，是爲檀雄天王。令孫女飲藥成人身，與檀樹神婚而生男，名檀君，立國號曰朝鮮。朝鮮、尸羅、高禮、南北沃沮、東北扶餘、濊與貊，皆檀君之理。檀君聘娶非西岬河伯之女生子，曰夫妻，是謂東扶餘王。檀君與唐堯同日而立，至禹會塗山，遣太子夫妻朝焉。享國一

The Ancient Chronicles of Tan'gun say: “Shangdi-Hwan'in had a son from a concubine, her name was Ung, (the son) desired to descend on earth and become human, so (Hwan'in) gave him three heavenly sigils, he (the son) came down under the divine *Tan* tree, on the of T'aebaek mountain. This was Tan'ung. He (Hwan'in) gave his granddaughter a potion so she could obtain a human body, then she married the spirit of the *Tan* tree and had a son, named Tan'gun. (Tang'un) created a kingdom, named Chosŏn. Chosŏn, Silla,

¹⁴⁴ Xu Stella (2016), 61

¹⁴⁵ 神人 *shenren* / *sin'in* is ambiguous: it could either be a deity, a spirit, a human with godlike attributes or simply a human.

千三十八年，至殷武丁八年乙未， 入阿斯達爲神	Koguryō, Eastern and Northern and Okchō, and Ye and Maek as well, all are because of Tan'gun. Tang'un then married the daughter of the Habaek of the Pisō peak, having a son named Puru, this was called the king of Puyō. Tan'gun and Yao took the throne the same day, with a ceremony on the Tushan mountain, and (Tan'gun) sent the prince Puru to establish a dynasty. On the one- thousand-eightieth year of reign, eighth year of Wuding of Yin (Shang), year Yiwei, Tan'gun came to Asadal becoming a god.”
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Unfortunately, the *Tan'gun Kogi* is no longer available, so it is impossible to verify it directly and, by principle of economy, we could only suppose both variations were present in that text. What is evident here is that, ended being a foundation myth of a semi-legendary kingdom, Tan'gun story started being a narrative comprising all later kingdoms in Korea and Manchuria, as the explicit inclusion of the kingdom's name and the hint to the mythical (Hae)Puru (解) 夫妻 of Puyō. One can only suppose this mutation was likely fabricated during the Koryō kingdom 高麗 (918-1392) – if not even during last Unified Silla period 統一新羅 (668–935) – as a political tool to unite people at war with each other not many generations ago.¹⁴⁶

Before wandering again, let us summarize the major variation of the Tan'gun myth, enumerating its major points and confronting it with its Siberian equivalents:¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Pai Hyung Il (2020), 110-121; Xu Stella (2016), 46-8

¹⁴⁷ This table is an adaptation of that of Pak (2015), integrated with the information of Boileau (2002), 352-4; Janhunen (2003); Yung Sung-chan (2016), 76-9; Xu Stella (2016); Sem (2022) and Winkelman (2023), 2-8

	<i>Samguk Yusa</i> 三國遺事	<i>Chewang Un'gi</i> 帝王韻紀	<i>Sejong sillok</i> 世宗實錄 (Ver. 2)	<i>Sejong sillok</i> 世宗實 (Ver. 1)	Siberian mythologies	
					Husbandry	Hunting
Sky deity	Hwan'in 桓因 (Chesök 帝釋)	Shangdi-Hwan'in 上帝桓因 (Sökche 釋帝)	Shangdi-Hwan'in 上帝桓因	?	Hierarchy of ancestors (with ferine traits)	Bear god(dess) / Snake-dragon
Sky deity's son (?)	Hwan'ung 桓雄	Tan'ung 檀雄	Tan'ung 檀雄	None		Animals
Helpers (?)	Weather gods 風伯·雨師·雲師	None	None	None		
Minor deities	three thousand followers 徒三千	three thousand deities 鬼三千				
Symbols	<i>Ch'önbuin</i> 天符印	<i>Ch'önbuin</i> 天符印	<i>Ch'önsam'in</i> 天三印	None	?	
Place / <i>Genius loci</i>	<i>Tan</i> tree 壇樹	god of the <i>Tan</i> tree 檀樹神	god of the <i>Tan</i> tree 檀樹神	<i>Tan</i> tree 檀木	Altar	Mountain forest
Totem animal	Bear 熊 / Ungnyō 熊女	Granddaughter (?) 孫女	granddaughter(?) 孫女	None	Deer, snake-dragon, bear or tiger	
Master of riches	Tan'gun 檀君	Tan'gun 檀君	Tan'gun 檀君	Tan'gun 檀君	Tribe ancestor	Bear / Tiger (forest master)

As for the lineage of the *Chewang Un'gi* and the second *Sejong Sillok*, where two generations are added (the concubine Ung 雄 and the “granddaughter” 孫女), this could be a way to explain a non-Sinitic name succession and create a fictitious genealogy of convenience.¹⁴⁸ But convenience for what or whom? Seeing from the effect, it seems the two major problem was to distance the more “human” Tan'gun from the sky deities and at the same time not totally negate the relationship. In this sense, both *Chewang Un'gi* and *Sillok* second version seems closer to the first version of the *Sillok* first version than other ones, which is: a myth where no clear heavenly kinship is seen. In fact, Tan'gun there is either a parentless human sent by an impersonal Heaven or closer to the tree deity than to any sky god.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Sin Jong-won (2016), 130-2

¹⁴⁹ Xu Stella (2016), 61: commenting the first version in the *Sejong sillok chiri chi*: “Without a patriarchal or a matrilinear affiliation, Tan'gun appeared without connection to the Heavenly God.”

At the same time, now we could see how the whole myth seems a compromise of two Siberian kind of mythologies: one closer to that prevalent among hunting society (bear totem, tree or forest, shamans) and one among husbandry society (hierarchy among gods, ancestors, altars), even though the husbandry version is somehow prevalent. What is not explained, however, is the doubling of the sky gods.

3.1. *Chumong between Koguryō and the Manchus*

But let us restart our wandering. This time not among northern Siberian people, but among southern Tungusic people: the Jurchen-Manchu. As it is generally known, Jurchen 女真 created its Jin State 大金 (1115–1234) during the last period of Koryō kingdom and then, after the fall of the Mongol Empire (1206-1294), then Yuan dynasty and the Japanese Invasion of Korea (1592-1598), the descendent of the Jurchen, the Manchu people 滿洲 assaulted the Ming dynasty 大明 (1364-1644) creating a new unified China under the Qing dynasty. Qing dynasty is therefore an excellent study model, as it has a population of Siberian origins but also a knowledge of the Sinitic-style polity, plus Jurchen-Manchu people may have had some knowledge of Korean mythologies from their conquest of the Manchurian territories from Khitan-Liao 大遼 (916-1125), that in turn conquered Parhae 渤海 (698-926).

Within the official historiography of Aisin Gioro 愛新覺羅 imperial clan¹⁵⁰ we found an interesting mythological account: the *Manzhou Shilu* (*Manju-i yargiyan kooli*) 滿洲實錄 narrative starts with a landscape not dissimilar to that at the start of *Chewang Un'gi* account:

Manzhou Shilu (*Manju-i yargiyan kooli*) 滿洲實錄, I

長白山高約二百里周圍約千里此
山之上有一潭名闡門周圍約八十
里鴨綠混同愛濤三江俱從此山流
出鴨綠江自山南瀉出向西流直入

The Long White Mountain (Golmin Šanggiyan Alin)¹⁵¹ is two hundred *li* in height and thousand *li* in circumference. On the peak of the mountain there is a lake known by the name of Tamun, which is

¹⁵⁰ Commissioned during the emperor Qianlong 乾隆帝 (1736-95) rule.

¹⁵¹ Changbaishan 長白山 / Mount Paektu 白頭山

Manzhou Shilu (Manju-i yargiyan kooli) 滿洲實錄, I

遼東之南海混同江自山北瀉出向北流直入北海愛濤江向東流直入東海此三江中每出珠寶長白山山高地寒風勁不休夏日環山之獸俱投憩此山中此山盡是浮石乃東北一名山也

eighty *li* around. Rivers named Yalu, Huntung (Songhua) and Aihu (Tuman) come forth from mountain in. The Yalu proceeds from the south of the mount, flows west and enters the sea south of Liaodong. The Hun River comes from the north of the mountain, flows north, and enters the northern sea. The Aihu River flows east and enters the eastern sea. Treasures and pearls come out of these three rivers. Because the wind on the heights of the Long White Mountain is strong and the area is cold, after summer has come, the animals which roam the mountains go to Long White Mountain and rest there. The white mountain to the east which is filled with pumice stone is that very mount.

Then, the proper myth takes place:¹⁵²

滿洲原起於長白山之東北布庫哩山下一泊名布勒瑚里初天降三仙女浴於泊長名恩古倫次名正古倫三名佛庫倫浴畢上岸有神鵲銜一朱果置佛庫倫衣上色甚鮮妍佛庫倫愛之不忍釋手遂銜口中甫著衣其果入腹中即感而成孕告二姊曰吾覺腹重不能同升奈何二姊曰吾等曾服丹藥諒無死理此乃天意俟

Manchu origins begone on Bulhūri Lake, on the foot of a mountain named Bulkūri, northeast of Long White Mountain. Three heavenly maidens came to bath in the lake, their names were Enggulen, Jenggulen and Fekulen. Finished the bath, on the bank (of the lake), Fekulen found a vermillion fruit which a divine magpie had placed on her clothes. From the color it seems very fresh, so Fekulen did not like the idea of

¹⁵² Pai Hyung Il (2020), 251-4; Durrant (1979). Noteworthy, this story is classified as a humanity creation myth too: Schipper et al. (2011), 291-2

爾身輕上升未晚遂別去佛庫倫後
生一男生而能言爰爾長成母告子
曰天生汝實令汝以定亂國可往彼
處將所生緣由一一詳說乃與一舟
順水去即其地也言訖忽不見其子
乘舟順流而下至於人居之處登岸
折柳條為坐具似椅形獨踞其上彼
時長白山東南鄂謨輝〔地名〕鄂多
理〔城名〕內有三姓爭為雄長終日
互相殺傷適一人來取水見其子舉
止奇異相貌非常回至爭鬥之處告
眾曰汝等無爭我於取水處遇一奇
男子非凡人也想天不虛生此人盍
往觀之三姓人聞言罷戰同眾往觀
及見果非常人異而詰之荅曰我及
天女佛庫倫所生姓愛新〔漢語金也〕
覺羅〔姓也〕名布庫哩雍順天降
我定汝等之亂因將母所囑之言詳
告之眾皆驚異曰此人不可使之徒
行遂相插手為輿擁捧而回三姓人
息爭共奉布庫哩雍順為主以百里
女妻之其國定號滿洲乃其始祖
也〔南朝誤名建州〕

discarding it, and it took in her mouth while dressing; but, during that, some bite of the fruit came directly into her throat. Because she suddenly became pregnant, she said: "I think that, because of the weight in my belly, I'm unable to ascend, what could I do?", the other two older sisters answered: "We already took the cinnabar elixir and gained immortality. As for you, wait for the heavenly providence: when your body will become light again, ascend (with us).", not too late, they ascended. Fekulen gave birth to a boy, already able to speak. After he surprisingly grown up, his mother said to him: "Heaven gave birth to you so you could rectify the State, which is in turmoil, for this reason you can go forth!", told him every detail the circumstances of his birth, she gave him a boat telling to go downstream, and ended speaking, she abruptly ascended, not seeing her son (again). At the end of the stream, he arrived at a settlement when he gone ashore and bent to a willow, propped up some vines and fashioned a stool upon which he set like it was a chair. At that time, he was the only one to occupy that place. On the southeastern borders of the Long White Mountain, in the Omoho region, in the Halai city, three clans were fighting to become the chief.: all the time they were mutually killing and injuring each other. (One day) a man came to fetch water and saw the boy,

(he had) an amazing demeanor and appearances. When he returned to the battle place informing the others, he said: “Stop fighting! I met a boy where I went to fetch the water, and he is an extraordinary man. How could the Heaven give birth to him in vain?” Wanting to see him, the clans stop the fight, they asked the extraordinary man, why he was so different. He said: “I was born from the heavenly maid Fekulen, my clan’s name is Aisin [‘gold’ ‘golden’ in Chinese] Gioro, my name is Bukūri Yongšon (“hero mountain-deer”)¹⁵³, I was made descent from Heaven to bring the order, and that’s because of your infightings.”, said them following the words of his mother. The crowd was astonished and said: “This man is not one whom we can take away on foot.”, so they made a palanquin with and, returned (to the city of). Three clans decided to stop fighting and paid respect to him, and so Bukūri Yongšon became the ruler and gave him Lady Beri as wife. This State was named Manchu and this boy was Shizu [southern dynasty (Song) called them Jianzhou (Jurchen)].

This myth spread orally among Hūrka / Hūrha tribes of the Nanai¹⁵⁴, then reported by the *Jiu Manzhou dang* (*Fe Manju Dangse*) 舊滿洲檔 (1635). Even though the Nanai

¹⁵³ Sem (2022), 122

¹⁵⁴ Absorbed by the Manchus in the seventeenth century.

version has some variations: the place is Heilongjiang and not Changbaishan, and the *Manzhou shilu* gives more details, with a clearer focus on the mother¹⁵⁵.

Here we can see many Siberian and Korean elements: the sacred tree and the sacred mountain, known to both parts of Asia¹⁵⁶ and the Heaven-born hero. The combination of a heavenly birth and the journey southward is however closer to the narrative of Chumong 朱蒙 / Ch'umo 鄒牟 / Ch'umong 鄒蒙 of Koguryō than to the myth of Kojosōn. This strong similitude with the greater northern kingdom was first noticed by the Japanese scholar Naitō Konan 内藤湖南 (Torajirō 虎次郎, 1866-1934), and he therefore theorized that the Qing myth was based on that of Koguryō.¹⁵⁷ This new diversion to our main focus, Tan'gun, open new possibilities, such considering all northern kingdom foundation myth as a part of a general type, involving a Sky Father, a sacred marriage and a hero. These definitions will however be discussed at the end of this chapter. For now, let us divert to Chumong of Koguryō for a while.

The Chumong narrative is surely more complicated. One of the first Korean versions we have currently is reported in the Kwanggaet'o Stele 廣開土王陵碑, fifth century:

Kwanggaet'o Stele 廣開土王陵碑, lines 1-4

惟昔始祖鄒牟王之創基也出自北
夫餘天帝之子母河伯女郎剖卵降
世生而有聖 [德鄒牟王奉母] 命駕
巡幸南下路由夫餘奄利大水王臨
津言曰我是皇天之子母河伯女郎
鄒牟王爲我連葭浮龜應聲卽爲連
葭浮龜然後造渡於沸流谷忽本西
城山上而建都焉不樂世位天遣黃

It was in ancient time, when our ancestor king Ch'umo founded (our State) came from North Puyō as son of the Heavenly Emperor. His mother, the daughter of Habaek, gave birth to him by cracking an egg. Possessing the heavenly [virtues, king Ch'umo followed the orders of his mother and] made an imperial tour to the south. Arriving at the Puyō's Great Ōmni River, he said facing the river: "I am the son of the

¹⁵⁵ Durrant (1979), 76-9; Seo Taesok (2001), 535-548. Durrant also noticed that the Chinese adaptation has less orality features compared to the Manchu version

¹⁵⁶ Boileau (2002), 352-4; Janhunen (2003); Pai Hyung Il (2020) 251-4; Sem (2022), 122.

Interestingly, the shift in the Tan'gun myth toward Mount Paektu / Changbaishan from the classical location of Mount T'aebaek was a modern reinvention: Xu Stella (2016) 102-3; Pai Hyung Il (2020)

¹⁵⁷ Seo Taesok (2001), 535-548; Pai Hyung Il (2020), 251-4

龍來下迎王王於忽本東正履龍首
昇天

Sublime Heaven¹⁵⁸ and my mother is the daughter of Habaek, king Ch'umo order you to weave together the reeds for me, so turtles can float (on the surface)". Soon after he talked, (the reeds) bent and he ferried (on the turtles) and crossed the river. Upon the mountain-fort on the west of Cholbon mountain, in Piryu valley, he established his capital, where he would rule for long. Accordingly (to rituals) he summoned the Yellow Dragon from the Heaven and he "meet the king". The king was on the hills east of Cholbon and the Yellow Dragon took him on its back and ascended to Heaven.

This rather simple version had given some headache to the scholar Noh Taedon, who noticed that both in the later *Sagi* and *Yusa* version the place of origin was East Puyŏ and there are many other, quite noticeable, changes in the details:

***Samguk Sagi* 三國史記, XXX, Koguryŏ annals**

始祖東明聖王，姓高氏，諱朱蒙 [一云鄒牟一云衆解]。先是，扶餘王解夫妻，老無子，祭山川求嗣。其所御馬至鯤淵，見大石，相對流淚。王怪之，使人轉其石，有小兒，金色蛙形[蛙一作蝸]。王喜曰，“此乃天賚我令胤乎。”乃收而養之，名曰金蛙。及其長，立爲太子

The first ancestor was the emperor Tŏngmyŏng, whose clan name was Ko and whose name was Chumong [also called Ch'umo and Chunghae]. His origins go like this: Haeburu, king of Puyŏ, was old and had no children and seeking to have an heir, he made a rite for the mountains and rivers (gods). (One day), arrived at Kon'yŏn ("Kon pond"), he saw a huge rock and

¹⁵⁸ This is also a title given to Shangdi

後其相阿蘭弗曰，“日者天降我曰，‘將使吾子孫，立國於此。汝其避之。東海之濱有地，號曰迦葉原，土壤膏腴宜五穀，可都也。’”阿蘭弗遂勸王，移都於彼，國號東扶餘。其舊都有人，不知所從來，自稱天帝子解慕漱，來都焉。及解夫妻薨，金蛙嗣位。於是時，得女子於大白山南優漱水。問之曰，“我是河伯之女，名柳花。與諸弟出遊，時有一男子，自言天帝子解慕漱，誘我於熊心山下，鴨渌邊室中私之，即往不返。父母責我無媒而從人，遂謫居優漱水。”金蛙異之，幽閉於室中，爲日所炤，引身避之，日影又逐而炤之。因而有孕，生一卵，大如五升許。王棄之與犬豕，皆不食。又棄之路中，牛馬避之。後棄之野，鳥覆翼之。王欲剖之，不能破，遂還其母。其母以物裹之，置於暖處，有一男兒破殼而出，骨表英奇。年甫七歲，嶷然異常，自作弓矢射之，百發百中。扶餘俗語，善射爲朱蒙，故以名云。金蛙有七子，常與朱蒙遊戲，其技能皆不及朱蒙。其長子帶素言於王曰，“朱蒙非人所生，其爲人也勇。若不早圖，恐有後患，請

suddenly started crying, the king, thinking that was unusual, ordered to remove that rock, and (there) there was a little child, his color was golden, and he looked like a frog [or a snail]. The king happily said: “This is a reward from the Heaven, I declare (him my) heir!”. Then, they adopted (the boy) and nursed him, calling him Kūmhwa, making him the prince. After this, Aranbul said: “One day the Heavenly (God) visited me and said: ‘I sent my son (down to you) and he will build a State here, he will avoid your place. On the shores of the Eastern Sea there is a land, named Kasōb’wōn, its soil is fertile and grows all type of grain. It is a worthy place to establish a capital”. Aranbul encouraged the king to move the capital there and so the kingdom was named East Puyō. In the old capital there was a man, he did not know where he had arrived and called himself son of the Heavenly Emperor Haemosu when he arrived in the city. Then, Haeburu passed away and Kūmhwa inherited the throne. At that time, (the man) meet a woman on the south of Taebaek Mountain, on the Ubul Waters. Asked (about herself) she said: “I am the daughter of Habaek, my name is Yuhwa, I have come here to play with my brothers. That time there was a man calling himself Heavenly Prince Haemosu, he led me to feet of Ungsim (“Bear-Heart”) Mountain on the edge of Yalu River, in his

除之。”王不聽，使之養馬。朱蒙知其駿者，而減食令瘦，驚者善養令肥。王以肥者自乘，瘦者給朱蒙。後獵于野，以朱蒙善射，與其矢小，而朱蒙殪獸甚多。王子及諸臣又謀殺之。朱蒙母陰知之，告曰，“國人將害汝。以汝才略何往而不可。與其遲留而受辱，不若遠適以有爲。”朱蒙乃與烏伊·摩離·陝父等三人爲友，行至淹淲水[一名盖斯水在今鴨綠東北]欲渡無梁。恐爲追兵所迫，告水曰，“我是天帝子，何伯外孫。今日逃走，追者垂及如何。”於是，魚鼈浮出成橋，朱蒙得渡。魚鼈乃解，追騎不得渡。

private court. As he approached (me) he never returned. As I became a mother, he didn't ask to marry him but to become his attendant I scolded him, and I was banished on the Ubul Waters.” Kūmhwa found it unusual and secluded (them) in his palace, that made the sun shine, making (Yuhwa) body avowing it, (but) as the sunlight illuminated her again, that caused her to become pregnant, giving birth to an egg as big as six *toe*. The king then threw it away to pigs and dogs, but none of them ate it, so it threw it again in the street, but cows and horses avoided it, so again it threw it in the fields, but birds covered it with their wings. The king tried to cut open the egg but was unable to destroy it and returned the egg to his mother. She wrapped the egg with those things in a hot place, and a boy came out of the shell, his appearance was wonderful. He was seven years old and his tallness uncommon, he himself built bow and arrows and made a hit at every shot. Because it means “Good Archer” in Puyō language, it was named Chumong. As his fame spread, Kūmhwa had seven sons, all always playing with Chumong, but none of them was able to catch him (while playing). Taeso, the oldest brother, said to the king: “Chumong was not born as human (do) and, when he will become a man, he will be valiant. If we do not scheme (against him) now, he will become a trouble later. I

suggest getting rid of him.” The king did not listen to him and made (Chumong) feed his horse. Chumong knew that it was a speedy horse, so he decreased the food making him lose weight, then the king mounted on the fat horse and gave the skinny one to Chumong. Later, during a hunting trip, Chumong was recognized as a good shooter: even with few arrows, he was able to catch many animals. Princes and ministers were sent to kill him, the mother of Chumong secretly knew this and said to him: “Our countrymen will try to kill you, where couldn’t you go with your talents and wit? Better act now than incur in humiliation, you will not have any high achievement by not going far away”. Chumong took with him three men who became his friends, Oi, Mari and Hyöppo and crossed the Ömho Waters [also called Kaesa Water, nowadays known as Yalu, in the northeast], they wanted to cross but there was a bridge. Fearing of the approaching enemies, (Chumong) said to the waters: “I am the son of the Heavenly Emperor, descendent of Habaek. Now that I’m fleeing, what could I do now that the enemies are approaching?”, by the force of these (words), fish and turtles left the surface, building a bridge, and Chumong managed to cross (the waters). Then the animals undid (the passage) and the chasers were unable to cross.

Then, it is said in the Modun Valley 毛屯谷 he met three men, future ancestor of important clan of Koguryō, which is very close to the myth of Bukūri Yongŏn, but the hero was unable to build a palace on the shores of the Ōmsa River 淹瀦水¹⁵⁹, so he moved near the Piryu River 沸流水 and founded the kingdom there, which was also called Cholbon Puyō 卒本扶餘. An almost identical story is also seen in the *Yusa* (SKY XIII, Koguryō annals) and the *Lunheng* 論衡 (LH II, Old Accounts, Northern barbarians: Kingdom of T'angni 橐離) with minor changes¹⁶⁰: the biggest concern of the *Tongmyōng 'wang p'yōn* is clearly trying to making a coherent narrative with the different versions, adding at least some unusual details like a metamorphosis duel between Habaek and Haemosu.¹⁶¹

What we could see from these versions is that there's a general confusion about the birthplace of Chumong: while the Kwanggaet'o Stele and the Moduru tomb epitaph designate North Puyō, but the birthplace becomes East Puyō in the *Kusamguk Sagi*, *Samguk Sagi* and in the *Samguk Yusa*, and simply Puyō in the *Weishu* 魏書, *Zhoushu* 周書, *Suishu* 隋書 and in the *Liangshu* 梁書. This could be resolved addressing the fact that Koguryō conquered North Okchō the around the fourth century making what remained of Puyō move east by the third-fourth centuries, changing the designation. This, plus the additional myth of Kūmhwa, suggest that the version referring to Puyō as East Puyō are chronologically later.¹⁶²

About the Kūmhwa myth, it noticeable how is similar to the myth of Chumong and could in fact be considered an autonomous foundation myth. This kind of egg-born hero myth is associated with the south of the Korean Peninsula, and though it is indeed frequent in that region, it is noticeable that it exists a frog cult in the Lower Heilongjiang and until the twentieth century, in the Tumen River Basin: it is reported a variation of Jurchen-Manchu foundation myth, according to which a frog or an otter

¹⁵⁹ Or Ōmho River 淹瀦水, as in the text above.

¹⁶⁰ Xu Stella (2016), 51-2. In this fashion, the version reported in the *Tongmyōng 'wang p'yōn* 東明王篇 is almost useless, since it does not differ too much from the text already mentioned, as it shares the source of the *Ku Samguksa* 舊三國史 with the *Sagi*, itself taken as a source for the *Yusa*.

¹⁶¹ Curiously, a similar magic competition is attested in the *Yusa* but involving the future King T'arhae 脫解尼師今 of Silla and the king of Original Kaya 本伽倻 (SMY II, Extraordinary Events 2: Karak Kingdom). T'arhae is also another example of hero born from an egg.

¹⁶² Noh Taedon (2014), 13-8

married the daughter of a local lord, giving birth to Nurhaci 努爾哈赤 (1559-1626). In the myth of Kūmhwa there is no need for a river god like Haemosu: there, the water element is represented by his birthplace, a pond. This association is not coincidental: we could suppose a tie to the Yŏn clan of Iri Kōsesa 伊犁渠世斯 and the (in)famous generalissimo Yŏn Kaesomun 淵蓋蘇文 (594-666). Interestingly, in the *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 is reported a legend of Yŏn Kaesomun's water birth (*XTS* vol, 220, biographies 145: Eastern Barbarians – Account on Koguryō).¹⁶³

So, now we have found a simple form of the Korean northern kingdoms' foundation narratives: a hero, son of Heaven and maybe the waters (of a river?), born parentless. This narrative is seen in the case of Kūmhwa, and in the Tan'gun myth, first version of the *Sejong Sillok*, but it is seen also in the case of Chumong, as in the fifth century Moduru tomb epitaph shows:

***Moduru tomb epitaph* 牟頭婁 墓誌, lines 3-5**

惟昔河泊之孫日月之子鄒牟聖王 元出北夫餘天下四方知此國郡最 聖...	In ancient times, there was the heavenly king Ch'umo, grandson of Habaek and son of the Sun and the Moon, originally come from North Puyō. In all four directions under the Heaven, he is known as the first emperor of this kingdom...
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This simpler version is close to that of the *Weishu* (*WS* vol. 100, biographies 88: Account on Koguryō) and *Zhoushu* (*ZS* vol. 49, Account on Other Polities: Koguryō), which report that the mother of Chumong was a maid made pregnant by the sunlight, despite being generally quite alike to the *Sagi* on all other details.¹⁶⁴

Another variation within the myth of Chumong lays in the name of the hero: in many sources he is called Tongmyōng 東明, in others he is called Chumong (or variants), while in others both names are treated as they were fundamentally the same:

¹⁶³ Noh Taedon (2014), 18-27. Frog and snail are also tied to creation narratives both in Siberia and China: Schipper et al. (2011), 55-79; Sem (2022), 121-2

¹⁶⁴ Noh Taedon (2014), 14-7. In the *Weishu*, Chumong straightforwardly say that he is the “son of the Sun” (*wo shi rizi* 我是日子)

Sources where the name is Tongmyŏng	Sources where the name is Chumong et similia	Sources where the name is interchangeable
• <i>Beishi</i>: Tongmyŏng of Puyŏ • <i>Liangshu</i>: Tongmyŏng of Puyŏ • <i>Lunheng</i>: Tongmyŏng of Puyŏ • <i>Suihu</i>: Tongmyŏng of Puyŏ	• <i>Weishu</i>: Chumong of Puyŏ • <i>Zhoushu</i>: Chumong of Puyŏ • <i>Kwanggaet'o Stele</i>: Ch'umo of North Puyŏ • <i>Moduru tomb epitaph</i>: Ch'umo of North Puyŏ	• <i>Yŏn Namsan tombstone</i>: Tongmyŏng or Chumong of Puyŏ • <i>Samguk Sagi</i>: Tongmyŏng or Chumong of East Puyŏ

We see here a conflict between two versions: one portraying the hero as Tongmyŏng from Puyŏ, one portraying Ch'umo or Chumong of North Puyŏ. The third option, where both names are interchangeable, are clearly the latest: the Yŏn Namsan tombstone 泉男産 墓誌銘, dated to 702 CE, is dedicated to the third son of Yŏn Kaesomun, while the *Samguk Sagi* was written during the Koryŏ dynasty.

Noh Taedon, therefore, deduced that the Chumong myth was originally a Puyŏ myth tied to the Tongmaeng festival 東盟, taken from its original place by clan of Kyeru from southern Puyŏ, which created the Kyeru Principality 桂婁部 and replaced the Sono Principality 消奴部 in the command of the Koguryŏ confederation after 75 BCE. Later, Koguryŏ under Kyeru lead subdued the Xianbei Confederation 鮮卑 (92-234 c.a) and opened diplomatic channels with Eastern Han dynasty 東漢 (25-220) in 32 CE. After the takeover of the federation by T'aejo 太祖大王 (r. 53-121 or 53-146), who came from a minor branch of Kyeru clan and adopted a Sinitic style centralized monarchy, the myth shifted from that of a hero from Puyŏ founding Koguryŏ to that of a triumphal rise of Koguryŏ as an empire and its emancipation from Puyŏ. It must be reminded that T'aejo did not have any direct tie with the Chumong cult and that Puyŏ was absorbed by Koguryŏ in the fourth century. Synthetizing: the myth started as the story of Tongmyŏng from Puyŏ, became that of Chumong of Puyŏ and that Chumong of North Puyŏ under the Kyeru Principality's rule, shifted toward East Puyŏ in the third-fourth centuries and finally became the myth of Tongmyŏng-Chumong

with the addition of Kūmhwa story during the rise of Yŏn clan in the sixth-seventh century, by the end of the kingdom.¹⁶⁵

A similar political change of narrative could be seen in the Tan’gun narrative too, specifically in the choice of version: one with totem animals and one parentless. The mention of the tiger in the Tan’gun myth in the *Yusa* version is likely tied to a propaganda of the Koryŏ’s Wang dynasty, who propagated two myths about its origins: one claiming a tie to a dragon and one to a tiger. A similar consideration could be made about the indirect citation of a “granddaughter 孫女” in the *Chewang Un’gi*: this could be a way not to directly put the tiger where in the *Yusa* there is a bear, or not to portray the tiger as the loser,¹⁶⁶ but on the other hand, the very choice an almost “parentless” version of the story in the same text is unclear. It may be a way to Sinicize the narrative, making more “historical” and quasi-euhemeristic, closer to the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors 三皇五帝 narrative, or a way to avoid a backlash from the Mongols, or a combination of both.¹⁶⁷

We can summarize the two versions of Korean northern myth as follows: the first is the long version, with divine parents and a subvariant with an egg birth:

	Tan’gun 檀君	Tongmyŏng 東明	Kŭmhwa 金蛙	Jurchen- Manchu	Siberian and Tungusic	
					Husbandry	Hunting
Sky deity	Hwan’in 桓因	Habaek 河伯 / Sun 日 / Heaven 天	(Heaven 天)		Hierarchy of ancestors (with ferine traits)	Bear god(dess) / Snake- dragon
Second sky deity	Hwan’ung 桓雄		Haeburu 解夫妻 (implied)	Fekulen 佛庫倫		
Water deity	?	Haemosu 解 慕漱		(none or frog)	frog (Evenks), Mue Duenteni “Water Bear” (Ulch and Nanai), fish (Nanai)	
Totem animal	Tiger 虎, Bear 熊	?	(frog or snail)	(magpie, mountain	deer, snake-dragon, bear or tiger	

¹⁶⁵ Noh Taedon (2014), 21-33 and 38-41

¹⁶⁶ Sin Jong-won (2016), 132-4. See §4.5 for a broader discussion about the Wang clan foundation myth.

¹⁶⁷ *Chewang Un’gi* was written with a Confucian perspective under the Mongol rule by the exiled scholar Yi Sŏnghyu, who was frustrated with the pro-Yuan clique at the royal court, despite being generally supportive of the Mongol presence in the Peninsula: Xu Stella (2016), 55-58

	Tan'gun 檀君	Tongmyǒng 東明	Kūmhwa 金蛙	Jurchen- Manchu	Siberian and Tungusic	
					Husbandry	Hunting
				deer, frog)		
Hero from parents	Tan'gun 檀君	Tongmyǒng 東明	None	Bukūri Yongŏn 布庫里 雍順	Tribe ancestor	Bear / Tiger (forest master)
Hero from egg	None		Kūmhwa 金蛙	Nurhaci 努爾哈 赤	?	

The second version is the shortest, “parentless” version, where the hero is directly born from the Sky: in case of Tan'gun, it is implied by its descent from the Heaven as in *Sejong Sillok* first account; in case of Chumong, by its birth from the Sun and the Moon (Moduru epitaph) or by the sunlight (some Chinese version). These two narratives are clearly not mutually exclusive and a middle way is found in the *Chewang Un'gi* for Tan'gun, in many Chinese accounts for Chumong and in the very story of Kūmhwa.¹⁶⁸ Since the “parentless” variants are those with less evident common point with the Siberian and Tungusic stories, one could only suppose they are a more Sinicized, i.e.: “historicized” and cleansed of “barbarian” elements like a clear evident animal totemism and “unorthodox” deities.¹⁶⁹

3.2. A Possible Chinese Model

This however does not explain the present of a mediator like Hwanung nor the choice of the *topos* of a birth by an egg (*nansaeng sŏrhwa* 卵生說話) in the case of Chumong and Kūmhwa and neither why it was Haeburu chosen to be the link with the Tan'gun myth. Clearly there is a possibility of a regional, shared solar cult tied to the egg image,¹⁷⁰ this is nevertheless insufficient to explain why this sequence of events in the Chumong myths, *Chewang Un'gi*'s Haeburu mention, and by extension in the Tan'gun myth altogether.

¹⁶⁸ Even the Moduru epitaph version could be in the middle, if we assume Sun and Moon there are gods and not just inanimate object or placename for the Sky: cf. Noh Taedon (2014), 118-122

¹⁶⁹ Another reason could be the context of ritualistic of regality: cf. Janhunen (2003), 19-23

¹⁷⁰ Riotto (2017) 120-5; Pai Hyung Il (2020) 87-97. See §11.1 for a broader analysis.

Wandering again, this time between proto-historic and Han dynasty China, we see the strange case of the heirs of Shangdi 上帝 itself. More specifically in origin stories about Yu the Great 大禹. Park Jong-seong briefly summarizes this narrative¹⁷¹:

1. The Yellow Emperor 黃帝 gave birth to Luoming 駱明, Luoming gave birth to a white horse 白馬, the white horse became Gun 鯀
2. Gun was executed by the Yellow Emperor for disobeying, but, after being executed in the Yu Mountain 羽山, he transformed into the Yellow Bear 黃熊 and dived into the Yu Lake 羽淵
3. The emperor ordered Zhurong 祝融 to kill Gun, but after his death, Gun rebirths from his belly
4. They cut his belly with the Wudao sword, and Yu 禹 came out of it
5. Yu controls the flood¹⁷², then reached a mountain and transformed into a bear. He said to the Master Tushan 塗山 “you may bring flood only when you hear the drum”, but Yu step on a stone than hit the drum, Master Tushan sees him as a bear and Yu run away, then he reached the Song mountains 嵩山, and Qi 啓 was born. Later, Yu ordered “Give back my son” to a rock which was his wife transformed, and the rock opened to the north and Qi was born (again)

According to other versions, after the Gun belly was opened, a Yellow Dragon 黃龍 came from that and became Yu. In both cases, Yu became a bear like his father and like his father he has power over the waters. Yu is also sometimes described as half-fish, like his grandfather¹⁷³. If we address these variations we see: first, that Luoming, Gun and Yu are related as water deities; second, they are all heirs of the Yellow Emperor, so they are also partly Sky deities¹⁷⁴.

What is the connection with Tan’gun? It is clear the relationship with Chumong, since he was born from a Sky deity and a river deity, and he too is a skilled archer; looking

¹⁷¹ Seo Taesok (2001) 535-548; Park Jong-seong (2015), 42. The story is a summary of the various version, the more well-known accounts are from *Shiji* 史記, *Shanhaijing* 山海經, *Tianwen* 天問, *Shujing* 書經 and the *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋

¹⁷² Interestingly, the myth of Yu controlling the flood is clearly a creation myth too, more specifically it can be classified within the “earth diver” motif: Schipper et al. (2011), 124-5 and 154-160, cf. pp. 179-218 in the same study for a broader comparative analysis

¹⁷³ Seo Taesok (2001) 535-548; Park Jong-seong (2015), 42-3. Yu’s grandfather is sometimes identified (or replaced) with Zhuanxu 顓頊.

¹⁷⁴ Park Jong-seong (2015), 44

closer, however, we can also see an explanation for the existence of Hwan'ung in the Tan'gun genealogy:¹⁷⁵

	Yu the Great	Tan'gun	Chumong	Kūmhwa	Commonality
Generation I	Huangdi 黃帝	Hwan'in 桓因	Habaek 河伯		Heavenly God
Generation II	Luoming 駱明 / Zhuangxu 顓頊	Hwan'ung 桓雄	Haemosu 解慕漱	Haeburu 解夫妻	Heaven-Water God
Generation III	Gun 鯀	Tan'gun 壇君			bear, lake
Generation IV	Yu 禹	(Haeburu 解夫妻)	Chumong 朱蒙	none	bear / dragon
Generation V	Qi 啓	(Kūmhwa 金蛙)		Kūmhwa 金蛙	egg birth

A brief explanation for some nonimmediate point:

First: the birth from a rock of Qi and the birth from an egg of Chumong and Kūmhwa are clearly related motifs, and the (re)birth from the belly of Gun and Yu clearly points out that these gods were originally female. In this sense, at least Gun and Ungnyō may be even more similar.¹⁷⁶

Second: if the relationship between Tan'gun and the bear motif is clear because of his mother Ungnyō, the “bear-woman”, a similar relationship with Chumong is not immediate. However, it must be remembered that, in the story of his mother Yuhwa, she was taken by Haemosu “to feet of Ungsim Mountain (熊心山)” which means “Bear-Heart Mountain”, name which also becomes Ungsin Mountain (熊神山) in the *Yusa*, i.e.: “Bear-God Mountain”. Similarly, the lake where Gun transforms into a bear has a name, in some version, that was glossed as “place where the sun sets”, which has also a reminiscence within the cavern's detail in the Tan'gun myth. The relationship between water, bear and birth is also present in the Korean ancient culture, but we also have some parallel among Nanai, Evenks, Ulch and Oroch, among which the bear is associated with the mountain. Moreover, as for Nanai and Ulch, the heavenly goddess

¹⁷⁵ Park Jong-seong (2015), 43-7; Yung Sung-chan (2016), 76-9; Xu Stella (2016), 62-3 and 251-4

¹⁷⁶ Park Jong-seong (2015), 45-6

and master of taiga, forests and mountains, the she-bear Duenté, is paired with two bear cub: “taiga bear” Na Duenteni and “water bear” Mue Duenteni¹⁷⁷.

Third: the association of Chumong with the dragon is evident by the foundation ritual of “meet the king” 迎王 with the Yellow Dragon 黃龍. As for Gun, in some version he did not transform into a Yellow Dragon 黃龍 instead of a Yellow Bear 黃熊 / 黃能¹⁷⁸.

Fourth: despite the relationship between Tan’gun and Haeburu is clearly later and politically motivated, it accidentally helped to reinforce and clarify the Chinese narrative model in the Tan’gun myth¹⁷⁹: the confusion on the role of Hwan’ung is clarified by both existence of Gun in Chinese story and Haemosu in the Koguryō one. The cases of Habaek, Haemosu and Haeburu are even more transparent in this sense, since their role as River of Heaven deities is heavily debated, while the case of Gun and Yu and the Siberian myths as well show us the role could be double¹⁸⁰.

As we will see more in detail within the further chapters (§§5 and 7), the Korean northern foundation narratives will then be adopted by the Koryō kingdom and then re-adapted by the commoners. This will eventually lead to the formation of the shamanic narrative of Tanggūm’aegi (*Chesŏk-ponp’uri*), object of this study.

We can now summarize our preliminary conclusions to our journey:

- Tan’gun and Chumong myths have many elements in common with Siberian myth. Animal totemism, more evident in the Tan’gun myth, was likely a more prominent part of the story, depicting a heavenly bear goddess, master of the forests and mountains.
- With the adoption of husbandry at the expense of foraging, the myth gradually adopted a more visible hierarchy of characters. A mythical hero or clan ancestor

¹⁷⁷ Janhunen (2003); Park Jong-seong (2015), 5-46; Sem (2022), 122-3. Park correctly points out that this tie is more “complex” in Chinese mythology. It may be due to the persistence of matrilineality and levirate in Ancient Korean Peninsula?

¹⁷⁸ Park Jong-seong (2015), 42-5; Cuc (2010), 156-7. However, the dragon detail in the Chumong myth may also be a syncretism with some Daoist element.

¹⁷⁹ Park Jong-seong (2015), 47-8

¹⁸⁰ Hwan’in, Hwan’ung, Habaek, Haeburu and even Haemosu were all interpreted as Heaven gods, but in the case of Habaek and Haemosu there is a general confusion among scholars on which is a river god in which myth. This due to versions that links the two myths as the *Chewang Un’gi* and the *Tongmyŏng’wang p’yŏn*, and the fact that the first element of their names could be interpreted as “sun” in native Korean (*hae*). Cf. Choi Moon-Hyoung (2009); Noh Taedon (2014), 14-8; Cuc (2015), 157-9; Yung Sung-chan (2016), 74-6; Riotto (2017), 120-5

substitutes the totem animal in the role of master of riches.¹⁸¹ At this stage, Korean northern myths are still very similar if not the same.

- It is unknown when the Tan'gun and Chumong of Puyŏ myths started to differentiate, if the latter is not a regionalization of the first, however their Sinicization was rapid enough to leave traces in elements and narrative structures of both myths. Both stories in fact share the same pattern of deities' genealogy and role as the Xia Dynasty 夏 (2070-1600 BCE)'s Qi myth even in the early stages. The prominence of water element in this new version likely signals a shift towards an agricultural myth form.
 - The Sinicization also caused the emergence of a "short" version of both narratives, more akin to Chinese historicizing model.
- However, the way Tan'gun and Chumong myths were Sinicized are different: while Tan'gun myth adopted a more Xia-style structure in the heavenly genealogy with two Sky deities, Chumong myth adopted (or re-adapted) the dragon element.
- While the very existence of Kojosŏn as a kingdom is still debated,¹⁸² and so the value of Tan'gun as a royal ancestor's myth, Chumong myth was likely adopted by the Puyŏ Sono clan as own royal ancestor's myth and then re-adopted and re-adapted by the Koguryŏ Kyeru clan as their own. These political adaptations to the story likely gave birth to the many variations attested. During the latest Koguryŏ period, with the same mythical elements, the Yŏn clan forged the parallel myth of Haeburu and Kŭmhwa to justify its rise to power.
 - The Chumong myth (at least) was used by the Jurchen-Manchu to create a national foundation myth for the Aisin Gioro dynasty. The adoption of elements from Korean culture is likely due to the geographical proximity and the relative (former) importance of Korean kingdoms in Manchuria. This relatively new foundation myth and its variations can be used to clarify some aspects of Korean northern States myths themselves.

¹⁸¹ This is clearly a simplification: likely neither husbandry nor agriculture acquisition were linear and less than ever teleological, see Graeber & Wengrow (2022), 101-295. As for the problem of mythical ancestors, see Detienne (2004), 67-80. For a confront with contemporary Chinese proto-historical conceptions, cf. Chang (2000), Boileau (2002) Nelson (2019), 151-184 and Winkelmann (2023)

¹⁸² Xu Stella (2016), Pai Hyung Il (2020)

- The Tan'gun myth was likely adopted during the Unified Silla period and under Koryŏ it became the national narrative to unite all the subjects of the kingdom. To ensure this, intellectuals forged different variations where Tan'gun, Haeburu and Chumong stories were interlinked taking again the Gun myth as a narrative model. Tan'gun became the ancestor of all Korean people and kingdoms.
- Eventually, the myth was (re-)adopted by the commoners, transforming into the Tanggŭm'aegi story (*Chesŏk-ponp'uri*), object of this study.

3.3. Festivals and Rain

So far, we have given for granted that the Tan'gun myth was likely intended as an agricultural myth, whatever its origins are. Now it is time to explain this statement in detail. That Tan'gun myth may have been intended as a myth celebrating farming at least in one specific context, it's not just a way express an educated guess regarding a difficult academic riddle, since, if we accept that later Chesŏk, object of this research, is fundamentally a prosperity deity and a prosperity deity with many ties with cultivation, consideration regarding general aspects of Korean shamanism such the importance of blisses¹⁸³ would be put in their place in this particular context. In fact, this general anthropological truism does really explain the specific agriculture sense it has acquired, not if taken for themselves alone. Obviously, the agricultural interpretation does not exclude other considerations like the embedding of the mythical ancestor cult and the animal totemism we have seen so far; however, this would help explain other official ritual practices adopted during the Koryŏ period.

Unfortunately, we currently lack any ancient writing about any agricultural ritual involving Tan'gun, however we have an analogy in the later Koguryŏ kingdom: the Tongmaeng festival (東盟祭). The description by the Chinese sources of this seasonal festival is the following:

Sanguozhi 三國志, *Weishu* 魏書 X, On the Eastern Barbarians 東夷傳

¹⁸³ Choi (2009); Chačatran (2015); Yung Sung-chan (2016) , 76-9

以十月祭天，國中大會，名曰東盟。其公會 [...] 其國東有大穴，名隧穴，十月國中大會，迎隧神還於國東上祭之，置木隧於神坐

On the tenth month there is a ritual to Heaven, with a huge gathering, named Tongmaeng [...] To the nation's east there is a great cavern known as Suhyöl. During the tenth month, at the time of the great gathering, the god Susin is met and escorted onto [the river] to the east of the nation where ceremony is held and a wooden image of it is set up atop a pedestal.

Here “nation” or “kingdom” stays for “capitol city” while the “gathering” is the festival itself. The original object of worship was Ilsin 日神, whose ritual was then merged with that of Susin. Susin name could be also written as “god of the waters” 水神, as it appears so in the *Weilüe* 魏略, and was therefore an agricultural deity. The ceremony recorded as follows: the ritual starts in front of a large cavern, maybe the T'ongch'ön cavern 通天窟 near the Yalu River, the residence of the goddess; then, the goddess would be escorted in the place of reception; Susin was met at the cave and invited to embody a wooden statue, veiled in silk; the image was then moved up to Yalu river, near the capitol city and placed upon an altar on the water; a ceremony of unveiling takes place, with the sunbathing of the altar, a symbolic wedding between Ilsin and Susin is celebrated. This ceremony was the climax of the Tongmaeng festival.

A similar harvest festival, the Yönggo 迎鼓, was held in Puyö. It is not clear who officiated the ceremony: there was a chosen “heavenly lord” 天主 like among the Samhan tribes? According to the Puyö Records in the *Sanguozhi*, the Puyö king was held responsible for the inundations and famines and deposed after such events, which indicates a role of a certain figure as the representative or embodiment of the community among the two gods. It is however a stretch considering this figure a king from the start: first, because the politics in first Koguryö was very collegial until the rise of T'aejo; and second because the implicit link between kingly sovereignty and shamanism is not so obvious. It has to be remembered the case of Zhou 周 (c.a 1046-256 BCE), among which the king was likely the ruler of the shamans and priests, but neither a shaman or priest himself, even though he was tasked to the cult of Heaven

and the royal ancestors.¹⁸⁴ Whatever the Koguryō kingly sovereignty was based or not upon the shamanism, the designated celebrant was the representative of all Five Principalities 五部, as it was in Puyō, and therefore the festival served also as a way to strengthening the social cohesion of the allied tribes, a function that was inherited by the major festivals of later kingdoms.

It is clear from the description that the Tongmaeng festival has many similarities with the Chumong birth narrative, and therefore with Tan'gun story too. It is unclear when the ancestor cult was attached to it (if ever separated), what is sure is that with the rise of a sovereign clan, Ilsin and Susin became their clan ancestors, subtracting them to the communities: in the following lines we will see that, even in a centralized polity, local variations and synchronisms persisted. So, when the Sono clan before and the Kyeru clan after created a centralized monarchy, Ilsin and Susin first and Chumong and Yuhwa then became the imperial ancestors, bestowing the title of “Scion of Heaven” 天孫 or “Son of Koguryō God” 高麗神子 to the ruler: temples to Yuhwa and Chumong were installed in every principality by royal palace orders, temple with a full follow of personnel and guards. With the progressive assimilation of Yuhwa and Chumong as a royal court's gods, they were also referred by the commoners as Tūnggo-sin 登高神 and Puyō-sin 扶餘神, identified as courtly gods, Earth and Sun gods and, definitively, the two State deities. Among the Principalities the process appeared as a localized syncretism: for example, in the *Tangshu* is reported that in the Liaodong's temple of Chumong there were held chain mail armor and enshrined sharp spears. These details, partly explained by the importance of swords in Bronze Age shamanism, indicate that the swords and the armor related to some important regional event, to which Chumong cult were then attached, i.e. a case of syncretism. Other cases are the late-Koguryō association of Chumong to mount Mada, and the depiction of Fuxi 伏羲 / 伏犧 and Nüwa 女媧 as the gods of the Sun and the Moon, as within the nobility tombs¹⁸⁵.

The legacy of both Tan'gun and Chumong were taken up by the Koryō: in the capital Kae'gyōng 開京 (modern day Kaesŏng) there was a shrine with images of both

¹⁸⁴ See Chang (2000); Gilles (2002), 354-376; Noh Taedon (2014), 69-122. There is a general caution and reluctance in hypothesizing that even the Shang dynasty may have been based on shamanism: Michael (2015); Nelson (2019), 58-99 and 143-167; Graeber & Wengrow (2022), 423-452

¹⁸⁵ Grayson (1984) 186-8; Cuc (2010), 153-5; Noh Taedon (2014), 27-33, 118-22 and 283-292

Chumong and Yuhwa, reported in the *Gaoli Tujing* 高麗圖經. Chumong was venerated until mid-Koryŏ period in P'yŏngyang, a practice maybe dated to Unified Silla. As for Tan'gun myth, its celebration was held at official State level on the same period with the adoption of the P'algwanhoe or Eight Prohibitions Festival 八關會 and the Yŏndŭnghoe or Lantern Festival 燃燈會: these two festivities were another legacy of Koguryŏ passed through Unified Silla. They were occasion of Heaven worship by the king. We will discuss of these festivals in other chapters; here is sufficient to report that the main object of worship was the Chesŏk we have discussed so far. It is also noteworthy that one of these festivals, the P'algwanhoe, was describe in the *Gaoli Tujing* as being substantially identical to the Tongmaeng, not without reason: it is probable that, being the festival syncretistic and having the same purpose of the Tongmaeng, the role of the Koguryŏ major event was absorbed into the other festival, even more considering that Koryŏ State considered itself a scion of Koguryŏ too¹⁸⁶.

This association between Chesŏk and agriculture will be eventually extended to all aspects of production and reproduction, when the Koryŏ deity was gradually re-adopted by commoners, leading to the modern conceptions of Chesŏk (see §§5 and 7).

We can therefore summarize this chapter:

- Tan'gun and Chumong myths have many elements in common with Siberian myth. Animal totemism, more evident in the Tan'gun myth, was likely a more prominent part of the story, depicting a heavenly bear goddess, master of the forests and mountains.
- With the adoption of husbandry at the expense of foraging, the myth gradually adopted a more visible hierarchy of characters, a mythical hero or clan ancestor substitutes the totem animal in the role of master of riches.
- At this stage, Korean northern myths are still very similar if not the same. If we assume that the adoption of agriculture may have come after the husbandry, it is likely that some kind of farming and harvesting festival existed. If the case of the Koguryŏ's and Tongmaeng festival can be taken as a case study, it is possible that the cult of Heaven and water / river was fixated into the myth by this kind of festivals.

¹⁸⁶ Vermeersch (2008) 89-91; Noh Taedon (2014), 283-292

- It is unknown when the Tan'gun and Chumong of Puyŏ started to differentiate, if the latter is not a regionalization of the first, however their Sinicization was rapid enough to leave traces in elements and narrative structures of both myths. The pattern of the myths adapted over the foundation myth of the Xia Dynasty seems quite early. The prominence of water element in this new version likely signals a shift towards an agricultural myth tout-court.
- However, the way Tan'gun and Chumong myth were Sinicized are different: while Tan'gun myth adopted a more Xia-style structure in the heavenly genealogy with two Sky deities, Chumong myth adopted (or re-adapted) the dragon element.
- If nothing can be said precisely about any Kojosŏn political entity and therefore if Tan'gun had any royal ancestor's role, Chumong myth was likely adopted by the Puyŏ Sono clan as own royal ancestor's myth and then re-adopted and re-adapted by the Koguryŏ Kyeru clan as their own. These political adaptation to the story likely gave birth to the many variations attested. During the latest Koguryŏ period, with the same mythical elements, the Yŏn clan forged the parallel myth of Haeburu and Kŭmhwa to justify its rise to power.
- The Tan'gun myth was likely adopted during the Unified Silla period and under Koryŏ it became the national narrative to unite all the subjects of the kingdom. To ensure this, intellectuals forged different variations where Tan'gun, Haeburu and Chumong stories were interlinked, taking again the Gun myth as a narrative model. Tan'gun became the unifying character between the many Korean foundation myths. Two festivals adopted by Unified Silla, the P'algwanhoe or Eight Prohibitions Festival and the Yŏndŭnghoe or Lantern Festival, comprising elements from Koguryŏ's Tongmaeng festival, now linking explicitly the Tan'gun myth with the agricultural cycle and identifying the sky god Hwan'in with other mythical figures in a syncretic fashion.
- The association with agriculture eventually expanded to all production and reproduction aspects from Koryŏ period on, leading to the modern attributes of Chesŏk.

4 Chesök in Koryŏ State Cult

The Eight Prohibition Festival was one of the major festivals of Koryŏ, however its nature was hybrid and worth of an examination on its own. The P'algwanhoe is, in fact, the synthesis of three different traditions: one Buddhist, one Chinese and one Korean.

The term “Eight Prohibition” is the translation of the Sanskrit *Aṣṭāṅga-sīla* (Pali: *Aṭṭhaṅga-sīla*), eight temporary vows took by laypeople in special occasions:

1. Do not take other beings' lives.
2. Do not take other's possessions.
3. Abstain from sexual activities.
4. Do not lie.
5. Do not take intoxicants.
6. Do not take place over elevated, fancy seats.
7. Do not wear fancy clothes or jewels, do not song and dance.
8. Do not eat after midday.

The first vows are the canonical Five Percepts for Laypeople (*Pañca-sīla*), while the last three are additional. A common occasion when a layperson took these vows were the “fasting days” *Upavasatha* (also *Upasatha*, *Upoṣadha*, *Poṣadha*, *Posaha* etc.): it was believed that, during these days, ghosts and gods were closer to the human world, and so human should behave more morally possible. Moreover, it was believed that the king of *devas*, Śakra devānām Indra, dispatched the Four Heavenly Kings to oversee the human actions to fulfill its role of supreme, heavenly judge.

In the Indian tradition, the *Upasatha* days were fixated on the two days Full Moon and two of the New Moon, plus one day for every quarter moon (respectively, the 8th, 14th, 15th, 23rd, 29th and the 30th or 1st day) on every lunar month. For monks, there were additional fasting periods: such as the first, the fifth and ninth lunar month, propitious for the merit-making. Assemblies made of both laypeople and monks were common for such practices, as testified by the “Sutra about Fasting Explained by the Buddha” *Foshuo zhaijing* 佛說齋經 [T87.2688], translated in Chinese during the third century BCE¹⁸⁷.

¹⁸⁷ Vermeersch (2008), 87-8, 90-1; Kim Sung-soon (2018), 232-7

4.1. The Chinese Upavasatha

In China, the practice of the Eight Precepts changed, sometimes significantly. The rite became a kingdom's matter, and took over elements, primarily from Daoism. The *Upavasatha* was also used for the rulers' propaganda, rulers which took as model the Maurya emperor Aśoka (r. 268-232 c.a), the exemplar Buddhist king.

First mentions of the Eight Prohibition Festival in China are found during the Jin 晉 (266-420) and Northern Qi 北齊 (550-577) dynasties, associated with the control of natural disasters and the ritual offering to the monks (*dāna*). During the Sui dynasty 隋 (581-618), and particularly under the emperor Wen 隋文帝 (r. 581-604), the Eight Prohibition Festival was used as a ceremony for the war dead, in imitation to the Aśoka's conversion after years of bloody wars. Moreover, the festival syncretized with the Daoist "Three Primordial" Sanyuan 三元 days, celebrated during the first lunar month, which also matched with the agricultural calendar, as the Spring in China starts during the first lunar month.

This syncretism with the "Three Primordial" days was made possible by a partial overlap with the above-mentioned three abstinence months, the first of which is precisely the first lunar month.

During the Eastern Jin 東晉 (316-420), the "three abstinence months" practice is recommended in the "Petition for Dharma Reverence" *Fengfayao* 奉法要, penned by the palace advisor Xi Chao 郗超 (335-377), and, in fact, it is attested that the lay devotees fasted for 108 days; under the emperor Wu of Liang 梁武帝 (r. 502-549), the laypeople fasting period was shortened to seventy-two days, but from the monks the rules became stricter, as reported in the *Danjiuruwen* 斷酒肉文: total abstinence from alcohol and meat, so there would be no confusion with laypeople and heretics. The meat prohibition was extended to the royal clan too from the 511 (Tianjian 天監 era tenth year); after the fall of Liang dynasty 梁朝 (502-557), further prohibitions were made: under the emperor Wenxuan of the Northern Qi 北齊文宣帝 (r. 550-9), during these months hunting, fishing, falconry and butchering were forbidden. Moreover, music and plays were banned from the Buddhist temples.

From the fifth century on, in China chants and sutra recitations became a standard for these festivities: during the Sui and the Tang 唐 (618-907) dynasties, it was a common practice to gather in the temples to recite the *Dazhidulun* (**Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra*) 大智度論 [T25.1509], gathering that made monks and nuns to flock toward the capital. For the “three abstinence months”, other sermons, public confessions and Eight Prohibition Assemblies were also common. After the fifth century, there was a new trend among monks to retire in hermitage called “morality village” *yiyi* 義邑 or “community village” *sheyi* 社邑, to study and recite the sutra - a practice attested in Dunhuang too. From the Tang to the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period 五代十國 (907-979), offering to Buddha and sermon remained a standard, while a prohibition to capital punishment was added, prohibition that rapidly spread to Korea and Japan. Moreover, the emperor Gaozu of Tang 唐高祖 (r. 618-626) conflated “six fasting days” from Buddhism with the “ten fasting days” from Daoism. A later Daoist syncretism is attested from the monk Jigaku Daishi Ennin 慈覺大師圓仁 (793-864) too, in his diary, the *Nittō Guhō Junrei Kōki* 入唐求法巡禮行記: according to Ennin, the Tang emperor of his time was still a Daoist during the ascension to the throne, and therefore he introduced the “days of the Three Primordial” *sanyuanri* 三元日 and the rite to the Great Canopy Heaven (*Daluotian* 大羅天)¹, from the New Moon (first day) of the fourth lunar month, to the Full Moon (fifteenth day) of the seventh month. With ascension of the Song dynasty 宋 (960-1279), the butchering prohibitions fell in disuse, but not the “three abstinence months”².

4.2. The Eight Prohibitions in Korea

The Eight Prohibition Festival was introduced to Silla 新羅 (57 BCE-935 CE) in 572 by the monk Hyerang 惠亮 (fl. 551), a defector from Koguryō. We do not have precise data about how this festival was in Koguryō, however we have more

¹ The highest heaven in the Daoist cosmology, Lingbao lineage 靈寶.

² Grayson (1984), 186-8; Hung-Youn Cho (1999), 53-6; Vermeersch (2008), 86-9, 91-2; Ahn Jee-Won (2011), 230-297; Yang Eun-Yong (2011), 231-6; Kim Sung-soon (2018), 237-40

information about how the festival was celebrated around the unification period in Silla (seventh-tenth century c.a). Probably, the Eight Prohibition festival was already syncretized with the Tongmaeng in Koguryŏ, and to some extent something similar happened in Silla with its native Heaven worship. Like his colleagues in China, Hyerang is said to have held the first P'algwanhoe in Silla at the Hwangnyong temple 皇龍寺 / 黃龍寺 with hundred other monks, to placate the spirits of soldiers fallen in war (*SKS* XLIV, biographies 4: Kŏch'ilbu). Likely, the ritual involved donations to the monks, recitations and chanting, and was felt like a whole-kingdom affair. Since the king was directly involved in the festivities, it did not pass many times before it became even more a celebration of his figure, and a formality during the enthronements. It is also probable that the “three abstinence months” practice was already known.

Another change was the inclusion of the Heaven / Indra cult into the festival. The first evidence of a syncretism with the native Heaven deity are dated back to king Chinhŭng 眞興王 (r. 540-576), while the existence of royal Indra temple in Silla is reported since the times of king Chinp'yŏng 眞平王 (r. 579-632): this temple had already the name of “temple to Śakra inside (the palace)” Nae-Chesŏkkung 內帝釋宮³, and was already used for the royal clan's legitimation (*SKYI*, marvelous events 2: The Jade Belt Bestowed by the Heaven). It is interesting how this temple was also known with two other names: “temple to Śakra” Chesŏk-sa 帝釋寺 and “temple to the Heavenly Pillar” Ch'ŏnju-sa 天柱寺 (*Tonggyŏng-chapki* 東京雜記 II, Buddhist spaces: Ch'ŏnju-sa)⁴. Other temples were attached to Nae-Chesŏkkung, for example Chosŏn records report the existence of “inner Buddhist halls” Nae-Pultang 內佛堂 at the time of king Soji 炤知麻立干 (r. 479-500), which basically served for the same rituals, but more distinctly Buddhist (*Tanjong Sillok* X, year 2, month 1, Sin'yu 辛酉 year). However, it cannot be ruled out that this is

³ It is worth noticing how the term used for said Buddhist temple, *kung* 宮 (literally: “palace”), is commonly used for the Daoist ones.

⁴ This last variant is interesting because it may refer to a belief in an *Axis Mundi*, common with the Central Asian Shamanism, assuming it is not a simple typo for “temple to the Heavenly Ruler” Ch'ŏnju-sa *天主寺.

not a backdating of a late Koryŏ custom. Less uncertain is the “temple to the Four Heavenly Kings” Sach’ŏnwang-sa 四天王寺, tied to queen Sŏndŏk and the Śakra’s *Trāyastriṃśa* Heaven (*SKY* I, marvelous events 1: Queen Sŏndŏk Foresees Three Events)⁵.

It is clear from the beginning that Koryŏ continued this Silla legacy: after moving the capital to Kaesŏng, T’aejo Wang Kŏn 太祖 王建 (r. 918-943) built several Buddhist temples, attracting many monks to the new center, and many nobility’s scions took the monastic robes. Later, the capital saw the construction of two pagodas in imitation of those of Kyŏngju, former capital of Unified Silla: one with seven and one with nine stores. This was one of the first political statement of the dynasty: as in Silla and Koguryŏ, Buddhism became a kingdom-sponsored cult at the service of the royal clan. In fact, some temples became (or were built as) “memorial-temple”: temples which contained a hall for the deceased kings’ portraits (“true appearance hall” *chinjŏn* 眞殿), i.e. a space for the royal ancestral cult, the first and most important of which was the Pong’ŭn-sa 奉恩寺. In fact, it became a tradition to hold a celebration in such halls every time a king died – allegedly, the first “memorial-temple” to T’aejo appeared only in 952, under king Kwangjong 光宗 (r. 949-975).

Between the seventh and the ninth year of T’aejo reign (924-926), there were build two temples to Śakra: one attached to the Pong’ŭn-sa, the Oe-Chesŏgwŏn 外帝釋院, and one inside the palace walls, the Nae-Chesŏgwŏn 內帝釋院. These temples were then tied to the “temple to the godly heroes” Sinjung’wŏn 神衆院, built in 926, dedicated to the Four Heavenly Kings and other war deities. Clearly, these sites had a role within the Eight Prohibitions and the Lantern Festival rituals, the two most important celebrations according to the Ten Injunctions (*KRS* XCIX, important clans 1: T’aejo, year 26, month 4, day 15). However, it seems that the

⁵Grayson (1984), 186-8; Vermeersch (2008), 86-9, 91-2; Yang Eun-Yong (2011), 231-6; Chačatran (2015)

festival was held even before the construction of such buildings, as reported by the *Koryŏsa Chŏr'yo* 高麗史節要⁶:

***Koryŏsa Chŏr'yo* 高麗史節要 I, T'aejo the godly emperor 太祖神聖大王,
first year of T'aejo 太祖元年 [918]**

十一月。設八關會。有司言，
“前王每歲仲冬，大設八關
齋，以祈福，乞遵其制。”王
曰，“朕以不德，獲守大業，
盍依佛教，安輯邦家。”遂
於毬庭，置輪燈一所，香燈
旁列，滿地光明徹夜。又結
綵棚兩所，各高五丈餘，狀
若蓮臺，望之縹緲。呈百戲
歌舞於前，其四仙樂部龍鳳
象馬車船皆新羅故事。百官
袍笏行禮，觀者傾都，晝夜
樂焉。王御威鳳樓觀之，名
爲供佛樂神之會。自後，歲
以爲常

On the eleventh month, the Eight Prohibitions Festival was held. There was an official who said: “every year on the middle of winter, the previous king⁷ held the Eight Prohibitions Rite [*aṣṭāṅga-śīla-pūjā*] in large-scale, to pray for blessing. I beg you to implement such regulations”. The king said: “Since I have no virtue, I will obtain a great *karma* (in this way). How I should not follow the Buddha’s teachings, if they pacify our Country?”. Following [the recommendation], a great platform⁸ with lanterns was built within the Jade Halls [courtyard]; nearby, incense lanterns were set in line; all over the ground, bright lights pierced the night. Moreover, there were two adorned tents, each over five *zhang* in height, shaped like lotus flowers, tall to look at. Before that, there were the “hundred spectacles of dances and songs” [*Paekhūigamu*]. Of these, four [parts] belonged to the Daoist Music Bureau⁹, while

⁶ Yi Gi-yeong (1974), 110-5; Puggioni (2008), 525-6; Lee Seog-Ju (2010), 260-272; Yang Eun-Yong (2011), 231-240; Kim Jongmyung (2016), 21-2; Kim Sooyoun (2022), 58-64; Mahy Kaya (2022)

⁷ Kung Ye 弓裔 (r. 901-918) of T'aebong 泰封 / Majin 摩震 (901-918).

⁸ (*R*)yun 輪 literally means “wheel, circle” and usually translates the Sanskrit *cakra*. In this context, it likely refers to a *maṇḍala*, originally a circular platform over which rituals were performed. See Kim Sooyoun (2022), 51-8.

⁹ Or: “(part) of this, was the (spectacle) of Four Immortals, of the Music Bureau...”

the depictions of dragons, phoenixes, the horse-drawn carriages, and the boats were all customs from Silla. Hundreds of officials wore a long formal robe, [holding] a tablet [in their hands], performing rituals; onlookers flocked to the capital, and there was music day and night. The king came to Wibong pavilion [in Kaesŏng] to see it, calling [the rite] “the festival of Buddhist offerings and music gods”. After that, it was held every year.

Under king Sŏngjong 成宗 (r. 981-997), grandson of T’aejo, the Eight Prohibitions Festival was interrupted. Among the various reasons adduced, the irritation of foreign envoys, caused by the ceremony of presenting to the throne effigies of loyal subjects – another ceremony likely inherited from Silla. The festivals were restored soon later by king Hyŏnjong 顯宗 (r. 1009-1031), and, from that time onward, twenty-six out of thirty-four Koryŏ kings held the festival.

Both the Yŏndŭnghoe and the P’algwanhoe were designated as “congratulation ceremony” *karye* / *jiali* 嘉禮, within the classical Five Rites (*Wuli* 五禮) classification¹⁰. These rites were often performed for the enthronement of a new ruler, as a prayer for his safety and that of the reign. In a Buddhist point of view, in this secular rite, the regality of the king was displayed in parallel with that of Śakra, while the festival was aimed at the protection of the king, the State and the Dharma. For similar reasons, during these rituals, and especially during the of *Chesŏk-toryang* (*Śakra-bodhimaṇḍa) 帝釋道場 rite, Śakra himself was seen as a fierce, warrior and protector deity, granting the army courage and blisses, likely descending on Earth in the process. This element shows there was some syncretism between Shamanism and Buddhism in these festivities. Another shamanic element is the veneration for the landscape deities, explicitly mentioned in the sixth of the Ten Injunction (“The Eight Prohibitions [Festival], because it honors the heavenly

¹⁰ One of the least important according to the *Rites of Zhou* or *Zhouli* 周禮.

deities and the six peaks and famous mountains' [spirits], the river [spirits] and the dragon gods" *p'alghan soi sa ch'öllyōng kŭp o 'ak-myōngsan, taech'ōn yongsin ya* 八關所以事天靈及五嶽名山、大川龍神也)¹¹.

We have seen that the P'alghanhoe was celebrated for the enthronement, but that was not the only occasion: the P'alghanhoe was usually held every two or three years, as well as in every special occasion, either positive (commemoration, military victory etc.) or negative (disaster, military crisis etc.). There were two celebrations: a bigger one and a smaller one. The bigger one was held in capital, i.e. Kaesōng, on the Full Moon (fifteenth day) of the eleventh lunar month; the smaller one was held in the "Western Capital" *Sōgyōng* 西京, i.e. P'yōng'yang, on the fourteenth and the fifteenth day of the tenth lunar month.

Within the *Koryōsa* (KRS LXIX, Annals 23, rites 11) we have detailed protocols on how the rites would have been conducted. According to these documents, the Eight Prohibition Festival and the Lantern Festival¹² can be divided into the following passages:

1. A ceremony where the king received congratulations, mainly from nobles, the military and bureaucrats
2. A ceremony where the king received tributes from foreign dignitaries
3. A ceremony where food (tea, biscuits, alcohol etc.) was offered
4. An incense-offering ceremony, where the king performed the rituals in Buddhist and ancestor temples
5. The "hundred spectacles of dances and songs" *Paekhūigamu* 百戲歌舞.

Likely, dances and songs for the heroes who have fallen in war

In addition to this, the king had to perform a seven-day ritual (*kisang-yōngbok-doryang* 祈祥迎福道場) inside the Oe-Chesōgwōn, the officials performed other rites in the royal temples, while again other rites were performed in Kwangju and

¹¹ Yi Gi-yeong (1974), 110-5; Vermeersch (2008), 86-9, 91-2; Lee Seog-Ju (2010), 260-272; Ahn Jee-Won (2011), 230-275; Yang Eun-Yong (2011), 231-240; Chačatran (2015); Kim Gap-dong (2018), 38-45; Kim Sung-soon (2018)

¹² The main difference between the two rites was in magnitude, not in substance, as we will see. In fact, the passages counted below are taken from the description of the Lantern Festival.

P'yŏngyang. The costs were so high that, for their administration, a specific department was created, called the *P'alghan-dogam* 八關都監.

This long protocol was true at least on paper. In fact, rarely a Koryŏ king did participate to all these ceremonies in person, rather opting for sending high officials in his behalf. This was especially true for the minor ceremonies in P'yŏngyang. Only in rare occasions a king was seen out of his palace for the Eight Prohibition Festival, such in the case of the Buddhist Canon printing under king Sukchong 肅宗 (r. 1095–1105). Similarly, the foreign dignitaries were likely not real officials, but rather rich merchants, at least most of them¹³.

From the *Koryŏsa Chŏr'yo* account, we have seen that the P'alghanhoe involved traditional spectacles from Late Silla, but this was not the only Silla tradition kept by the Koryŏ official ceremonies. Within the same article, we can also find a possible mention to the “Four Immortals” *sasŏn* 四仙, likely the four most famous *hwarang* 花郎 from Silla. After the Silla fall, the role of *hwarang* was likely confined to that of cultural, educational and ceremonial corps, having long lost their military value. When Sŏngjong tried to ban the P'alghanhoe, a complain was sent to the throne about the excessive zealotry in following the Chinese customs, while it was necessary to preserve the native ones, including those of the “Young Immortals” corps, the *sŏllang* 仙郎¹⁴ (*KRS* XCIV, biographies 7: Sŏ Hŭi 徐熙 = *KRSJ* II, Sŏngjong, year 12, month 10). Then again, we find a strikingly similar letter to the throne wrote under king Ŭijong 毅宗 (r. 1146-70), lamenting that, during his rule, it was hard to find nobility scion able to the serve within the aforementioned corps, part of the native tradition (*Tongmunŏn* 31, memorials and correspondences: “memorial on the value of the Eight Prohibitions and the Young Immortals” *p'alghan-sŏllang-ka p'yo* 八關會仙郎賀表 by Kwak Tongsun 郭東珣). The nobility element likely signals that this “parade” *hwarang* were used as

¹³ Vermeersch (2008), 86-9, 91-2; Ahn Jee-Won (2011), 94-8, 101-3; Yang Eun-Yong (2011), 231-240; Mahy Kaya (2022)

¹⁴ clearly a synonym for *hwarang*.

political symbols for regional unity within the reign¹⁵, as well as the military nature of the P’algwanhoe, though vestigial in this case.

Koryŏ did not only appropriate of the legacy of Silla, but that of Koguryŏ too. In fact, it is likely that the monarchy opted to emphasize those or that cultural inheritance depending on the situation, but it ultimately the official culture was syncretistic, and this is reflected on how the P’algwanhoe was perceived too. When the Song envoy Xu Jing 徐兢 (1091-1153) came to Koryŏ, he reported two interesting facts: first, that in main capital Kaesŏng, where the major of Eight Prohibitions festivities was held, there were temples to the mythical Koguryŏ cultural heroes Chumong and Yuhwa; second, that the Eight Prohibitions Festival was a reenactment of the Koguryŏ’s Tongmaeng festival, at least in his eyes¹⁶.

Xuanhe fengshi Gaoli tujing 宣和奉使高麗圖經 XVII, Temples 祠宇

以十月祭天大會名曰東盟其
國東有穴號樞神亦以十月迎
而祭之自王氏有國以來依山
築城於國之南以建子月率官
屬具儀物祠天後受契丹冊與
其立世子亦如此行禮焉其十
月東盟之會今則以其月望日
具素饌謂之八關齋禮儀極盛
其祖廟在國東門之外唯王初
襲封與三歲一大祭則具專服

On the tenth month there is a big ritual to Heaven, with a huge gathering, named Tongmaeng. Toward the capital’s east, there a cavern, called *susin*¹, where, on the tenth month, (its) deity is welcomed and given offerings. Since the Wang (dynasty) governs the kingdom, they have built fortifications on the capital’s southern mountains, and during the first [lunar] month and official is dispatched [there] with offerings for the Heaven. Later, the (Koryŏ kings) obtained the investiture from the Khitan in that palace, while the crown prince was observing the

¹⁵ It is worth remembering that early Koryŏ nobility consisted in clans descending from the powerful, local warlords allied with Kung Ye before, and with T’aejo Wang Kŏn then.

¹⁶ Vermeersch (2008), 89-91; Ahn Jee-Won (2011), 109-110, 214-5; Noh Taedon (2014), 283-292

¹ “Grave clothes god” *Susin* 樞神. Cf. with the Koguryŏ’s “god of tunnels” *Susin* 隧神 / “god of the waters” *Susin* 水神 mentioned in the previous chapter.

冕圭親祠之其餘則分遣官屬
歲旦月朔春秋重午皆享祖禰
繪其像於府中率僧徒歌唄晝
夜不絕又俗喜浮屠二月望日
諸僧寺然燭極繁侈王與妃嬪
皆往觀之國人喧鬧道路其神
祠在百里內者四時遣官祠以
太牢又三歲一大祭徧其境內
然及期以祀神為名率斂民財
聚白金千兩餘物稱是與其臣
屬分之此為可哂也

“eight prohibitions’ fasting” [*aṣṭāṅga-śīla upavasatha*], a vegetarian banquet held on the full moon (fifteenth day) of the same month. The ritual is magnificent. The [royal] ancestors’ shrine is found outside the capital’s eastern gate. Only after three years from the enthronement, and then, after further three years, there is a great sacrifice, during which the king wears the full regalia and personally performs the ritual. As for everything else, officials are dispatched [to perform the sacrifices]². On the first day of the [lunar] year, on every month’s first day, and during the vernal and autumnal equinoxes, offerings are presented to the royal spirit tablets and representations. Their portraits are held within the palace. Monk disciples are lead there to chant endlessly, day and night. Moreover, [there] the predilection for the Buddha is common, thus, every full moon (fifteenth day) of the second month, every Buddhist temple light some candles up. It is magnificent and extravagant. The king, along with the queen and the consorts, go out to enjoy the spectacle, while the commoners go on the street, making a great noise. Every season, officials are sent to make animal sacrifices³ for the spirits’ temple within a hundred *li* range [from the

² Seemingly, here Xu Jing made confusion between the tenth lunar month’s *P’algwanhoe*, held at P’yŏng’yang, with those of the eleventh month, held at the capitol city.

³ “(Great) animal sacrifice” or “great(er) lot” *t’aeroe / tailao* 太牢 is a Confucian technical term referring to the immolation of the “three premium quality offerings”: a cow, a sheep and a pig - more often, a single cow.

capital], while every three years they make a great ritual. However, in these times, with the pretext of the offerings to the spirits, [the officials] plunder the people's wealth: hundreds of *liang* (tael) in white gold are hoarded, other products are requested and (the loot) is shared with the subordinates. This situation is ludicrous!

Along with the festival, Koryŏ inherited the imperial ideology of Koguryŏ as well. Traces of this policy can be found in the *Koryŏsa* and in the stone inscriptions: the kingdom was often described as “everything-under-the-Heaven” *tianxia* / *ch'ŏnha* 天下, the courtly customs involved imperial address terms (“I, the only one” *yiren* / *ir'in* 一人 and “His Majesty” *bixia* / *p'yeha* 陛下), and in the case of Munjong 文宗 (r. 1046-1083), it is reported at least a case of a Minister of Rites insisting for the use of imperial yellow or red ropes, addressing the monarch with the title “emperor” *huangdi* / *hwangje* 皇帝. Likely, the most overlooked yet manifest imperial element of an imperial ideology within Koryŏ is found in the royal name customs: the temple names of the Wang ruling clan followed the Chinese imperial tradition, using the titles “ancestor” *zong* / *chong* 宗 or “founder” 祖 *zu* / *cho*, while the crown princes were titled “son of His Highness” *t'aeja* 太子 or even “imperial son of His Highness” *hwang-t'aeja* 皇太子 and coherently their apartments were located in the Eastern Palace (Tonggung 東宮). This imperial ideology survived even the Khitan invasions and the subsequent vassalage status toward the Liao dynasty⁴.

The Eight Prohibition festival reflected this ideology. In fact, we have previously seen how during the “congratulation ceremony”, the Koryŏ rulers received merchants from abroad, a custom, this, aimed to create a perception of a formal

⁴ Breuker (2003, 2004)

recognition to the kingdom's autonomous tributary system, and was as well as an imitation of rite's "internationalism" as performed in the neighbor Song dynasty (*Songshi* 宋史 CXIII, annals 志 66: Five Rites 嘉禮 16). Like in China, the king performed the royal rite to the land and grain gods (*sajik* 社稷), as well the imperial Heaven worship at the round altar (*hwan'gu* or *wŏn'gu* 圓丘). The latter was probably performed in some form during the Eight Prohibition festival.

In the surviving songs within the *Koryŏsa*, the rulers were explicitly addressed as "[Son of] Heaven" *ch'ŏn[ja]* 天[子] and "Son of Heaven of the Eastern Sea" *Haedong-ch'ŏnja* 海東天子. Particularly, in the "the wind gets through the pine" (*P'ung'ipsong* 風入松), the monarch is equated with the mythical, ideal Confucian rulers Yao and Shun, as well as to the Buddha. This last element is also a retrieving of the Unified Silla royal ideology, according to which the king was a buddha and his dominions a "buddha-field" *buddhakṣetra*⁵:

***Koryŏsa* 高麗史 LXXI, annals 志 25, songs 樂 2: songs in Tang style, "drinking song" (*Kyŏngbae-ga* 傾杯歌)**

龍鳳燭、交光星漢。對咫尺鼇山
、開雉扇。會樂府兩籍神仙，梨
園四部絃管。漸曉色、都人未散。
盈萬井、山呼鼇抃。願歲歲，天
仗裏、鎮瞻金輦

Dragon and phoenix lanterns, their jointed
light [reaches] the Milky Way / facing it
nigh, the O mountain, opening a pheasant
feathers fan. Joining together, [plays] two
Sinsŏn divisions⁶, from the Music Bureau,
and four orchestral ensembles, from the
Riwŏn palace. / Advancing the dawn's
colors, the capital people are [no more]
scattered. Overflowing in every quarter,
(they) shout to the mountain, toward the O
[mountain], clapping their hands. / Every

⁵ Breuker (2003, 2004); Vermeersch (2008), 86-9, 91-2; Kim Jongmyung (2016), 26-28; Ahn Jee-Won (2011), 104-6; Yang Eun-Yong (2011), 231-240

⁶ *Sinsŏn* 神仙 literally means "Daoist immortals, Daoist fairy". Another name for the *hwarang* / *sŏllang*?

year, I hope to observe in awe the golden carriage, [among the Son of] Heaven's guards.

***Koryŏsa* 高麗史 LXXI, annals 志 25, songs 樂 2: songs in Tang style, “the wind gets through the pine” (*P’ung’ipsong* 風入松)**

海東天子當今帝， 佛補天助敷化
來。 理世恩深， 遐邇古今稀。 外
國躬趨盡歸依， 四境寧清罷槍旗，
盛德堯湯難比。

[...]

南蠻北狄自來朝， 百寶獻我天墀。
金階玉殿呼萬歲， 願我主長登寶
位。 對此大平時節， 絃管歌謠聲
美。

The Son of Heaven of the Eastern Sea is at a time an emperor and a buddha, / assisting the Heaven he came to educate. / By taking care of the world, [he shows] a deep compassion, / near and far, old and present: (he is) incomparable. / Coming from afar, he reached and took refuge, / the four borders are peaceful and clean, destroyed are the spears and the [military] insignia. / (His) virtues are great, those of Yao and Shun are incomparable [...] barbarians from south to north spontaneously comes to pay homage, / hundreds of treasures are donated to our [Son of] Heaven and (his) courtyard, / through the gilded stairs of the Jade Halls, countless cries for a long life, / hope that our king seat on his throne for a long time. / During these peaceful times, the instruments and the songs are pleasing to hear.

It must be noticed that were likely more compositions dedicated to such events, written in the indigenous language and-or poetry forms: the *Koryŏsa* reports that many royal ceremonies involved native music. However, it is likely that the Chosŏn redactors preferred the Chinese-style ones, also erasing the more explicit elements of imperial ideology within the text, in deference to the newly adopted Neoconfucian ideology⁷.

Some modifications to ritual happened with the time: for example, during the Military Dictatorship, between the reigns of Ŭijong and Kojong 高宗王 (r. 1213-1259), the Nae-Chesŏgwŏn name was changed in “prayer hall inside [the palace]” Nae-Wŏndang 內願堂 and tied to the “inner Buddhist halls” Nae-Pultang. This, because a person was struck by a lightning inside the Pong’ŭn-sa Nae-Chesŏgwŏn (*Tanjong Sillok* X, year 2, Sin’yu 辛酉 year, month 1). Thus, the new hall was unlikely to be in the same royal temple. The change involved the ritual performed in the hall too, which became purely Buddhist in nature⁸. However, it was the Lantern Festival which became more recognizably Buddhist among these two festivities, as we will see.

4.3. *The Lantern Festival in Korea*

The Lantern Festival or Yŏndŭnghoe can be easily described as a lesser version of the P’algwanhoe. Like the P’algwanhoe, the Yŏndŭnghoe was likely a result of syncretism between Buddhist, Chinese and native believes:

This festival was originally celebrated on the Full Moon (fifteenth day) of the fourth or the second lunar month, thus, corresponding with Vesak (Vesākha / Vaiśākha) in the first case, and with the Bodhi Day in the second case. In China, the date was anticipated to the first lunar month, creating a syncretism with the Daoist festival for the “Three Primordials” Sanyuan 三元. In Korea there was another syncretism with native festivals for the start of the agricultural season.

⁷ Breuker (2004)

⁸ Ahn Jee-Won (2011), 230-293

In the Koryŏ kingdom, the date choice varied upon time. During the first period of the dynasty, the chosen date coincided with the Chinese one (first lunar month's Full Moon). Additionally, minor celebrations for temple inaugurations or national crises were usually held on the second lunar month. Like its twin festival, the Eight Prohibitions, the Lantern Festival was de facto abolished by Sŏngjong and later resurrected by Hyŏnjong. Between the Hyŏnjong second year (1010) and the eighth year of Myŏngjong 明宗 (r. 1170-1197) the date shifted from the first to the second lunar month, in accordance with the Korean seasonality, and the traditional date of Buddha's nirvāṇa as well. This change also created a parallel with the Eight Prohibitions festival: the P'algwanhoe coincided with the Vesak, while the Yŏndŭnghoe coincided with the Bodhi Day. During the middle period, and particularly the Military Dictatorship, there was a new shift toward a stricter Buddhist orthodoxy, this can be seen in the Yi Kyubo 李奎報 (1168-1241)'s "writings about the Lantern Festival ritual at the Pong'ŭn temple" *Pong'ŭn-sa Yŏndŭnghoe-doryang mun* 奉恩寺燃燈會道場文, when the scholar-official explicitly writes that the festival was tied to the cycle of the seasons and the Buddha's birthday. This suggests that the month may have changed again, from the second to the fourth one. However, it was in 1245, under Kojong, that this change became official – thus taking the name of Sawŏl-P'ar'il-Yŏndŭnghoe 四月八日燃燈會 – along with the identification with the Buddhist Vesak (*KRS CXXIX*, biographies 42, Rebellions: Ch'oe Ch'unghŏn). One last change happened from the Ch'ungnyŏl 忠烈王 (r. 1274-1298) to the Ch'ungsuk 忠肅 (r. 1313-1330) reign, during the Mongol Interference: the celebrations were further prolonged, starting from the tenth lunar month of the previous year from the third lunar month of the new year. Under Ch'unsŏn 忠宣 (r. 1298 & 1308-1313), there was a further anticipation, with bigger celebrations held during the ninth lunar month⁹.

How was the Lanterns Festival? As anticipated before, the main difference between the Yŏndŭnghoe and the P'algwanhoe was in magnitude, not in substance. Therefore, most of the elements that we saw at that festival were likely present in

⁹ Han Geum-soon (2008), 466-9; Vermeersch (2008), 89-90; Ahn Jee-Won (2011), 92-7 & 100-112

this one too. For example, in the case of the Lantern Festival, there are mentions of king's visits at the Pöbwang-sa 法王寺, outside the royal palace. It is unclear why this temple, but it is possible that inside the Pöbwang-sa there was a "spirit pavilion", likely related to the P'alghanhoe, and thus, only by analogy, with the Yöndünghoe. The entire festival lasted two days, divided by a night banquet (*tüngsögyön* 燈夕宴) with a lantern show (*kwandüng* 觀燈). This spectacle was substantially identical to that of the Eight Prohibition Festival, with silk mats, folding screens, standards and painting. Here the only difference lays in the importance given to the lanterns, seen as meritorious offers to the Buddha. Like in the case of the Eight Prohibitions, the Lanterns Festival was held in the two mayor capitals of Kaesöng and P'yöngyang alike. The ceremonies preparation within the capitals was complicated enough to establish a dedicated department called *Yöndüng-dogam* 燃燈都監, alike to that of the Eight Prohibition festival. However, being this a "lesser" festival, it did not have a regular budget on its own but had to rely upon donations.

The Yöndünghoe and the P'alghanhoe were celebrated at local, village level too. In fact, at the local level, the Lantern Festival was called "Lantern Festival of the First Primordial" Sang'wön-Yöndünghoe 上元燃燈會 and, according to late thirteenth century's *P'ahan chip* 破閑集, it was strictly tied with local folklore. Both inside the palace and on the city's streets. Lanterns had symbolic importance as offerings, therefore every house hung lanterns. Lanterns were usually hung on poles decorated with colorful silks, but such decorated poles were also erected regardless of the lanterns. For the Hüngwang-sa 興王寺 inauguration by Munjong in honor of his parents, both decorated poles and lanterns are mentioned (*KRS VIII*, important clans 8: Munjong, year 21, month 2, day 5). The *P'ahan chip*, on the other hand, describes another practice, consisting in creating mounds of colorful silks.

In the last part of the dynasty, the Sang'wön-Yöndünghoe lose relevance (at least officially), while the Lantern Festival became more recognizably Buddhist, and so the lantern element became more relevant (*KRS CXXXII*, biographies 42, Rebellions: Sin T'on). It is interesting how the customs tied to these festivals

survived the dynasty itself, keeping their characteristics for the first part of Chosŏn (*T'aejong Sillok* XXVII, Taejong, year 15, first month = *T'aejong Sillok* XXVI, T'aejong, year 16), and only then they took the traits of local, seasonal shamanic festivals. In fact, Yŏndŭnghoe archaic characters are reported in the Yŏngnam (Kyŏngsang region) customs even in the late nineteenth century! Moreover, the most strikingly example of Yŏndŭnghoe continuity can be traced back Cheju Yŏngdŭng-gut, as noted by many scholars¹⁰:

***Sŏngjong Sillok* 成宗實錄 LIV, Sŏngjong: year 6 (1475), Pyŏngsul 丙戌 year, month 4, day 8**

傳于漢城府曰：“今日風亂，而家家燃燈，火災可畏。其禁之。”國俗以是日爲釋迦生日，家家張燈。多樹長杠，連綴數十燈，至爲鳥、獸、魚、龍之狀，務極侈巧，觀者坌集

[The king] sent one advice to the Hansŏng city's governorate: “these days there is a turbulent wind and, with every house lighting up the lanterns¹¹, I fear this may cause fires. We shall prohibit this (practice)”. Within our Country, it is custom to celebrate the Buddha's Birthday on this day, and every house displays some lantern. We erect many poles, and dozens of lanterns are hanged together. Moreover, we create (lanterns) in extravagant shapes like birds, beasts, fishes and dragons, so that they attract onlookers.

¹⁰ Han Geum-soon (2008), 466-9; Vermeersch (2008), 90-2; Nam Hyang (2010), 298-9; Ahn Jee-Won (2011), 92-7, 100-3 & 112-120. See also Lee Seog-Ju (2010)

¹¹ Or, alternatively, “celebrating the Lantern Festival”, with the description of the lighting up implied.

Sinjŭng-dongguk-yŏjisŭngnam 新增東國輿 地勝覽 (1530), Chŏlla region 全
羅 道, Cheju governorate 濟州牧: local customs 風俗

二月朔日 於歸德金寧等地 立竿	During the first day of the first lunar
十二 迎神祭之 居 涯月者 得槎	month, in Kwidŏk Kŭmnyŏng and other
形如馬頭者 飾以彩帛 作躍馬戲	places, [the locals] erect twelve [bamboo]
以娛 神 至望日乃罷 謂之然燈	poles to welcome the gods and celebrate
是月禁乘船	them.
	Those who live in Aewŏl build horsehead
	effigies, embellishing them with colorful
	silks, and, by riding them, entertain the
	gods. With the Full Moon, everything ends
	in an event called <i>Yŏndŭng</i> . In this month
	is forbidden to take boats.

Before addressing the nature of Chesŏk in these State rituals, let us see how the P'algwanhoe and the Yŏndŭnghoe alike were perceived by the commoner. In fact, before we have only briefly mentioned how the two festivals were celebrated at the local level, without detailing the perceptions as whole, but without these details it, would be difficult to understand how, during Chosŏn, they kept “Koryŏ” characteristics, nor how they became seasonal shamanic festivals, and most importantly what is the relationship with Chesŏk’s characteristics in the later shamanism.

4.4. State Celebrations among the Commoners

We have seen how both the Eight Prohibitions and the Lantern festival were adapted to local agricultural festivities, respectively one for the harvest period and the other for start of the agricultural season. This element was reinforced by similar association made by the Chinese intermediation. It is likely that this association with agricultural seasonal cycles remained particularly strong and clear among the

commoners, and even more so for those who celebrated the festivals at village level. Within the villages, these festivities had likely a strong shamanic tone, as well reported by the nickname that T'aejo Wang Kōn gave to the P'alghanhoe: "festival of Buddhist offerings and music gods" *kongbur-aksin-ji-hoe* 供佛樂神之會 or "festival where gods [and humans] offer to the buddhas and rejoice together" *kongbul-laksin-ji-hoe* 供佛樂神之會, a notion long after remarked by Kim Pusik 金富軾 (1075-1151) in his "congratulation letter" to the king: "the gathered deities peacefully submit [to the king]" *Kullyōng-soi-hoeyu* 群靈所以懷柔 (*Tongmunsōn* 31, memorials and correspondences: "congratulation for the Eight Prohibitions" *Ha-P'alghan-p'yo* 賀八關表, Kim Pusik) – let us also keep in mind that all ritual music was in the native "village-style" *hyang'ak* 鄉樂; a parallel theme was that of light, in fact in the later periods the term "P'alghan-" was associated with the native verb "be bright, be brightened, be sunny etc." *palk-* (밝-), and therefore it is not surprise if modern scholars made a parallel between the Eight Prohibition festival and Christmas or the Thanksgiving on one hand, and between the Lantern Festival and Easter on the other hand. The importance of sun and brightness is well expressed by a poem by Yi Illo 李仁老 (1152-1220), who explicitly use the term "sunny sky, yang-filled sky" *yang-ch'ōn* 陽天: "auspiciously arrives a summer day / the pleasant scent [of the Dharma] spreads to the three thousand worlds" *Kagi chōk-kūb ir-yang-ch'ōn / kyehyang i-p'yōn samch'ōn'gye* 佳期適及一陽天 / 戒香已遍三千界 (*Tongmunsōn* 20, *qiyan jueju* [heptasyllabic quatrains]: "the emperor retinue during the Eight Prohibitions festival's day" *P'alghan-il hojong* 八關日扈從, Yi Illo). This was a period when "the whole world dances and sings tirelessly" *manmul mi-bul-komu* 萬物靡不鼓舞 and "Heaven calls while people respond" *ūng-ch'ōn-su-in* 應天順人, according to the Kim Pusik poem mentioned before¹².

So far, we can easily conclude these festivities were the two main occasions for mass gathering and entertainment. This is well described by the 1196 Myōngjong refusal to punish the joyful but "inappropriate" peasants: "The king said: 'lords and

¹² Breuker (2004); Vermeersch (2008), 91-2; Ahn Jee-Won (2011), 208-227

commoners share their joy, paying their respect [to the king]. Therefore, how could we punish them?’” *wang wal*: ‘*yŏ-pŏnmin tongnak, ch’ong-ji-ya, i-joe-ji-ga hu?*’ 王曰, “與藩民同樂, 寵之也, 而罪之可乎?” (KRS XX, important clans 29: Myŏngjong, year 11, month 11, day 26 = KRSJ XIII, Myŏngjong, year 11, month 11). This episode introduces us to the other aspect of the State-sponsored festivals: that of political propaganda. Within the capitals, in fact, the P’algwanhoe and the Yŏndŭnghoe festivals were two of the few occasions when the king was seen around the palace – even more: the king in full regalia accompanied by a parade! P’algwanhoe and Yŏndŭnghoe thus were show of imperial might. In the poems dedicated to the king for these occasions, there is mentions of “barbarian vassals”¹³ paying their deference to the king in the classical, Confucian “father-kingdom / son-vassal” relationship¹⁴. We have seen how these “foreign envoys” were unlikely real, but mere merchants taking their role. However, in the eyes of the imperial propaganda this was unimportant, as was likely perceived as true for many commoners.

4.5. *Chesŏk the Heavenly King*

Let us make a summary of what can be the image of Chesŏk basing on what we have discussed so far:

- Chesŏk was equated with the Confucian “Heaven” Tian 天 as well with the Buddhist Śakra
 - The Heaven’s worship had an imperial fashion: the Koryŏ rulers were “Son of the Heaven”
 - As a Buddhist deity, Chesŏk / Śakra was a judge of human daily life
- Chesŏk was also identified with native sky deities, reinventing the Unified Silla Heaven’s worship model
 - Thus, Chesŏk was a unifying deity common among the various Three Kingdom’s period foundation narratives

¹³ Mainly: T’amna 耽羅 (Cheju) and the Jin 金朝 (Jurchens).

¹⁴ Ahn Jee-Won (2011), 208-227

- However, some elements point toward a stronger, explicit identification with Habaek of the Koguryō's Chumong myth (as per the *Gaoli Tujing*)
- Chesōk worship's aim is to bring prosperity to the kingdom
- Chesōk was a war deity which brings protection by giving strength to the army and fear among the enemies

So far, it may seem that Hwan'in identification which we have discussed about in the previous paragraph is absent, or at least a re-invention by later Koryō literati under the Mongol yoke. This objection has a pinch of truth, meaning that the unifying narrative around Tan'gun was likely put under the spotlight again when the necessity was felt again, viz. when the “barbarians” had the upper hand over the “empire”, threatening its cultural independence. However, as we will see, an indirect clue about the importance of the Tan'gun myth are very recent in the Koryō history, being related to the mythical narrative of the Wang royal clan origins. But before addressing that, we must understand how the Chesōk of the P'alghanhoe was also a “Buddhist” deity.

We have said that Śakra cult aimed at the protection of the Dharma, the kingdom and the royal clan. This aim is explicated in many official inscriptions, such as the “Sūngmyo pagoda's inscription by the State preceptor Wōn'gong” *Wōn'gong Kuksa Sūngmyo-t'ap-pi* 圓空國師勝妙塔碑. This role is also enlightened by the position of its mayor temple: inside the royal palace, “protecting” the ancestor and the Sajik (soil-and-grain) temples. This protective character was twofold: on one hand, Śakra was associated with Avalokiteśvara and Subhūti (*Xuanhe fengshi Gaoli tujing* XVII temples: Anhwa-sa = KRS CXXIII, biographies 36, favored people: Yōng Ŭi 榮儀), thus having a more pacific outlook; on the other hand, Śakra was portrayed as almost identical to Mārīcī, a war deity that embolden the troops and make enemies surrender. An example of this can be found in the *Marishi-bosatsu Darani-kyō* (**Mārīcī-bodhisattva dhāraṇī-sūtra*) 摩利支菩薩陀

羅尼經, a text containing Koryŏ paintings¹⁵. In this representation, Śakra can easily be mistaken for Mārīcī, however it is a superficial resemblance:

1. The character is not a young boy, but a seated figure
2. The figure lacks Mārīcī iconographic elements like svastikas or Sun symbols on his hands, nor there is any fan
3. Over his right hand, what seems to be a remnant of a fan representation, is more likely to be that of a lotus stalk

Normally, one may expect that Śakra would be painted while holding his *vajra*, his signature weapon. However, during Koryŏ there are examples of Śakra painted while holding a fan or a lotus flower. Fans and lotuses, when stylized, can indeed be very similar to each other, and this led to confusion between the two deities in later Chosŏn paintings¹⁶.

Thus, during Koryŏ, Chesŏk / Śakra was both an imperial deity cloaked in regality and a war deity that granted victories, protection. This is clearly fitting for the Koryŏ ruler clan, the Kaesŏng Wang clan 開城王氏, ascended to the throne with the warlord Wang Kŏn. It is the relationship with this clan that brings us to the ties with both the Tan'gun and the Chumong myths:

The mythical clan history of the Wang clan is found in the first section of the *Koryŏsa*, the *Koryŏ-segye* 高麗世界, compiled under Ŭijong with the name of *P'yŏnnyŏn-t'ongnok* 編年通錄. The clan succession line (Korean side) is reported by this text as follows:

Kang Hokyŏng 康虎景 → Kang Ch'ung 康忠 → Kang Poyuk 康寶育 → Kang Chin'ui 康辰義 → Kyŏnggang 景康

Kyŏnggang, a.k.a. Chakchegŏn 作帝建, is said to be the father of Wang Ryung 王隆 (d. 897), and the grandfather of Wang Kŏn. The Wang clan's imperial legitimacy is built over three pillars: the divinization of Kang Hokyŏng, the ties with Tang

¹⁵ Originally held at Kyoto's Myōshin-ji Seitaku-in 妙心寺聖澤院, now part of the Tokyo's Seikado Bunko Art Museum 靜嘉堂文庫美術館 collection.

¹⁶ Ahn Jee-Won (2011), 225-286

imperial clan (Longxi Li house 隴西李氏) and the Wang Ryung descendance from a dragon. Herein, we will focus on Kang Hokyŏng, Kang Ch'ung and Chakchegŏn. The first element is well described in both the *Koryŏ-segye* and the *Chewang Un'gi*. Kang Hokyŏng is described as a “sacred bone general” *sŏnggol-changgun* 聖骨將軍, meaning he was a member of the Sillan ruling clan, despite he is said to be a man from the Paektu-san range, within the Koguryŏ territories. However, what interest us more is his encounter with the Paektu mountain vixen-goddess, which is a clear reference to Tan'gun and Ungnyŏ narrative, *Samguk Yusa* version¹⁷:

***Koryŏsa* 高麗史 I, *Koryŏ-segye* 高麗世界**

先祀山神，其神見曰，‘予以寡婦主此山。幸遇聖骨將軍，欲與爲夫婦，共理神政，請封爲此山大王。	First, he made a sacrifice to the mountain god, the goddess appeared and said: “as a widow, I rule over this mountain. Luckily, I met a sacred bone general, and we married, governing together as gods. I wish to bestow to you the tile of ‘mountain emperor’”
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***Chewang Un'gi* 帝王韻紀, II.m, 3**

聖骨將軍孫 [諱虎景，今九龍山天王也。[…] 虎變爲女曰， “我寡居此山，願與君同理神政。” 因婚而爲神。由是，名虎景，而山名九龍。[…]]，有女賢而美，遂合生景康 [大王諱，作帝建]	The sacred bone general had a scion, [the (general's) name was Hokyŏng, now he is the heavenly ruler of the Kuryong mountain [...]] the fox transformed herself into a woman and said: “I live as a widow in this mountain, I wish to rule here with
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¹⁷ Sin Jong-won (2016), 132-4; Yoon Kyeong Jin (2023), 124-134

you as gods”, thus she married him and they became gods [...] / there was a woman, wise and beautiful, / who then conceived Kyönggang [the (son’s) imperial name is avoided: Chakchegön]

From Kang Ch’ung, the narrative starts including prophecies about a future Peninsula unification:

According the *Koryŏ-segye*, the Silla general (*kamgan* 監干) and geomancy (*p’ungsu* / *fengshui* 風水) expert P’ar’wŏn 八元 prophesied that, if someone had planted some tree over the Puso 扶蘇山 (= Song’ak) mountain peak, a king able to unify the “Three Han” (*t’onghap-Samhan-ja* 統合三韓者) would have born. Kang Ch’ung, having heard the story, planted a pine there. This prophecy was clearly retrieved during the Wang Kŏn rule: it is in fact reported that, in 918, a buried mirror was discovered. This mirror was engraved with a prophecy, reciting: “The Heavenly Emperor begot a son within Chinma who will subjugate the rooster and the duck” *Sangje kang-ja ō-Chinma, sŏn cho-gye hu pak-ap* 上帝降子於辰馬, 先操雞後搏鴨 (*KRSI*, important clans 1: T’aejo documents = *SKSL*, biographies 10: Kung Ye). Here “Chinma 辰馬” is a portmanteau of Chinhan 辰韓 (Silla) and Mahan 馬韓 (Koguryŏ), while the “rooster” is a reference to the “rooster wood” i.e. Kyerim 雞林 (again: Silla), and the “duck” refers to the “duck green field” i.e. the Yalu / Amnok river 鴨綠 (again: Koguryŏ). Even more interesting here is the mention of a tree (or wood) over a mountain, elements that again appear within the Tan’gun myth as well, in the *Chewang-Un’gi* and *Sejong Sillok* versions¹⁸.

The story of Chakchegön starts with his birth from his mother Kang Chin’ui 康辰義 and an unknown Chinese noble (*Taedang kwisŏng* 大唐貴姓), who later became the Emperor Tang Suzong 唐肅宗 (r. 756-762) – or Tang Xuanzong 唐玄宗 (r.

¹⁸ Sin Jong-won (2016), 132-4; Yoon Kyeong Jin (2023), 131-4

712-756), in the later *P'yönnŏn-kangmok* 編年綱目 (late thirteenth century) – who gave his mother a bow and arrows as heredity to his child.

Chakchegön, wanting to know his father, sailed to China. However, he was caught in a storm and lost himself in the sea. Here, Chakchegön met the Dragon King of the Western Sea, who asked him to kill his enemy, an “old fox” *no-ho* 老狐, whose magical powers made him able to become bright as the Sun and the Moon under the disguise of a Buddha, annoying the sea creature with his music and his sutra recitations. Chakchegön killed the fox with his bow and, having completed his task, the Dragon King gave the hero his daughter (“dragon-woman” Yongnyö 龍女) hand¹⁹. Then, the Dragon King asked Chakchegön what his wish was, Chakchegön said that he wished for the unification of the Peninsula. The dragon then predicted him that this will happen if “three Kön (Samgön 三建)” would have birth, a phrase explained by Yi Chehyön 李齊賢 (1288-1367) as “if three generations will have the same name, there will be a king for the Three Han” *samse-ilmyöng p'il wang* *Samhan* 三世一名 必王三韓: an allusion to Wang Ryung (*hao*: Yonggön 龍建) and his son T'aejo Wang Kön.

What is noticeable here is that the protagonist is described as a “man from Koguryö” *Koryö-in* 高麗人, despite having a Chinese father and being the Koguryö Empire already collapsed in the seventh century. However, this is coherent with the Koguryö ideology that saw the territories in the P'yöngyang south as its own. Moreover, Chakchegön is said to known as “the godly bow” *sin'gung* 神弓 i.e. a “new Chumong” of sort, as the mythical Koguryö founder's name means “good archer” *sönsa* 善射. If on one hand the story takes the basic narrative elements from the Köt'aji 居陟知 story (*SKY* II, prodigies 2: Queen Chinsöng and Köt'aji), a human helps a god and can marry the god's daughter as reward²⁰, on the other hand this is the only story where the Koguryö elements are predominant: there's the archery and the dragon, as in the Chumong myth, while the bow as inheritance and

¹⁹ The *Koryö-segye* also reports another, more Buddhist variant: Chakchegön's ended up in the Dragon King's palace, encountered the dragon's daughter, who asked him to help her in to copy an enchanted sutra, and only then to liberate his family from “a calamity” (clearly the fox).

²⁰ Sin Jong-won (2016), 133-6; Yoon Kyeong Jin (2023), 137-147

an implicit way to recognize the father may be a recall to the mythical foundation of Paekche by Onjo 溫祚 and Piryu 沸流, sons of Chumong (SKS XXIII, Paekche chronicles 1: king Onjo = SKY II, prodigies 2: Southern Puyō, Old Paekche, Northern Puyō). It is worth noticing how the Chakchegōn narrative was preserved with some changes in the Cheju “origins story of (the war god) Kun’ung” *Kun’ung-ponp’uri* 軍雄本풀이²¹.

We can make the following considerations:

First: the Wang clan founding myth is an amalgam of elements from Silla, Koguryō and maybe Paekche for political purpose, with a strong emphasis on the unification, *scilicet*: by a resurrected Koguryō. The fact that no real continuity can be seen between these elements was clearly intended by the redactors to strengthen this sense of cohesion. At the same time, the imperial ideology of the narrative is clear (despite the term “Son of Heaven” is never explicit) as well as the Daoist and Buddhist ones (geomancy, sutra).

Secondo: there are clearly some recalls of some version of the Tan’gun myth, even though it is not clear which one, if any of the extant. In fact, elements from various stories seem to have parallels in this or that version, but the general structure from which the redactor drawn upon is not evident.

Third: the “Heaven” nature in this myth is more abstract and Confucian. The one mention of a personal heavenly god (Shangdi / Sangje 上帝) appears only later in the *Koryōsa* as a reference to the prophecy in this narrative, but not directly in the *Koryō-segye*, nor appears that this “Heaven” can be attributed to any specific Korean founding myth. While at some point that the Koguryō culture is emphasized (Chakchegōn story), it is also clear that the “Heaven” is the same from all “Three Han”.

The inclusion of Tan’gun elements, and thus Kojosōn, maybe a way to extend this political narrative even retroactively. This also indicates that the conflation between the many sky deities which we can see in the other Korean myth redactions (*Samguk Sagi*, *Samguk Yusa*, *Chewang Un’gi* etc.) already had its ground within the Wang

²¹ Choi Won-oh (2008), 308-9; Sō Taesōk (2011), 1290-130

clan foundation myth. This granted that these narratives are usually spread at the beginning of a dynasty as a way of legitimation, even though not necessarily wrote down at first.

Summarizing:

- The P'algwanhoe (Eight Prohibitions Festival) and the Yöndünghoe (Lantern Festival) were the two most important festivals during the the Koryö kingdom.
 - Originally Buddhist, these festivals already syncretized with Daoism in China and with native agricultural festivities during the Korean Three Kingdoms period.
 - P'algwanhoe was gradually equated with Vesak (Vesākha / Vaiśākha), while the Yöndünghoe was gradually equated with the Bodhi Day. It was only during the last part of the dynasty, that the Yöndünghoe became more recognizably Buddhist and identified with Vesak.
- The two festivities many had elements from both Silla and Koguryö, the ruler was described as a “Son of the Heaven” and his dominions as “Everything-under-the-Heaven (i.e. an empire)”, while foreign merchants created a resemblance of foreign tributary relationship with foreign lands. This kind of celebration, already present in China, was a propaganda tool, alongside with the sporadic king parades outside the palace.
- Both festivities were celebrated in the two mayor capitals and in the regions. The regional celebrations had more elements from local folklore and a more shamanic nature in general. These regional celebrations felt in disuse during the last part of the dynasty, when the Buddhist elements became prominent.
 - The Yöndünghoe survived to Koryö and even the Chosön fall in its regional, shamanic forms. The Cheju Yöngdung-gut is the most widely known.
- Both the P'algwanhoe and the Yöndünghoe were aimed at ensuring safety, prosperity and victory for the kingdom and the royal house. This was made

by imperial rites of Heaven worship. This Heaven was identified with Chesŏk, whose nature was multilayered:

- As a Confucian deity, Chesŏk was described as the impersonal “Heaven” Tian 天.
- As a Buddhist deity, Śakra / Chesŏk was both a judge and a protector war deity. His characteristics were basically the same of Mārīcī.
- In the Wang ruling clan founding myth, Chesŏk is mostly impersonal, designated only once as Sangje / Shangdi 上帝. However, the narrative takes many elements from Silla, Koguryŏ and even Tan’gun myth, signaling that the intent was to amalgamate all Korean sky deities (and related founding myths) into one single narrative. This, to emphasize the kingdom’s political cohesion, in contrast to late Silla.

5 The Koryŏ Religio-Cultural Landscape

We have seen how Koryŏ's State rituals built around Hwan'in-Chesŏk were intended to bring social cohesion and material prosperity. This was not an exception: the practical conception of cults and rites serving to bring good luck and prosperity (*kibok-sin'ang* 祈福信仰) is a well-known feature of Koryŏ religious lifestyle, regardless of the (usually multiple) affiliation. This conception is thought to be of shamanic origins and survives in modern time: it is not even an exaggeration calling it a characteristic of the Korean religiosity²².

Koryŏ population and State both had the cultural tendency to use rituals and ceremonies to ensure the positive outcome of their problems and celebrate major events. In fact, Koryŏ seen a rise in the number and variety of rituals as no dynasty before. The culture of the period was indeed ecumenical and eclectic, permitting many religions to coexist under its patronage: mainly Buddhism, Daoism and Shamanism. Confucianism was the prerogative of the administration and bureaucracy, but even in this case too there were mixings and sharing of power with Buddhism and Daoism (mainly for the rituals' management). However, the sources may be very detailed when it comes to royal palaces' rites and the like, while are often fragmented when it comes to the rest of population.²³

As we will see, Koryŏ preserved some cultural and religious trend from China that got lost in the place of origins: one of this is the Chan Fayan school 法眼宗, lineage of which was absorbed by the Linji school 臨濟宗 during the Song period.²⁴

If we wanted to lay a distinction between the many rituals and their forms, we could lay some distinction on the levels of administrative power, which coincides also with the either officiality or local popularity:

²² Yi Gi-yeong (1974); Chačatřjan (2015); Kim Jongmyung (2016); Seo Jinseok (2019), 41-63; Kim Youn-gyeong (2020); Kim Sooyoun (2022), 52; Kim Staci (2022), 140-2

²³ Yi Gi-yeong (1974), 110-130; Vermeersch (2008); Yang Eun-Yong (2011) 230-1; Kim Jongmyung (2016), 21-2 and 26-8

²⁴ Vermeersch (2020), 5-8

Distinction among Koryŏ rituals, basing on the distance from administrative power center:

Palace cults:	Described but not always in detail. Something is inferable from the later sources. Generally, Buddhist or Daoist.
State-sponsored cults:	Widely described, often of Buddhist or Confucian nature (or both).
Temples' and (local) aristocracy' cults:	Mostly inferable by the inscriptions and private works of the literati for the details. If not, inferable by later sources. Buddhist ones are most recorded.
Popular cults:	Almost no direct information about, something is inferable from the later sources. Mostly of Buddhist or Shamanic nature.

This array is deducted from the analyses of Sem Vermeersch (2003, 2008), Kim Sooyoun (2014), Kim Jongmyung (2016), Mahy Kaya (2022) et al. However, this is clearly not the only possible framework. In fact, adopting a more Gramscian point of view, it is possible to make another distinction: the religions of the Sinicized élite, and the popular religions, more influenced by Shamanism, while an in-between state could be found in local realities with a minimum power - not the Buddhist clergy per se: as we will see, the hierarchies inside of the society were untouched even inside the *saṅgha*.

For the State, rituals and festivals were held for every event to ensure its wellbeing and prosperity as well as a method to dispel the catastrophes: every emergency required a ritual. These rituals also guaranteed cohesion with the population and an occasion of propaganda for the ruling class, especially for the royal clan²⁵. This may sound as a typical Confucian feature of a proper Confucian State and, in a sense, it was, however, it must be reminded that even if Confucian, the ruling class was very pragmatic and syncretistic regarding of religion: in fact, it is difficult to find a singular belonging to many State-sponsored rites.²⁶

We have seen in the previous section how the most important State-sponsored festivities had their specific commissions attached, this bureaucracy was framed within the classical Three Departments and Six Ministries system 三省六部. On the practical level, the number of commission boards seems unusually high, not

²⁵ Yang Eun-Yong (2011); Kim Jongmyung (2016); Vermeersch (2020)

²⁶ Walraven (1991); Vermeersch (2008, 2020)

counting the parallel Buddhist administration: just to mention two of these commissions, there were at least one agency dedicated to Daoist rituals, the “Office of gods’ response” or “Commission of Daoist rituals” *Sogyōksō* 昭格署²⁷, and the “Council of Yin-Yang” or “Commission for the divination” *Ŭmyang hoeŭi(so)* 陰陽會議(所), of broader competences.²⁸ This arrangement was clearly derived by the importance of the rituality within the kingdom, as well as to ease the competitiveness among and within the various faiths, all seeking to influence the nobility and the throne.

The following section will illustrate each major faith separated, however it has again to be remembered that many of those were held and even practiced jointly to the point that separation was sometimes more a *pro forma* than substantial. Indeed, the will to illustrate them separately is purely illustrative.

5.1. *Koryō Confucianism and Chesōk*

Confucianism was officially the State ideology of the Koryō kingdom’s bureaucracy and served as the main model for the administration of the official rites²⁹. As seen before, however, these rites may have many natures and origins, nonetheless, the Koryō kingdom held Confucian official responsible for them: from many entries in the *Koryōsa*, it results that Koryō administration regularly sent scholar-officials to the local shamanic shrines³⁰ and funded Buddhist temple indifferently.

The ideological model of the Koryō Confucian official was the scholar Ch’oe Ch’iwŏn 崔致遠 (857-tenth century) of Unified Silla, and Unified Silla itself was seen too as a model for the coexistence of Buddhism and Confucianism within the State³¹. The ideal relationship between Buddhism and Confucianism for the Koryō

²⁷ Corresponding to the *Sogyōkchōn* 昭格殿 of the Early Chosŏn dynasty.

²⁸ Vermeersch (2003), 157-8; Kim Sooyoun (2022), 58-63

²⁹ Kim Jongmyung (2016), 22-4

³⁰ Walraven (1991), Suh Young Dae (1992)

³¹ Vermeersch (2020), 1-2; Kim Jongmyung (2016), 21

officials is easier to explain taking as an example the main formulation of Ch'oe Ch'iwŏn and what the Koryŏ officials actually said:

***Samguk Sagi* 三國史記 IV, Silla anallas 4, king Chinhŭng**

[Ch'oe Ch'iwŏn stele (*Nangnang-bi* 鸞郎碑)]

國有玄妙之道，曰風流。設教之源，備詳仙史，實乃包含三教，接化羣生。且如入則孝於家，出則忠於國，魯司寇之旨也。處無爲之事，行不言之教，周柱史之宗也。諸惡莫作，諸善奉行，竺乾大子之化也。

In our Kingdom there is a marvelous Way called “P’ungnyu”. The foundation of this institution of this teaching can be found in the history of immortals. Indeed, embracing the Three Teachings, uniting for the edification of all beings. Therefore, when coming [home] be filial with your family, and when going out be loyal to your Country, these are the institutions of the Justice Minister of Lu (Confucius). Serving without effort, and applying the teaching of the non-word, this is the school of the Archivist of Zhou (Laozi). Not doing any wicked deed and pursuing the goodness, this is the teaching of the Prince of India (Buddha).

***Tongmunsŏn* 東文選 68, chronicles 記, *Kukch’ŏng-sa Kŭmdangju Pul-Sŏkka-yŏraesari-yŏng’i-gi* 國清寺金堂主佛釋迦如來舍利靈異記**

夫王道無二。五帝三王。禮樂不同者。以所遭時或理或亂故也。
[...] 人王法王世出世之法雖殊。
其以混一爲王。歸一爲佛。

There are not two ways of regality. Yet, Rites and Music under the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors [of ancient China] changes during time, being either in order or confused [...] As for the king

of the people and the king of the Dharma (i.e. Buddha), even though the way of the first is secular and the way of the second is otherworldly, there is no divergence: while uniting [the aggregates] in one, one can become king, while returning to unity, one becomes Buddha.

Noteworthy, the Ch'oe Ch'iwŏn theory on unity of the Three Teachings (Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism) was a retrieving of the Chinese Buddhist apologetic of earlier centuries, put in affirmative form. This way of thinking of Ch'oe Ch'iwŏn was again used in Koryŏ. The general approach of Korean scholar-officials was different from those of their Chinese equivalents: while in China the mainstream reasoning is that the Three Teaching have “the same origin”, in Korea is preferred the argument of the “confluence” of Confucianism and Buddhism, and sometimes even Daoism³².

***Tongmunsŏn* 東文選 65, chronicles 記, *Sorim-sa Chungsugi* 小林寺重修記**

聖人之道。迭興於世而化成天下。
。故昔吾孔子當衰周時。以仁義
設其教。及更楊，墨，黃，老。
奇言異術。雜裂而四出。其弊流
於秦漢。而無所不至。而有不忍
聞。於是釋迦氏入中土。醇以第
一義示人。教之以慈悲之行。以
度衆生。所以趣時也。故柳子以
爲浮屠之說。不與孔子異道。又
曰。眞乘法印。與儒典並用。而

The way of the saint: it is alternately come in the world to civilize all under the heaven. Hence, when Zhou [order] was declining, our Confucius established this teaching through Benevolence and Righteousness. After that, Yang[zi], Mo[zi], the Yellow [Emperor] and Lao[zi] emerged, with their strange words and aberrant arts. They branched out everywhere and their disastrous [teachings] spread to the Qin and the Han dynasties, there were no place they did not

³² Vermeersch (2003, 145-6; 2020, 2-5 & 8-12); Kim Jongmyung (2016), 21-8

人知嚮方矣。然則苟統而混之。
儒，釋二教。本無異歸焉。

reach; that was unbearable. Consequently, [the doctrine of] Śākyamuni came to China, showing the people that purity [of the mind] comes first, teaching the compassion (*karuṇā*) as way to save the sentient beings (*sattva*), something that appeared in [its proper] time. Therefore, Liuzi³³ regarded the doctrine of Buddha and the way of Confucius as no different. He also said: “the Dharma Seal of the True Vehicle (the Tripiṭaka) and the Confucian Classics should be used together, so people will know their direction [for their life].” Being so, they will effortlessly reach [the same goals] when mixed. Confucianism and the [doctrine of] Śākyamuni are two teachings [but] being originally not different they return [to the same source].

Yŏngch’wi-san Taejaŭn Hyŏnhwasa-bi 靈鷲山大慈恩玄化寺之碑

[Ch’ae Ch’ungun 蔡忠順 (d. 1036) inscription on the back of the Hyŏnhwa temple’s stele of 1022, celebrating king Hyŏnjong 顯宗 (r. 1009-1031) after the Khitan invasion]

臣聞聖人之至鑑也，儒書韞志勤
修，則政教是興，佛法在心虔敬，
則福祿克就，所謂雖各主三教而

[Thus] I have heard: as for the mirror of the saint, the Confucian books store the purpose of the diligent cultivation, so that politics and education thrive; the Buddhist

³³ “Master Liu”, he’s likely Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819)

共在一源，真理內融化門外顯者也。所以於儒則無先其仁孝。故先生云，“孝者，德之本歟，教之所由生也。”是以，先王之以孝理天下也，其教不肅而成，其政不嚴而理，天下和平，災害不生矣。於佛則亦說父母恩重經，具如卷中之旨也。更不勞剖宣，可謂儒釋二門皆宗於孝。孝之至矣，德所厚焉

Dharma is in the humble reverence of the mind, so that blessing can be obtained. What this means is that there are three teachings, but they have the same origin, that the true principle is fused within, and transform itself to manifest outwardly. Therefore, in Confucianism nothing is more important than benevolence and filial piety. Thus, our previous kings said: “The filial piety is the root of the virtue, by which the principle is settled.” Therefore, our kings arranged the world by filial piety. Their teaching was reached without effort, their government without embellishments, and the universe is pacified and calamities averted. As for the Buddhism, a similar teaching is found in the *Sutra of filial piety*, so there is no need to elaborate [further] here. It can be said there are two ways, Confucianism and Buddhism, and both come from filial piety; if filial piety is perfected, virtue is expanded.

In practical terms, this approach was articulated in the following way: while Confucianism was the teaching for this life, Buddhism was a teaching for the next, and both were essential for the government. For this reason, the kingdom had direct control over every temple and monastery and therefore it was prohibited for the enemy of the royal house to build any of those. In the measure Buddhism was at the State's service, it was regarded as identical to Confucian teachings of benevolence

and filial piety (*in-hyo* 仁孝) and its purpose in rituals was bringing good luck on the State affairs³⁴.

This seems to imply that Confucian officials tied to the highest institution subtly regarded Confucianism as having the upper hand in the relationship with Buddhism, however both doctrines were seen as two faces of the same coin too, which equalizes them on a concrete level³⁵. The apparent stance of superiority can be understood as a reaction to the privileges some Buddhist figures tied to local nobility had over the regular bureaucracy and administrative etiquette but wasn't more than a mask most of the times.

On local and personal levels, the lines were more blurred. A perfect example of this is the renowned counselor, scholar, and poet Yi Kyubo 李奎報 (1168-1241), who lived under the Military Regime (*Musin Chǒnggwǒn* 武臣政權) of 1170-1270. His most famous work is the “Collection of the Minister Yi of the Eastern Kingdom (Koryŏ)” *Tongguk-isangguk-chip* 東國李相國集, in which he mentions many times the *Śūramāṃga-sūtra* 首楞嚴經, a Buddhist text that united in its study the Doctrinal, Esoteric and Sŏn (Zen) schools. Yi Kyubo allegedly memorized this sutra, and enjoyed discussing it with other scholars, taking it as a source for poetry he then showed to the monks³⁶. At the same time, Yi Kyubo was interested in Daoism, and this is again seen in the *Tongguk-isangguk-chip*: in his poetries are mentioned the *Cantong qi* 參同契; the Shangqing school's immortal An Qisheng 安期生 and other immortals from the *Xianjing* 仙經³⁷ as well as the deified form of Laozi, “Supremely Mysterious and Primordial Emperor” Taishang Xuanyuan Huangdi 太上玄元皇帝³⁸. Laozi himself is mentioned as a (spiritual) patriarch he wanted to serve. Along these, there are many mentions to “internal alchemy” like

³⁴ Kim Jongmyung (2016), 22-33

³⁵ Vermeersch (2020), 8-12

³⁶ Yi Kyubo's interest in the *Śūramāṃga-sūtra* is part of a trend inherited from a century back: Kim Sooyoun (2014).

³⁷ Maybe the *Wenchang Datong Xianjing* 文昌大洞仙經

³⁸ More commonly known as “Heavenly Honored One of the Way and the Power” Daode Tianzun 道德天尊, “Supreme Lord Lao” Taishang Laojun 太上老君 or simply “Lord Lao” Laojun 老君. Other, less common name-titles are “Great Emperor of Supreme Purity” Taiqing Dadi 太清大帝 and “Lord Lao of the Original Obscurity-Chaos” Hunyuan Laojun 混元老君.

the tropes of “returning a child” and the “acquisition of the harmonious *ki* (*hwagi* / *heqi* 和氣)”³⁹. Amalgamating all these philosophies, the fact the Yi Kyubo was well versed in Tang poetry and Xuanxue 玄學 speculations of the Northern and Southern dynasties 南北朝 (220-589). Nonetheless, it must be noted that Yi Kyubo always regarded himself as an orthodox Confucian without seeing in this any contradiction of sort, and so was regarded too, as demonstrated by the fact it was appointed Minister of Rites, director of the Chancery and supervisor to the Rites⁴⁰.

The relationship with shamanism is more garbled, as we have more information during the persecution around the twelfth century⁴¹. Before that period, shamanism was courted: shamans were invited to the court at least from the twelfth year of King Hyōnjong (1004), as per the *Koryōsa*, then they were associated in rituals tied to the P’algwanhoe. By the 1109-1259, again their part in official rites was discussed with the Department of State Affair (Tosōngch’ōng 都省廳). This likely as a way to limit the excesses of Buddhism rites on the State finances and morale⁴², due to the difficulty of wartime against the Khitan-Liao first, then the military pressures by the Jurchen-Jin 大金 (1115-1234), the coup by Yi Chagyōm 李資謙 of 1126, the 1135 revolt of the monk Myoch’ōng 妙清, the Military Dictatorship and finally the 1270-1356 Mongol interference⁴³. The persistence of difficulties likely caused new desperation among the Confucian literati, this time about the helpfulness of shamanism and the ritual frenzy erupted among the population as response to the chaos. In fact, just before the Military Dictatorship, king Ŭijong 毅宗 (r. 1146-70) tasked the minister Ham Yuil 咸有一 (1106-1185) to conduct a campaign against shamanism on Confucian bases⁴⁴. How this persecution was conducted is illustrated by the *Koryōsa* article about Ham Yuil:

³⁹ Kim Youn-gyeong (2020), 23-5. See also the intermingling between Daoism and Esoteric Buddhist on the same period in Kim Sooyoun (2022)

⁴⁰ McBride (2008), 233-4 & 238-9

⁴¹ Suh Young Dae (1992), 244-5; Lee Seog-Ju (2010); Kim Staci (2022), 139-40

⁴² Lee Seog-Ju (2010), 272-82

⁴³ Peter H. Lee (2000), 311-361; Riotto (2018), 150-167

⁴⁴ Suh Young Dae (1992), 240, 249; McBride (2008), 236-8; Lee Seog-Ju (2010), 272-82

毅宗朝，復入內侍，掌橋路都監。
有一嘗酷排巫覡，以爲人神雜處，人多疵癘。及爲都監，凡京城巫家，悉徙郊外，民家所畜淫祀，盡取而焚之。諸山神祠無異跡者，亦皆毀之。聞九龍山神最靈，乃詣祠射神像，旋風忽起，闔門兩扇，以防其矢。又至龍首山祠，試靈無驗，焚之。是夜，王夢有神求救者，翼日，命有司復構其祠。

轉監察御史，出爲黃州判官。屬郡鳳州，有鵠鷗岩淵，世謂靈湫。有一集郡人，填以穢物，忽興雲暴雨，雷電大作，人皆驚仆。俄頃開霽，悉出穢物，置遠岸。王聞之，命近臣祭之，始載祀典。又爲朔方道監倉使，登州城隍神，屢降於巫，奇中國家禍福。有一詣祠，行國祭，揖而不拜，有司希旨，劾罷之。

King Ŭijong received the [complains] of the ministers and sent the City Inspector of the Roads (Ham Yuil). [Ham] Yuil was disgusted and expelled the shamans. It was believed that, because human and gods intermingled, there were many ills, therefore was made City Inspector. In the capital there were many shaman houses, which he moved by the walls (i.e. in the suburbs) and, because in [those previous] popular houses licentious rites flourished, he destroyed them by the fire. He [also] burned every mountain god's shrine that wasn't miraculous. Having heard that the god of mt. Kuryong was extraordinary, he visited its shrine and shot arrows to the god's effigy, but then abruptly rose a whirlwind that shut the temple's door, protecting [the god's image] from the arrows. Again, when he came to the mt. Yongsu's shrine, he tested the deity but having no results and burned it. That night, however, the king had a dream of the god seeking aid and so the next day he made the shrine rebuilt.

He was then transferred from Inspector on Rites duties to those of Magistrate of the Hwangju region. In the Sok prefecture of

the Pongju region, there is a pond [near] the Huryu temple, the commoners believed it was a “divine puddle”. [Ham] Yuil gathered a group of people and made them cover the pond with rubbish, but suddenly cloud rises and there was a storm, with lightings and thunders, which caused a strong fear, and when the weather returned bright, the rubbish was transported far away [from the pond]. Having heard of this, the king instructed the minister to create a ceremony for that, creating new rituals. When [Ham Yuil] was Prisons Inspector in the Sukpang region, the city god of Tŭngju descended on the [local] shaman, [who] predicted the fortune and misfortune of the kingdom. [Ham] Yuil visited the temple to officiate the State rites, but since he offered his homages without bowing, he was scolded and removed [from the position] by a royal order due to [the word of] some official.

Following this campaign, there were many other attempts to punish and drive out shamans from the cities, according to the *Koryŏsa*, but seemingly all unsuccessful. In fact, even the attempt to tax the shamans backfired in a legitimation for the category⁴⁵. This should not surprise, as there are almost many evidences from the same *Koryŏsa* that on a local level shamanism was still popular even among Confucian officials: just after the end of Ham Yuil campaign and at the start of

⁴⁵ Walraven (1991); Lee Scog-Ju (2010), 272-82; Kim Staci (2022), 139-40

Military Dictatorship, Yi Kyubo wrote a poetry about the annoyance a shaman caused him in his boyhood, reluctantly reporting that she had some popularity and even the king couldn't do anything at the time. We will return on this poem on the section about the Koryŏ shamanism. Another example, way clearer, is the case of the Kongju vice-governor Sim Yang 沈陽 and the city god of Naju, "Emperor of Kŭmsŏng" Kŭmsŏng Taewang 錦城大王: under king Ch'ungnyŏl 忠烈 (r. 1274-1298), Sim Yang once encountered a shaman who scared him saying that the local city deity forced her the role, it was known that this shaman had an adulterous affair. Soon after, a postal official told the city military official (*to-byŏngmasa* 都兵馬使) that "the Emperor of Kŭmsŏng was arriving", he in turn informed the governor, and when the king too was informed of the prodigy (*sin'i* 神異) it was organized a proper parade: "when passing though the Naju administration, all officials were wearing court uniforms to receive [the god] outside the cities, carefully offering proper [ritual] food" *so-gwa chuhyŏn-su kae-gong pok-kyo a chu chŏn yu-gŭn* 所過州縣守, 皆公服郊迓, 廚傳惟謹. It is unclear by the *Koryŏsa* if it was all a scheming of the shaman, still she was finally captured by Sim Yang along with her lover, when the procession arrived in Kongju (*KRS* CVI, biographies 19, officials: Sim Yang). Truly, the shaman may have been fraudulent, nevertheless the parade in honor of the local city god was made with royal approval despite this or even regardless of this⁴⁶.

Indeed, the reasons behind the shortcomings of the persecution against the shamans are the same behind the shamans popularity in the first place: it was not that Confucian official denied any power to the shamanic deities, rituals or even of the shaman themselves, on the contrary they believed in their powers, but denied the appropriateness. So, the principle that made Ham Yuil spare the miraculous shrines and burning the others was the same that convinced the minister Chŏngga 鄭可臣 (1224-1298) to donate part of his salary to the Naju city temple, as compensation to the local god for the help in the conquering of Cheju and Chindo islands (*KRS* CV, biographies 18, officials: Minister Chŏngga = *KRSJ* XIX, Ch'ungnyŏl, year 3,

⁴⁶ Walraven (1991), 23-6; Suh Young Dae (1992), 242; McBride (2008), 239

month 5). Therefore, the attempts of persecution were likely seen by most scholar-officials as anti-pragmatic or even against the very Confucianism purpose, making it practically ineffective⁴⁷.

5.1.1 The Medieval, Confucian Chesŏk

Who or what was the Chesŏk according to Koryŏ Confucians? Judging by the previous information about the P'algwanhoe and the Yŏndŭnghoe, it is indubitably that the rite to Hwan'in was arranged as a form of native Sacrifice to Heaven on imperial fashion, both a *jitian* / *chech'ŏn* 祭天 and Fengshan / Pongsŏn sacrifice 封禪 as far as we know. On the other side, some part of the rite was maybe felt as a private cult extended to the kingdom, at least for what concerns the Outer Chesŏk temple, but even if it was the case, it must be remembered that the royal Chesŏk cult included the rites in honor of royal ancestors in royal Buddhist temples. On more doctrinal level, it is possible than, being Chesŏk identified with the Heaven, there was some sort of Doctrine of Interactions Between Heaven and Mankind *Tianrenganyinglun* 天人感應論 as the basis of the official rites, at least at some point⁴⁸.

This, if we strictly stick to the *Koryŏsa*, however the many accounts of both Tan'gun and Chumong myths written during this period we discover that the matter was more complex: while writing about the Chumong myth, Kim Pusik 金富軾 (1075-1151) gives in the *Samguk Sagi* the title “Heavenly Emperor” *Ch'ŏnje* 天帝 for Haemosu and mentions Haeburu as “Heaven” *Ch'ŏn* 天, while Yi Kyubo adds the title Shangdi 上帝 for Habaek in the *Tongmyŏng'wang p'yŏn*⁴⁹. Finally, writing about Tan'gun in the *Chewang Un'gi*, Yi Sŭnghyu gives the titles Shangdi 上帝 and

⁴⁷ Walraven (1991); Suh Young Dae (1992), 242. On a side note, it has to be noticed that the Naju city god's fame continued until the late XVII century and over, as many late-Koryŏ / early-Chosŏn popular stories about it remained available to Tasan Chŏng Yagyong 茶山 丁若鏞 (1762-1836), as reported by Walraven.

⁴⁸ Lee Seog-Ju (2010), 260-272; Mahy Kaya (2022)

⁴⁹ *Tongguk-isangguk-chip* 東國李相國集 III, Old-style Lüshi 古律詩: *Tongmyŏng'wang p'yŏn* 東明王篇

Sökche 釋帝 for Hwan'in. These accounts give a more sense of a personified idea of “Heaven” rather than an abstract one. Similarly, since the titles for every native sky deity are basically the same, it can be supposed that some sort of conflation had occurred, helped by the tie made in the official narrative between the Three Kingdom period’s founding myths. The identification with the Buddhist Śakra was accepted seemingly without questions, as Yi Kyubo describes Chesök as “ruling over the Six Heavens of the Upper Worlds (*t’ong yukch’ön ō-sanggye* 統六天於上界)” during his mocking of the old shaman as well as during his lamentation of its indifference for the kingdom’s hardships in the “Indifference of Śakra” *Sōktoso* 釋道疏 and the “Celebration to the Indifference of Śakra” *Sōktoso-jesa* 釋道疏 祭祀⁵⁰. This implies that there was a conflation of various versions of Chesök among some Koryŏ Confucian scholars.

Summarizing:

- Koryŏ Confucianism was the base of public and ritual administration. Ritual administration was shared with other non-Confucian institution embedded within the Confucian model, included Shamanic temples, except for Buddhist ones, which run in parallel. However, this wasn’t seen as an incoherence for the Confucians.
- The Koryŏ Confucian ideology was modelled after the legacy of Ch’oe Ch’iwŏn, scholar of Unified Silla: it was syncretistic and pragmatic. At the official level, Buddhism was equated to Confucianism and there was a tendency in describing the Three Teaching (Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism) as serving the same purpose. Similarly, Shamanism was integrated in the system, especially for the local administrations.
 - Later lamentations about the excesses of Buddhist institutions were likely related to a crisis period and to an image of a proper Confucian kingdom.

⁵⁰ Lee Seog-Ju (2010), 264-271

- Similarly, later lamentations about Shamanism were related to its allegedly lack of appropriateness (*li-yi* / *rye-ŭi* 禮義) of the practices and-or practitioners, not in a widespread disbelief among officials.
- On the local and private level, Confucian were even more pragmatic. A perfect example is the middle-late Koryŏ scholar Yi Kyubo, whose interests spanned from Confucianism to Buddhism to Daoism and Xuanxue. It was this pragmatism that made the middle-late period's anti-Shamanism campaign fall short, due to silent opposition within the local bureaucracy.
- Official Chesŏk cult was equated to the Confucian Heaven worship. Chesŏk was seen as the protector of the kingdom to which State's prosperity depended on. This Chesŏk was therefore seen as a syncretism of Chinese, Buddhist and native heaven deities and was sometimes personal (non-abstract in nature).

5.2. *Daoism in Koryŏ and the Chesŏk Cult*

Before Koryŏ there was some form of Daoism in the Peninsula⁵¹, however it was during Koryŏ that proper Daoist schools are attested as distinct from Shamanism and Buddhism.

Under Koryŏ there were fifteen Daoist institutions. The most important one seems to have been the Pogwŏn'gwan 福源觀 or Pogwŏn'gung 福源宮 and the “Hall of the Nine Luminaries” Kuyodang 九曜堂. While the second was built by king T'aejo, the first was commissioned under Yejong 睿宗 (r. 1105-1122). Yejong was the most interested in Daoism among Koryŏ kings, whose predilection was likely derived from Yi Chungnyak 李仲若 (d. 1122). According to the chapter “leisure and ceremonies” of the *Sŏhajip* 西河集, Yi Chungnyak was interested in Daoism from boyhood, and after being called to China he returned to Koryŏ, where it was able to cure the illness of king Sukchong 肅宗 (r. 1095–1105) with the new acquired knowledge. After this event, Chungnyak went again in China under the Song

⁵¹ Cho Hung-Youn (1999), 56-8; Kim Youn-gyeong (2020), 18-20; Cuc (2010)

emperor Huizong 徽宗 (r. 1100-1126), and, returned as a Daoist master, he sponsored the construction of the Pogwŏn'gung with the blessings of Yejong⁵².

This temple was not founded by Yi Chungnyak, but by an unknown Daoist master. It was a temple dedicated to the “Three Purities” Sanqing 三清, which are the Sun, the Moon, and the Stars, and the “First Ancestor of the Original Obscurity-Chaos” Hunyuan Shizu 混元始祖, the deified form of Laozi. It was a royal temple, in fact was the abode of circa ten Daoist masters, clearly tasked to for the “ceremony of the abstinence and offering” *cheaech'o* 齋醮, hold in the “abstinence hall” *Chegung* 齋宮. This rite was observed by the royal family too and seems made of two parts: the public one was a rain-making sacrifice while the one held in the royal palace was the “ceremony of abstinence for the Three Worlds (*trailoka*)” *ch'osamgye* 醮三界:

***Koryŏsa* 高麗史 XCIX, important clans 世家 17: Ŭijong 毅宗, year 6, month 4, day 15**

己卯 禱雨于山川及諸神祠。醮三界於內殿，太一於福源宮。

Jimao / Kimyo day: there was a prayer for the rain at the [sacred] mountains and rivers, and [a prayer to] all the gods at all the temples. A fasting for the Three World was held inside the [royal] palace, and a [fasting] to the Great Unity was held in the Pogwŏn'gung

The fasting on the sixteenth day (*kimyo* / *jimao* 己卯) was an important practice in Daoism. What affiliation was this ceremony of? Since he is the only Korean Daoist master whom we have information about, let's get back to Yi Chungnyak: at the time of his trips in the Song China, the most prominent Daoist at the court of Huizong was Chen Nan 陳楠 (d. 1213), disciple of Zhang Boduan 張伯端 (987-1082 c.a), one of the Five Southern Patriarchs. The lineage of Chen Nan was an

⁵² Kim Youn-gyeong (2020), 20-2

expert in both alchemy and the Leifa ritual 雷法. The Leifa ritual seeks to obtain immortality by both fasting and the use of talismans (*fulu* 符籙), particularly by self-cultivation, rituals of abstinence, spells, and ceremonies to the gods, trying to influence the climate. Considering the shared similarities of the rites held in the Pogwŏn'gung, it is likely that he was a follower of Chen Nan⁵³. It must be noted that Chen Nan is not affiliated with one tradition, as both he and the Leifa ritual are associated with the two schools of Shenxiao 神霄 and Quanzhen 全真 – Chen Nan became posthumously a patriarch of the latter. Also noteworthy is that both Shenxiao and Quanzhen's doctrines see unity in the Three Teaching of Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, with more emphasis in the Quanzhen one⁵⁴.

A good summary of this courtly situation can be read in the *Gaoli Tujing*:

***Xuanhe fengshi Gaoli tujing* 宣和奉使高麗圖經 XVIII, Daoism 道教**

大觀庚寅，天子眷彼遐方願聞妙道。因遣信使，以羽流二人從行，遴擇通達教法者，以訓導之。王侯篤於信仰，政和中，始立福源觀，以奉高真道士十餘人。然晝處齋宮，夜歸私室，後因言官論列，稍加法禁。或聞侯享國，日常有意授道家之籙，期以易胡教，其志未遂，若有所待然。	During the Daguan era [of Huizong], in the Gengyin year (1110), the Son of the Heaven took care of the desire for the Mysterious Way (i.e. Daoism) in those distant regions. Therefore, he sent the emissaries along with two Daoist masters, so they would select those who were versed in the [Daoist] doctrines and be their teachers. Wang U (i.e. king Yejong) has a deep faith and, during the Zhenghe era (111-1118), he built the Pogwŏn'gwan, so he could receive more than ten realized Daoist masters. Thus, during the day they stay in the “abstinence hall”, returning in their private dwellings during the night. Later, since [the king] received complaints from the officials,
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⁵³ Kim Youn-gyeong (2020), 20, 22-3

⁵⁴ Li Yuanguo (2012), 29-36, 59-70; Pregadio (2013), 254-5, 627-9 & 1220-2; Paolillo (2014), 72-8. For the origins of this ritual within the Esoteric Buddhism, see Meinert (2013)

few more restrictions were added. Furthermore, I heard that [king] U, during his reign, always wished to obtain Daoist texts and change [State religion] from Buddhism (“barbaric teaching”) [to Daoism], this ambition was never fulfilled, however, even if expectations were held in this regard.

Beyond the Palace rituals, Daoism enjoyed the favor of both the common people and the State officials, and this is demonstrated by the flourishing of Daoist schools centered on specific practices. Among these Koryŏ schools we can count the ritualistic Schools of Divination (Kwae 卦), the School of Celestial Bodies Rituals (Chaech’o 齋醮), the School of Mass Rituals (Toryang, from Skr.: *bodhimāṇḍa* 道場) and the School of Assembly Rituals (Chaehe 齋會). Daoism-related practices were also widespread, such as the use of Toch’am 圖識, a systemized form of divination, and the use of a yin-yang 陰陽-based geomancy for the construction of the Buddhist temples⁵⁵. This last practice is a legacy of the influent Buddhist monk Tosŏn 道諤 (826-898), active at the time of Koryŏ T’aejo⁵⁶.

The doctrine studied by the State officials can be seen, again, in the case of Yi Kyubo: at that time of the Military Regime, the *Cantong qi* was surely studied, it was known the deified form of Laozi along with many other Daoist masters, and so were practiced the “internal alchemy” Neidan 內丹 and Xuanxue philosophy 玄學⁵⁷. In general, the boundaries between Daoism and Buddhism were very porous and

⁵⁵ Yang Eun-Yong, 2011, 230-1; Sem Vermeersch, 2007, 86-99

⁵⁶ Puggioni (2008), 522

⁵⁷ Kim Youn-gyeong (2020), 20-5; McBride (2008), 233-4 & 238-9

vague, especially with Esoteric Buddhism and the use of talismans and incantations⁵⁸.

This seems true for all strata of Koryŏ society, in fact, around the thirteenth century there was a change in perception about Esoteric Buddhism that paired it with Daoism and Shamanism. This is due to the changes among the official Buddhism toward a more esoteric one, that make its popularity rose⁵⁹, an effect of the influence exerted by the Mongol court. However, some association between Daoism proper and Shamanism was already attested by Yi Kyubo:

Tongguk-isangguk-chip 東國李相國集 II, Old-style Lüshi 古律詩, “Lay of the Old Shaman” *Nomu P’yŏn* 老巫篇

爾曹若謂吾術神。變化恍惚應無垠。有聲何不鏤人聽。有形何不緘人聞。
章丹陳朱猶謂幻。況復爾曹難隱身

If one of you says: “my techniques are divine!”, / to [your] transformations and trances I respond without hesitations. / When there is a sound, why the people aren’t quiet and hear it? / When there is a form, why the people don’t come closer and see it? / Even flaunting cinnabar and vermillion, I will call [all of this] an illusion. / Moreover, how many of you will say that it is difficult becoming invisible?

5.2.1 The Medieval, *Leifa Chesŏk*

How was the Chesŏk cult conceived in Koryŏ’s Daoism? At the beginning, we have mentioned the “Hall of the Nine Luminaries” Kuyodang 九曜堂, built by king T’aejo. This temple was attached to both the Outer Chesŏk temple and the Temple of Divine Warriors. The temple name refers to the classical Indian planets

⁵⁸ Kim Sooyoun (2022), 58-63. Particularly, there was a coalescence of *fulu* 符籙 / *pujŏk* 符籙, *dhāraṇīs* and *maṇḍala*.

⁵⁹ Kim Sooyoun (2022), 65

(Navagraha), which are the Seven Planets plus two “lunar nodes”, Ketu (Jiedu / Kyedo 計都) and Rāhu (Luohou / Naho 羅睺)⁶⁰. Therefore, the Kuyodang was somehow considered a Buddhist temple. However, the later Chosŏn annals report it differently:

***T'aejo Sillok* 太祖實錄 II, first year of T'aejo (1392), Muin 戊寅 year, month 11, day 1**

禮曹啓：“道家星宿之醮，貴於簡嚴，盡誠敬而不瀆。前朝多置醮所，瀆而不專。乞只置昭格殿一所，務要清潔，以專誠敬。其福源宮、神格殿、九曜堂、燒錢色、太清觀、清溪拜星所等處，一皆革去。”上從之。

The officials of the Ministry of Rites made a petition: “in the Daoist ceremonies towards the constellations, simplicity and solemnity are regarded as valuables, [and] the most important [things] are sincerity and reverence, while profanity is not. The previous dynasty established many places for these rituals, [but] they were profane and not rigorous (“specific”). We request that only the Shrine of Brightness (Sogyŏkchŏn)⁶¹ can be used for praying for purifications, by the means of sincerity and reverence. As for the Temple of the Source of Bliss (Pogwŏn'gung), the Shrine of Divinity (Sin'gyŏkchŏn), the Hall of the Nine Luminaries (Kuyodang), the Temple of Great Purity (T'aech'ŏnggwan) and the places of star-worshipping of the Ch'ŏnggye stream, all of these have to be abolished”. The petition was approved.

⁶⁰ The “lunar nodes” are the intersections between the Moon orbit and Sun orbit, the point where eclipses occur.

⁶¹ *Sogyŏkchŏn* 昭格殿 is also translated as Commission of Daoist rituals. In this case, the change in naming is motivated by the reference to the specific temple and not to the commission attached to it.

The simplest reason behind this double designation is that the temple was likely used for both Buddhist and Daoist rites. In case of the Daoist one, the celestial bodies objects of the prayers were not nine as in Buddhism, but eleven: the Eleven Luminaries (Sibilyo 十一曜), which are the Navagraha with the addition of the fictional “Purple Mist” Ziqi / Chagi 紫氣 and “Moon Comet” Yuebo / Wölpyae 月孛⁶². The first is a moving point used for calculating intercalary months, the second is the lunar apogee, the farthest point to the Earth in the Moon orbit.

Since the Kuyodang was attached to the Outer Chesök temple and the Temple of Divine Warriors, it can be deduced that Chesök faith was related to the stars’ worship, at least for what concerns Daoism and Esoteric Buddhism. It is however difficult to know if Chesök was identified with any specific Daoist deity. A possible clue can be found in the change of the name of the Lantern Festival in the last part of the dynasty: from Yöndünghoe to “Lantern Festival of the Upper Primordial” Sangwön Yöndünghoe 上元燃燈會⁶³, a reference to the Daoist festival for the same period and the first of the “Three Primordials” Sanyuan 三元.

Summarizing:

- Koryō Daoism was embedded within the kingdom’s institutions and rituals, with unclear boundaries with Buddhism, particularly those of Esoteric Buddhism. It seems to be widespread among all social strata.
- The Koryō Daoism practiced in the royal palaces consisted in fasting and likely in the use of talismans, other practices that seems more State-related are the stars’ worship and the cult of Laozi in his deified form. It is attested among the literati the practice of Neidan and the knowledge of Xuanxue philosophy. Various specialized schools, but of unspecified affiliation and lineage, are attested among the commoners along with the use of talismans and incantations.
 - The only Daoist lineage in Koryō is possibly that of Chen Nan, disciple of Zhang Boduan and practitioner of the Leifa ritual, used

⁶² Lee Seog-ju (2010), 262-5; Kim Sooyoun (2022), 63-4

⁶³ Han Geum-soon (2008), 466-9; Sem Vermeesch (2008), 94-6

by both Shenxiao and Quanzhen lineages. Chen Nan was likely master of the scholar Yi Chungnyak under king Yejong.

- During the Military Regime, Daoism was surely well-known among the shamans, as attested by Yi Kyubo. After the Military Regime and during the Mongol Interference in thirteenth century, Esoteric Buddhism became more popular even among commoners. This caused a further confusion within the Daoism, Shamanism and Esoteric Buddhism.
- Chesök was associated with the cult of planets and stars, as demonstrated by the Kuyodang, a worship hall built during the reign of T'aejo. The Kuyodang was used for both (Esoteric) Buddhist and Daoist rituals to the stars and was attached to the Outer Chesök temple. However, it is unknown if Chesök itself was ever identified with any Daoist deity.

5.3. The Koryŏ's Buddhism and Chesök-Śakra

There is a wide consensus on the importance of Buddhism in Koryŏ society. However, the relationship with the kingdom administration was not always easy.

In the interregnum between Unified Silla and Koryŏ, both Hwaŏm 華嚴 and Sŏn 禪 schools flourished in the provinces thanks to the local nobilities (or rather warlords). The new dynasty forged an alliance with these new provincial clans cultivating a relationship with prominent Sŏn masters and temples. This new situation was a double-edged sword: on one side, the royal Wang clan obtained legitimacy, while on the other side these new clans made difficult for the king to properly govern. As result, the first monarchs, Hyejong 惠宗 (r. 943-945) and Chŏngjong 定宗 (r. 945-9), lived a short life⁶⁴.

This situation lasted until the reign of Kwangjong 光宗 (r. 949-975), who centralized the power of the monarchy with the institution of the civil service examinations, a move to gradually side the aristocracy. A similar institution for the monastic community was created in 958 under the advice of the minister Shuangji / Ssanggi 雙冀: an exam for aspiring monks and nuns divided for Sŏn and non-Sŏn

⁶⁴ Puggioni (2008), 519-527; Kim Jongmyung (2016), 26-28

schools. The exam for the Nine Mountains of Sŏn was held in Kwangmyŏng temple 光明寺, while the examination for the scholastic schools was held in the Wangnyun temple 王輪寺⁶⁵. Ranks and titles were different for the two curricula. It is likely that, after passing the examination, the candidate received a certificate (*toch'ŏp* 度牒) and registration in a Monastic Registry (Sŭngjŏk 僧籍), all to be renewed every three years. Though, the existence of this certificate is only attested when it became dysfunctional in the last part of the dynasty. The bureaucratization of the *saṅgha* was not just a mere subterfuge to ensure loyalty of the temples, but also a way of controlling the actions the Buddhist clergy: the immorality of the monks was a problem that cyclically rose during the entire dynasty⁶⁶.

On the Buddhist administration side, there was a relative stability until the rise of the Inju (Inch'ŏn) Yi clan 仁州李氏 in the eleventh-twelfth centuries, a clan that practically held hostage the royal family and tried two uprisings. The first uprising was that of Yi Chaŭi 李資義 (d. 1095) against king Hŏnjong 獻宗 (r. 1094-5) in 1094, the second one was the Yi Chagyŏm 李資謙 (d. 1127) revolt against king Injong 仁宗 (r. 1122-1146) in 1126. These two revolts were conducted with the help of part of the Buddhist clergy, particularly that of the Pŏpsang school 法相, and as a result, the *saṅgha* was removed from the political sphere. A similar episode was that of the monk Myoch'ŏng 妙清 (d. 1135): Myoch'ŏng was a prominent monk expert in geomancy, he was summoned by king Injong in the 1128 as an adviser to envision a general reformation of the State. Myoch'ŏng proposed the implementation of general instruction and a system of control of the peasantry, to make it independent from the aristocracy control and gradually bureaucratize the countryside. However, his reform was thwarted by the faction led by the minister Kim Pusik, better known for the *Samguk Sagi*. Sided, the monk then proposed to move the capital to P'yŏngyang, officially for geomantic reasons, but, in reality, to disengage the royal clan from the capital's aristocracy. Sided again, the monk

⁶⁵ Later, in the twelfth century, it was added an examination specific for the Tiantai / Ch'ŏnt'ae school 天台, held in the Kukch'ŏng temple 國清寺.

⁶⁶ Yi Gi-yeong (1974), 115-8; Vermeersch (2003), 148-58; Puggioni (2008), 519-527

attempted a rebellion, creating a breakaway statelet in P'yŏngyang under the name of Taewi 大為, but he was then defeated in battle by Kim Pusik⁶⁷.

As seen in the section about Confucianism, the Koryŏ bureaucracy and nobility saw Buddhism in a pragmatic way. In what sense? Buddhism was seen as a religion of good luck that protects the State (“to protect the Dharma is to protect the kingdom” *hobŏp-hoguk* 護法護國). In fact, Buddhist rituals were used for praying for a good climate, prevention from epidemics, natural disasters and so on. King T'aejo considered Buddhism a way of obtaining blessing⁶⁸, and this is shown well in the first two of his Ten Injunctions:

***Koryŏsa* 高麗史 XCIX, important clans 世家 1: T'aejo 太祖, year 26, month 4, day 15**

其一曰，我國家大業，必資諸佛護衛之力，故創禪教寺院，差遣住持焚修，使各治其業。後世，姦臣執政，徇僧請謁，各業寺社，爭相換奪，切宜禁之。

其二曰，諸寺院，皆道詵推占山水順逆而開創，道詵云，‘吾所占定外，妄加創造，則損薄地德，祚業不永。’朕念後世國王公侯后妃朝臣，各稱願堂，或增創造，則大可憂也，新羅之末，競造浮屠，衰損地德，以底於亡，可不戒哉？

First: the great effort of our nation depends on the favor and protection of the Buddhas. Therefore, temples of both doctrinal and Sŏn schools shall be built, and [monks] shall be sent to administrate said temples to burn [incense] and follow [the Doctrine], each administrating their own business. In the future, if a treacherous subject would ever obtain power and persuade the *saṅgha*, the

⁶⁷ Puggioni (2008), 532-7

⁶⁸ Yang Eun-Yong (2011), 230-6; Kim Jongmyung (2016), 26-28

***Koryŏsa* 高麗史 XCIX, important clans 世家 1: T'aejo 太祖, year 26, month 4, day 15**

various temples would quarrel and struggle among themselves. This ought to be prevented.

Second: each temple and monastery were built following the geomantic recommendations of Tosŏn. Tosŏn said: 'if [the temples] are indiscriminately built out of where I divined, it will decrease the virtues of the land, and the bliss will not be eternal (i.e. it will hasten the fall of the dynasty)'. I am concerned that in the future the nobility, queens and princess and ministers all may desire a shrine or to expand one, this may cause great anxiety. In the end of Silla, many temples were capriciously built, reducing the virtues of the land, as result (the virtue) decreased causing (the kingdom's) demise, how could this not be an admonition?

In fact, both Sŏn and Hwaŏm temples were built in the capital during the first period, and the location of the temples was conceived as a magical protection, following to the doctrines of Tosŏn. For a similar reason, though not magical, it was forbidden to the enemies of the kingdom to found or managing Buddhist institutions. Every temple had a "true (appearance) hall" *chinjŏn* 眞殿, a hall where portraits of the king were held, used for the annual ceremony of a king's death⁶⁹.

Buddhist ceremonies were divided in many types: sermons (*pŏphoe*, Skr. *pūja* 法會), rituals (*toryang*, Skr. *bodhimaṇḍa* 道場), funeral services (*chaehoe* 齋會), sermons of eminent monks (*pŏpsŏk* 法席), offering to the monastic community and so on. It was estimated that there were least eighty-three types for a total of 1038 rituals reported by the *Koryŏsa*, most of which with the involvement of the king. For every of each type of rituals there were several sub-types: a sermon was either a *Hwaŏm pŏphoe* 華嚴法會, a *Tamsŏn pŏphoe* 談禪 etc., while rite was either a "rite of the Prajñā" *pan'ya-toryang* 般若道場, a "rite of the Avatamsakasamādhi" *Hwaŏm-sammae-toryang* 華嚴三昧道場 a "rite of the Śūraṅgama" *Nūng'ŏm-*

⁶⁹ Puggioni (2008), 519-526; Yang Eun-Yong (2011), 231-6; Mahy Kaya (2022)

toryang 楞嚴道場 and so on. Tantric ceremonies were also held in honor of, among others, Mahāvairocana, Indra, Lakṣmī, Mārīcī and the planets. Buddhist rituals worked in synergy with Daoist ones, however Buddhist rituals were more lavish⁷⁰. Being Buddhist rituals so important, frequent and expensive, it is unsurprisingly that Buddhist institutions enjoyed many privileges. Buddhist clergy was exempted from taxes and public corvée, and for this reason was prohibited to public serf-slaves in specific regions to join the *saṅgha*, or at least to publicly reclaim the title. The accusation that the commoners wanted to become monks to fill their stomach and escape the corvée was frequent from Kwangjong onwards. During the reign of Sōngjong 成宗 (r. 981-997), the minister Ch'oe Sūngno 崔承老 (927-987) made a petition to the throne (*KRS* XCIII: biographies 6, officials: Ch'oe Sūngno), which addresses the problems caused by Buddhist privileges. This petition can be summarized as follows:

- Limits shall be set against the excessive donations to the temples.
- Prohibitions shall be set on the temples against the practice of usury.
- Limits shall be set against the excessive honors bestowed to the monks.
- Prohibitions shall be set on the monks against the use of guesthouses and postal stations.
- Prohibitions shall be set against the use of Buddhist ceremonial imagery.
- Prohibitions shall be set against the use of precious materials for the construction of Buddhist imagery.
- Prohibitions shall be set against the use of corvée and public finances for the construction of Buddhist temples.
- The State shall have a more reserved attitude towards the Buddhism in general.

It is unclear if this petition ever became a law and, if so, it was ever applied. It is worth noticing that the concern of Ch'oe Sūngno was primarily of economic nature⁷¹. This financial anxiety was indeed motivated, as Buddhist temples were very active: a temple produced agricultural crop, paper, ink, brushes, textile, cloths,

⁷⁰ Puggioni (2008), 525-6; Yang Eun-Yong (2011), 230-6

⁷¹ Vermeersch (2003), 148-58

painting, craftworks, statues and ex-votos. All these materials were sold to the commoners. Moreover, a temple functioned also as bank, refuge, hospital, guesthouse, printing house, library and school. Ironically, many Confucian officials critical of Buddhist institutions studied in these kind of monasteries⁷².

5.3.1 *The Temple Powerhouses*

Inside the temples there were the same privileges for the aristocracy that existed outside. It was common for the fourth children of a noble family to become monk, and so was for the illegitimate sons of the king (*sogun* 小君). For this category, it was granted a high bureaucratic rank at the access, however monks from lesser nobility had not any particular privilege. A probable mark of this privilege was the custom of wearing expensive and extravagant attires: during his visit in 1224, the Japanese Zen patriarch Dōgen 道元 (1200-1253) said that two monks whom he met looked like lay people. A common trait of both high-status monks and low-status monks was that both indulged in women and often had families. Alcohol drinking among monks was also generally tolerated (if not accepted) during the major festivities and the occasional friendly meetings with important figures, even though it was prohibited the wine brewing and consuming by monasteries in 1021 and 1356. On the other side of the social scale, for commoners, there were restrictions to the access to monastery, as already shown. These limitations usually involved a maximum number of monks and nuns per family depending on the number of children in particular regions, but it seems that such laws were rarely fully applied⁷³.

The lowest tier on the *saṅgha* hierarchy were those who aspired to be monks and nuns but cannot fulfill that desire in any way, and so were hired by the temples as helper, if not servant-slaves, to circumvent both the secular and the monastic laws. In this way they were also exempted from taxation. In the Korean sources, this people were known as “monk disciples” (*sūngdo* 僧徒), “monastery-dependent

⁷² Vermeersch (2003), 154-5; Puggioni (2008), 527-8

⁷³ Vermeersch (2003), 155-161

monk disciples” (*suwŏn sŭngdo* 隨院僧徒) and probably as “married monks” (*yuch’ŏpsŭng* 有妾僧) too, while in the 1123 *Gaoli Tujing* they are called “secular monks” (*zaijia heshang* / *chega-hwasang* 在家和尚):

***Xuanhe fengshi Gaoli tujing* 宣和奉使高麗圖經 XVIII, Daoism 道教**

在家和尚，不服袈裟，不持戒律。
白紵窄衣，束腰皂帛。徒跣以行，間有穿履者。自爲居室，娶婦鞠子。其於公上，負載器用，掃除道路，開治溝洫，修築城室。悉以從事，邊陲有警，則團結而出，雖不閑於馳逐，然頗壯勇。其趨軍旅之事，則人自裹糧，故國用不費，而能戰也。聞中間契丹爲麗人所敗，正賴此輩。其實刑餘之役人，夷人以其髡削鬚髮，而名和尚耳。

“Secular monks” never wear the monastic robes (*kāṣāya*), nor follow the monastic rules (*vinaya*). They wear white ramie clothes and a black silk sash on the waist. They walk barefoot but, sometimes, one of them wears shoes. They build houses for themselves, take wife, and raise children. They have the public duty of loading burdens, clearing the streets, opening, and maintaining drainage channels and ditches within cities and palaces. They are fond of their work. When there is an alarm at the borders, they are summoned in unities of group. Even though they are unskilled in cavalry, they are quite strong and valiant. When the army marches, they bear their own provisions; even without paying them, the State could equally wage a war. I heard that, when Khitans were defeated by Koryŏ, it was indeed thanks to them. In fact, they do the corvée labor for eunuchs (i.e. regular monks), but since they have shaved hair and beard, [the people] simply call them “monks”.

This category of people was employed for the construction of fortifications and military vessels, and there is a proof they were used for the construction of at least the Chunggwang temple 重光寺 (*KRS V*: important clans 6: Hyōnjong year 20, month 6, day 29). However, the most important part of their work was the military service: as we have seen, they were deployed in war as support troops, but in other circumstances they were the temples' private army. During external conflicts, these temples' militias were freed from the temple duties and integrated within the regular army, while, during the Military Dictatorship, they were used by the temples against the central power. When in 1104, the general Yun Kwan 尹瓘 (1040-1111) successfully proposed an army's reformation, it was created the "Demon-Subduing Army" Hangmagun 降魔軍 as a result. It is likely that the "secular monks" were the part of this division used against the Jurchens⁷⁴.

Under Koryō, monks were encouraged to participate in wars, and it seems that monks killed in action were bestowed with titles: king Hyōnjong rewarded a fallen monk with title of abbot (*sujwa* 首座) (*KRS IV*: important clans 4: Hyōnjong year 2, month 7, day 21). Buddhist temples were also used as military centers for conscripts' recruitment and training. It seems that Sōn monks were particularly appreciated for their martial abilities: the scholar Yi Kyubo praised many times the valiance of the order in battle and its (magical) ability to repel the invaders⁷⁵.

***Tongguk-isangguk-chip* 東國李相國集 XXV, Official declaration 榜文: inscription on the Tae'an-sa 大安寺同前榜**

是禪之爲無上大乘也。由是 我太祖大王
。因哲師祕要。崇信宗門。乃大闢五百禪
宇。闡揚心法。然後北兵自却。無復寇邊
。然則禪之利於世也。可勝導哉。

The [way of] Sōn there is the highest doctrine
[*uttara-mahāyāna*]. Because of this, following the
secret teachings of a wise master and elevating the
faith of this lineage, our great king T'aejo built five
hundred Sōn temples to propagate the mind's

⁷⁴ Vermeersch (2003), 158-61; Kim Hwansoo (2013), 276-8. See Kim Hwansoo (2013) for the possible connection with the Chosōn era's *chaegasūng* 在家僧

⁷⁵ Kim Jongmyung (2016), 28-38

Dharma's [doctrine]. After this, the northern armies spontaneously retreated and at the borders there were no more bandits. Thus, Sŏn is beneficial to the world. It is capable of leading to victory!

So far there were mentions of Sŏn, Hwaŏm and Pŏpsang, but what were the schools in Koryŏ?

5.3.2 *The Long War between Sŏn and Scholasticism*

In the first part of the dynasty, a way to include the entirety of lineages was the expression “Nine Mountains (of Sŏn) and Five Scholastic (sects)” *ogyo-gusan* 五教九山. The Nine Mountains of Sŏn were introduced by the end of Unified Silla period, and were predominately of Southern lineages, specifically of the Mazu Daoyi 馬祖道一 (709-788)'s Hongzhou school 洪州宗. The only exception was the patriarch Chisŏn Tohŏn 智詵道憲 (824-882), of the Hŭiyang lineage 曦陽山門, who adhered to Northern Chan. As mentioned before, the Sŏn temples and patriarchs were important for the Koryŏ monarchs, and in fact in the first decades the Sŏn school politically dominated over the other lineages. The most important Sŏn patriarchs in this period were Chŏngjin Kŭngyang 靜眞兢讓 (878-956) of the Hŭiyang school and Ch'anyu Togwang 絜幽道光 (869-958) of the Pongnim school 鳳林山門⁷⁶.

During the reign of Kwangjong, there was the reintroduction of the Tiantai / Ch'ŏnt'ae school 天台宗 by Ch'egwan 諦觀 (900-975), disciple of Luoxi Yiji 螺溪義寂 (919-987). The most important patriarch of this school was Ŭich'ŏn 義天 (1055-1101). This school in its Korean adaptation was very influent even back in China: the king Qian Chu of Wuyue 吳越錢俶 (r. 947-978) had to ask Koryŏ for the reintroduction of the lineage, while the master Po'un 寶雲義通 (927-988) became the thirteenth patriarch of the school. The Fayan / Pŏp'an school 法眼

⁷⁶ Puggioni (2008), 519-523

宗 was introduced by Kwangjong himself through the kingdom of Wuyue 吳越 (907-978) to resolve the differences between Sŏn and Scholastic schools. The Chinese patriarch protagonist of this introduction was Yongming Yanshou 永明延壽 (904-976), who was also a proponent of the unity of the Three Teachings. The school started with Fayan Wenyi 法眼文益 (885-958) and his attempt of unifying the Huayan, Faxiang, Tiantai and Chan doctrines. Therefore, the school aim was to merge Scholasticism into Chan, the specular of Tiantai aim. While in China the school was absorbed by the Chan Linji school during the Song dynasty, in Koryŏ it was still important until the 1123 at least, as reported in the *Gaoli Tujing*, but then was absorbed by the Ch'ŏnt'ae school under the guide of Ŭich'ŏn⁷⁷.

The Pŏpsang school 法相宗, derived from the Faxiang school, was introduced in eighth century's Silla with Chinp'yo 眞表 (fl. 752) and it is the adaptation of the Indian Yogācāra / Cittamātra / Vijñaptimātra. It was very important school starting from the reigns of Munjong 文宗 (r. 1046-1083) and Sŏnjong 宣宗 (r. 1083-1094). Its most eminent monk was Hyedŏk-wangsa Sohyŏn 慧德王師韶顯 (1038-1096) of the Inju Yi clan, which was discussed before. It is likely, that during the Koryŏ period, the prevalent lineage was that of Xuanzang 玄奘 (602-664) and Kuiji 窺基 (632-682), rather than that of Sŏmyŏng Wŏnch'ŭk 西明圓測 (618-696). This school managed to retain its prestige until the Military Dictatorship period⁷⁸.

Some decades after the foundation and the 1011 Khitan invasion of the kingdom, both Pŏpsang and Hwaŏm school 華嚴宗 regained their prominence, outshining the Sŏn schools. This resurrection of scholasticism has two reasons: first is the will of the kings to take distance toward the Sŏn, and therefore local nobility, the second is the contribution both Pŏpsang and Hwaŏm temple gave in the printing of the Tripiṭaka. In this period, the most prominent monks of the Hwaŏm school were T'anmun 坦文 (900-975) and Kyun'yŏ 均如 (923-973). Kyun'yŏ was in conversation with several Pŏpsang monks, as testified by the theme of many of his

⁷⁷ Yi Gi-yeong (1974), 115-8; Puggioni (2008), 523-5; Kim Sooyoun (2014), 173-79; Vermeersch (2019), 219-232; Vermeersch (2020), 5-8

⁷⁸ Puggioni (2008), 515-6, 530-2

debates (mainly “harmonization of Nature and Dharma” *sōngsang yunghoe* 性相融會). As for the Hwaōm school, the most prominent monk of this period was indubitably Ŭich'ōn, who was versed in Pōpsang and Ch'ōnt'ae doctrines as well. With the aid of his mother, Queen Dowager Inye 仁睿太后 (d. 1092), in 1097 Ŭich'ōn founded the Kukch'ōng-sa 國淸寺, main base of the Korean Tiantai. The newly re-established school attracted many Sōn monks, particularly those from Pōp'an school. Because Ch'ōnt'ae school was doctrinally a “meditative” lineage like Sōn, the set phrase to describe the Buddhism's landscape in Koryō changed from “Nine Mountains (of Sōn) and Five Scholastic (sects)” to “Five Scholastic (sects) and Two (meditative) Lineages” *ogyo yangjong* 五教兩宗⁷⁹. This situation was unique to Korea, as both Chinese Tiantai and Japanese Tendai are “doctrinal” schools.

In this period of Koryō, the study of *Śūramgama-sūtra* was widespread regardless of the school and even outside institutionalized Buddhism. This text, likely a Chinese forgery, is an attempt of harmonization and synthesis of different doctrines, responding to the desire for a unification of the various schools during the eighth century. In particular, the *Śūramgama-sūtra* tries to make a synthesis of Huayan, Tiantai, Chan and Esoteric Buddhism. Guifeng Zongmi 圭峰宗密 (780-841), patriarch of the Huayan school and proponent of Chan and Scholasticism unification, is said to make often mentions of this text; similarly, the Fayen patriarch Yongming Yanshou made mentions of this sutra in his *Zongjing lu* 宗鏡錄. For these reasons, during the Song dynasty the *Śūramgama-sūtra* was greatly influential, particularly for the Chan schools, and had a greater impact than during the previous periods. In Korea, the interest for this sutra started with Yi Chahyōn 李資玄 (1061-1125), who brought the text to the attentions of the Sōn schools. The legacy continued with Yi Kyubo, who furthered the study on the text in Korea, as shown by the many references in the *Tongguk-isangguk-chip*. The sutra spread in the Koryō society in three ways:

⁷⁹ Puggioni (2008), 529-538; Vermeersch (2019), 219-232

the first one was the study and publication of the text itself, a practice started with Yi Chahyŏn and Yi Kyubo. The first official edition of the *Śūraṅgama-sūtra* was published in 1235, under king Kojong 高宗 (r. 1213-1259), other editions, like those of king Ch'ungsŏn 忠宣 (r. 1298, 1308-1313) and king Kongmin 恭愍 (r. 1351-1374), were clearly used for funeral ceremonies of royal clan's member or high officials. Annotated versions are also attested: the most influential one was that of Hanam Pohwan 閑庵普幻 (fl. late thirteenth century), of the late Koryŏ period;

the second way of dissemination was by rites, introduced during the XII century, and then adapted: while in Song China, the *Śūraṅgama-sūtra* was used to gain merits and cast away the bad karma, in Korea the text was used to ensure the safety of monks during the rainy season retreat (*vārṣika* 冬安居), prevent calamities and ensure peace upon the kingdom. As we have seen with major royal rituals, this extension of Buddhist practices not limited to this sutra, nor to this period;

the last way was the publication of main *dhāraṇī* of the sutra, the Dafoding *dhāraṇī* 大佛頂陀羅尼, in *dhāraṇī* collections or inscribed upon stone poles. Like the rites mentioned before, the aim of these practices changed from obtaining good karma to ensuring safety to the kingdom. As for the pillar, they were built following Esoteric Buddhist practices, though they were not exclusive found among Esoteric Buddhist temples, but among Sŏn temple too⁸⁰.

During the first Koryŏ period, the two Esoteric Buddhist schools were the Ch'ongji (*dhāraṇīyāna*) 摠持宗 and the Sin'in (*mudrāyāna*) 神印宗, or Chin'ŏn (*mantrayāna*) 眞言宗. Both schools were founded during late Silla and will survive until Chosŏn period - while their Chinese counterparts went extinct at the end of Tang dynasty. The focus of the Ch'ongji and Sin'in schools were on *dhāraṇī* and mandala elaboration; and on the use of *mudrā*, respectively. During time, these two schools adapted to the changing cultural landscape: during the twelfth-thirteenth century, they were involved in the rituals derived from the *Śūraṅgama-sūtra*, while,

⁸⁰ Kim Sooyoun (2014), 173-194; Vermeersch (2019), 222-237

during the Mongol Interference, the whole tantric teaching became popular even among commoners thanks to the Yuan court influence.

At the court level, tantric rituals were primarily reserved for Indra and the Four Heavenly Kings, likely during the P'algwanhoe and the Yöndünghoe. Mahāvairocana and Lakṣmī were prayed for good luck, while Mārīcī during wars. Maybe, tantric rituals were also conducted in palace Daoist temples: when Yejong made the Kuyodang built, in 1116, both Buddhist monks and Daoist priests were summoned (*KRS XIV*: important clans 14: Yejong, year 3, month 3), a pairing that appeared again in 1162, under king Ŭijong (*KRS XVIII*: important clans 18: Ŭijong, year 16, month 3)⁸¹.

For Buddhist monks, it was common to practice Esoteric Buddhism and Sōn at the same time, as demonstrated by the presence of Dafoding *dhāraṇī* pillars near their temples and the shape of some *dhāraṇī*. But what shape the tantric practices took, in Korea? Most of the materials we have comes from the last part of the dynasty, twelfth-late thirteenth century, and consist in *dhāraṇīs*, maṇḍalas and talismans. This material was mostly found in statue cavities, but its nature shows its practicality (portability, economy etc.), sign it was also mass produced for the commoners⁸².

As for the *dhāraṇīs*, the most representative book was the *Siddham dhāraṇī Collection* (*Pömsö ch'ongji chip* 梵書摠持集), a Chinese text reprinted in three editions during Koryŏ period, each with a variation: one with circle-shaped text, one with the text in straight lines for Sōn practice, and one with even clearer Sōn influences, shown in the preface and the editorial notes by the Sōn monk Muŭija Hyesim 無衣子慧謹 (1178-1234), but with unmistakable tantric wording. The *dhāraṇīs* are mainly focused on Mahāvairocana, as in the Hwaŏm school, while the framework seems heavily Yogācāra. The choice of Siddham writing system shows a clear influence of Khitan-Liao Buddhism, specifically, a reliance over the

⁸¹ Grayson (1984), 191-4; Puggioni (2008), 517-8, 526; Kim Sooyoun (2014), 187-94

⁸²Koo Junghoe (2009), 70-80, 187-194; Kim Sooyoun (2022)

Essential Collection for Gaining Buddhahood (Xianmi yuantong chengfo xinyaoji 顯密圓通成佛心要集);

the mandalas were mainly found within the abdominal cavities of statues and are based on Vajradhātu tantric doctrines and *bīja*(*mantra*) magical theory, having Yogācāra practitioners as ideal reader. The Bodhisattvas mentioned within the mandala are those of the Assembly of the Perfected Body (*Sōngsin hoe 成身會*) and the Thirty-seven World-Honored-Ones (*samsipch'il-chon 三十七尊*), i.e., again, manifestations of Mahāvairocana. Interestingly, the mandalas in themselves are gaunt and simple, consisting in plain black syllables writing, with optional lotus decorations and *dhāraṇīs*. Other than inside abdominal cavities, some mandala texts were also found over *huryōngt'ong 喉鈴筒*, i.e. enchanted object hold within statues, often rice and water-filled jars, made following the indications of the *Sutra on the triumphant meditation of the blessed equanimity secret, great tantra king (Myo kilsang p'yōngdūng pimil ch'oesang kwanmun taegyo wang kyōng 妙吉祥平等祕密最上觀門大教王經)*;

Buddhist talismans (*pulbu 佛符*) or talismanic seals (*puin 符印*) are fruit of syncretism of Daoist practices, especially those of Heavenly Masters and Lingbao Daoism, with Buddhist *dhāraṇīs* and mandala seals. Of this period, the most ancient artifact consists in three talismans in a silver bracelet decorated by lotus flower and scroll design (*ŭnje yōnhwa tangch'omun ch'ōn 銀製蓮花唐草文釧*), these talismanic seals were used for protection against bad rebirths, prevention from bad karma and gaining love and respect. In the late Koryŏ, talismanic compendia started to be printed, often found within abdominal cavities of statues, ranging from 1287 to 1375. Like in the bracelet case, these seals are used to prevent disasters, gain a good rebirth and avoid a bad one, banish wicked spirits, ensure a safe childbirth and so on. Curiously, in the texts attached to or prescribing such talismans, it is often said to write the seals on yellow paper with cinnabar ink, following the Daoist custom, but the artifacts are always printed in black ink over white paper: a signal of the large diffusion of these artifacts. In fact, even the talismanic compendia found inside Buddhas' statues are in a pocket-sized format.

Before, we briefly mentioned the relationship between Koryŏ Esoteric Buddhism and Daoism. We have seen that, as for the royal court, Daoist and Buddhist rituals were conducted in the same places, and the existence of Buddhist talismans on the model of the Daoist ones strengthen this vision. More broadly, the use of incantations was formally distinct between Daoist and Buddhist one, but for the commoners' devotion the boundaries were blurred, as both the Buddhist mantras and *dhāraṇīs* on one hand, and the Daoist exorcisms⁸³ practically served the same aims. This tendency to merge among the two doctrines was likely emphasized by the presence of Leifa Daoism, heavily syncretic by itself, as well as by the Mongol Interference, when, among the commoners, there was an even stronger blending of Esoteric Buddhism, Daoism and Shamanism. Traces of the Esoteric Buddhist popularity from this period can be seen in the exorcist ritual among modern Scripture reading shamans of banishing a puppet doll called *che'ung* 除雄 or *ch'uryŏng* 芻靈 during the fourteenth day of the first lunar month of the year: a practice tied to the tenth-eleventh centuries' astrological beliefs on the "lunar node" Rāhu⁸⁴.

The late middle to the last part of Koryŏ period was a tumultuous time for both the Korean kingdom and the Buddhist community:

With Yi Chaŭi and the Yi Chagyŏm revolts, the Pŏpsang *saṅgha* divided itself into two factions: one, led by Kim Tŏk-kyŏm 金德謙, which opposed the uprising; and one, led Ŭijang 義莊, Yi Chagyŏm son, which was in its favor. In the end, the pro-coup faction joined the army of Yi Chagyŏm in 1126, suffering the defeat along with him. As a result of these actions, Buddhist monks were formally excluded from the political scenes.

Almost contemporarily, starting from king Yejong, a new Sŏn movement took the scene: the "Householders' Buddhism" *kōsa pulgyo* 居士佛教, main exponent of

⁸³ Synthesizable with the formulaic expression "[go away, spirits,] in accordance with [gods] decrees" *kŭpkŭp-yŏ-yullyŏng / ji ji ru lŭling* 急急如律令.

⁸⁴Koo Junghoe (2009), 70-80, 187-194; Kim Youn-gyeong (2020), 20, 22-3; Kim Sooyoun (2022)

which was Yi Chahyŏn 李資玄 (1288-1367), scholar and founder of the Pohyŏn-wŏn 普賢院 on mt. Ch'ŏngp'yŏng. The conjecture of the decline of the doctrinal Buddhism due to the involvement of Pŏpsang school in a failed coup, and the rise of a laypeople Sŏn movement, helped the Sŏn school to flourish again: in this brief period, the most prominent Sŏn scholars were Tamjin 曇眞, and T'anyŏn 坦然 (1069-1158). Tamjin is credited to have introduced doctrines of Yunmen Wenyan 雲門文偃 (862-949); while T'anyŏn, Tamjin disciple along with Yi Chahyŏn, introduced the doctrines of Huanglong Huinan 黃龍慧南 (1002-1069). T'anyŏn then became the royal preceptor of king Injong. It is noteworthy how these are the first attested exposition of Koryŏ to the Linji school 臨濟宗 doctrines before the Mongol Interference.

This small truce between the kingdom and the Buddhist *saṅgha* was preserved until the uprising of Myoch'ŏng, that we have discussed at the beginning of the paragraph: Myoch'ŏng was a monk who first proposed an anti-aristocratic reform, then tried to disjoint the royal house from the aristocrats proposing a relocation of the royal capital, and then rebelled himself, ending in a defeat by the hand of Kim Pusik⁸⁵

The Military Regime was characterized both by turmoil and renewal for the Korean Buddhism. The military rule allegedly started when the general Chŏng Chungbu 鄭仲夫 (1106-1176), tired of the vexations against the military officers, staged a coup against the civilian government. The new regime overshadowed the royal house's powers but did not entirely exauthorated the civilian cadres: even though the State examination were suspended, the new government continued to rely on civilian bureaucrats, hiring them on technical capabilities rather than literary ones. This was especially true under the rule of Ch'oe Ch'unghŏn 崔忠獻 (1149-1219), the Chŏng Chungbu's successor who built the new dictatorship institutions⁸⁶.

This should not mislead us, however: the same regime that preferred a technocratic rule for the State, at the same time was a patron of the arts and literature, as

⁸⁵ Puggioni (2008), 535-540

⁸⁶ Peter H. Lee (2000), 311-327; Puggioni (2008), 535-540

demonstrated by the mass of works written during this time. Among the others, Yi Kyubo was active in this period as part of the Seven Sage of Bamboo Grove (*Chungnim-gohoe* 竹林高會)⁸⁷. Other particularly important figures of this circle were O Sejae 吳世才 (b. 1133) and Yi Illo 李仁老 (1152-1220): O Sejae was often described by Yi Kyubo as a brilliant scholar, clearly founded in Daoism; while Yi Illo was a former Buddhist monk during the first part of the military dictatorship, but later retook the layman vests, becoming a renowned civilian official. Yi Illo is particularly famous for his “Collection for Overcoming Idleness” *P’ahan chip* 破閑集⁸⁸. It is not an exaggeration to say that The Seven Sage of Bamboo Grove shows a cross-section of the interaction between philosophies / religions among the scholars of this period.

The relationship with Buddhist clergy was equally complicated: Ch’oe Ch’unghŏn was as pragmatic in remaking the central administration as he was in reconfiguring the relationship between the central government and the Buddhist institutions. This approach can be easily seen in his 1196 memorandum to the throne (*Pongsa Sipcho* 封事十條):

***Koryŏsa* 高麗史 CXXIX, biographies 列傳 42, Rebellions 叛逆: Ch’oe Ch’unghŏn**

今一二浮圖山人也，常徘徊王宮，而入臥內，陛下惑佛，每優容之。浮圖者，既冒寵，屢以事干，穢聖德，而陛下勅內臣，勾當三寶，以穀取息於民，其	Nowadays, the Buddhist hermits are few. Most (of them) wander around the royal palaces, and some even enter inside the bedrooms. Your Majesty, infatuated with the Buddha, has even entitled them to act in such way. The monks are already emboldened, often making their business [at State expenses], defiling the virtues. However, Your Majesty instructed your subjects [scil.:
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⁸⁷ The name was an homage to the homonym, third century Chinese Daoist intellectual circle.

⁸⁸ Peter H. Lee (2000), 311-327

Koryŏsa 高麗史 CXXIX, biographies 列傳 42, Rebellions 叛逆: Ch'oe Ch'unghŏn

弊不細。惟陛下，斥群髡，
使不跡于宮，毋得息穀。

[...]

在祖聖代，必以山川順逆，
創浮圖祠，隨地以安。後
代將相群臣，無賴僧尼等，
無問山川吉凶，營立佛宇，
名爲願堂，損傷地脉，災
變屢作。惟陛下，使陰陽
官檢討，凡裨補外，輒削
去勿留，無爲後人觀望。

servants and/or ministers] to handle the matter of the Three Jewels (*Triratna*), loaning cereals [to the monks] and taking the interests back from the commoners. This malpractice is no small matter! I suggest that Your Majesty should expel (from the palace) this people along with the Buddhist monks, order them to never set foot inside the palaces (again), and prohibit the cereal loaning practices.

[...]

At the time of our noble ancestor (T'aejo Wang Kŏn), Buddhist temples were obligatorily built according to the favorable or unfavorable nature of the landscape [i.e. geomancy]. Following the land [nature], peace [was ensured]. In the later periods, generals, officials and many unscrupulous monks erected Buddhist structures, calling them prayer sites [lit.: “prayer halls” *wŏndang*], not inquiring if the landscape was propitious or not. (They) damaged the veins of the Earth⁸⁹, and thus repeated calamities were created. I suggest that Your Majesty should instruct the Office of Yin and Yang [= *Ŭmyang hoeŭi*] to set up an investigation, removing any

⁸⁹ *Chimaek* (*dimai*) 地脉 / 地脈: a Fengshui concept connected to the doctrine of natural *ki* (*qi*) circulation.

Koryŏsa 高麗史 CXXIX, biographies 列傳 42, Rebellions 叛逆: Ch'oe Ch'unghŏn

unlawful addition, leaving no trace behind. Thus, posterity will not look down on us.

In practical terms, this policy consisted in trying to curb the monks' privileges, patronizing the Sŏn schools over the scholastic ones. The Sŏn patronage had likely two reasons: the first one is the more direct nature of Sŏn teaching, which (in theory) does not require an intense study of several texts, impractical if not inaccessible for concrete army men; the second reason is the connections between the aristocracy and the scholastic temples, which posed risks for the new regime.

However, this new regime initially backfired, as demonstrated by an attempt by several temples' private armies to assassinate the dictator under the pretext of a new corvée law, and taking advantage of a Khitan-Liao incursion in 1217. To this revolt, then, followed another revolt led by slaves, impoverished by the fragile situation⁹⁰.

As result, the Sŏn schools gained prominence again. Despite suffering a lack of royal patronage after the death of Ŭich'ŏn, for the Ch'ŏnt'ae school the situation changed again with the rise of Chigyŏm 志謙 (1145-1229) and Wŏnmyŏ Yose 圓妙了世 (1163-1245).

Yose is the most famous of the two: his biography, written by the scholar Ch'oe Cha 崔滋 (1188–1260) and preserved in the *Tongmunŏn*, starts with the stark assertion that, before him, there was no Samantabhadra ritual (*Pohyŏn toryang* 普賢道場) and “Sŏn incantation” (*Sŏnsong* 禪誦) in Koryŏ Ch'ŏnt'ae. Yose became a monk at the age of twelve, passing the Ch'ŏnt'ae examinations at twenty-two, gaining the name of a formidable debater. Yet, in 1198 he retired from the public life becoming a wandering monk. In 1232, he founded the White Lotus Society (Paengnyŏn-sa 白

⁹⁰ Lee, Peter H. (2000), 377-399; 377-399; Puggioni (2008), 535-540

蓮社) with a huge ceremony to Samantabhadra. Both the ritual and the society were open to laypeople and ordered monks alike and had such success that was soon recognized by the military regime.

Another important figure of this time was Pojo Chinul 普照知訥 (1158-1210), who happened also to be a close friend of Yose during his traveler period. Chinul, was even more influential: he was a promoter of a Hwaŏm of and Sŏn doctrinal synthesis, reviving the Sagul-san School 闍崛山門 of Pŏm'il 梵日 (810-889). Chinul too founded a society open to both monks and laypeople: the Samādhi and Prajñā Society (*Chŏnghye-sa* 定慧社), a society which promoted the gaining of enlightenment through devotion, recitation, work and meditation. The Samādhi and Prajñā Society rapidly gained followers among commoners and local nobility. When Chinul transferred southward, in the Chogyŏ region, the society changed name in “Sŏn Cultivation Society on mt. Chogyŏ” *Chogyŏ-san Susŏn-sa* 曹溪山修禪社. Thus, Chinul became the founder of the still influential Chogyŏ Order (*Chogyŏ-jong* 曹溪宗).

These two laity-oriented societies (the White Lotus Society and the Sŏn Cultivation Society) thrived during the and beyond, during the Mongol Interference time. It must be reminded, however, there were not unique, just the most influential ones: for example, some notices of laypeople joying the White Lotus Society comes from the already established Water Purity Society (*Sujŏng-sa* 水精寺). However, it is not clear if these movements were primarily aimed at the local level or were totally devoted to a reformation regardless of their range⁹¹.

Other influential monks came out from these movements. One of them was Muŭija Hyesim, a disciple of Chinul about whom we have mentioned in the Esoteric Buddhism section. Hyesim led the Sŏn Cultivation Society as successor of his teacher, he was a versatile scholar, who integrated the *Śūraṅgama-sūtra* doctrines to those of Sŏn. Hyesim compiled a collection of *kong'an* (*kōan*) 公案 named *Sŏnmun-yŏmsong-chip* 禪門拈頌集 [K46.1505], starting from Śākyamuni Buddha,

⁹¹ Peter H. Lee (2000), 377-399; Puggioni (2008), 540-550; Vermeersch (2019), 234-8; Kim Sooyoun (2022), 51-8, 64-70

passing through the Twenty-eight Indian Patriarchs, and ending with the Six Chinese Patriarchs. Thus, with this arrangement, Hyesim was trying to demonstrate the validity of the “direct transmission out of letters” of Chan lineages. Hyesim also wrote the editorial notes on third edition of the *Siddham dhāraṇī Collection*, commissioned to a monk named Hyegwi 惠歸 and printed together with the *Diamond Sutra*. A clear testimony of the interplay of Sōn and Esoteric Buddhism as well as lasting relevance of the *Śūraṅgama-sūtra* in this period. Interestingly, Hyesim was eclectic even outside the Buddhist doctrinal field: in his “letter answering the minister Cho’e Hongyun” *Tap-Ch’oe-ch’amch’i Hong’yun* 答崔參政 洪胤, he defines himself a “Confucian Buddhist” (*yu-ji-bul* 儒之佛), stating that Buddhism and Confucianism does not differ at the core. Even more, Hyesim, quoting from the *Qishijie Jing* 起世界經⁹², says in the letter that Laozi and Confucius are Buddha envoys and bodhisattvas themselves – Mahākāśyapa and Mānava respectively. Thus, according to Hyesim, Confucianism and Daoism come from Buddhism and does not fundamentally differ to it⁹³. We can see in this letter a sensibility and an ideology specular and complementary to those of Confucian scholars of his time.

Mongol incursions were a problem for Koryŏ already during the Military Regime. In fact, the raids of 1236 brought so much destruction to the kingdom’s temples that the 1011-1081 Buddhist Canon edition was lost. After the royal court retreat to Kanghwa Island, a new Tripitaka edition was commissioned. The work was presided over by the scholar Yi Kyubo. The reedition was completed around 1251 and, in 1268, a great monk assembly of both Scholastic and Sōn lineage was held to inaugurate the Tripitaka. This event was presided by Iryŏn, more famous for his *Samguk Yusa*. Iryŏn was a Sōn monk of the Kaji-san lineage 迦智山門, however, he was a promoter of Chinul doctrines, declaring himself his spiritual heir. Iryŏn obtained prominent roles during his life: beside the overseeing on the inaugural

⁹² Maybe the *Tiandi Jing* 天地經 or the *Zaoli Tiandi Jing* 造立天地經, which, in term of content, are identical to the *Qingjing Faxing Jing* 清淨法行經. All of these are apocryphal scripture about the advent of Mahākāśyapa in China.

⁹³ Lee, Peter H. (2000), 377-399; Kim Sooyoun (2014), 180-1; Kim Sooyoun (2022), 51-8, 64-70

monks' assembly, he was also bestowed with the title of Great Sŏn Master (*tae-sŏnsa* 大禪師)⁹⁴.

During their takeover of the Peninsula, the Mongols encountered a fierce resistance by the Koryŏ kingdom and people: the Mongol army met an initial defeat in 1231 and was able to control Koryŏ only after removing the Military Regime in 1259. However, the royal court was allowed to return to Kaesŏng only in 1268. Subsequently to the new status of vassal kingdom, the Koryŏ royal clan was forced to contract political marriages with the Yuan imperial house, and many Koryŏ princes and princesses were kept in the Yuan courts. Another mean of domination was the Branch Secretariat for Eastern Campaigns (*Chŏngdonghaengsŏng* / *Zhengdong Xingsheng* 征東行省), then used to invade Japan in 1274 and 1281. This new situation reshaped again the relationship between Buddhist institutions and the central authority.

During Mongol rule, some movements which we have seen before continued to thrive, such as the White Lotus Society, the Sŏn Cultivation Society and the Sŏn Kaji lineage (due to Iryŏn fame). Generally, in this period, Sŏn, and Ch'ŏnt'a'e schools were the most prominent ones, but Hwaŏm and Pŏpsang schools were reinvigorated too. The Mongol rule made also its contribution: despite neither Tibetan nor Nepali Buddhism really spread, princes and aristocracy became more familiar with Esoteric Buddhism. Therefore, there was a popularization of this branch, usually intended in a ritualistic sense, a trend that affected also the other, non-esoteric lineages. This was inevitable, given the closeness of local nobility and Buddhist temples. On the other hand, for the commoners the Esoteric Buddhism was not really differentiated from Daoism and Shamanism, as we have seen before. As for the Sŏn schools specifically, the more closeness with mainland China brought new trends: the Kanhwa Sŏn 看話禪 practice, the meditation over the *kong'an*, was already known by Chinul and Hyesim, which based this practice over the *Śūramgama-sūtra* doctrines. However, the Kanhwa Sŏn meditation really spread during this period: one main catalyst of this trend was Manhang 萬恒 (1247-

⁹⁴ Puggioni (2008), 540-2

1319) of the Sŏn Cultivation Society, who personally knew Mengshan Deyi 蒙山德異 (1231-1308), of the Wumen Huikai 無門慧開 (1183-1260) lineage. The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch (*Yukcho-tan'gyŏng* / *Liuzu Tanjing* 六祖壇經) in the Deyi's edition was particularly popular in Korea during the Mongol rule. Similarly, the Linji school's doctrines were known already at the time of T'an'yŏn, Tamjin and Iryŏn, but, again, is during the Mongol rule that a proper Linji / Imje lineage was established with T'aego Pou 太古普愚 (1301-1382) and Paeg'un Kyŏngha 白雲景閑 (1299-1375). Paeg'un Kyŏngha was also a promoter of the Kanhwa Sŏn and the author of the "Anthology of Great Buddhist Preceptors' Sŏn Teachings" *Chikchi* 直指, one of the first examples of movable metal type printing. During the Mongol rule, the Pŏpsang school was important for the relationships with Mongol élite, despite being confined in the provinces. Among other Korean monks, Hyeyŏng 惠永 (1228-1294) obtained many honors by Kublai Khan 忽必烈 / Yuan Shizu 元世祖 (r. 1260-1294), while Haewŏn 海圓 (1262-1340) obtained the favors of the Muslim prince Ananda 阿難答 (1270-1307 c.a) and then of Külüg Khan 曲律汗 / Wuzong 元武宗 (r. 1307-11). This tie is well shown by the number of Chinese temples renewed or founded by Korean prince and princes during their hostage period⁹⁵.

When the Yuan grip over Koryŏ was starting to fade away, the necessity of reforms was felt even more than before. Among the scholar-officials, spread a debate about whether the royal house had to be maintained or overthrown, so to implement such reformations. Ironically, King Kongmin himself was well determined to emend the kingdom's political scene. To implement a radical reformation, he hired Sin Ton 辛旽 (1322-1371), a monk son of a temple slave, thus independent from both the nobility and the pro-Mongol factions. Sin T'on had to renounce his vows when he became a public official, and started cleaning up the central administration, removing important figures in the chancelleries, finance commissions, security

⁹⁵ Lee, Peter H. (2000), 311-3, 328-362; Puggioni (2008), 540-550; Kim Sooyoun (2014), 177-9; Kim Sooyoun (2022), 64-70

councils and secretaries. His reform can be summarized as follows (*KRS CXXXII*, biographies 42, rebellions: Sin T'on):

- The king should not listen to dilations and false accusations [n.b.: reported as direct advice to the throne]
- Purge and renewal of the high-level administration
- Selection of a new, more loyal group of bureaucrats from local magistracy, censorate, State councilors and political critics. The so-called “newly recruited literati” *Sinjin-sadaebu* 新進士大夫
- Land reformation and redistribution, to subtract power to pro-Yuan nobility, and aristocracy more in general. This policy was upheld by the newly created *Chŏnmin Pyŏnjeong Togam* 田民辨整都
- Census and emancipation for slaves and servants. First, for those kept by big landowners, then for slaves and servants in general
- Help to women in need, on request to the central authority

It is notable how similar reforms were also advocated by Yi Chehyŏn 李齊賢 (1288-1367) and Yi Saek 李穡 (1328-1396), i.e. renew the civilian and military administration, reform the land distribution, disempower the big nobility and the landowners – though, obviously, they were all presented in a Neoconfucian veneer.

Sin T'on reforms made him an enemy of many bureaucrats, who accused him of centralizing the power around his person. After the death Queen Indŏk 仁德太后 (1351-1365), king Kongmin became psychologically weak, and thus yielded to the accusation against Sin T'on, demoting him first and then making him executed. After his death, the Neoconfucian faction depicted the ex-monk as a shadowy figure and a traitor⁹⁶.

The final period of Koryŏ saw an escalation in the anti-Buddhist polemics among Neoconfucians. However, it is likely that for most scholar-official continued the same approach they had before. For example, Yi Saek 李穡 (1328-96), despite he made a petition to the throne to send all the unregistered monks to the frontlines, he saw no difference between Confucianism and Buddhist on the morale and

⁹⁶ Lee, Peter H. (2000), 343-362; Puggioni (2008), 550-1

meditation practices. Less ambiguous was the fierce, posthumous debate between Sambong Chŏng Tojŏn 三峰鄭道傳 (1342-1398) and the Sŏn monk Hamhŏ Tŭkt'ŏng Kihwa 涵虛得通己和 (1376-1433)⁹⁷:

Chŏng Tojŏn was an important political figure of his time, author of two treatises against Daoism and Buddhism: the “Book on the Heart-Mind, *Ki* and Principle” *Simgiri-p'yŏn* 心氣理篇, and the “Various Confutation against Mr. Buddha” *Pulssi chappyŏn* 佛氏雜辨. While in the first was aimed at showing the contradiction of both Buddhism and Daoism, while presenting Neoconfucianism as their perfect counterpart, the second work is more direct against Buddhism: *Pulssi chappyŏn* is mainly directed against the Sŏn teachings, deemed as a nihilist and quietist doctrines. In the first part of the text, Chŏng Tojŏn critiques the doctrines of *karma* and *saṃsāra*, while in the second part shows the inconsistencies within the Buddhist doctrine of the heart-mind, taking examples from *Śūraṅgama-sūtra* and the Chinul works.

Kihwa was a Sŏn monk, and a very prolific one, since his author of many commentaries on important sutra such as the Diamond Sutra and the Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment (*Yuanjue jing* / *Wŏn'gak-kyŏng* 圓覺經). Son of a diplomat, he was initially interested in Neoconfucianism, as he studied in the newly founded Confucian Academy (*Sŏnggyun'gwan* 成均館), however he turned to Buddhism after the tragic death of one of his friends. His response to Chŏng Tojŏn is found in the “Treaty Exposing the Correct” *Hyŏnjŏng-non* 顯正論, published after the death of his opponent. The Kihwa's takes are divided in three sections: the first part clarifies the common elements of Buddhism and Mencius against the Neoconfucian exclusivism. Mainly: the heart-mind is originally pure, and experiences suffering by the contact with the world, thus, Buddhism has various ways to recover the original heart-mind. The point of the first thesis is to highlight the commonality of Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism. Thus, he also emphasizes the shared ethics of “humaneness”; in the second part, Kihwa stress the hypocrisies of Neoconfucian doctrines. For example, while the Neoconfucian master Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032-

⁹⁷ Lee, Peter H. (2000), 343-362; Vermeersch (2003), 148-58; Muller (2018), 179-83; Vermeersch (2020), 8-12

1085) said that “humaneness” lies within “being one” with the “myriads of things”, he omits that Confucius indulged in hunting and fishing, while for Mencius eating animals was acceptable as long as one does not hear the animal cries, and, in general, that Confucian traditionally accepted bloody sacrifices; Kihwa concludes affirming that Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism, if correctly intended, are expression of the same fundamental reality. In explaining his thesis, he rebuked the Chŏng Tojŏn’s idea of Sŏn as nihilism, showing the Buddhism doctrines of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is fundamentally the same in all the Three Teaching, meaning that they are all equally valid doctrines.

What is worth noticing in this debate is a sort of inversion of roles: while Yi Kyubo was clearly fond in Buddhism and Daoism without seen in this any contradiction with his Confucian stance, and on the other hand Hyesim saw the source of Confucianism and Daoism within Buddhism, here Chŏng Tojŏn does not advocate to any ecumenism, not even superficial – a position clearly not shared with Yi Saek; Kihwa, on the other hand, in seeing no contradiction between the Three Teachings, was clearly more consistent with his predecessors, either Buddhist and Confucian.

5.3.3 *Buddhism among the Commoners*

So far, we had some glimpse on how the relationship between the Buddhist clergy was, the Confucian scholar-officers and the commoners. For the sake of clarity, it is, however, better to make a brief resume:

- For all the Koryŏ period, lay commoners who cannot join the *saṅgha*, it was possible to become “monk disciple” (*sūngdo* 僧徒) / “monastery-dependent monk disciples” (*suwŏn sūngdo* 隨院僧徒), i.e. corvée workers, slave-servant and private army of the temples. In fact, while joining a temple did not eliminate social classes and privileges, it was a way to obtain material benefits, even the most basic ones. On the other hands, Buddhist temples also served as refuges, hospitals, guesthouses, printing houses, libraries and schools for most of the commoners.
- During the Military Rule, laypeople had a greater interaction with Buddhist teaching due to the White Lotus Society and the Sŏn Cultivation Society.

Interestingly, there were a tendency of practicing both Sŏn and Esoteric Buddhism, so the Mongol popularization on the latter can be already seen in the popularity of the former.

- During the Mongol rule, Esoteric Buddhism become very popular among commoners, basically indistinguishable from Daoism and Shamanism due to its heavy emphasis on rituals.
- Syncretism and ecumenism of the Three Teaching (Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism) was a common trend both among Buddhists and Confucians during the entire Koryŏ period. This tendency is shown mainly within Sŏn (Fayan / Pŏp'an school; Hyesim; Kihwa). Confucian scholar too showed this tendency, mostly in official epigraphies, and more rarely in their texts, as in the case of Yi Kyubo. This trend gradually faded with the rise of Neoconfucianism and the Yuan's fall.

These interactions were, however, mostly presented from a top-down point of view: they are mainly focused on recognized institutions. Thus, to understand the relationship between commoners we have to search in other documents and use deductions.

Among other documents, the legal codes can give us an interesting perspective. In fact, the *Koryŏsa* can either be too harsh on the Buddhist communities, being ideologically biased in favor of Confucianism, or, on the other hand, its sources can be too hagiographical. In both senses, the *Koryŏsa* mostly portrays an “imagined *saṅgha*” rather than a real one. On the contrary, laws and prohibitions address the real people, dealing with what a monastic community was expected to do or not to during their daily life. And this, regardless of if those laws were effectively applied. This is the position of Vermeersch (2003), who deduced how real monks acted from the from the Koryŏ laws concerning them.

One example of this is the various laws prohibiting monasteries from brewing alcohol. And this despite drunkenness during the major festival was at least tolerated: a 1278 report from a capital's Military Commissioner explicitly recommend to ensure the alcoholic beverage supply for all the festivals, Buddhist or not. It is possible, however, that such alcohol was used for the ceremonies, but

even in that case it is unlikely that it was wasted after them. Even more, knowing that both Yi Kyubo and Yi Illo narrate about drunken monks in their poetries.

Monks did not mix only during the festivals, as they were often mentioned in the legal code for transgressing the monastic dress code. These laws were maybe sumptuary too, as they mention fancy dresses clearly unhaveable to monks from non-aristocratic backgrounds. This situation was so clear that king Hyōnjong, made a legal code to address the problem, lamenting that the fanciness of monks' robe made impossible to distinguish them from laypeople. However, detailed legislation seemingly arrived only in 1027. These laws were clearly ineffective, however, if almost two hundred year later the renowned Zen master Dōgen still noted that, if not for erudition and the alms bowls, Koryō monks were almost identical to laypeople.

Drinking with laypeople and dressing like laypeople are merely indirect clues about the relationship between the monastic *saṅgha* and the lay *saṅgha*, one can rightfully object. However, the Koryō legal codes often, directly address the problem of unregulated mixing of the two communities, which seems not infrequent:

Here is an example from 1131:

***Koryōsa* 高麗史 LXXXV, annals 志 39, Penal laws 刑法 2: bans**

六月，陰陽會議所奏，“近來，僧俗雜類，聚集成群，號萬佛香徒，或念佛讀經，作為詭誕，或內外寺社僧徒，賣酒鬻葱，或持兵作惡，踴躍遊戲，亂常敗俗。請令御史臺·金吾衛，巡檢禁止。”詔可。	Sixth month: Office of Yin and Yang [= <i>Ŭmyang hoeŭi</i>] received a petition: “Recently, monks and laypeople mix with each other, they assemble in groups, calling [these groups] ‘Thousands of Buddha’s’ Fragrant Followers’, and they recite Buddhas’ names and read the sutras, but [in reality] they are false and absurd. Moreover, [these] association of monks and laypeople, out of the temples
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[supervision], buy alcohol and sell onions⁹⁸, while other (among them) takes arms and commit wrongdoings. They jump and dance, they wreak havoc, causing social disharmony. We ask to send inspectors, dispatch the street police, and instruct the patrols to stop all of this”. The king approved the petition.

This was a recognized problem at least from 1100, when monks and nuns were forbidden from join these assemblies. In 1275 it was even prohibited to visit the temples except to go to commemorate the parents. In this last case, the prohibition was clearly aimed at moralizing the commoners, as well as at forbid any mixing among monks, nuns and laypeople⁹⁹.

Likely, these frequent contacts helped the spread of Buddhist doctrines from the monks to the general population. There was clearly some diffusion even before Koryŏ, and we can deduce it retracing some common beliefs back from at least from Unified Silla:

The belief in Buddhas’ external powers (*t’aryŏk* 他力) was clearly strong, and we can deduce it from the fact that even within Confucians was a common idea that Buddhism protected the kingdom. Thus, both among scholar-officials and peasants, worshipping Buddhas was a way to ensure good luck, and this belief was in strict relationship with geomancy and divination practices¹⁰⁰. This is even more clear when we revise the Esoteric Buddhist objects and talismans dated from the late-middle Koryŏ on.

The belief of magical power of Buddhist practices and doctrines can be retraced at least from Late Silla (or Unified Silla): the magical healing power of Buddhist sutra

⁹⁸ Eating onions and drinking alcohol is against the monastic rules (*Vinaya*).

⁹⁹ Vermeersch (2003), 157-8

¹⁰⁰ Yi Gi-yeong (1974), 110

recitation is attested in the case of the monk Wŏn'gwang 圓光 (542-640 c.a) and king Chinp'yŏng 眞平王, (r. 579-632), and allegedly even before, during the reign of Nulchi 訥祗麻立干 (r. 417-458). It is difficult not to see in this practice the precursors of “scripture-reading” shamans of late-Koryŏ / early-Chosŏn.

On the other hand, a syncretism of Esoteric Buddhism, Daoism and Shamanism is attested at least from the seventh-eighth century, as attested by figures like Milbon 密本 and queen Sŏndŏk 善德女王 (632-649). Again, the continuity of these beliefs with those of late Koryŏ period is undeniable.

In general, it seems that during Silla, some role of spirit-tamer shifted from local shaman to Buddhist priests, without a total abolition of the latter, but rather a change in the roles¹⁰¹.

If this spirit-tamer role seemingly returned to the shamans during Koryŏ, with the progressive Buddhism's nativization, that does not mean the end of the opposite trend, i.e. the syncretism of Shamanism with Buddhism, nor that there was an *ex abrupto* severing of relationship between the two realities, as we will see. In any case, it is undeniable that such beliefs were common enough among common people to survive until the Chosŏn period and beyond.

5.3.4 Śakra Worship in Medieval Korea

How was Indra / Śakra intended by Koryŏ Buddhists?

We have seen how the courtly Esoteric Buddhist rituals were often in honor for Indra, associated with the classical seven planets (Navagraha) and the “lunar nodes” (Ketu and Rāhu) and the Four Heavenly Kings (Caturmahārāja). We have also seen how these rituals held inside the temple palaces served to ensure good weather, good luck and protection, and to celebrate the king's ascension to the throne. However, we have also seen, these characteristics are not specific to courtly Buddhism, as they often overlap with Leifa Daoism. Luckily, we have reports of a

¹⁰¹ Grayson (1984); Cho Hung-Youn (1999)

case which can help us understand how Koryŏ kings intended Indra as a Buddhist deity. The events reported are dated to the times of Ŭijong 毅宗 (r. 1147-1170)¹⁰²:

***Koryŏsa* 高麗史 CXXIII, biographies 列傳 36, favored people 嬖幸: Yŏng Ŭi**

又奏曰，如欲延壽須事天帝
釋觀音菩薩。王多畫其像分
送中外寺院廣設梵采號曰祝
聖法會發，州郡倉廩以支其
費。儀乘傳巡視守，令僧徒
皆畏苛酷爭遺賄賂。

又於安和寺塑置帝釋觀音須
菩提，聚僧，晝夜連聲唱諸
菩薩名號，稱為連聲法席

(The official Yŏng Ŭi) told to the king: “If you desired to prolong your life, worship [the *deva* king] Śakra and the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara.” The king ordered to make several depictions [of them], to be delivered both in the inner (i.e. of the capital) temples and in the outer ones, and established a ceremony called “sermons for thanking the buddhas” [*ch’uksŏng-pŏphoe*], for which he convinced provinces and districts to use their [storage] resources, so they would cover the expenses. During this time, Yŏng Ŭi went horseback from postal stations, intimidating local officials and monks, so they would not try to please him by illicit donations and dishonest behaviors.

Moreover, at the Anhwa temple, they built [depictions of] Śakra, Avalokiteśvara and Subhūti; day and night, the monks’ assembly chanted the names of all bodhisattvas. (This ritual) is called “sermons of jointed chants” [*yŏnsŏng-pŏpsŏk*].

¹⁰² Yi Gi-yeong (1974), 130; Puggioni (2008), 526; Lee Seog-ju (2010), 265-272

This entry within the *Koryŏsa* explicit how the aim of Śakra worship was at least to “prolong the life / longevity” (*yŏn-su* 延壽) of the ruler. This also well harmonizes with the astrological faith in stars and planets, coherently worshipped along with Śakra.

Likewise, detailed descriptions of Śakra are later too, among monks and literati. We have seen how Yi Kyubo depicted Indra “ruling over the Six Heavens of the Upper Worlds”¹⁰³. Doubtlessly, these descriptions are “canonical” and well attested within the Indo-Buddhist mythology, and so easily obtainable by reading the sutras. Nonetheless, it is interesting how, despite being easily available, these depictions seemingly became popular only later, thanks to the White Lotus Society and the Sŏn Cultivation Society.

In fact, during from the eleventh to the thirteenth century, temples, especially the urban ones, started to include a “Good Dharma (Sudharma) hall” *Sŏnpŏp-tang* 善法堂. The very name of the hall is a reference to Śakra: Sudharma palace is the name of the Indra abode in the Sudarśana city, on the thirty-second heaven of the Trāyastriṃśa. Apparently, it was Chinul and the Sŏn Cultivation Society which started the trend of including this hall within the temples, as it is reported that he gave his final public sermons in a *Sŏnpŏp-tang*. A detailed description of one of these halls is found within the *Gaoli tujing* (*Xuanhe fengshi Gaoli tujing* XVII, temples: Anhwa-sa). The *Gaoli tujing* mention is interesting, as it is said that the hall was included within the Anhwa temple 安和寺 complex, a royal temple founded by king Yejong. Traces of this hall can be found also in the *Samugk Yusa* (SKY IV, five explanations: the *imugi* of Poyang) and in later documents, but the scope seems to have already changed from the original one¹⁰⁴.

Likely, the original scope of the *Sŏnpŏp-tang* was to worship Śakra as the kingdom protector and heavenly, otherworldly judge after the death. Originally, the use of sermon hall, class hall, meditation hall and/or laypeople assembly hall, if present, was likely secondary. The change started along with the change in Śakra’s perception: from a generic heavenly judge to a judge of human actions made during

¹⁰³ McBride (2008), 233-240; Lee Seog-ju (2010), 264-271

¹⁰⁴ Kim Sung-soon (2018)

one's life. Thus, the rites were progressively less aimed at worshipping Indra himself with *pūjas* and fasting, and more to meditation, sermons and abstinence rituals, especially during the ninety day-long summer retreats (*varṣika* 安居), as reported by Sōksik Yōng'am 釋息影菴 (fl. late thirteenth - early fourteenth century) in his *Poksŏn'wōnsaso* 復禪源寺疏. Apparently, this trend toward ascetic rites was particularly strong among the Sŏn Cultivation Society-affiliated temples. But what were these abstinence rituals about? We lack of enough Koryŏ documents on the matters, but it is possible to sidestep the issue researching within the Chosŏn and Chinese sources:

Milkyo-gaegan-jip 密教開刊集 (1784) by Mong Ŭn 蒙隱

Three Abstinence Months, Six Fasting Days:

三 長 六 齋 日
維摩經云。正月一齋食者。一
萬三千年。持戒功德准。積
米七萬斛。八萬善神擁護。五
月。一齋食者。一千五百年。
持戒功德准。積米一萬斛。五
千善神擁護。九月。一齋食者
。一萬年。持戒功德准。積米
一萬斛。五千善神守護。
[...]
每月。六齋日初八日。十四日
。十五。廿三日。廿九日。三
十日。四王太子使者。巡案善
惡。[提胃經云。修一毛善。

In the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* it is said: the one who fasts on the first lunar [month], for 1300 years will obtain merits in accordance with the precepts (*śīla*), equal to make donation of 7000 rice *kok*, and will be protected by 80000 deities; [the one who fasts] on the fifth [lunar] month, for 1500 years will obtain merits in accordance with the precepts, [equal to] make donations of 10000 rice *kok*, and will be protected by 5000 deities; [the one who fasts] on the ninth [lunar] month, for 10000 years will obtain merits in accordance with the precepts, [equal to] make donations of 10000 rice *kok*, and will be protected by 5000 deities.

持一支戒。施一匙飯。誦一經 [...]

偈。午一齋食。功德無量云云

。] 八節日。[八王下也。]

立春。春分。立夏。夏至。立

秋。秋分。立冬。冬至。

Every month, there are six fasting days. On the eighth day of the first [lunar month], the fifteenth, the twentieth, the twenty-third, the twenty-ninth and the third day [of the second lunar month], the Four Heavenly King are dispatched to examine the human actions (the *Trapusa Sūtra* says: even just washing a piece of fabric, keeping a vote, offering a rice spoon, recite a sutra chapter, [all of this] will create uncountable merits). [Similarly,] during the eight solar terms (the eight descents of the kings): the spring equinox [*Lichun*], the vernal equinox [*Chunfen*], the summer beginning [*Lixia*], the summer solstice [*Xiazhi*], the autumn beginning [*Liqiu*], the autumnal equinox [*Qiufen*], the winter beginning [*Lidong*], and the winter solstice [*Dongzhi*].

Chir'üi-rok 質疑錄 by Kümmyōng Pojōng 錦明寶鼎 (1861-1930)

每月有六齋日 初八日 二十三
日 四天王使者 巡察人間 十四
日 二十四日 四天王太子 巡察
人間 十五日 三十日 四天王自
巡人間 檢察人間之禍福 達于

Every month, there are six fasting days: the eighteenth day of the first [month] and the twenty-third day, the Four Heavenly Kings are dispatched to inspect the human world, [and so during] the twenty-fourth, the fifteenth and thirtieth. The Four Heavenly Kings investigate humans' fortunes and

帝釋天之堂下 是爲每月六次 misfortunes and report them to the Śakra
巡檢 豈無大關於人世之職分 palace. How could this reconnaissance not to
耶 be a responsibility toward the human world?

The important terms there are “three abstinence months” *sam-chang ’wōl* 三長月 and “six fasting days” *yuk-che ’il* 六齋日. Practices, these, clearly not confined to the monks during the late Koryŏ period. These fasting were very popular during the Eastern Jin, the Liang and the Tang dynasties, as we have seen discussing the P’algwanhoe i.e. the Poṣadha / Upavasatha / Uposatha. If this indirect evidence is to be believed, that would mean that, during the late middle and last part of Koryŏ, the Sŏn Cultivation Society popularized a more “canonical” version of Śakra and its fasting practices: a Śakra now judge of human actions, controlled with the help of Four Heavenly Kings, specific days of the year, and generally more personal¹⁰⁵.

The personalization of Śakra faith became even more prominent during the last decades of Koryŏ, when Buddhist came under assault of prominent Neoconfucian scholars. This is well attested by the “Lotus Sutra’s Miraculous Tales” *Pŏphwa Yŏnghŏmjŏn* 法華靈驗傳, a collection of short stories from both Korean and Chinese sources, concerning the marvelous power of the Lotus Sutra, written for a devotees’ public. The text likely dates to 1270, while the first printing edition allegedly dates to 1377, and the first known copies date to 1534. In this collection, Śakra is mentioned five times. Among these stories, what concern us the most are the following twos: in the eighth tale, he donates a chest of gold to a Buddhist devotee, while in the sixteenth tale, he ensures that the rain fall on in the right time. These two stories, both of Chinese origin, are clearly indication that Śakra was perceived as a deity of human fortunes in this life. In fact, there is only one story when Śakra is more akin to the otherworldly Jade Emperor and King Yama: the fifty-fourth one, when the *deva* king’s proposal of an official position in his abode

¹⁰⁵Kim Sung-soon (2018)

is turned down by the protagonist over the perspective of a rebirth in the Amitābha's Western Paradise¹⁰⁶.

Summarizing:

- Buddhist temples and lineages were already part of the power dynamics in Korea even before the foundation of Koryŏ. From the founding to its demise, Koryŏ power dynamics was (tendentally) a struggle between the Center and the Peripheries. Whatever the affiliation, any Buddhist school that found itself ousted from the Center, leant on local aristocracy and other similar power (devotees, private armies etc.) against the Center. The bureaucratization of the *saṅgha* was basically ineffective to prevent this recurrent situation.
 - Social stratification that existed outside the monasteries continued inside them. Thus, an aristocrat monk had more privileges than a commoner monk. There were also limitations for those who wanted joining the *saṅgha*, as every monk and nun was exempted from taxes and corvée.
 - A Koryŏ Buddhist temple was at the same time a material production and a knowledge production center. In fact, a temple produced agricultural crop, paper, ink, brushes, textile, cloths, painting, craftworks, statues and ex-votos, and functioned also as bank, refuge, hospital, guesthouse, printing house, library and school.
 - Every monastery had its own private army composed by corvée worker and serf-servants, working for the temple as “(monastery-dependent) monk disciples”. Normally, such militias supported or merged with the regular army during the war. The Buddhist temples themselves served as a military recruiting and training centers during the war, and Sŏn monks were renowned as excellent soldiers.
- The vicissitudes around the various Koryŏ Buddhist schools can be summarized as follows: during the first part of the dynasty, Sŏn was

¹⁰⁶ Riotto (2023)

prominent, but the doctrinal schools regained fame after the 1011-1081 Tripitaka publishing. Then, Ŭich'ŏn re-established the Ch'ŏnt'aek school as a "meditative" lineage. As the Pŏpsang fall in disgrace after a failed coup, and with the rising of laypeople movement during the Military Regime, Sŏn regained power. Esoteric Buddhist ritualism obtained an ephemeral popularity during the Mongol rule.

- Many attempts of doctrinal unification / synthesis were made, such as the introduction of Sŏn Pŏp'an school in the tenth century, and the introduction of the *Śūraṅgama-sūtra* in the thirteenth century. The latest event is likely one reason why Sŏn and Esoteric Buddhism were often practiced together.
- The ideal of Unity of the Three Teachings (Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism) was widespread in Sŏn schools. This is made clear by schools like the Sŏn Pŏp'an, of the first period, and figures like Hyesim, of the middle-late period, and Kihwa, of the last period of the dynasty.
- Courtly Esoteric Buddhism was not particularly separated from Daoism, nor it were practices like the use of talismans, mandalas and *dhāraṇīs*. During the Mongol rule, the popularization of Esoteric Buddhist rituals further eased this syncretism with Daoism (and Shamanism) among commoners.
- Monastic communities are often mixed with laypeople. Monks participated to the State's festivals, are often described dressing cloth alike those of laypeople (thus sanctioned as "unappropriated"), educated the devotees within the temples, and there are mentions of several unlawful lay societies ("Thousands of Buddha's' Fragrant Followers") at least from the twelfth century. The thirteenth-sixteenth-century White Lotus Society and Sŏn Cultivation Society were later additional pieces in this situation.
- Śakra was likely venerated as the king protector and heavenly judge after the death for most of the dynasty. We know that the *devas'* king was venerated along with the Four Heavenly Kings, the stars and the planets by the courtly Esoteric Buddhism.

- In the twelfth century, we have mentions that clarify how Śakra was personally worshipped for longevity; while approaching to the thirteenth century, Śakra became more popular thanks to Sŏn Cultivation Society, becoming more personal and less otherworldly in the process; between the late thirteenth-fourteenth century, Śakra was likely fully intended as a personal, heavenly judge influential over human life.
- The Sŏn Cultivation Society likely popularized the Indian myths surrounding the Poṣadha days, i.e.: specific days of the month, during which Śakra dispatches his Four Heavenly Kings to examine the human actions, and thus days when some ascetism is recommended.

5.4. *The Native Shamanic Belief System and Chesŏk*

Unlike Daoism and Buddhism, the *Koryŏsa* redactors were cautioned not to give even a resemblance of legitimacy to the native Shamanism. This was likely due to popular nature of the beliefs and the fame shamans built around themselves during the middle and the last part of the dynasty: a scandal for the upper-class Confucian officials. As a result, we now possess only a collection of fragmentary episodes, while the relationship with the kingdom administration can only be inferred by the late legislations if not directly from the sporadic mentions within the early Chosŏn documents.

Nonetheless, Shamanism had an important role in the early period of the dynasty, as testifies the T'aejo injunction about the native gods worship within the Eight Prohibition and the Lantern festivals (*KRS XCIX*, important clans 1: T'aejo, year 26, month 4, day 15: “The Eight Prohibitions [Festival], because it honors the heavenly deities and the six peaks and famous mountains’ [spirits], the river [spirits] and the dragon gods” *p’algwan soi sa ch’öllyŏng kūp o’ak-myŏngsan, taech’ŏn yongsin ya* 八關所以事天靈及五嶽名山、大川龍神也). This was likely one legacy of Silla, as we have seen in the “Chesŏk in Koryŏ State Cult” paragraph. For

the sake of simplicity, we will start the analysis with the relationship with Confucian State cults during the first part of the dynasty, then we will proceed chronologically.

The Heaven worship existed in Korea well before its institutionalization, as we have seen in the Koguryŏ case, and thus it was present even before Koryŏ. Therefore, it was only natural that Chesŏk State cult in Koryŏ involved shamanic ideas and practices – not to mention the P’algwanhoe’s local celebrations. Particularly, the most striking shamanic element within the P’algwanhoe was the idea of Śakra descending on Earth and granting blisses, albeit explicitly mentioned only during Tripitaka publications¹⁰⁷.

The ancestor-worship as performed during the P’algwanhoe and the Yŏndŭnghoe can be easily ascribed to the local Shamanism as well. If we can deduce that the use of portraits may have been a Unified Silla custom, the use of statues is less obvious (a Koguryŏ custom?). We can nonetheless infer that it was a shamanic rite for two reasons. First: the *Koryŏsa* clearly said it was part of the commoners’ funerary ritual, likely of high status; second: because we are told that the Liao envoy recognized this ritual as “unlucky”. In fact, we know that the Khitan-Liao imperial funerals at some point involved the use of emperor’s effigies as substitute for the ruler’s embalmed corpse i.e. the use funerary statues¹⁰⁸:

***Koryŏsa* 高麗史 XCII, biographies 列傳 6, officials 諸臣: Ch’oe Sŭngno 崔承老**

我國，春設燃燈，冬開八關，廣徵人衆，勞役甚煩，願加減省，以紓民力。又造種種偶人，工費甚多，一	In our Country, we hold the Lantern (festival) in spring, and the Eight Prohibition (festival) in winter. Large crowds are gathered, and their corvée labor is excessive. I hope that we can
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¹⁰⁷ McBride (2008), 236-8; Vermeersch (2008), 86-9, 91-2; Lee Seog-Ju (2010), 260-272; Ahn Jee-Won (2011), 230-275; Kim Gap-dong (2018), 38-45.

¹⁰⁸ Kim Gap-dong (2018), 38-45. For the use of effigies for funerals and ancestral worship among the Khitan-Liao and then Mongol-Yuan, see Heissig (1980), 7-16, 59-62; Louis (2013), 97-104.

Koryŏsa 高麗史 XCII, biographies 列傳 6, officials 諸臣: Ch'oe Sŭngno 崔承老

進之後，便加毀破，亦甚無謂也。且
偶人非凶禮不用，西朝使臣，嘗來
見之，以爲不祥，掩面而過，願自
今，勿許用之 moderate and reduce [the size of these
celebrations] to alleviate the
commoners' hardships. Moreover,
(during these festivals) we built many
human effigies, and their construction
cost is too high. After being enshrined
only once, (these effigies) are rapidly
destroyed: this is utterly nonsensical!
Such effigies are not used outside of
inauspicious rites [i.e. funerals], so
when an envoy from the Western
Dynasty [= Khitan-Liao] happened to
see one, he thought they were unlucky.
and soon he covered his face and went
over. I hope that we will not allow the
use of such things from now on.

Beyond this, we cannot infer anything else in a precise way, as there is no mention of the meaning and use of these effigies. They were more akin to the Mongolian *ongon* (*onŷon*) clay statuettes or the Sinitic stone guardians placed in the burial site, or even to the modern, wood *changsŭng* 長牲 placed around the village?

The use of “dragon lantern”, “dragon standards” and dragons’ depictions is also well attested for both the festivals since the beginning, and they are explicitly said to be part of Silla customs (*KRS* XCIX, important clans 1: first year of T’aejo). Unsurprisingly, this too reflects shamanic belief. It is in fact a continuation of the native, imperial dragon cult, as testified since the reign of Chinhŭng 眞興王 (r. 540-576) (*SKS* IV, Silla chronicles 4, king Chinhŭng: the Hwangnyong temple

construction = SKY III, pagoda stories 4: the Hwangnyong temple of four *zhang*). This imperial dragon had likely the same characteristics Chinese counterpart, i.e. it was a rain-bringer god, as so was coherently worshipped within a seasonal ritual¹⁰⁹. During the Koryŏ period it was also a usual practice to invite shamans for the courtly rainmaking rituals, consisting in shaping a clay dragon figure (*t'oryongje* 土龍祭). The employment of shamans for rainmaking rites did not create any fuss among Confucian scholars even in the middle-late period of the dynasty, usually. In fact, the only case where the shamans were persecuted in connection with this practice, was under king Ch'ungsuk 忠肅 (r. 1313-1330), i.e. during the Mongol interference, when the shamans failed to summon the rain (*KRSJ* XXIV, Ch'ungsuk, year 16, month 5)! The frequency of these rituals at court is commonly used among scholars as an indicator of how some rulers were favorable to the Shamanism, and thus as an indicator on how shamans were perceived within the upper-class too¹¹⁰.

5.4.1 Shamanic Gods during Koryŏ

We have seen in the chapter “Chesŏk in Koryŏ State Cult” how Chesŏk was seen as a State-protector warrior deity. This description can be put in parallel with the description of another type of gods: the “city (walls) deities” *chenghuang* / *sŏnghwang* 城隍. *Sŏnghwang* worship had in fact a role within the Eight Prohibition and Lantern festivals and thus were associated with Chesŏk. But this was not the only reason: during Koryŏ, the *sŏnghwang* were “military” gods, i.e. warrior deities which protect and preside over the kingdom territories, to which the king gave honors, titles and grades.

But what are these deities in Koryŏ? The term *chenghuang* 城隍 originally refers to local deities associated with the city walls, divinization of important figures, attested since the seventh century. It was during Tang dynasty, after the An Lushan rebellion (755-763), that the *changhuang* were associated with the city protection from conflicts and illness and thus bestowed of official titles by the emperor. In

¹⁰⁹ Kim Gap-dong (2018), 38-45.

¹¹⁰ Suh Young Dae (1992), 244-6; McBride (2008), 236-8; Lee Seog-Ju (2010); Kim Gap-dong (2018). See Hong Ze et al. (2024) for the ancient Chinese beliefs behind this ritual.

Koryŏ the situation is comparable with the Tang case: we have seen how the *sŏnghwang* were given titles by the rulers and thus inscribed within a State-sponsored “heavenly bureaucracy”. In addition to this, the *sŏnghwang* were able to influence the outcome of a war, e.g. in 1236 against the Mongols (*KRS XXIII*, important clans 23: Kojong, year 23, month 9); they were also believed of being able of control the weather, as reported by Yi Kyubo in his two poetries: “Writing about the City God Prayed for Rain in Kyeyang Region” *Kyeyang-giu-sŏnghwang-mun* 桂陽祈雨城隍文 and “Another Writing about the City God Prayed for Rain” *U-giu-sŏnghwang-mun* 又祈雨城隍文; they were believed to be able to foretell the future, this is reported in the beforementioned Yi Kyubo poetries and in other cases as well; finally, it is reported at least one case of a *sŏnghwang* able to protect from illness (*T’aejong Sillok XXII*, T’aejong year 11, Kapsul 甲戌 year, month 7, day 15). Overall, this situation is not so different from that of the Tang dynasty. However, the *sŏnghwang* origins is more variegated:

- The first *sŏnghwang* category was that of divinized local clans’ ancestors, as extensively reported within the 1481-1530 *Sinjŭng Tonggukyŏjisŭngnam* 新增東國輿地勝覽. An example of this is the city god of the Sasu village 泗水縣 (*KRS XC*, biographies 3, clans 1: An Chongok).
- The second *sŏnghwang* category was that of non-human deities, like the Eight Bells god of Yŏnghae (Yŏnghae P’allyŏng-sin 寧海八鈴神). This god is reported by U T’ak 禹倬 (1262-1342) within his *Yŏnghae-sarok* 寧海司錄, and by the *Sinjŭng Tonggukyŏjisŭngnam* as well.
- The third *sŏnghwang* category are landscape gods, reported within the Ham Yuil biography (*KRS XCIX*, biographies 12: Ham Yuil 咸有一) as well by Kim Kŭkki 金克己 (fl. late twelfth-thirteenth century), who writes to have met the Heavenly God of Kyebyŏn, Ulsan (Ulsan-Kyebŏn-Ch’ŏnsin 蔚山戒邊天神) in human form on the mount Sindu 神頭山. This deity too is also mentioned within the *Sinjŭng Tonggukyŏjisŭngnam*.
- The fourth *sŏnghwang* category are pure shamanic deities. A particular case is that of the “Three Saints” Samsŏng-sin 三聖神 of the Kuwŏl mountain

九月山 shrine (*Sejong Sillok* CXXVII, Sejong year 32, Kich'uk 己丑 year, month 1, day 13), believed by the scholars to be the triplet Tan'gun-Hwan'in-Hwan'ung – though the agreement is not unanimous.

- The fifth *sŏnghwang* category are the “imported” deities. In the previous paragraphs we have seen how Mārīcī was prayed during war, the detail omitted before is that this deity was a city walls protection god. Likely, Mārīcī was not the only foreign *sŏnghwang*, we have in fact another possible case: Mazu 媽祖. Birth as the shaman Lin Mo 林默 during the Southern Song, Mazu is a sea travels' proctor goddess which gained her fame between the eleventh and the late thirteenth centuries. According to Suh Young Dae (2017) it is possible that some mention of the Samsŏng 三聖 / Samsŏng-Daewang 三城大王 deities may refer to Mazu, adopted in 1274, under king Ch'ung'yŏl 忠烈 (1274-1308) via his wife, the Yuan princess Jingguo 齊國大長公主, when commerce with Mongol China were important (*T'aejong Sillok* XXII, T'aejong year 11, Kapsul 甲戌 year, month 7, day 15). According to the scholar, Mazu was taken as a triplet alongside with other gods (maybe Xiaoxing 小星 and the Dragon King 龍王), thus the homonymy with other “Three Saints” deities. Other mentions of this goddess(es) are found in the fifteenth century *Siyong Hyang'ak-po* 時用鄉樂譜, the *Sinjŭng Tonggukyŏjisŭngnam* and the *Sejong sillok chiri chi*. However, since some these documents could as well refer to the other Samsŏng mentioned before, there is not a definitive consensus neither about the Mazu whereabouts in Koryŏ, nor about the nature(s) of Samsŏng.

We can see from above how the regionality had an important role, and, in the previous chapters, how local cults were Shamanism's prerogative. Coherently with this situation, we always see shamans managing the *sŏnghwang* temples (*sŏnghwangdang* 城隍堂). Thus, the *sŏnghwang* worship was an expression of local dynamics, and so the official recognition by the central authority was a compromise of sort. This recognition came with strings attached: Confucian officials were sent abroad to pair with shamans in their shrine. Sometimes this

created mutual problems (e.g. *KRS CVI*, biographies 19, officials: Sim Yang), but there is at least one case of clear political collaboration:

***Koryŏsa* 高麗史 C, biographies 列傳 30, officials 諸臣: Chŏng Ŏnjin 丁彦真**

丁彦真，神宗五年，爲大將軍。時慶州人謀反[……]彦真既至，因祈恩詣城隍祠，密以捕賊之謀授覲。一日，賊徒都領利備父子至祠潛禱，覲給曰，“都領舉兵，將復新羅，吾屬喜之久矣。今幸得見，請獻一盃。”邀至其家，飲之醉，遂執送彦真。	During the sixth year of Sinjong reign (1203), Chŏng Ŏnjin became Supreme General. At that time, the people of Kyŏngju were plotting a rebellion [...] Once arrived, Chŏng Ŏnjin visited the city god shrine to pray, and secretly instructed the shaman about his plan to capture the rebels. One day, the rebel leader Ribi and his son secretly went to the shrine to pray, and the shaman said to them, deceptively: “With your military uprising, chief, surely you will restore Silla, and we are very glad about this! It is a very lucky event for us to have met you today, so please let me offer you a cup!”. Invited [the rebels] to his house, [the shaman] let them drunk, then he captured and handed them to Chŏng Ŏnjin.
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This collaboration / forced cohabitation encompassed both the administrative and the ritual aspects of the cults. In fact, we have seen before how official titles were given to the *sŏnghwang* gods, following the Chinese custom. This had some implications: first, *sŏnghwang* had to be registered within official registries; second, the Confucian officials had the power to change the rites' conduction and even

suppress them. Under king Ch'ungsuk we have two exemplar case: first case is that of an official who, having become an ardent Buddhist, changed the *sŏnghwang* offerings from meat to vegetarian (*KRS XXXV*, Ch'ungsuk year 15, month 7, day 30); the second case is that of the king himself who, after the death of his horse and his falcon near the Töksu county *sŏnghwang* shrine, he made the place torched, following the Confucian praxis (*KRS XXXIV*, Ch'ungsuk year 6, month 8, day 30 = *KRSJ XXIV*, Ch'ungsuk, year 6, month 8). A third yet unique case is that of a Daoist ritual ("pure service for the scenery" *chŏngsasaek* 淨事色) made for the Kaesŏng city god (*KRS CXXXV*, important clans, biographies 48: king U, year 11, month 9 = *KRSJ XXII*, Sin U 3, king U, year 11, month 9). This last case should not surprise us: we have seen before that the term *sŏnghwang* included the landscape deities, and thus mountain gods too¹¹¹. This situation was not created at once: the integration of local cults inside the kingdom administration and, more importantly, its control took time. The first attempt to integrate the *sŏnghwang* under the Confucian banner was made under king Sŏngjong and his minister Ch'oe Sŭngno, who tried to reframe these cults within the mountain rites (*sanje* 山祭) "orthodoxy". However, this change was implemented only under King Munjong 文宗 (r. 1046-1083) by the creation of a delegation tasked with supervising the local rites' Confucian nature (*KRS VIII*: important clans 8: Munjong year 18, month 2, day 7 = *KRSJ V*, Munjong 2: Munjong, year 18, month 2). Both the *sŏnghwang* worship and the institutions are reported still in the twelfth century (*Xuanhe fengshi Gaoli tujing* XVII, temples) and after (*Songshi* 宋史 CDLXXXVII, biographies 246, neighbor kingdoms 3: Koryŏ) and were even maintained by the early Chosŏn dynasty (*Sejong Sillok* CXXVIII: Five Rites and Other Rituals 五禮辨祀)¹¹².

The progressive absorption of the *sŏnghwang* into the administrative Confucian schemes, at least on paper, signals a shift toward the Song dynasty practices. Despite there is no evidence of a specific *sŏnghwang* worship by the ruler as in

¹¹¹ Suh Young Dae (1992), 240-2, 245; McBride (2008), 236-8; Ahn Jee-Won (2011), 225-7; Suh Young Dae (2017); Suh Young Dae (2021), 174-9, 184-196.

¹¹² Ahn Jee-Won (2011), 225-7; Young Dae (2021), 184-196.0

Song China, the clear intent was to centralize the cult around the court following the Chinese model. During Song dynasty, in fact, there is a drive toward the centralization of the *chenghuang* cult: this was in part made within a Daoist frame, which reinterpreted the city deities as regional deities, subordinated to the Jade Emperor, i.e. the Heaven part of the imperial cult. At the same time, this worship was intended as a Daoist ancestral worship – this was the case under emperor Zhenzong 宋真宗 (r. 997-1022). Another drive was likely the Confucianism of the Southern Song, during which the *chenghuang* were included within the official ritual canon (*Zhenghe Wuli Xinyi* 政和五禮新儀). This may have some direct parallel with the court practice of *sōnghwang* offers during the P’algwanhoe: a way to reiterate the subordination of the city toward the sky deity Chesŏk – though this connection is not explicit within the *Koryŏsa*. Another similarity was that of the “divine generals” (*shenjiang* 神將) worship within the Southern Song’s Leifa rituals 雷法: in Southern Song, emerged a group of practitioners called “ritual masters” *fashi* 法師¹¹³, middlemen between folk and official religion who performed Leifa rituals and, some of which, also self-possession by these “divine generals”, as in the Marshall Wen 地祇上將溫力保傳 cult. It is also interesting how folk Daoism merged with the *chenghuang* worship during the Southern Song, as testified for example by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200)¹¹⁴. Again, this draw a direct parallel with Koryŏ, where shamans *sōnghwang* cult was mediated by the Confucian officials and absorbed by the official rituals. Even more, considering how Shamanism was partly influenced by Daoism, as we will see, to the point that modern “scripture-reading” shamans use for themselves the title *pŏpsa* 法師, the exact equivalent of the Daoist title of *fashi* (see §2.3).

5.4.2 Fortunes and Misfortunes

The reason behind rise of Shamanism at court during the middle Koryŏ period (eleventh-twelfth centuries c.a) is a source of debate. While the fortune among the

¹¹³ The title was likely adopted from Lingbao lineage, see §2.2.

¹¹⁴ Yamauchi (2000); Liu Jingyu (2011), 1-34; Young Dae (2021), 178-9.

commoners can be easily attributed to the Khitan-Liao wars, the Jurchen-Jin military pressures, and the subsequent political instability, the dynamics of Shamanism ascendent over the ruling clan is not clear. The scholar Lee Seog-ju (2010) argues that the Shamanism rise within the court was encouraged by Confucian official to contrast the Buddhist excesses, while Kim Gap-dong (2018) argues that the fortune was due to the Yi Chagyŏm rebellion first, and the military dictatorship then. The ruling house impotence in the matter is highlighted by both scholars, impotence either before the Confucian élite or before the military junta respectively.

The first reported case of shamans called at court for a rainmaking rite was during king Hyŏnjong 顯宗 (r. 1009-1031) (*KRS IV*, Hyŏnjong, year 12, month 5, day 6), however is likely that such rituals were performed even before. Under Sukchong 肅宗 (r. 1095–1105) the trend continues, integrated within other rites of Confucian and Buddhist origins – this is strikingly clear seeing the *Koryŏsa* entries about his sixth reign year. According to the *Chosŏn Musokko* 朝鮮巫俗考 (V: Koryŏ shamanic costumes 10), under Sukchong it was also created the position of “immortal official” *sŏn’gwan* 仙官: a shaman who performs during the P’algwanhoe, chosen from the daughters of noble families¹¹⁵. It is evident the similarities between these *sŏn’gwan* and their (possible) male counterpart, the *hwarang* 花郎 / *sŏllang* 仙郎, even more considering how modern-day male shamans can be called *hwaraeng’i* (see §§2.3 and 4).

In this period, influences from Buddhism and Daoism are clearer during the Military region and the Mongol rule. Though, its rise can be supposed that they started with king Yejong 睿宗 (r. 1105-1122), who favored Daoism – likely the Leifa rituals: see §5.2. During Yejong it is likely the use of talismans and Daoist scripts grew among the commoners, following the courtly fashion reported by the *Gaoli Tujing*¹¹⁶.

¹¹⁵ McBride (2008), 236-8; Lee Seog-Ju (2010), 272-282; Kim Gap-dong (2018), 35-45.

¹¹⁶ Koo Junghoe (2009), 47-62, 69-71 & 140-151; Kim Gap-dong (2018), 49-51

The apex of shamans-held rainmaking ritual was under king Injong 仁宗 (r. 1122-1146), with seven rites during his twenty-four reign years. Injong took the throne when he was only thirteen years-old, thus his favoritism toward Shamanism can be seen as a refuge against the power that Yi Chagyŏm tried to exert over him – we shall bear in mind that Yi Chagyŏm was tied with the Pöpsang *saŋgha* (cfr. the previous chapter). However, the fortune of shamans was maybe not determined only by the king liking, as it seems they already had some informal political power, and an informal organization as well, as demonstrated by an exemplar lobbying case:

***Koryŏsa* 高麗史 XVI, important clans 世家 16: Injong 仁宗, year 9, month 8, day 12**

丙子 日官奏，近來巫風大行淫祀，日盛請令有司遠黜群巫，詔可。諸巫患之，斂財物質銀瓶百餘賂權貴。權貴奏曰，鬼神無形其虛實恐不可知，一切禁之未便。王然之弛其禁

On the Bingzi / Pyŏngja day, the minister of divination presented a memorial: “Recently, the shamanic costumes are very strong, and [people] perform licentious sacrifices; we ask (your majesty) to give an order to the officials so they can go and expel those shamans”. The king approved the degree. However, the shamans, afraid of it, collected (their) belongings, bought over hundred jars of silver, and bribed a powerful noble. That noble presented another memorial, saying: “Gods and spirits did not possess a form, perhaps we can know nothing about their nature [lit.: truth and false]. Therefore, it is inconvenient to entirely

prohibit [their worship]”. The king agreed and retired the prohibition.

Being either due to their ascendance over the commoners or due to the king preferences, under Injong, shamans were also invited to the “Central Secretariat” Tosŏngch’ŏng 都省廳, officially to pray for rain (*KRS XVI*, important clans 16: Injong, year 11, month 5, day 12), a practice continued until the establishment of the military regime. Shamans continued to influence the court even after Yi Chagyŏm rebelled in 1126: When the king felt ill in 1246, he consulted a shaman. According to the shaman, the illness cause was the wrath of Yi Chagyŏm’s spirit, so the king exiled the rebel’s family to the Inju region (Inch’ŏn); for the same reasons, Injong posthumously rehabilitated the minister Ch’ŏk Ch’un’gyŏng 拓俊京 (d. 1144), who also had strong relationship with the rebel, but then was convinced to betray him (*KRS XVII*, important clans 17: Injong, year 24, month 1, days 17 & 21). This approach was not well seen among many Confucians, surely not by the minister Kim Pusik, who fought against Yi Chagyŏm. In fact, writing about the Inju Yi clan rising from Sukchong until Injong, the minister admits that the violence of that period may have caused the illness, but he implies that the illness vanished because the ghost were placated with proper rituals (“with the killing spread among the humans and the other world in disorder, there was resentment among the buried spirits, but [their] hatred against [us] was put to rest” *churyu inmul, yodong yumyŏng, pon’gi ur-in, wŏndae p’yŏmjip* 誅流人物。擾動幽明。憤氣鬱陸。冤對封執), not by the shamans (“yet [the shamanic rituals] were of little effect” *sang mi-hyohŏm* 尙微效驗). As *ultima ratio*, Kim Pusik conceded, one should rely on Buddhism to placate the most wrathful spirits (“not to get the Pengsheng’s mortal illness, to surely overcome the Baiyou’s plague, to avoid their path, we should take refuge in the True Vehicle” *pu-jak P’aengsaeng-ji-yo, chang so Paeg’yu-ji-ra, p’yŏn mu t’a-do, sut’ak chinsŭng* 不作彭生之夭。長消伯有之癘。更無他道。須托真乘) and thus bring the peace again to the land (*Tongmunŏn* 110, memorials: “Memorial for the Karma Divination Ceremony at

the Songni Temple” *Songni-sa-chŏmch’arhoe-so* 俗離寺占察會疏). It is interesting that here the shamans and the Confucian minister started from the common belief, according to the wrath of those who died of violent death causes illness and other disgraces, and they both agree that the spirits must be placated. The main difference is that Kim Pusik, despite accepting the common reasoning, prefers to placate the spirits not by resorting to the shamans, but by relying on Confucian practices and Buddhism. In this sense, both Confucianism and Shamanism here show the same “etiology”, and in fact dead spirits’ appeasement in Confucian terms is well attested during the Chosŏn period¹¹⁷.

Immediately after Injong, the shamans’ fortune had both ups and down. As we have seen in the chapter “Koryŏ Confucianism and Chesŏk”, under king Ŭijong 毅宗 (r. 1146-70) and his minister Ham Yuil 咸有一 (1106-1185) there was a persecution of “unorthodox” shamanic rite. As we have said his persecution is easier to reframe as an attempt of “rectification” of shamanic costumes rather than as a hostility tout-court, if only because the same Ham Yuil met the non-cooperation of his local colleagues (*KRS* XCIX, biographies 12: Ham Yuil 咸有一). It is also interesting that king Ŭijong, whose reign saw many epidemics, resorted to figures in between Daoism and Esoteric Buddhism, and thus akin to the eclectic shamans we will encounter later. For example, in 1157, Ŭijong privileged the Ch’ongji temple 攄持寺 abbot, the esoteric Buddhist master Hoejŏng 懷正, for his knowledge on exorcisms (*chugŭm* 呪噤) against the advice of his ministers (*KRS* XVIII, important clans: Ŭijong, year 11, month 8, day 22 = *KRSJ* XI, The Emperor Ŭijong Changhyo 毅宗莊孝大王: Ŭijong, year 11, month 8). Similarly, during an epidemic in 1162, Ŭijong attended several lectures on Daoist magic and Esoteric Buddhist practices (“discourse about the Yin-yang and the *dhāranī*” *ŭm’yang-pichu-ji-sŏl* 陰陽秘祝之說), he also bestowed rich gifts to “special Daoist temples” *pyŏl-kung* 別宮, where dozens of Daoist and Buddhist monks were invited from abroad to officiate a ceremony called “special tribute” *pyŏl-kong* 別貢. All of this, again against

¹¹⁷ Walraven (1991), 26-35; Suh young Dae (1992), 243; Lee Seog-ju (2010), 272-82; Kim Gap-dong (2018), 35-45

the advice of his ministers (*KRS XVIII*, important clans: Ŭijong, year 16, month 3, day 30 = *KRSJ XI*, The Emperor Ŭijong Changhyo 毅宗莊孝大王: Ŭijong, year 16, month 3)¹¹⁸.

With the Military Regime, shamans were openly backed by the generals, as most of them were of commoner origins. For example, during the eighth year of Myōngjong 明宗 (r. 1170-1197) it was established the “Commission for the separated prayers” *Pyōllye-kiūn-dogam* 別例祈恩都監 following the advice of the Esoteric Buddhist monk Ch’isun 致純. The aim of the commission was to avoid the calamities (“In this way, disasters and rebellions could end” *chūk chae-ran ka-mi* 則灾亂可弭) and it was financed with individual donations by high-ranking officials (*KRS LXXVII*, annals 31: government officials 2 = *KRSJ XII*, The Emperor Myōngjong Kwanghyo 明宗光孝大王 1: Myōngjong, year 8, month 8). Similarly, in his seventeenth reign year (1187), Myōngjong organized a ceremony for the “Daoist talismanic gods” *tobu-sin* 道符神 to exorcise an epidemic outbreak in Seoul (*KRS LV*, annals 9: Five Provinces). These two cases could surely be ascribed to Buddhism and Daoism respectively; however, the events that followed them make it implausible that they were *exclusively* Buddhist and Daoist. In fact, during the first year of Sinjong 神宗 (r. 1197-1204), Ch’oe Ch’unghōn 崔忠獻 (1149-1219) and his faction reunited many shamans and established the “Commission for the Mountains and Rivers Support” *Sanch’ōn-pibo-dogam* 山川裨補都監, to worship the landscape gods and thus defend the kingdom (*KRS XXXI*, annals 31: government officials 2 = *KRSJ XIV*, The Emperor Sinjong Chōnghyo 神宗靖孝大王: Sinjong, first year, month 1) – we must bear in mind that landscape deities were framed within the *sōnghwang* worship, a shamans’ prerogative. The fact that all these three institutions were designed to prevent calamities and were organized under the Military Regime banner make it likely that there was a constant shamans’ participation, despite this was explicit only for the *Sanch’ōn-pibo-dogam* case.

¹¹⁸ Koo Junghoe (2009), 71-2; Kim Gap-dong (2018), 45

This policy made it possible for the shamans to frequent the élites mansions, causing scandals: this was the case of the official Hyŏn Töksu 玄德秀 (d. 1215), who captured a male shaman disguised as a woman to encounter a noble wife in his house (*KRS* CIX, biographies 12, officials: Hyŏn Töksu; *Sinjŭng Tonggukyŏjisŭngnam* LIV, P'yŏngan region: Yŏngbyŏn county administration, important figures) This situation was among the reasons why Yi Kyubo wrote a poetry against shamans (*Tongguk-isangguk-chip* II, Old-style Lüshi, “Lay of the Old Shaman” *Nomu P'yŏn*). The shamans did not get the favor of all Buddhists either: within the Hyesim (1178-1234) epitaph, it is said that, before his full ordination, the Sŏn patriarch “enjoyed to scold the unorthodox shamans and destroying their bizarre temples” *hŭi hwe-ch'ŏk mu-yosa* 喜毀斥淫巫祆祠 (*Tongguk-isangguk-chip* XXXV, epigraphs: “Inscription for the State preceptor Chin'gak, who guided the Sŏn Cultivation Society, second, posthumous abbot of the Tansok temple on mt. Chogyŏ” *Chogyesan che'i-go Tansoksa-chuji Susŏnsa-ju-chŭngsi* Chin'gak-kuksa pimyŏng 曹溪山二世故斷俗寺住持修禪社主贈諡眞覺國師碑銘). If this hostility was widespread from the beginning, is also possible that the Military Regime was initially unfavorable to the shamans but then changed its mind. This reading is also possible by the ambiguity the biographic parts within the Yi Kyubo's “Lay of the Old Shaman” *Nomu P'yŏn*¹¹⁹.

Under Kojong 高宗 (r. 1213-1259), with the continuation of the Khitan wars and the rise of Mongol polity, the situation changed again. Under Kojong, rainmaking ritual are still practiced in 1250 (thirty-seventh reign year), and so the exorcisms against the epidemics, with the rise of the *generalissimo* Ch'oe Hang 崔沆 (1209-1257) in 1249, there were a new attempt to ban and expel the shamans from the capitals, likely a way to appease that part of commoners and élite scandalized from the previous shamans' excesses (*KRS* CXXIX, biographies 42, rebellions: Ch'oe Hang = *KRSJ* XVII, Kojong 4: Kojong, year 38, month 2). During the interregnum between the death of Choe Ŭi 崔瑄 (1233-1258 c.a) and the rise of Kim Injung 金

¹¹⁹ Koo Junghoe (2009), 69-80, Lee Seog-Ju (2010), 272-82; 149; Kim Gap-dong (2018), 45-52

仁俊 (a.k.a. Kim Chun 金俊, d. 1268) there were two interesting events: first is the return of two Koryŏ generals from Yuan China with “golden talismans” *kŭmbu* 金府 / 金符 (*KRS* XXV, important clans 25: Wŏnjong ascension year, month 8 = *KRSJ* XVII, Kojong 5: Kojong, year 46, month 8); the second event is the first mention of “blind monks” *maengsŭng* 盲僧 (*KRS* CXXX biographies 43, rebellions: Kim Chun = *KRSJ* XVII, Kojong 5: Kojong, year 45, month 6; *KRS* XCI, biographies 4, royal clan 2: Prince Wŏnjong, Duke Sunan). These two events may be related: the “blind monks” are believed by the scholars to be shamans of sort, maybe the precursors of the modern-day “scriptures reading shamans” (see §2.3), a kind of shamans with strong connection with Buddhism and (proper) Daoism practices, thus very likely influenced by the courtly Daoist practices¹²⁰.

During the Mongol interference, Shamans regained a new importance: this is evident from the number of rainmaking rituals performed after the king return to Kaesŏng in 1270. Because Yuan emperors had a high esteem of the category, Korean Shamans and Shaman’s relatives were often sent to the Mongol court (e.g.: *KRS* XXX, important clans 30: Ch’ungnyŏl, year 18, month 8, day 19; *KRS* CXXII, biographies 35, officials: Yi Suk = *KRSJ* XX, king Ch’ungnyŏl 4, year 30, month 11). This reflected on the Koryŏ court, for example king Kongmin 恭愍 (r. 1351-1374) changed the location for an ancestral temple after a shaman predicted him that it was inauspicious (*KRS* LIV, annals 8: Five Provinces 2 [1373, month 4]). Another example is that of a high minister who donated part of his salary to a shamanic temple (*KRS* CV, biographies 18, officials: Minister Chŏngga = *KRSJ* XIX, Ch’ungnyŏl, year 3, month 5). On the other hand, shamans were often mentioned within palace intrigue chronicles involving Mongol princesses. It is interesting that within these cases the terms “shaman” and “blind monks” are used, without specifying if they were intended as synonyms. Moreover, in some of these cases we have a brief description of these rituals: for example, one consisted in building a wooden puppet, piercing it with nails and discarding all in a well (*KRS* CXXX, biographies 43, Rebellions: Hong Pog’wŏn); while another rite was called

¹²⁰ Suh young Dae (1992), 242-3, 253; Koo Junghoe (2009), 40-71 & 149; Kim Gap-dong (2018), 51-2

“praying fast with buried offerings” *ch’o-i-do*, *mae-chŏnch’an* 醢以禱, 埋奠饌 and it was allegedly used either to expel the king’s bad luck or to curse him (*KRS* XXVIII, important clans 28: Ch’ungnyŏl, year 3, month 7, day 29 = *KRSJ* XIX, King Ch’ungnyŏl 1: Ch’ungnyŏl, year 3, month 7; *KRS* XCI, biographies 4: imperial clan 2). The new atmosphere within the court made possible for shamans’ relatives to become officials, or even high officials. We can name a few:

The first one is Yi Suk 李淑 (1373-1406), born from a shaman of the P’yŏngch’ang region, near the T’aebaek mountain. Yi Suk obtained important titles and so was sent to the Yuan court, where he became an imperial eunuch (*KRS* CXXII, biographies 35, officials: Yi Suk = *KRSJ* XX, king Ch’ungnyŏl 4, year 30, month 11).

The second case is Chi Yun 池淵 (d. 1377), son of a shaman from Ch’ongju. Chi Yun rapidly climbed the military *cursus honorum*, obtaining the ranks of “tributes bookkeeper” *p’ansung-gyŏngbu-sa* 判崇敬府事 and “high cartographer” *p’anp’ando-sasa* 判版圖司事. After the execution of Sin Ton in 1371, he was accused of accumulating power and wealth, creating a monopolistic clique alongside two other officials (*KRS* CXXV, biographies 38, evil officials: Chi Yun).

The last case is Kang Yung 姜融 (d. 1349): grandson of a slave, he became a palace officer (*naebu-ryŏng* 內府令), while his sister became a shaman at the Song’ak mt. temple. At some point, a general autonomously decided to substitute Kang Yung’s sister in her role with another shaman of his acquaintance, and when Kang Yung tried to oppose the change, he was rebuked and insulted. We do not know how the incident ended: it is probable that it caused a scandal within the court. However, we do know that the king promoted Kang Yung to the position of “accomplished official” *ch’angsŏng-sa* 贊成事, gave him the honorary title of “outstanding minister” *kongsin* 功臣 and bestowed him of the nobiliary title of “Prince of Chinnyŏng” *Chinnyŏng-puwŏn’gun* 晉寧府院君 (*KRS* CXXIV, biographies 37, favored people: Kang Yung).

This situation caused discontent within the Confucian élite, now progressively influenced by Neoconfucianism. As result, under king Kong'yang 恭讓 (r. 1389-1393) a law was promulgated, prohibiting “diviners, blind fortunetellers, shamans” and other low status people from legally obtaining a land (*KRS* LXXVIII, memorials 32: Treatise on Food and Money 1 [1391, month 5]). However, there was clearly some negligence in applying these laws, as in the following year the king received yet another memorial against Buddhism and Shamanism (*KRS* XXXV, King Kong'yang 2: Kon'yang, year 3, month 5). Memorials, petitions and treaties against both Shamanism, Buddhism and Daoism started to be penned. The most outspoken anti-Shamanism Confucian scholars in this period were Sambong Chŏng Tojŏn 三峰鄭道傳 (1342-1398) (*KRS* CXIX, biographies 32, government officials: Chŏng Tojŏn) and Sangch'on Kim Chasu 桑村金子粹 (1351-1413) (*KRS* CXX, biographies 33, government officials: Kim Chasu). It is interesting that, in the last Mongol interference period, the term “blind monk” started to be substituted with “blind fortuneteller”, *maeng'in* 盲人, a term that will be most widely used during Chosŏn period to indicate the “scripture reading Shamans”, as differentiate from regular shamans and non-Shaman fortunetellers (e.g.: the before mentioned 1391 law)¹²¹.

Lee Seog-ju (2010) argues that, during the last part of the dynasty, shamanic rites spread from the palace to the city centers and finally into other regions, due to the repression pressures. We however have seen with Kim Gap-dong (2018) that the situation was more intricate: shamanic rites sponsored by the central authority date back at least to the Military Regime period. On the other hand, during the Mongol interference anti-shamanic officials were surely more vocal, but at the practical level the persecution was relegated to the individual initiatives (e.g.: *KRS* CXXIV, biographies 37, favored people: Min Hwan 閔渙).

It is undoubtedly true that some courtly rituals were gradually popularized, and the Mongol interference period is no exception. We can see this trend in two *Koryŏsa* entries, dated on 1390 and 1391 respectively:

¹²¹Suh young Dae (1992), 239-249; Lee Seog-ju (2010), 272-82; Kim Gap-dong (2018), 52-66

Koryŏsa 高麗史 XLVI, important clans 世家 46: King Kong'yang 恭讓王,
year 2, month 9, day 4

遣內侍于演福·洛山·王輪等寺，設
齋祈福。王自卽位以來，每月朔望，
必於宮中，招僧講經。每四時，必
於十三所祈恩，曰道場，曰法席，
曰別祈恩，諂事神佛，大臣·臺諫每
論，不聽。

[The king] invited the eunuchs (or
“palace attendants”) to the Yŏnbok,
Naksan and Wangnyun temples,
arranging rites to pray for good luck.
From his accession to the throne, every
new and full moon [i.e. first and 15th
month day c.a.] he invited monks for
sutra recitations. Every season, he went
to thirteen praying places, called “seat
of enlightenment” ([*bodhimaṇḍa*]
toryang), “[place of] sermons” (*pŏpsŏk*)
and “[halls of] special prayers” (*pyŏl-
kiŭn*), where he obsequiously worships
the gods and the buddhas. Great
ministers and censors try every time to
discuss that, be [the king] does not
listen.

**Koryŏsa 高麗史 CXX, biographies 33, government officials 諸臣: Kim Chasu
金子粹;**

Koryŏsa Chŏr'yo 高麗史節要 XXXV, King Kong'yang 恭讓王 2: Kong'yang,
year 3, month 5

As for the Buddhist doctrines, if they
are not credible, even less are those of
the shamans: weird, absurd and puerile!
The building of shamanic temples [lit.

Koryŏsa 高麗史 XLVI, important clans 世家 46: King Kong'yang 恭讓王,
year 2, month 9, day 4

浮屠之說，猶不可信，況怪誕荒幼之巫覡乎。國中設立巫堂，既爲不經，所謂別祈恩之處，又不下十餘所。四時之祭，以至無時別祭，一年靡費，不可殫記。當祭之時，雖禁酒之令方嚴，諸巫作隊，托稱國行，有司莫敢詰焉。故崇飲自若，九街之上，鼓吹歌舞，靡所不爲。風俗不美，斯爲甚矣。乞明勅有司，除祀典所載外，一禁淫祀，痛斷諸巫出入宮掖，以絕妖妄，以正風俗

“shamanic halls”] within the capital is already inappropriate [lit. “not in the classics”], (moreover, there are) places are called “[hall of] special prayers” (*pyŏl-kiŭn*): there are ten or more of these. They perform rites every season, but adding the special, non-seasonal rites, every year they waste a fortune, and we cannot even entirely register [their costs]! When they perform such rites, despite the alcohol prohibition laws being very severe, all the shamans gather in groups, stating they are doing State’s rituals, and therefore the officials do not dare to question them. As a result, they drink plenty as they please. They play drums, dance and sing in every street, without consequences. The costumes are compromised, how could they not? I ask that a clear order be sent to the officials, so they get rid of all the uncanonical rites. Thus, to ban the illicit rites first and then to prohibit the shamans from entering in the palace, so to end this absurdity and rectify the costumes.

Here, we can see that there was a spread of the “halls of special prayers” and related practices. Formally, the original courtly ritual is nothing new: an earlier rites divided in three parts was that of 1152, the Buddho-Daoist “ceremony of abstinence for the Three Worlds (*trailoka*)” *ch’osamgye* 醮三界 (*KRS*, XCIX, important clans 17: Ŭijong, year 6, month 4, day 15; *KRS* XIX, important clans 19: Ŭijong, year 23, month 2, day 28), while a later one was performed under king Kongmin (year 2):

***Koryŏsa* 高麗史 XCIX, annals 志 15: rites 禮 3 (1372, month 1, day 7)**

王幸仁熙殿，奏樂行祭。命大臣祭正陵用樂。仁熙殿正陵。每祭 皆三行，
內行國行都評議司行也

The king personally visited the Inhŭi palace, [there] music was played and rites performed. He instructed the great ministers to make offerings to the queen [Indŏk] tomb with music. Every [time] there were rites at the Inhŭi palace and queen tomb, there were three [kind] or rites: rites in the inner [palace], State rites and the rites [performed] by the central government administration (Top’yŏng-ŭisa).

What changed from Ŭijong times is clearly the importance of shamans. It is not clear if there was a shamanic presence within the “ceremony of abstinence for the Three Worlds (*trailoka*)” already. On the other hand, is clear that the beforementioned rites performed under Kong’yang had enough shamanic presence to popularize them among the commoners. We also have some precedents on the commoners’ side that likely paved the path to this situation: the assemblies of the “Thousands of Buddha’s’ Fragrant Followers” *Manbul-hyangdo* 萬佛香徒 of 1131 (*KRS* LXXXV, annals 39, Penal laws 2: bans) and the “special Daoist temples” *pyŏl-kung* 別宮 of 1162 (*KRS* XVIII, important clans: Ŭijong, year 16, month 3, day 30 = *KRSJ* XI, The Emperor Ŭijong Changhyo 毅宗莊孝大王: Ŭijong, year

16, month 3). It is in fact very likely that both rites likely influenced Daoist and Buddhist-leaning shamans¹²².

In the last period of the Mongol interference and later during the interregnum between Koryŏ and Chosŏn, Shamans' status became again ambiguous but did not disappear all at once. Yi Saek 李穡 (1328-1396) and his disciple Kwŏn Kŭn 權近 (1352-1409) wrote against shamanism, signaling the new trend among the upper élites, but at the same time their writings describe Shamanism as still very popular (e.g.: *Tongmunsŏn* 101, biographies: *Yangch'ŏn-sŏnsaeng Munjip* 陽村先生文集, "Thousand Stories about Performers, Filial Sons and Nobles of the Previous Dynasty" *Uin-hyoja-gun-manjŏn* 優人孝子君萬傳). It is interesting that not even the early Chosŏn kings were interested in totally suppressing Shamanism, adopting a more pragmatic way: Shamanic-like plays were financed by the kingdom as a propaganda tool, while the first *sŏnghwang* rites did not exclude the shamans (*T'aejong Sillok* XXI, T'aejong, year 11, *Kapsul* 甲戌 year, month 7, day 11). Some shamanic rites were even maintained for a long time: the "special prayers" (*pyŏl-kiŭn*) survived up to the sixteenth century due to its supposed antiquity. It is noteworthy that, from these early Chosŏn documents, we can deduce that Koryŏ-period "special prayers" rites were seasonal, involved an active shaman presence and were dedicated to the landscape gods (*T'aejong Sillok* XXII, T'aejong, year 11, *Kapsul* 甲戌 year, month 7, day 15; *Sejong Sillok* XXIX, Sejong, year 7, *Kisa* 己巳 year, month 7, day 2)¹²³.

5.4.3 Rites and Gods

So far, we have seen the positions of Shamanism within Koryŏ society, but what were their practices and what were their beliefs? The sources are again scattered.

An interesting feature of Koryŏ shamanism seems to be the possibility of non-shamans to encounter shamanic gods. These encounters sometimes are reported as

¹²² Koo Junghoe (2009), 40-91; Lee Seog-ju (2010), 265-282; Kim Gap-dong (2018), 52-66; Kim Youn-gyeong (2020), 20-3

¹²³ Suh young Dae (1992), 244-5; Saeji (2012), 149-161; Kim Staci (2022), 140-2.

folktales, this is the case of Yi Ŭimin 李義旼 (d. 1196) and the forest *tokkaebi* Todoŭl 豆豆乙 / Todorī 豆豆里 (*KRS* CXXVIII, Biographies 41, Rebellions: Yi Ŭimin; *Sinjŭng Tonggukyŏjisŭngnam* XXI, Kyŏngsang region: Kyŏngju county administration, historical heritage, the spirits' bridge), or that of king Kojong and "Sir Tree" Mok-ryang 木郎, another trees' goblin (*mongmae* 木魅) (*KRS* LIV, annals 8: Five Provinces 2 [1231, month 10, day 13]); sometimes, these stories as reported as exceptional yet credible events, like in the case of the minister Ch'oe Kiu 崔奇遇 (fl. twelfth century), saved from a tiger by a mountain spirit (*KRS* XCVIII, biographies, government officials: Ch'oe Kiu). This interaction eventually became a *topos* during Chosŏn, as reported in the *Chŏngjong Sillok*. According to this document, even Confucian officials could make gods descent on people by ritual means, as demonstrated by a case of an unnominated minister during the late fourteenth century (*Chŏngjong Sillok* III, Chŏngjon year 2, Ŭrhae 乙亥 year, month 1, day 10). Confucian gods and rituals were still regarded as effective as those of shamans in the early Chosŏn, as demonstrated comparing two similar cases: one about the Koryŏ king Ch'ungsuk, who made the Tŏksu city god shrine torched after the death of his horse (*KRS* XXXIV, Ch'ungsuk year 6, month 8, day 30 = *KRSJ* XXIV, Ch'ungsuk, year 6, month 8); the other case is that of the minister Hong Yunsŏng 洪允成 (1425-1475): the minister knew that was forbidden to pass by the shrine on horseback, but he refuse to dismount and so he was unhorsed. Out of spite, Hong Yunsŏng offered wine and his horse to the deity but, when the meat was refused, he torched the shrine. Later, the god make the minister magically drunk anytime its followers offered alcohol to the shrine (e.g.: *Tongsaryak* 東史約 XII 1: 0517,1-2). Of these two incidents, it is interesting that only Hong Yunsŏng actions were "punished"¹²⁴.

From these accounts and those of the previous paragraphs, we can briefly summarize the intersecting beliefs of Shamanism and Confucianism during Koryŏ:

¹²⁴ Walraven (1991); Suh young Dae (1992), 240-250.

- There was a shared belief in the gods, spirits, ghosts, goblins (*tokkaebi*) etc. Supernatural entities can interact with the human world, bringing either blessing or misfortune, and can be controlled by rites.
 - The landscape gods (*sŏnghwang*) worship and rainmaking rituals were usually a shamans' prerogative.
- Shamanic, Buddhist, Daoist and Confucian rites were equally effective in dealing with gods, divination, magical protection etc. Local Confucian and Shamanic rites were usually conducted together.
 - There clearly was a gap between high-cadre officials and local officials: the firsts were generally less accommodating to shamanic and folk religion than the seconds.
- There was a widespread practical eclecticism / syncretism: out of standardized rituals, Daoist and Buddhist talismans, sacred text recitations etc. were accepted as valid magical means. This became more evident between the Military Rule and the Mongol Interference period.

We have seen before and that interaction with Buddhist rituals was likely the norm for Koryŏ shamans since the establishment of the dynasty. For the reasons we have exposed before, it is however during the Military Regime and the Mongol Rule that we have more data regarding shamans, and thus about the interactions between Shamanism and Buddhism too. In this period, Esoteric Buddhism became more popular (see §5.3) and thus what the *Koryŏsa* authors implicitly highlighted was the similarities between the two religions – for the Neoconfucians this was also a way to attack both types of “unorthodox, obscene sacrifices”.

Buddhist-leaning shamans known as “blind monks” were already known since the time of Kojong, and as have we have seen they were expert ritualist and fortuneteller. Unfortunately, we have few information regarding their beliefs. Maybe the closest description within the *Koryŏsa* is that of the Igŭm (or Yi Kŭm) case, under king U 禡 (r. 1374-1388):

有固城妖民伊金，自稱彌勒佛惑衆云，“我能致釋迦佛。凡禱祀神祇者，食馬牛肉者，不以貨財分人者，皆死。若不信吾言，至三月，日月皆無光矣。”又云，“吾作用，則草發青花，木結穀實，或一種再穫。”愚民信之，施米帛。金銀恐後，馬牛死，則棄之不食。有貨財者，悉以與人。又云，“吾勅遣山川神，倭賊可擒也。”巫覡尤加敬信，撤城隍祠廟，事伊金如佛，祈福利。無賴輩從而和之，自稱弟子相誣誑，所至守令或出迎館之。

In the city of Kosŏng, there was an evil / fraudulent commoner (named) Igŭm, proclaiming to be the buddha Maitreya he deceived the people saying: “I can summon¹²⁵ Śākyamuni buddha! All of those who worship the gods and the land spirits, eat horse or cow meat, or do not share their wealth, all of those will die! If you do not trust my words, in three month the Sun and the Moon will lose their light!” He also said: “When I act [scil.: using my powers], blue flowers will blossom in the grass, trees will bear grain fruits, or in one sowing there will be more harvests”. Ignorant people trusted him and offered him rice, silk, gold and silver, fearing being left behind; when horses of cows died, they discarded (the corpses) without eating them; those who had wealth, gave it entirely to him. (Igŭm) also said: “I dispatch mountains and rivers gods at my command, and [so] I can capture the Japanese pirates”. Shaman found him outstanding and worshipped him, believing (his words), so they removed the city god

¹²⁵ Or “reach”.

Koryŏsa 高麗史 CVII, biographies 列傳 20, government officials 諸臣: Kwŏn Hwa 權和

(*sŏnghwang*) temple and the ancestral shrine (*samyo*), serving Igŭm like a buddha, praying for wellbeing. Ruthless people became his followers, agreeing with him; proclaiming to be his disciples, they deceived each other. Local magistrates (*suryŏng*) sometimes came out to welcome them within the government mansions.

Apparently, there was little or no distinction between those figures and low-status monks¹²⁶, this is exemplified by two incidents occurred between the reigns of Ch'ungnyŏl 忠烈 (1274-1298) and Ch'ungsŏn 忠宣 (r. 1298):

The first case is that of the curse against the Princess Supreme Kyeguk 薊國大長公主 / Budaširi [Buddhaśrī] 寶塔實憐 (1285-1316) by the royal consort Cho 趙妃 : the Princess Supreme was envious of the royal consort and wrote a letter to the Empress Dowager, accusing the consort of having bewitched her. The king investigated, but nonetheless Kyeguk put pressure on the Empress Dowager. After a while, an anonymous letter appeared on the palace doors, accusing the consort of “using the gods [powers by] the curse of a shaman” *sa sin mu-jujŏ* 事神巫呪詛 so that the king favors the consort daughter instead of the Princess Supreme. The consort and her family were arrested. After a diplomatic effort by the king, finally there was a process of reconciliation with the Mongol princess. What interest here is not that there was no cursing out of the illations, but that the Yuan court sent “five Tibetan monks and two Daoist masters” *Pŏn sŭng o-in tosa i-in* 蕃僧五人·道士二

¹²⁶ Or even “monk disciple”?

人 to reassure the consort: an indication that Korean Shamanic practices were seen as equivalent of those of Buddhism and Daoism (*KRS* CXXII, biographies 35, officials: Ch'oe Seyŏn 崔世延 = *KRSJ* XXI, Ch'ungnyŏl 3: Ch'ungnyŏl, year 23, month 7).

The second case is that of the curse against the Princess Supreme Cheguk 齊國大長公主 / Borjigin Qutluy Kelmyš 孛兒只斤 忽都魯 揭里迷失 (1259-1297) by the palace attendant Mubi 無比: when the Princess Supreme felt ill and died, the cause was attributed to the envy of the other consorts, and the crown prince made Mubi arrested. When interrogated, the consort and her faction confessed that they used the “arts of a shaman and a monk-magician” *munyŏ sul-sŭng* 巫女術僧 (*KRS* LXXXIX, biographies 2: Empresses and Consorts = XXII, Ch'ungnyŏl 4: Ch'ungnyŏl, year 24, month 6). It is interesting here that the term “monk-magician” *sul-sŭng* 術僧 is described in another article as a person who “predict good and bad luck” *pok kirhyung* 卜吉凶 (*KRS* CVI, biographies 19, officials: Kim Hwŏn 金暉), and thus this term was either a synonym of “blind monk” or indicated a generic Buddho-Daoist ritualist.

We have seen in the previous paragraphs (§§5.2-5.3) that there was little to no distinction between Esoteric Buddhism, Daoism and Shamanism at the popular level, especially around the thirteenth century, during the Mongol Rule.

Koo Junghoe (2009), in his studies about the “scripture reading shamans”, traces back to this period three shamanic practices: the use of talismans, either Daoist (*tobu* 道符) or Buddhist (*pulpu* 佛符 / *puin* 符印); the worship of the “lunar node” Rāhu; and the chanting of mantras and *dhāraṇīs*. As we have seen, among the commoners, mantras and *dhāraṇīs* were used prevent disasters, gain a good rebirth and avoid a bad one, exorcise spirits, ensure a safe childbirth and so on. A similar aim was given to the “lunar node” Rāhu cult, from which derives an exorcistic rite involving a puppet doll. The use of talisman is well attested in modern times, while during Koryŏ its popularity is well attested both by the frequency of talismanic text within the various Tripitaka editions and by the discoveries within the Buddhist statues. The use of text chanting as magic predates Koryŏ (e.g.: *SKY* V, incantations

6: Milbon bounds the wicked spirits 密本摧邪) and continued during this period, as reported by the *Gaoli Tujing* (“According to the ancient costumes of Koryŏ, people do not take medicine when fall ill. Since they knew how to serve the spirits, they could only recite incantations” *Gaoli jiusu, min bing bu fuyao, wei zhi shi guishen, zhouzu yansheng weishi* 高麗舊俗，民病不服藥。唯知事鬼神，呪咀厭勝爲事: *Xuanhe fengshi Gaoli tujing* XVI, Offices: Office of Medicine). Some ritual chants performed during the *sŏnghwang* rites are preserved within the *Siyong Hyang’ak-po* and there is clearly some overlapping between some “scripture reading shamans”’ gods and the *Siyong Hyang’ak-po* ones. Out of the those, the importance of Buddhist texts can be found among the Chŏlla “hereditary shamans”, like the writing of bodhisattvas’ names and the use of the *Anityatā Sūtra* within their ritual settings¹²⁷.

Buddhism and Daoism were not so distinguished within the popular religion, and so Koryŏ Shamanism interacted with Daoism as frequently as with Buddhism. The relationship was more ancient than Koryŏ, but it is during the Koryŏ period that we can trace back deities, doctrines and practices to specific Chinese lineages.

It is likely that, for many Confucian scholars, the native shamans appeared as corrupted Daoist ritualists. This can be exemplified by the Yi Kyubo’s poetry against shaman which here we have mentioned many times:

¹²⁷ Suh young Dae (1992), 246-9; Koo Junghoe (2009), 70-84, 140-171 & 207-210; Kim Gap-dong (2018), 52-66; Lee Young-Geum (2022), 191-215.

Tongguk-isangguk-chip 東國李相國集 II, Old-style Lüshi 古律詩, “Lay of the Old Shaman” *Nomu P’yŏn* 老巫篇

昔者巫咸神且奇。競懷椒糈相決疑。
自從上天繼者誰。距今漠漠千百朞。
盼彭真禮抵謝羅。靈山路復又難追。
山海經云。天門。日月所入。有靈山。
巫盼，巫彭，巫真，巫禮，巫抵，巫
謝，巫羅七巫居之。沅湘之間亦信鬼。
荒淫譎詭尤可嗤

In ancient times, the shaman (*wu*)
Xian was divine and marvelous / she
strove to dwell on pepper and
sacrificial rice¹²⁸ to examine [the
forms] and solve the doubts. / Ever
since he ascended to Heaven, who
was her successor? /

/ From the distant past to the present
– misty and foggy – / hundreds of
thousands of years have passed. / [As
for the] shamans Fen, Peng, Zhen,
Li, Di, Xi e Luo, / the road for the
Spirit Mountain (Lingshan) is long
and difficult to pursue.

[the *Shanhaijing* says: “the Heavenly
Door (Tianmen), where the Sun and
the Moon enter, is the Spirit
Mountain. There dwell the Seven
Shamans: Xi, Peng, Zhen, Li, Di, Xie
and Luo”]

/ Between the Yuan and Xiang rivers,
they still believe in the spirits; / wild

¹²⁸ Or: “there was competition to offer her pepper and sacrificial rice”. The subject is not specified.

Tongguk-isangguk-chip 東國李相國集 II, Old-style Lüshi 古律詩, “Lay of the Old Shaman” *Nomu P’yŏn* 老巫篇

and licentious hypocrisy and
sophistry

– their faults are contemptible.

Here, Yi Kyubo mentions the *Shanhaijing* and the *Chuci* anthology, both important documents describing the ancient Chinese notion of “shaman” *wu* 巫 (see §2.2). The scholar in fact makes a parallel between the “real” shaman Xian and the “false” shamans of his time. The redactional note explains who Wu Xian was according to the *Shanhaijing*: a woman part of a powerful group of seven shamans, dwelling on mountains; “between the Yuan and Xiang [rivers]” *Wŏn-Sang-ji-gan* 沅湘之間 is a reference to the *Chuci*, specifically to the two poetries “The Princess of the Xiang River” *Xiang jun* 湘君 and “The Lady of the Xiang River” *Xiang furen* 湘夫人. The Lady of the Xiang River was the daughter of the mythical sovereign Yao 堯 (trad. r. 2356-2283BCE). This description of great Chinese shamans / Daoist masters is contrasted with the shaman beliefs in supernatural spirits, which we have addressed before: “If it is not a millenary rat in a hole, / it must be a nine-tailed fox in the wood!” *yŏ pi hyŏl-chung ch’ŏnse-sŏ, tangsi rim-ha kumiho* 如非穴中千歲鼠. 當是林下九尾狐. The mention of the nine-tailed fox spirit (*kumiho*) could be another reference to *Shanhaijing*, according to which the fox spirits dwell in the “Green Hills” Qingqiu region 青丘 / 青邱, identified with Kojosŏn by Koreans since the Three Kingdoms period. In fact, this kind of spirit was well known even before the Peninsula unification (e.g.: *SKY* I, prodigies 1: “Lady Tohwa and the

Gentleman Pihyŏng” *Tohwa-nyŏ Pihyŏng-nang* 桃花女 鼻荊郎; *Taiping Guangji* 太平廣記, Foxes 3: Qian Yangling 汧陽令).

The poem then continues, remarking how pervasive Daoism was during his period even among shamans – let us remember that the poem writes about Yi Kyubo youth during king Ŭijong reign, but addresses the shamanism of early Military Rule period, thus around twelfth-thirteenth centuries:

爾曹若謂吾術神. 變化恍惚應無垠.
有聲何不鏤人聽. 有形何不緘人眈.
章丹陳朱猶謂幻. 況復爾曹難隱身

If one of you says: “my techniques
are divine!”, / to [your]
transformations and trances I
respond without hesitations. / When
there is a sound, why the people
aren’t quiet and hear it? / When there
is a form, why the people don’t come
closer and see it? / Even flaunting
cinnabar and vermillion, I will call
[all of this] an illusion. / Moreover,
how many of you will say that it is
difficult becoming invisible?

Later in the poem, Yi Kyubo mentions the shamanic belief in stars and planet power, a very popular belief even before Koryŏ, and which strikingly resembles the Leifa teachings and the Kuyodang rites popularized by king Yejong (see §5.2):

丹青滿壁盡神像. 七元九曜以標額.
星官本在九霄中. 安能從汝居汝壁

Paintings fill the walls reaching the
gods. /

/ The Seven Primes and the Nine
Luminaries are marked on a tablet. /
The Star Official originally resides
among the Nine Emphyreans, / how

could he follow you and dwell on
your walls?

The Seven Primes are the Sun, the Moon, Mercury, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, while the Nine Luminaries here are likely the seven stars of the Big Dipper plus two “attendant” stars. Traditionally, the Big Dipper is worshipped by Korean Shamanism, Daoism, Buddhism and Confucianism indifferently for prosperity, longevity and wealth. The Nine Empyreans (*kuso* / *jiuxiao* 九霄) refers to the classical Daoist cosmology, which divides the sky seven regions: eight for each cardinal point plus the center. Yi Kyubo was very familiar with these concepts since he was fond in *Xuanxue* philosophy and Tang poetry¹²⁹. It is also interesting here that “fill the walls” here is literally “fill the walls with blue and cinnabar” *tanch’ōng man pyōk* 丹青滿壁: blue (or green) and cinnabar are two auspicious colors according to Daoism, widely used in Korea until Chosŏn. Here likely refers on the auspicious colors used for the gods’ portraits. Similarly, the *Siyong Hyang’ak-po* reports a shamanic song named “Nine Heavens” *Kuch’ōn* 九天, which is a clear parallel to Yi Kyubo mention to the Nine Empyreans.

Other Daoist-Shamanic practices from middle-late Koryŏ period can be only reconstructed from the early Chosŏn documents. Particularly, it is interesting the “Scripture of the Jade Pivot” *Okch’u-gyōng* 玉樞經 case: in Song and Yuan China, this scripture was used to drive away calamities, illness and evil spirits, solve difficulties and obtain powers. The is primarily associated with the Daoist Leifa movement, while its pantheon can be traced back to the Shenxiao 神霄, Qingwei 清微, Quanzhen 全真 and New Wudang 新武當 schools of Southern Song-Yuan period. We have already traced a parallelism between the Song *fashi*, tied to the Leifa rituals, and the shamans’ social role in Koryŏ, so the continuity should be

¹²⁹ Suh young Dae (1992), 241-5 & 249-253; McBride (2008), 233-240.

clear. Although we cannot find any explicit mention to the *Okch'u-gyŏng* in the *Koryŏsa*, it is well possible that the scripture was imported under king Yejong. The *Okch'u-gyŏng* will be then inherited by Chosŏn: the text was used during rites by the *Sogyŏksŏ* 昭格署 officials, alongside with texts from Lingbao Canon (*Yŏngbo-gyŏng* 靈寶經), the “Scripture Which Prolongs Life” *Yŏnsaeng-gyŏng* 延生經, the “Scripture of Great Unity” *T'aeil-kyŏng* 太一經, the “Scripture of Zhenwu” *Chin'u-gyŏng* 真武經 and the “Scripture of the Dragon King” *Yong'wang-gyŏng* 龍王經 (*Kyŏngguk taejŏn* 經國大典, Ritual Canon 禮典: Talented People 取才). Practices associated with the *Okch'u-gyŏng* are then found in Chosŏn medical science books, folk practices and “blind monks / fortunetellers” rites as well. Examples of these practices are the “Labor Inducing Talisman” *Ch'oesaeng-bu* 催生符, used for childbirth; the “Cinnabar Talisman for the Tianzhong [Festival]” *Chŏ'njung-jŏkpu* 天中赤符, used as magical protection during the Tan'ŏ festival; the “Jave Pivot's Cinnabar [Spell]” *Okch'u-dan* 玉樞丹, used as protection against evil magic; and the “Jave Pivot's Cinnabar Ritual” *Okch'u-danje* 玉樞丹祭, performed against illness¹³⁰. There is a clear similarity between how Koryŏ shamans used Buddhist practices and these early Chosŏn practices.

What were the shamanic practices During Koryŏ? So far, we have mentioned a great number: chanting, dancing, use of talismans, *dhāraṇīs* etc.

Unfortunately, neither the *Koryŏsa* nor the *Koryŏsa Chŏr'yo* authors worried about describe the shamanic rituals in detail, maybe thinking they were obvious for any reader. However, Yi Kyubo reports us a rite which he likely assisted by the distance, giving us a vivid description:

***Tongguk-isangguk-chip* 東國李相國集 II, Old-style Lüshi 古律詩, “Lay of the Old Shaman” *Nomu P'yŏn* 老巫篇**

¹³⁰ Todd (2007), 19-22; Koo Junghoe (2009), 70-84, 140-171 & 207-210; Liu Jingyu (2011), 10-11; Li Yuanguo (2012), 59-70.

自言至神降我軀 [...] 酸甘淡酒自飽
腹。起躍騰身頭觸棟。緣木爲龕僅五
尺 [...] 瓦鼓喧聲無我耳

They say about themselves “the gods descend into my body”. [...] Fill her stomach of sour, sweet and mild wine; / jumping and dancing, rising her body, the head touches the ridgepole. / The tie beam is a shrine, nearly five feet [long] [...] The noisy sound of drums¹³¹ will not [make] my ears [ring anymore].

From this brief description, it is easy to notice how Korean shamanism in twelfth-thirteenth centuries resembles that of Chosŏn and even modern days¹³². Some things are not clarified, for example if the use of alcohol was used only for the dancing session or for the gods’ offering too, of which god is the ridgepole-shrine (the Sŏngju 城主?), or if it was the shaman who played the drums or if there were any assistants. However, it is remarkable in the first place that Yi Kyubo detailed his description.

We can now present a systematic presentation of Koryŏ shamanic practices according to the ancient sources:

Native practices:

- Spirits and gods descendance (*kangsin* 降神)
- Landscape and City Gods (*sŏnghwang* 城隍) rites
- Ritual dancing and jumping and ritual drum play [connection with the gods descendance is implied only by Yi Kyubo. Other sources may tie gods descendance with rituals. There is no mutual exclusiveness between these two possibilities]
- Foretelling, blessing and bewitching
- Magical chants

¹³¹ 瓦鼓 *oego* “tile drum” refers to an ancient clay drum.

¹³² Suh young Dae (1992), 241-5 & 249-253; McBride (2008), 233-240.

- Spirits and gods' interaction

Confucian-derived practices:

- Rainmaking ritual (*t'oryongje* 土龍祭)
- Landscape and City Gods (*sŏnghwang* 城隍) rites

Buddhism-derived practices:

- Ritual texts recitation / chanting [implied]
- Recitation of *dhāraṇīs* and *mantras*
- Use of Talismans (*pulpu* 佛符 / *puin* 符印) [implied]
- Some rituals (e.g.: *pyŏl-kiŭn* 別祈恩)

Daoism-derived practices (mainly Leifa 雷法):

- Ritual texts recitation / chanting [implied]
- Use of talismans (*tobu* 道符) [implied]
- Daoist alchemy [reported only by Yi Kyubo]
- Landscape and City Gods (*sŏnghwang* 城隍) rites
- Some rituals (e.g. “praying fast with buried offerings” *ch'o-i-do*, *mae-chŏnch'an* 醮以禱, 埋奠饌)

5.4.4 *Chesŏk among the Medieval Shamans*

How was Chesŏk intended by Koryŏ Shamanism?

The mentions that we have are mainly from middle to the late period of the dynasty, and seemingly all imply a strong connection to the Koryŏ Buddhist conception of Chesŏk / Śakra. However, Buddhism and Daoism syncretism is more evident:

Tongguk-isangguk-chip 東國李相國集 II, Old-style Lüshi 古律詩, “Lay of the Old Shaman” *Nomu P'yŏn* 老巫篇

信口自導天帝釋。 釋皇本在六天上。
肯入汝屋處荒僻。 丹青滿壁盡神像。
七元九曜以標額。 星官本在九霄中。
安能從汝居汝壁。 死生禍福妄自推。
其能試吾橫氣機。

She believes that her mouth, of itself,
speaks [the will of] the *deva* Chesök.
/ The [August] Śakra dwells up
above in the Six Heavens, [yet] he
willingly enters your chamber, / a
place so remote and desolated? /
Paintings fill the walls reaching the
gods. / The Seven Primes and the
Nine Luminaries are marked on a
tablet. / The Star Official originally
resides among the Nine Emphyreans,
/ how could he follow you and dwell
on your walls? / You absurdly
dispense death and life, blessings
and disasters. / How could you probe
the unexpected affairs of my life?
[lit.: “the reasons of my
unreasonable *qi*”]

Before we have seen how the celestial bodies worship can be associated with Daoism. Here, seeing the full picture, it is not difficult to sight a popularization of the “Hall of the Nine Luminaries” Kuyodang rites and of the palace Chesök faith in general (see §5.2). However, the influence of a later period is also visible: here, Chesök / Śakra oversees the human destiny. It was in fact the Sŏn Cultivation Society which popularized the idea of Śakra as a heavenly judge over this life (see §5.3). Unfortunately, Yi Kyubo does not explicit if with “life and death” *sasaeng* 死生 he intended only this life or if she included the afterlife too (“life-death” can also render *samsāra*), so these considerations must be taken with caution. In any case, it is an interesting fact that even modern-day shamans make rites to Chesök in Buddhist paraments.

As we have seen before, the Big Dipper is usually worshipped for wealth, prosperity and abundance. Therefore, the “Nine Luminaries” (*jiuyao / kuyo* 九曜) inclusion clearly anticipates the later transformations of Chesök into a birth, prosperity and abundance deity. This leads us to another mention of a shamanic Chesök:

***Koryŏsa* 高麗史 CXIV, biographies 列傳 24, officials 諸臣: Yi Sŭngno 李承老**

有妖巫自提州來，自稱天帝釋，妄言人禍福，遠近奉之，猶恐不及，所至貨財山積。至天壽寺曰，“吾入京，年豐兵息，國家太平。若上不出迎，我必昇天。”都人皆惑，歸之如市。云牧率騎卒與臺吏，執巫斷其髮，囚街衢獄，杖而逐之。

A wicked shaman from Cheju (Chech'ŏn) said she was the Heavenly Emperor Chesök, tricking the people talking about [their] fortunes and misfortunes. From near and afar, [people] donated to her, and, worrying about not reaching her, [they] left (for her) mountain of money and wealth. When she came to the Ch'ŏnsu temple, she said: “When I will enter the capital, the year [harvest] will be abundant, the army will rest and there will be the Great Peace [within the] Country! If his highness will not come out to welcome [me], I will surely ascend to heaven!” The people from the capital were infatuated and followed her like it was a market. (Yi) Unmok, official of the Investigative Bureau knights, captured the shaman, cut her

hair, jailed her, flogged her with a stick and then released her.

A nearly identical incident is reported in another article, where the official was scolded for punishing the woman (*KRS CXI*, biographies 24, officials: Yu T'ak 柳濯). Here, can see Chesök as both a prosperity and a protective deity, thus even closer to the modern-day Chesök-nim, Samsin-Halmöni, Sam-Chesök and the like¹³³.

We do not have shamanic depiction of Chesök from Koryö, however we have many specimens from early Chosön within the painting genre of the *kamno-t'aeng* (“*amṛta* scroll”) 甘露幀. These painting, used for Buddhist ceremonies, often contain a character know either as “Thunder god” Leishen / Noesin 雷神 or “Thunder lord” Leigong / Noegong 雷公: a benevolent deity which leads the souls of people struck by a thunder, he has a feline appearance, and his double nature of Buddho-Daoist and folk-shamanic god is pale clear. It is unmistakably a popular outcome of the Koryö time’s Chesök. This depiction coexisted with that of Śakra-as-Mārīcī within the *Marishi-bosatsu Darani-kyō* and in the later Chosön paintings, where it bears a flower in his hand (see §4).

The identification of Chesök with Leigong should not surprise us, as we have seen the influence of Leifa Daoism during Koryö, and of the *Okch'u-gyōng* in particular: a text in which Leigong is the central character. We can also remind that the Koryö era “blind monks” survived in Chosön as “blind fortuneteller” and “master of scriptures” (e.g.: *Sejong Sillok* LXIII, Sejong, year 16, *Kyesa* 癸巳 year, month 3,

¹³³ Suh young Dae (1992), 241-5 & 249-253; Richard D. McBride II (2008), 233-40; Nam Hyang (2010), 317-8; Ahn Jee-Won (2011), 293-7; Sö Taesök (2001), 261-2; Kim gap-dong (2018), 47-61; Lee Young-Geum (2022), 191-215.

day 16), likely becoming the modern-day “scripture reading shamans”, all influenced by Leifa Daoism. Moreover, Yun Sung-chan (2016) argues that a modern outcome of this Chesök-Noesin can be seen within some version of *Ch’ŏnjiwang-bonp’uri*, in “General Thunder” Pyörak-Changgun 霹靂將軍 and “General Fire” Hwadök-Chin’gun 火德眞君, two gods who punish “Long-Life Avaricious” Sumeng-jangja / Sumyöng-jangja 壽命長者 for his lack of filial piety (see §9.3)¹³⁴.

Summarizing:

- Koryŏ Shamanism was integrated into official rite (P’algwanhoe, Yöndünghoe, rainmaking rite) within a compromise with the local costumes (P’algwanhoe and Yöndünghoe local rites, *sŏnghwang* shrine).
 - There were various attempts to “rectify” the Shamanic rituals according to the Confucian costumes and doctrines, with a visible resistance from the local administrations.
 - Usually, Confucian scholars assisted the Shamans during the rites, imposing their upper hand when possible.
 - The frequency of rainmaking rituals can be used as a symptom of the king’s attitude toward Shamanism.
- Korean deities were integrated into the “city god” *sŏnghwang* worship, at the top of which there was the Heaven (Chesök). Titles and rites for the gods were formalized by the court, and there were instances of official Daoist rite. This situation was a reflex of Tang and Song costumes. Like in China, *sŏnghwang* could have multiple origins:
 - divinized local clans’ ancestors
 - divinized non-human entities (e.g.: the Eight Bells god of Yŏngha)
 - landscape deities
 - shamanic deities of local relevance, regionalized
 - “imported” deities (e.g.: Mārīcī, Mazu)
- Shamanism had a mixed fortune during the history of Koryŏ:

¹³⁴ Koo Junghoe (2009), 24-44; Li Yuanguo (2012), 59-70; Yun Sung-chan (2016), 85-7

- Probably had an importance during T'aejo (X century), but it was rapidly tamed by Sōngjong (late X century), who tried to absorb Shamanic rites into the Confucian ones.
- Shamanism had an unexpected rise at court during the middle period of the dynasty, maybe to prevent Buddhism excesses. There was likely a strong Daoist influence under Yejong (late tenth-early eleventh century).
- Shamans' fortune had its apex during Injong (twelfth century), who took refuge in Shamanism to escape from the Yi Chagyōm's shadow. Under Ŭijong we have another attempt to "rectify" Shamanism according to the Confucian doctrines, but we see also a strong influence from Daoism and (Esoteric) Buddhism during his reign.
- During the Military Regime period, Shamanism saw a new apex. Under Myōngjong and Kojong (late twelfth-late thirteenth century) we saw the emergence of the "blind monks": shamans heavily influenced by Daoism and Esoteric Buddhism.
- Under Mongol Interference, Shamanism continued its new apex but declined again with the end of the Yuan power. The new atmosphere within the court made possible for shamans' relatives to become officials, or even high officials. Shamans were equated with Buddhist and Daoist monks in magical powers. Shamans and shamanic rites were still popular even during the early Chosŏn period.
- Common shamanic beliefs included:
 - Supernatural entities can interact with human world (even non-shamans), bringing blessings or disasters, and can be controlled by rites.
 - Future can be foreseen by rites and / or gods' descendance.
 - Widespread Buddhist beliefs in buddhas, bodhisattvas etc. (e.g.: the Igūm incident)
 - Widespread Daoist beliefs (e.g.: Yi Kyubo's "Lay of the Old Shaman")

- Shamanic practices were syncretistic as well, taking elements from Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism.
 - Native practices: shamanic chanting and incantations; dancing, singing and drum playing; (maybe) ritual alcohol consumption; likely some *sŏnghwang* rite.
 - Confucian practices: rainmaking rites; common *sŏnghwang* rite.
 - Daoist practices, mainly from Leifa Daoism and *Okch'u-gyŏng* (imported under Yejong?): talismans: alchemy; some rites, some incantations; some *sŏnghwang* rites; sacred scriptures reading by the “blind monk” shamans.
 - Buddhist practices: talismans; *dhāraṇīs*, *mantras* and sutras recitation; some rites, including some *sŏnghwang* rite.
- We do not have extensive description of the shamanic Chesŏk during this period. The main sources are the Yi Kyubo’s “Lay of the Old Shaman”, two incidents reported in the biographies of Yi Sŭngno and Yu T’ak, and the *kamno-t’aeng* scrolls from early Chosŏn.
 - Yi Kybo describes a Chesŏk shrine, Chesŏk is associated with the “Seven Primes”, the “Nine Luminaries” and the “Star Official”; shaman possessed by Chesŏk can foresee “life and death, blessings and disasters”. This Chesŏk resembles both the courtly one, temple of which is associated to the “Hall of the Nine Luminaries” Kuyodang, while its patronage over human destiny links it to Śakra according to the Sŏn Cultivation Society. The Big Dipper mentions (“Seven Primes”) links this Chesŏk to abundance, birth and wealth as well.
 - The second cases describe two shamans who declared to be Chesŏk. The first case is more detailed and reports a belief about “abundant harvest” and the “Great Peace” coming to the kingdom if the shaman-Chesŏk wills are met. This deity is closer to the modern-day Chesŏk regarding the aspect of abundance, birth and wealth.
 - The last cases are those of the *kamno-t’aeng*: Buddhist hanging scrolls used for rites used in early Chosŏn. In these scrolls, Chesŏk

is depicted as Leishen / Leigong, a Chinese benevolent deity who guide the souls of those dead by a thunderstrike. This version of Chesŏk is clearly tied to the Leifa Daoism and the *Okch'u-gyŏng*, and has maybe a parallel in the two gods, “General Thunder” and “General Fire”, appearing in the *Ch'ŏnjiwang-bonp'uri* shamanic narrative.

6 Myth transmission and Shamanic institutions

So far, we have seen how the cultural landscape during the Koryŏ period was. This landscape created the basis for the formation of modern-day Korean shamanism, which became progressively more recognizable during the Chosŏn period.

We have defined the Korean shamanism as a “lecto-oral” phenomenon (see §§2 and 2.3), which means that the oral culture falls under the influence of the written one. This has heavy implications within the shamanic songs’ transmission in general:

This helps us to put in a right perspective the diffusion of the *Okch’u-gyŏng* practice and doctrines even outside the vein of “scripture-reading shamans” – for example with the figure of the “divine generals”¹³⁵.

Backdating the formation period to, at least, middle Koryŏ to early Chosŏn can explain the persistence of some archaicism too. For example, the transmissibility of the shamanic duties both from male and female line has a clear parallel in Koryŏ laws and Daoist customs¹³⁶. Addressing these data could cast a new light over the relationship within the shamanic lineages among the shamans, their husbands / wife, and the apprentices, clarifying in the process the relationship between “charismatic” and “hereditary” shamans. This goes out of the aims of the current work, however.

On the other hand, the only mention of a gathering of shamans (*KRS* XVI, important clans 16: Injong, year 9, month 8, day 12) could be an indication that some informal organization existed out of the kingdom bureaucracy – mainly the temples maintenance. It could be easy to see an affinity with the regional gathering of the “hereditary shamans”, but it is difficult to prove.

Buddhist institutions had surely a role: we have seen the cultural relevance of the Buddhist temples during Koryŏ, and we have accounts of “scripture-reading shamans” training there (see §2.3). The *Okch’u-gyŏng* case is again emblematic: being the most influential texts among the “scripture-reading shamans”, it was

¹³⁵ For the *Okch’u-gyŏng* diffusion during early Chosŏn, see: Li Yuanguo (2012), 29-36, 59-70; Stoll Todd (2007), 19-22

¹³⁶ Ramóna Kovács. “Freedom of Koryŏ women?.”; Deuchler (2021)

likely introduced during Yejong. However, the extant copies can be traced back during the early Chosŏn, printed by a royal Buddhist temple.

If the diffusion of paper gears from Cheju Island to the hinterland can be explained as an evolution from Buddhist and Daoist practices, while the presence of sitting rituals both in Cheju and Ch'ungch'ŏng can be explained with practicality, other things are clearly more ancient. For example, the signature instruments called *myŏngdu* in the hinterland and *mengdu* in Cheju are surely one of them: present from Hwanghae to Cheju, they consist in a bell, a mirror / two coins, and knives casted in bronze ensouling the shamanic ancestors, inherited from shaman-to-shaman, and manufactured following similar rituals. Such instruments may be an inheritance at least from the proto-Three Kingdom period, as many scholars did not fail to notice¹³⁷.

What we can conclude from this is that, during the Koryŏ period, shamans had many occasions for interaction and cultural transmission (myths, song, rites), more than what one might be led to believe. If this is true, the hypotheses around the antiquity of some shamanic narratives like Paridegi and Hallakkung'i could have some solid historical background, and so their dissemination. This framing, however, does not address the problem about the origin of shamanic regionalism: in fact, serious divergences could either precede or follow the Middle Ages. In the current analysis, this is less relevant than the very existence of divergences in themselves.

Summarizing:

- The bases for the formation of modern-day Korean shamanism can be backdated at least at least to Middle Koryŏ / Early Chosŏn period. Many elements of Chosŏn-period shamanism can be in fact tracked back to the so-called Middle Ages.
- If this is the case, the study of Koryŏ cultural landscape helps use to understand many elements such as the transregional presence of cultural features tied to the written language i.e.: the lecto-orality

¹³⁷ Hyun Yongjun (1980), 14-5; Kang So-jeon (2012): 14-28; Yoo Yohan (2021), 340-4. For the *myŏngdu* / *mengdu* relevance within the Chesŏk faith, see the next paragraphs.

- It is possible that, during Koryŏ, shamans organized themselves informally. Unfortunately, we have only one mention of this within the Koryŏ records.
- More formal interactions among shamans could have been possible within the Buddhist temples and by texts written there.
- Thus, considering both Koryŏ and Early Chosŏn landscape, it is possible to contextualize the existence of transregional features of Korean shamanism. Though this reframing has its limits, and some elements are surely older than Koryŏ, such as the Paridegi and Hallakkung'i myths and the metal instruments (*myŏngdu* / *mengdu*).

7 Tanggŭm'aegi and The Three Chesŏk

Within the Korean Peninsula, Chesŏk is one of the few deities venerated in all regions. Because of its success, it is very elusive to identify: the 2013 *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs*, for example, clearly distinguishes it from Samsin 三神 and Sejon 世尊, while other scholars (and shamans) identify them. In general terms, Chesŏk can be described as a “production deity”: its patronages include fecundity, childbearing, childbirth, offspring wellbeing, family’s health, agriculture and husbandry, longevity, good luck, and destiny. Moreover, its faith is included in familiar, household ancestral cult, and in Cheju this ancestral faith is extended to the shaman profession, meaning that the Three Chesŏk are believed to be the first shamans. Having so many “domains”, Chesŏk is oftentimes conflated with other gods, typically with Sŏngju 城主, one of the most important household deities. Identification with the shaman’s own tutelary spirit (Momju 母主) is also possible even outside Cheju. This situation led some scholars to define Chesŏk a “generic god”¹³⁸.

Surely, Chesŏk as a “generic god” is a workable definition, but not quite tested: for example, is there any deity that is *never* identified with Chesŏk? Moreover, if we take the Chesŏk main mythical narratives (the *Chesŏk-ponp’uri*), we will find that this god is already a *plural* deity: the characters who get the apotheosis are usually more than one – often the mother and-or her children, being them either one, two or three (see below).

For these reasons, in this work we will make a loose distinction between the “**generic**” Chesŏk we have described above, the Three Chesŏk / Samsin-Chesŏk and “Grandmother Chesŏk” Chesŏk-halmŏni, corresponding respectively with the *Chesŏk-ponp’uri* “three brothers” and their mother Tanggŭm'aegi. This, knowing

¹³⁸ Chang Tŏksun & Sŏ Taesŏk (1970), 170-2; Cho Hŭngyun & Pang Ch’anghwan (1997), 47-71 & 417-435; Seo Taesok (2001), 255-271, 303-315; Shin Yeon-woo (2009), 126-131; Encyclopedia Planning Team (2013), *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs*, 166-9 & 178-80; Yung Sung-chan (2016), 79-85; Nam Hyang (2018), 317-8; Lee Kyung Hwa (2022), 114-6, 158-162 & 170-2

that it is a merely a functional definition: in reality, no such lines exist between these gods, which all fall under the name / title of “Chesök”.

Samsin-Chesök 三神帝釋 / **Sambul-Chesök** 三佛帝釋 / **Samt’aeja** 三太子

(Cheju): these are the sons of Tanggŭm’aegi (see below), and they are usually three, but according to other versions they can be two (a son and a daughter) on just one. They oversee the children’s wellbeing up to a certain age, depending on the shaman¹³⁹. When the “generic” Chesök patronage over childbearing is not absorbed by them, some sort of division of labor is possible: “The Comprehensive Collection of Korean Oral Literature” *Han’guk Kubi-munhak Taegye* published by Academy of Korean Studies in 1980-1992, reports a version of the P’ohang (Kyöngbok) “Story about the Veneration of Sejon, Söngju and Samsin” *Sijon, Söngju, Samsin-ŭn Mosi-nŭn Iyagi*. In this story, the shaman tells that Sejon “blesses with offspring”, while the Samsin “help with the children growth”. They can be fierce deities as well: it is believed that hammering a nail after childbirth will anger Samsin, who will make the child blind¹⁴⁰. In Cheju, they are the Shamanic ancestors. Iconographically, they are portrayed in Buddhist robes, with a triangular paper hat (*kokkal*).

Chesök-halmöni 帝釋 할머니 / **Samsŭng-halmang** 삼승할망 **(Cheju):** also

called **Samsin-halmöni** 三神할머니 and, in Cheju, **Puldo-halmang** 佛道할망.

This “version” of Chesök has roughly the same prerogatives of the “generic” Chesök, with more emphasis on the fertility and childbirth. Tanggŭm’aegi is often divinized within the mainland narratives, but her divine patronages are always implicit: her role in the *Chesök-ponp’uri*, is to have the exceptional ability to generate and protect a divine prole, but it is never called out within the story (see §7.2). This is not the case of Cheju, however, where an obvious equivalent of this character (“the daughter of the Myöngjin King” Mengjin’guk Ttanim-agi) wins a

¹³⁹ Usually up to ten-years old.

¹⁴⁰ Encyclopedia Planning Team (2013), *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs*, 166-9, 178-80; Yung Sung-chan (2016), 81; Lee Kyung Hwa (2022), 170-2

magical competition and is bestowed by the Jade Emperor with the divine powers over childbirth (*Samsŭng-halmang-bonp'uri*)¹⁴¹.

An element shared by all these “versions” of Chesŏk is their origin from a heavenly, foreign lands. In fact, both Tanggŭm'aegi's parents and the heavenly god / Buddhist monk who will marry her moved from abroad, and it is possible that, in some Sŏul and Hwanghae version, the Three Brothers sail to China after their apotheosis (see §7.2). For this reason, Chesŏk is sometimes said to “came from the Kingdom of the Western Region of the Western Paradise (*Sŏch'ŏn Sŏyŏk-kuk* 西天西域國)”, i.e. India, and that it “arrives mixing with misty wind, cloudy breeze and foggy blizzard”, as reported by Chang Tŏksun and Sŏ Taesŏk (1970)¹⁴².

Chesŏk faith does not manifest only around its narrative epic, but within its prayer, invocation, chants and ritual instruments. From these elements we can better understand why Chesŏk is called a “generic” deity by some scholars.

Chesŏk as its “effigy” (*sinch'e*): the most common term for ritual jar used as effigy for a deity is either *tanji* (단지 / 壇地) or *ogari* (오가리 / *右巨里). Since Chesŏk effigies are usually rice-filled jars (see before), it must not come to surprise that the deity can take the name after them. In fact, Chesŏk can be called Chesŏk-ogari or Chesŏk-tanji as well. Similarly, the names Sejon-danji, Sijon-danji or Sinjuttanji are also used. Other names are clearly tied to the ancestor cult, like “ancestor jar” Chosang-danji 祖上壇地. Other names' links to ancestors are less evident, but nonetheless accepted by the scholars, like for example: Purudanji 扶婁壇地, Puridong'u, Purudok etc.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Seo Taesok (2001), 261-8; Choi Won-Oh (2008), 5-13; Hong Taehan (2016), 283-6; Lee Kyung Hwa (2022), 114-6, 158-162 & 170-2

¹⁴² Chang Tŏksun & Sŏ Taesŏk (1970), 170-2

¹⁴³ Chang Tŏksun & Sŏ Taesŏk (1970), 170-2; Yung Sung-chan (2016), 79-85

Chesŏk as many gods / many gods as Chesŏk: Chesŏk “dominions” are variegated, and so it is natural that this deity overlaps with many others. Typically, the identification appears within the prayers and the non-narrative songs with formulaic expressions like “X is Y-Chesŏk” or just “X is Y-Chesŏk which does Z”. Various authors report for example a conflation with Ch’ilsŏng (the Big Dipper), Ir-wŏl (Sun and Moon), the ancestor god Chosang, the household god Sŏngju, the shamanic *genius* Momju, the Western Sea Dragon King, the wind and fishing deity Yŏngdŭng, and the Ten Kings of Underworld. It must be noticed how the first ones clearly derived from the deity’s ritual context (see §7.3). **Chesŏk as its prerogatives** is another example that appears along with these cases within the songs: it exists a “Chesŏk of the *kokkal*”, from the Buddhist hat associated with the deity; a “Chesŏk of luck” and “Chesŏk of karma”, as a god overseeing destiny; a “Sukhāvātī-Chesŏk”, from its mythical Indian origins and its (loose) association with Buddhism. This explosions of names and attributes led the scholar Yung Sung-chan (2016) to believe that Chesŏk “permeates the natural objects” and its name a “honorific title” for any deity¹⁴⁴.

Now that we have described our deity, we can discuss the myths surrounding it:

7.1. *The Mudang Naeryŏk account*

The first account of Chesŏk including a narrative section can be found within the *Mudang Naeryŏk*, an illustrated text describing the shamanic rituals around Seoul, written between the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century¹⁴⁵:

¹⁴⁴ Cho Hŭngyun & Pang Ch’anghwan (1997), 47-71; Seo Taesok (2001), 303-315; Encyclopedia Planning Team (2013), Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs, 166-9; Yung Sung-chan (2016), 79-85; Nam Hyang (2018), 317-8

¹⁴⁵ Shin Yeon-woo (2009), 108-110 & 117-125. For further details about this book, see Seo Young-dae (2015) and Suh Young-dae (2016).

***Mudang Naeryök* 巫堂來歷, Chesök-köri 帝釋巨里 – Karam version**

帝釋巨里；帝釋即檀君聖祖 稱曰
三神帝釋 小兒十歲之內 或有危
險之地 三神必爲保護云故 高句
麗上山王無子禱于三神 見夢而生
貴子 後生 子發願因爲成俗

Chesök-köri: Chesök is the August Emperor Tan'gun. He is called Samsin-Chesök. [It is said that], when a child under ten years old is in danger, Samsin will protect him / her. This because king Sansang of Koguryō, having no children, prayed Samsin and, after a dream, he had one. After this, taking a vow for childbirth became a custom.

***Mudang Naeryök* 巫堂來歷, Chesök-köri 帝釋巨里 – Old Book version**

帝釋巨里；帝釋即檀君聖祖 稱曰
三神帝釋 高句麗上山王無子禱于
三神果得貴子 故生子發願因成俗
耳

Chesök-köri: Chesök is the August Emperor Tan'gun. He is called Samsin-Chesök. King Sansang of Koguryō, having no children, prayed Samsin and, as result, he had one. Because of this, taking a vow for childbirth became a custom.

Elsewhere within the *Mudang Naeryök*, Tan'gun (notice: not Chesök) is described as the god of the T'aebaek mountain, an agricultural deity, a household deity, the highest of all gods and the mythical ancestor of all Korean people¹⁴⁶. Many of these characteristics are very alike to those of the modern-day Chesök.

As for the story of king Sansang mentioned there, it is reported in few articles by the *Samguk Sagi* (SKS XVI, Koguryō annals 4: King Sansang 山上王), and we can outline it as follows:

¹⁴⁶ Seo Young-Dae (2015), 50-55

1. In the Chut'ong village (Chut'ong-ch'on 酒桶村), a shaman predicted to a poor woman that she “surely will give birth to a queen”. Therefore, the mother called her daughter “queen” Hunyŏ 后女.
2. King Sansang had no sons and prayed landscape deities to have one. One day, the Heavenly god appeared in a dream to the king, predicting him that a “lesser concubine” (*sohu* 少后) will give him a son. There was not any “lesser concubine” within the royal palace.
3. One day, a pig destined to the sacrifice to the Heaven (*kyo* 郊) escaped from the rite, arriving in the Chut'ong village. Here, a young woman, about twenty years old, captured the animal. She was very beautiful, and the king visited her out of curiosity.
4. The king fell in love with the village girl and wanted to sleep with her. The girl accepted, asking the king not to abandon her.
5. The queen, having heard of the village girl, sent some soldiers to kill her. However, the girl convinced them that she was carrying a legitimate royal heir. The king confirmed the girl's story and, therefore, she was saved from the queen's ire.
6. After giving birth to the child, the village girl was given the title of “lesser concubine”. The son was named Kyoje (“Heaven sacrifice's pig”) 郊麋 due to the story of his conception.
7. Kyoje became heir prince.

According to Shin Yeon-woo (2009), who made a structural analysis of this narrative, this story can be considered a “transitional phase” between the northern foundation narratives, and the modern-day Chesŏk origin story (*Chesŏk-ponp'uri*). For example, while the whole account undoubtedly resembles the later Chumong narratives, the presence of a pig sacrifice is clearly derived from the Haebaru and Kūmwa story. On the other hand, the fact that the story is multi-generational and focused on the mother side (matrilineality) rather than on the male side (patrilineality) is more akin to the Yi Kyubo's *Tongmyŏng'wang p'yŏn* – and, by extension, part of the *Samguk Sagi* Chumong's account (see §3). Finally, in all these

stories, childbirth is unexpected and always with a double cause: one human and one divine.

Chumong (male POV) ← Sansang (female POV) → Tanggŭm'aegi (female POV)

Shin Yeon-woo argues that the fil rouge connecting all these stories and related rites is the desire of (re)production, being it either the birth of a child or a plentiful harvest¹⁴⁷.

Though ingenious and useful, the Shin Yeon-woo analysis is unavoidably partial, meaning that is too focused on Chumong narrative. In fact, we can find these elements in two other narratives: the *Samguk Sagi* account on Tan'gun has a (partial) female focus and it covers more than two generations too; similarly, the propagandistic myth surrounding Koryŏ T'aejo origins takes too into account a female protagonist (Hogyŏng's fox spirit wife) and it spans for many generations (see §3)¹⁴⁸. If we consider these stories too, we have a clearer view about the many elements that amalgamated into the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri*. The implication of this is, however, that Koryŏ cultural reworking on Koguryŏ culture was more relevant for the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri* formation than the (late) Koguryŏ culture alone.

So, these are the bases for the current Chesŏk myths, specifically those centered around Tanggŭm'aegi. But what are these modern-day narratives?

7.2. Modern versions of the narrative

The story of Chesŏk is mainly told by six narratives: *Sejon-gut* (eight versions); *Chesŏk-ponp'uri* (eleven versions); *Ch'ogong-ponp'uri* (seven versions); *Tanggŭm'aegi* (five versions); and *Chung-gut* (four versions). The classification can be conducted geographically as well. In such cases, each record counts as variation, and therefore we can count at least seventy versions in total¹⁴⁹:

¹⁴⁷ Shin Yeon-woo (2009), 117-131

¹⁴⁸ Xu Stella (2016), 46-8; Sin Jong-won (2016), 132-6; Pai Hyung Il (2020), 110-121; Yoon Kyeong Jin (2023), 131-4

¹⁴⁹ Youm Won-Hee (2014), 33-40; Hong Taehan (2016), 276-283

Region / source	Recorded versions
Hamgyŏng	2
Hwanghae (~ Sŏul)	1
Ch'unch'ŏng	8
Kyŏngsang	7
Cheju	7
P'yŏngan	2
Kyŏnggi	15
Kangwŏn	5
Chŏlla	20
Manuscripts	2

Each recorded song is different from the other, depending on the regional style, ritual context, and even shaman's client requests. Despite all the differences, we can summarize the overall story to its common traits¹⁵⁰:

1. Tanggŭm'aegi parents lock their daughter within the house, forbidding her to meet strangers
2. A Buddhist monk asks for alms, Tanggŭm'aegi gives him alms
3. Tanggŭm'aegi miraculously get pregnant / the monk asks to stay overnight at her home
4. The monk gives a prophecy to Tanggŭm'aegi, and tell her how their sons will recognize him
5. Tanggŭm'aegi gives birth to the sons
6. The parents discover the daughter's childbirth
7. Tanggŭm'aegi get punished by her parents
8. Tanggŭm'aegi is exiled from home and goes searching for the father / Tanggŭm'aegi got secluded again, the sons go searching for the father
9. Apotheosis of Tanggŭm'aegi and her sons

Depending on the region, the reason for segregation could be the protagonist well-known beauty. A bargaining between Tanggŭm'aegi and the monk appears in some

¹⁵⁰ Hong Taehan (2016), 288-305; Lee Kyung Hwa (2022), 158-162

versions. While in the northern regions the monk enters the protagonist house by asking for alms, in Kangnŭng he manages to enter by magical means. Everywhere but Chŏlla, the monk continues asking for alms even when inside the house; the supernatural pregnancy happens either by touching the monk's vests (Puyŏ, Chŏlla, Cheju), or eating a grain of rice (Puyŏ, Sŏul, Ch'ungch'ŏng, Kyŏnggi), or by "clinging to one other's cloths" (P'yŏngyang, Hamhŭng). However, in some version there is no such description (Kanggye, Hwasŏng, Ansŏng) or the sexual relationship is made explicit. In few other versions (Kangnŭng etc.), the monk shapeshifts into a spider and violates Tanggŭm'aegi; in almost all versions, there is a premonitory dream about the three sons of the protagonist, this dream is explained by the monk, who also tells Tanggŭm'aegi how their sons will recognize him. The surname is either revealed immediately (Chŏlla), or during the reunion with the sons (Cheju, northern regions); in the western coast region, Tanggŭm'aegi buried alive as punishment by her family while in Chŏlla, Kyŏnggi and Inch'ŏn they try to kill her with a knife, only in some Cheju island's version she is forgiven. In Kanggye, Hamhŭng, P'yŏngyang and Yangp'yŏng, Tanggŭm'aegi is buried within a cave, while in Yŏng'wŏn it is a stone coffin. In all those northern versions, the moment of punishment coincides with that of childbirth; in the northern regions, the mother tells her sons that they are fatherless (Kanggye, P'yŏngyang e Yangp'yŏng); in the east coast regions, the sons power is shown by either killing some boys who tried to kill them, or by a fortuitous lightning bolt striking their schoolteacher, who tried to kill their mother¹⁵¹.

So far, we have shown the general outlook of the story. Concretely, however, this story varies depending on general macro-regions, influenced by the shamanic "styles" (see §2.3). Therefore, the scholars have recognized the following macro-variations: 1) North Korean versions 2) East Coasts and Yŏngsŏ (Kang'wŏn) versions 3) Sŏul-Kyŏnggi-Ch'ungch'ŏng versions (thought Sŏul narrative proper is extinct) 4) Chŏlla versions 5) Cheju Island versions.

North Korea: the northern regions versions usually have a prologue which either includes the creation narrative or the monk background. In the version of Kang

¹⁵¹ Hong Taehan (2016), 288-305

Ch'un'ok *mansin* from Hamhŭng, a version of the *Sŏngju-bonp'uri* is included too. In Yangp'yŏng, two spouses miraculously have a son after having prayed for a child. The son is called Sŏkka like the creation god (see §9), and he obtains magical powers after taking the monastic vows. In Osan, Yong'in, Suwŏn and Ansŏng, the story is briefer: a son is born, called Tyesŏk (= Chesŏk). It is unclear what relationship between the creation narratives and the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri* is: Hong Taehan (2016) and others argue that may have been originally connected, with the creation god becoming the monk, while other authors like Lee Chang-yoon (2000) argues it is an innovation, stemmed from Neoconfucian influences. Surely, as we will see, these two stories have many structural parallels¹⁵².

East Coasts and Yŏngsŏ (Kang'wŏn): in these regions, the backstories concern the protagonist Tanggŭm'aegi, who is explicitly divinized. In some versions from Kangnŭng and Yŏngdŏk, the story is preceded by the creation narrative; in Kyŏnggi, Ch'ungch'ŏng and some zones of Chŏlla, the story starts with the Tanggŭm'aegi parents building their home and then obtaining a divination telling them that a monk will marry their daughter. However, in some versions the monk is directly chosen by the parents; in all versions from East Coast, the encounter with the monk undergoes a long process of bargaining (proposal-declining-compromise); depending on if the shaman is from east or from the west of T'aebaek mountain range, Tanggŭm'aegi is either secluded or exiled as punishment; in the East Coast the story is more focused on the sons journey in search for the father, while in the other regions the stress is given to Tanggŭm'aegi and the monk. Specifically, the East Coast versions can be synthesized within the scheme: love story → sons search for the father → divinization¹⁵³.

Center-West: these versions are extremely standardized within the rituals, with many idiomatic expressions. Only the Three Brothers are divinized as Chesŏk, except for Ch'ŏngju versions¹⁵⁴. In the central-western regions, the protagonist parents receive a prophecy about their daughter. On the other hand, the Kyŏnggi-

¹⁵² Kim Heonsun (1994), 68-81 & 128-9; Lee Chang-yoon (2000), 120-122; Shin Yeon-woo (2009), 122-9; Hong Taehan (2016), 288-9 & 309-336

¹⁵³ Hong Taehan (2016), 288-9 & 309-336; Lee Kyung Hwa (2022), 156-7, 166 & 170-2

¹⁵⁴ Due to Chŏlla shamanism's influence.

nam version tells the monk background; in these versions, the monk enters the protagonist house using magic; in the other versions from Center-West, the protagonist searches for the monk without having been exiled¹⁵⁵.

Sŏul-Kyŏnggi-Ch'ungch'ŏng: in these versions, the parents have a prophecy about their daughter and the sexual relation with the monk is hinted. The Sŏul versions are now lost, and the only clue of their content can be derived from the Hwanghae version, since the Sŏul rites are alike to those of Hwanghae. Unfortunately, the only extant Hwanghae version is that of Kim Hwang-ryong *mansin*. We can call this version the **Hwanghae-Sŏul version**. In this version, a prophecy is given to the Tanggŭm'aegi parents, like in the East Coast version; Tanggŭm'aegi eats a grain of rice and miraculously get pregnant; as result, the protagonist is exiled; she goes to the mountain from which the monk came from (the Hwanggŭm mountain) and here she is divinized; finally, the monk / Heavenly deity recognizes his sons and send them back to the human world, where they become the Samsin and sail for a mythical version of China ("Country of the Son of Heaven from Jiangnan" Kangnam-Ch'ŏnjaguk 江南天子國)¹⁵⁶.

Chŏlla: there, the variations are significative, but the overall song length is shorter than in other regions. Moreover, the narratives are self-contained, with almost no influence from the rites out of the ludic aspects. The sense of tradition is very strong: only the detailed descriptions can be varied at will. The songs themselves are very "secularized": at the end of the narrative, there is no divinization, and the monk leaves the monastic ropes to stay with his family. This emphasize the journey of the female protagonist even if she is not a goddess¹⁵⁷.

Cheju: These versions show many divergences: during their search for the father, the three sons try the State examinations; they climb on a pear tree, but they got stuck and get helped; they pass the State examinations, but do not receive any title as sons of a concubine; enraged, they destroy the Yŏnch'u door; Tanggŭm'aegi is imprisoned for her sons' crimes (implying that she was killed). In one version, the

¹⁵⁵ Shin Yeon-woo (2009), 123-4; Hong Taehan (2016), 309-336

¹⁵⁶ Youm Won-Hee (2014), 35-40; Hong Taehan (2016), 306-336

¹⁵⁷ Shin Yeon-woo (2009), 123-4; Hong Taehan (2016), 306-336

brothers managed to become *literati* even after destroying the door. Their story continues even after the father recognition: the smithing gods Chŏn'gyŏngrok and Ssoech'ŏri-adŭl are in competition. Chŏn'gyŏngrok wins, and he is summoned by the Three Brother's father with a wild boar offering and an invocation to the Jade Emperor, and so finally he creates the *mengdu* for his sons – it is well possible that originally Ssoech'ŏri-adŭl was the real protagonist of this section and who created the *mengdu* was originally the Jade Emperor himself. In some versions, the Three Brothers become the Ten (Underworld) Kings, they cross a liminal space and there they create the shaman's "inner chamber" (see §7.3) in a world in between Life and Death: the "land of raw silk on the western river, within the sacred waters". As their final act, the Three Brothers resurrect their mother and leave the *mengdu* as their "effigies". As more focused on the sons' adventures, the Cheju versions are coherent with the creation myth structure, despite being clearly later than those on the mainland¹⁵⁸.

In these series of myths, not always the protagonists are divinized as Chesŏk, despite the narrative itself can be called "origin story of Chesŏk" *Chesŏk-ponp'uri*. In fact, depending on the version, there are four possible ending: 1) the Three Brothers are divinized 2) only the Tanggŭm'aegi is divinized 3) both Tanggŭm'aegi and the Three Brothers are divinized 4) neither Tanggŭm'aegi nor the Three Brothers are divinized. Outside of Chŏlla, where there is no divinization, the outcome is independent from the region.

The Three Brothers become either Chesŏk (Osan), Sambul-Chesŏk (Hwasŏng, Yangp'yŏng, Yong'in and Suwŏn), Samsin-jesŏk (Anch'ŏn) etc., but in Sokch'o they are divinized as "Salvation Buddha of the T'ongdo Temple" (i.e. Śākyamuni) and Mañjuśrī, while in Cheju they usually become the Ten (Underworld) King or even the "Thirty-three Kings" Samsi-wang, a crisis between the the underworld judges and Indra's thirty-three godly court (*Trāyastriṃśa*). When the mother is divinized as well, either she helps the world from the "Western Paradise", and the

¹⁵⁸ Kang So-jeon (2012), 28-32 & 121-130; Yoo Yohan (2021), 344-6; Hong Taehan (2016), 288-9, 309-336

sons are divinized as Sambul-Chesök (Chöng Unhak *mansin* from P'yöngyang); the sons became the Big Dipper, and the mother “Moonlight Chesök” Wölkwang-jesök (Song Kach'öl *mansin* from Ansöng); or she became Samsin-halmöni, and the sons either a buddha or the Dragon King (Yong'in, Sinsök-nam). In Kangnūng, the mother becomes a buddha, and the sons either a buddha, the Dragon King, or the spirits of the T'aebek mountain. In the East Coast, the Three Brothers can be divinized as rivers and mountain deities. Is interesting that, in these versions, it appears a rivalry between Tanggūm'aegi and the Heavenly god / monk during the apotheosis process, as if she was already a powerful goddess. Finally, the Three Chesök title can be specialized: either they are “first, second and third prince” (Ch'ogong 初公, Igong 二公, Samgong 三公) as in Cheju Island, or as “Sunlight, Moonlight and Mankind Emperor” (Ilkwang-jesök 日光帝釋, Wölkwang-jesök 月光帝釋, Inhwang-jesök 人皇帝釋) like in the mainland¹⁵⁹. It must be noticed that not always the Three Brothers are really three: the Sokch'o version implies they are two, other versions that there is only one Chesök.

Scholars have found that the narrative structure of Tanggūm'aegi story and that of Chumong myth often overlap. In both stories there is the intervention of a Heavenly god; the girl who will give birth to the Heavenly god's son is persecuted; she is shielded by miraculous means; and, finally, the son(s) get recognized by the father. The riddle trope and subsequent father's recognition mytheme is a reminiscence from the myths of king Yuri of Koguryö 琉璃 and (partly) of Piryu of Paekche 沸流¹⁶⁰.

So far, we have taken for granted that the fathers of the Three Brothers is a Heavenly deity. This is the generally accepted interpretation among scholars, and there are many clues for this conclusion, both direct and indirect. Among the direct proofs, there are the parallels with the ancient foundation myths, some northern versions where the monk is identified with the creator god, and the recognition moment

¹⁵⁹ Hong Taehan (2016), 288-305; Lee Kyung Hwa (2022), 167-173

¹⁶⁰ Kim Heonsun (1994), 128-129; Cho Hūngyun & Pang Ch'anghwan (1997), 13-42 & 63-72; Seo Taesok (2001), 17-219, 255-269 & 385-453; Seo Young-Dae (2015), 50-55 & 122-5; Hong Taehan (2016), 283-6. The riddle trial is also a typical element from folktales.

where it is explicitly described as a god. Among the indirect proof, is the description of the monk: he comes from a monastery on the “Hwanggŭm mountain”, and his surname is Pak. Hwanggŭm is believed to come from Middle Korean [Yale Romanization] “great deity” *han-kom*, while the term “Pak clan” Pak-ssi 朴氏 is believed to come from “seed of brightness” *palg’ŭm-ŭi ssi* i.e. the Sun, “father” of Chumong is some versions of his myth (see §3).

A similar consideration can be made about Tanggŭm’aegi: her name was interpreted either as “valley goddess” or as “village goddess” – both *tan(i)-kom* in Middle Korean. She is interpreted as a goddess of the earth, territory, (re)production and life. The proofs here are mostly indirect: in the East Coast, Tanggŭm’aegi has a spat before her apotheosis, where the Heavenly god threaten her with transformation in insects, signaling an underlying match of powers. Other proofs are more subtle: the magic pregnancy and the reclusion within a cave / coffin can be easily compared with the agricultural life-death cycles. Therefore, the punishments are to be intended as metaphors for death, and Tanggŭm’aegi childbirth and escape from the underground are testimonies of her powers over life¹⁶¹:

너그 아홉성제 달라들 어서 당곰아가씨를 뒷동산에다가/돌함 속에다 갖다
두며넌 추버두 지가 죽구/목이 말러두 지가 죽구 배가 고파두 지가야 죽을
터이니

You, nine celestial rulers, come rushing in and / take Tangom’agassi and place her on the back hill, / inside a stone enclosure; / then, even if she freezes, she will die by herself, / even if she thirsts, she will die by herself, / even if she hungers, she is bound to die.

¹⁶¹ Seo Taesok (2001), 261-8; Choi Won-Oh (2008); Hong Taehan (2016), 283-6; Riotto (2017), 120-5; Lee Kyung Hwa (2022), 114-7, 166-173

7.3. Rites and Purposes

A myth always “functions” within its context, and in Korean Shamanism, like elsewhere, that context is a ritual. While the purpose of the ritual somehow is almost the same in every Korean region, how the rite is conducted show subtle, yet significant variation depending on the shaman’s regional and personal style. So, how the Chesök rites work?

A general overview:

According to the 2013 edition of the *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs*, there is some difference between Chesök, Sejon and Samsin. Yet, the rituals associated with each of these gods are very similar to one to another. The *Encyclopea* describes so the Chesök “effigy”:

Jeseokjumeoni and Jeseogogari are sacred entities related to Jeseok. The pouch or earthenware jar usually contains rice, replaced each fall with newly harvested grains. When the year-old grains are taken out, a reading sometimes takes place to determine the fortunes for the family or the coming harvest. Sometimes the cotton pouches are wrapped with mulberry paper

And so is described the Samsin one:

Samsin is worshipped in varying forms of sacred entities, including samsindanji (earthenware jar), samsinbagaji (gourd bowl), samsingori (wicker basket), or sometimes not in the form of a specific entity. Sacred entities contain newly harvested grains, mulberry paper or skeins of thread and are sealed before being placed in the inner chamber (anbang) for the woman of the house, on top of the wardrobe or on a separate shelf

Therefore, we can say that both Chesök and Samsin “effigies” consists in vessels storing grains, mainly rice, renewed cyclically with the harvest. The only difference is that the Samsin “effigies” proper shows a greater variation in the form, but not in the function.

Offerings are also very similar, according to the *Encyclopedia*: for Chesök, “in some regions”, it is said that sea mustard (*miyö̌k*) soup and steamed rice “from the sacred pouch” are offered during the Ch’irwöl-Ch’ilsök 七月七夕 (Seventh Day of the Seventh Lunar Month); as for Samsin, sea mustard soup, steamed rice and fresh water are served for the child birthday; Sejon shares the custom of “vegetarian” offerings with the other twos: while to Samsin are offered “rice cake soup on Lunar New Year; five-grain rice on Great Full Moon; red bean porridge (*patjuk*) on Winter Solstice”, and Chesök is clearly associated with rice offerings and sea mustard, as we have seen. Yet, the main reason Sejon offerings are “vegetarian” is due to its Buddhist nature. The biggest difference between Chesök and Samsin on one hand, and Sejon on the other, is that Sejon appears more “matrilinear”: “The household worship of Sejon is a practice that is passed down from mother to daughter, who enshrines the deity in her married home through divination or a shamanic ritual”¹⁶². Sea mustard soup is traditionally associated with pregnancy and childbirth, as believed to be a natural anticoagulant, so the association with this deity was spontaneous.

Northern (“Traditional”):

Cho Hŭngyun and Pang Ch’anghwan (1997), describe the “traditional” way of setting a complete ritual for Chesök¹⁶³. Having chosen an auspicious day, purified the place, purified him / herself and made the proper, standard offerings, the shaman sets up the ritual table.

The offering is shared with other deities: white rice-filled bowls is served to Chesök, Ch’ilsö̌ng, the Dragon King, the Mountain God, the “Buddhist deity” Pulsa, the “Heavenly King” Ch’önwang, and “Saint Sun-Moon” Ir-wöl-Sö̌ngsin-nim. Then, red bean rice cakes (*p’at-ttö̌k*) are made and served to other deities: the “generals”, the ancestors etc. The main rite to Chesök is performed within the “inner chamber”

¹⁶² Encyclopedia Planning Team (2013), *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs*, 166-9, 178-180

¹⁶³ Cho Hŭngyun & Pang Ch’anghwan (1997), 47-60

anbang 안방: three triangular Buddhist hats (*kokkal*) are put on three bows (the god “effigies”). Rice and vegetarian food are offered along with clean water and corn (*ch’ongsu-oksū*). Then, various *ttōk* are offered: the “Chesōk rice cakes” *Chesōk-ttōk*, with rice and buckwheat, the *otki-ttōk*, with flowers etc. These cakes are offered along with fruits (apple, pear, persimmon).

During the rite, the shaman welcomes the deity with a fan depicting the Dig Dipper / Ch’ilsōng, she wears a military attire (*chōnbok* 戰服), the *kokkal*, a Buddhist prayer beads (*paekp’al-yōmju* 百八念珠). A rank badge depicting white cranes and a red waistband are also used. Interestingly, it is said, during the prayers, that the welcoming place for Chesōk belongs to Ch’ilsōng, and the second is conflated with the first.

The rite description seems based mainly on Hwanghae and Sōul accounts, the only two explicitly mentioned by the two authors.

Sōul region:

Youm Won-Hee (2014) reconstructed the rites dedicated to Tanggūm’aegi within the Sōul region, which had some resemblance to that of Hwanghae, now lost too.

The rite was called *andang-malmi*, from the “inner chamber” where the Chesōk effigy was held (*andang* 安堂). *Malmi* means it was a long epic chanted as offering to the deity and was either a rite to ensure longevity or a propitiatory rite for a funeral, depending on if the shamanic song was recited within the *Chesōk-kut*, or if it was associated with the household deity (Sōngju). Since Sōul is a crossroad of regional shamanic styles, the rite was originally performed by a shaman, performing while standing, and her / his attendants (*kidae*) sitting. Then, the rites changed, with a “great shaman” performing the rite while standing, and other shamans sitting. This long ritual gradually faded for various reasons; it was too “Buddhist” for the Chosōn court, and so gradually substituted with the Paridegi / Pari-gongju narrative; the rise of “charismatic” shamans shifted the focus on foretelling (*kongsu*) rather than the

rite itself; and, finally, the gradual loss of the “inner chamber” along with the traditional houses¹⁶⁴.

As for the *Chesök-kut*, the offering were alike the northern ones described above. The ritual offering itself is very similar to that of made in Hwanghae, with only minor differences between the table setting. Finally, it is also attested that in Söul existed two ritual “schools”: the Western and the Eastern. The main difference consisted in the order of rituals: the Western school preferred to perform rite to the mountain gods (*san-göri*) first, and then the Buddhist rite to Chesök (*pulsa-göri*), while the Eastern one kept the traditional sequence. The Western school was politically closer to the royal palace, so it did not want to appear “too Buddhist”¹⁶⁵.

Other regions (Kyöngsang-buk, Chölla-nam, Chindo, Central regions etc.):

Chesök faith varies a lot between region and region, and so its material culture’s expressions. Generally, Chesök divine effigy (*sinch’e*) consists in a vessel of varying material, where (usually rice) offerings are stored. A concise summary was made by Cho Hünghyun and Pang Ch’anghwan (1997):

In the central regions, it is custom to offer Chesök clean water and corn (*ch’öngsu-oksu*), and, for the special offering, they prepare specific rice cakes (*Chesök-ttök*, *otki-ttök*, *ch’öndu-ttök*) and fruits of three colors: apples, pears and kakis. The rice cakes are pierced with a specific flower (*söri* flower).

There is a significant variation among the Chesök effigies: in Kyöngsang-buk, it is a bowl made with ropes; within the Chölla-nam, it is either a bowl of a triangular basket made of hemp and then filled with rice, put in a house’s porch hall (*malli* = *maru-bang*) or in the “inner chamber” *anbang*; in Chindo island, it is a bowl put by the “inner chamber” entrance, annually filled with new rice. Generally, the offerings are “vegetarian” (i.e. Buddhist), but in Honam and Yöngnam broth is also offered as part of the familiar rite. In Chindo, the rice offering is served as a proper meal: along the rice, vegetables, chopsticks and spoon are also present.

¹⁶⁴ Youm Won-Hee (2014), 42-7

¹⁶⁵ Cho Hünghyun & Pang Ch’anghwan (1997), 49-50; Youm Won-Hee (2014), 53-4

The Chesök cult has regional meanings too: within Honam and Yŏngnam, it is linked to the children birth and bringing up; within the Chŏlla-nam, Chesök is worshipped for children wellbeing and good harvests; in Chindo island, Chesök is associated with ancestors and parents¹⁶⁶.

We will further examine in detail the meaning of these and other materials in the next paragraphs, discussing about the connections between Chesök and Yŏngdŭng.

Cheju:

In Cheju, Chesök is associated with the *mengdu* (*myŏngdu* in the mainland), the main shamanic tools, and so believed to be spiritual ancestors of all and each shaman (see §2.3).

Non differently from the other shamans in the mainland, Cheju *simbangs* as well have an “inner chamber” in their houses. This chamber is named “main hall” *tangju* 堂主: a personal shrine containing the *mengdu*, seen as the three gods living effigies. In the past, *tangjus* were located within the *kop’ang*, a warehouse for grains. Either the *tangju* was put on a shelf within this warehouse, or a box containing the *mengdu* (“main hall’s box” *tangju-gwe*) was kept in its place. The *kop’ang* itself is associated with the ancestor cult, specifically of the two deities Hyŏn-ssi Ir-wŏl and Wŏndang-halmang, venerated in that part of the warehouse called “Inner Big Dipper (chamber)” An-Ch’ilsŏng. It is possible that the *tangju* originated among shamans as a storage for sacrificial rice – making a curious parallel with the Ancient Rome’s *penati* cult is here unavoidable. To perform a *kut* outside her house, a *simbang* need to “invite” the Chesök to descend into the *mengdu*, inside the *tangju*, and then “escort” them to the ritual site. Not all families possess a *tangju*, so it is also possible to perform household rites to Chesök within the house or in its backyard¹⁶⁷.

Every time someone becomes officially a shaman, a *tangju* is built (“*tangju* is established”); while every time a shaman abandons the profession, the *tangju* is

¹⁶⁶ Cho Hŭngyun & Pang Ch’anghwan (1997), 49-50 & 417-43

¹⁶⁷ Kang So-jeon (2012), 82-92; Yoo Yohan (2021), 340-6

“removed”. Every year, a shaman celebrates the “birthday” of the three ancestral shamans and their mother, the Three Chesŏk and Tanggŭm’aegi: on the eighth, eighteenth and twenty-eighth day of the tenth month for the Three Brother, and between the eighth and the ninth month for Tanggŭm’aegi, respectively. This celebration is called “rite for the main chamber” *tangju-je*, and it is a sort of thanksgiving ceremony, where the shaman “repays” the gods year-long work, not alike the annual harvest festivals. The *tangju-je* is also celebrated when a person officially becomes a shaman. Nowadays, the celebration includes rites for shaman domestic wellbeing (*ant’aek* 安宅), and so familiar rites are also included. Usual *tangju-je* consists in a sequence of rites: for the ancestor spirits, for the Sun and Moon ancestor gods, for the hearth god, and for the Big Dipper god (Ch’ilsŏng). To each of these gods, a temporary altar is built and then the proper rite is performed. The *tangju-je* is the only ceremony where the shaman offers food to the clients and not vice versa¹⁶⁸.

Another, important rite for Cheju shamans is the “*mengdu* offering” *mengdu-gosa*: a Confucian-style short ritual (*kosa* 告祀) executed for the *mengdu* construction. The ritual starts after the shaman has “begged” within his / her own village for brass scraps, at a blacksmith furnace: in fact, this ritual is performed by the blacksmith, not the shaman! The ceremony is very simple: the smith sets up a table where the offerings are placed, offering usually consisting of rice (raw rice, boiled rice, rice cakes), boiled egg, fruits, grain wine, and sometimes pork. The deity venerated here are smithery gods Chŏn’gyŏngrok and Ssoech’ŏri-adŭl, from some versions of the *Ch’ogong-bonp’uri*. Other furnace’s deities can be included. Despite the ritual is the blacksmith’s task, shaman may prostrate to the offerings and pray the heavenly god Ssoech’ŏri-adŭl. Since in Cheju smithery and *mengdu* origins are also attributed to some *tokkaebis*, Ssoech’ŏri-adŭl is sometimes identified with these spirits¹⁶⁹.

¹⁶⁸ Kang So-jeon (2012), 82, 130-8; Yoo Yohan (2021), 340-9

¹⁶⁹ Kang So-jeon (2012), 121-130; Chang Chu-keun (2001), 15-41; Yoo Yohan (2021), 347-9

The importance of the shamanic instruments in Cheju is clear; however, it is not always shared with the mainland (at least explicitly). Since the *mengdu-gosa* version of *Ch'ogong-bonp'uri* resembles the creation narratives, it will be further analyzed in the dedicated section. For now, we should limit our focus on the sacred places and offering:

Region	Northern	Sŏul	Honam	Chindo	Cheju
Sacred space	<i>Anbang</i>	<i>Andang</i>		in front of <i>anbang</i> 's door	<i>tangju</i> or backyard
Offerings	fruits, rice and rice cakes	(vegetarian)	rice and broth (familiar rite)	rice and vegetables (familiar rite)	vegetarian, but context-dependent
Space's secondary dedication	Ch'ilsŏng (said during the rite)	(not reported)			Ch'ilsŏng (implied by the <i>kop'ang</i> nature)

We can date back both the importance of a central place and the pairing with the Big Dipper at least to Yejong of Koryŏ (see §5):

- Within the royal palace, the Nae-Chesŏgwŏn was associated with the Kuyodang, dedicated to planets and stars
- With the emergence of Sŏn cultivation societies, “Good Dharma (Sudharma) hall”, dedicated to Chesŏk / Śakra / Indra, were built within the inner part of the Buddhist temples
- Yi Kyubo mentions some constellations refiguration inside a Chesŏk shrine, part of the shaman's house

So, there clearly exists a symbiosis between the Chesŏk faith and the Big Dipper worship. Therefore, we must take a little detour from our analysis to understand how this relationship endures today:

7.4. Excursus: Chesök and Ch'ilsöng

Despite – or because – Chesök and Ch'ilsöng were often paired since ancient times, today it seems there is a low-key competition between these two gods. In fact, outside of the Honam area, the Bid Dipper characteristics were all absorbed by Chesök¹⁷⁰.

Ch'ilsöng in fact shares many patronages with Chesök: it ensures health, safety and longevity, especially for children, and it is a household deity worshipped within familiar rites. Unlike Chesök, which presides the inner the house inner parts, Ch'ilsöng is believed to be a door-guardian god (*munjön-sin* 門前神)¹⁷¹. However, we have seen how, in the Chindo island, Chesök effigy too is placed by the “inner chamber” door.

The myth surrounding this collective deity is relevant as well, as it can be seen as a conjunction between the *Chesök-ponp'uri*, the *Igong-bonp'uri* (see §10) and the Paridegi / Pari-gongju narratives. These are the four main versions reported by Seo Taesok¹⁷²:

Honam version (*Ch'ilsöng-bonp'uri*) Cheju version (*Munjön-bonp'uri*)

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. A mother has seven twins | 1. A mother has seven twins |
| 2. The father abandons them | 2. She abandons them |
| 3. The sons search for the father
with clues given to the mother
by her husband | 3. The mother was killed,
drowned |
| 4. The sons find their father as a
heavenly deity with a new wife | 4. The killer deceives the father
and marries him |
| | 5. The blood mother rebirths as a
wild boar sow |

¹⁷⁰ Seo Taesok (2001), 343-353

¹⁷¹ Seo Taesok (2001), 343-353; Encyclopedia Planning Team (2013), *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs*, 147-8; Lee Kyung Hwa (2022), 170-2

¹⁷² Seo Taesok (2001), 323-365

Honam version (*Ch'ilsŏng-bonp'uri*) Cheju version (*Munjŏn-bonp'uri*)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>5. The mother dies and rebirths as a game animal (either a golden deer, a wild boar sow or a wild swine)</p> <p>6. The stepmother takes her “revenge” on the blood mother and makes her killed</p> <p>7. The stepmother is punished, transformed into animals (snake, frog, insects etc. depending on the version)</p> <p>8. The sons and the father return to their hometown</p> <p>9. The mother is resurrected by the seven twins with the “resurrection flower”</p> | <p>6. The stepmother takes her “revenge” on the blood mother and makes her killed again</p> <p>7. Punishment of the stepmother</p> <p>8. The blood mother is resurrected by the seven twins with the “resurrection flower”</p> <p>9. Apotheosis of the seven twins</p> |
|--|--|

In Kwanbok (Hamhŭng), the twins are originally three, exactly like the Samsin-Chesŏk, but the father has another son from the stepmother. Therefore, here, the Ch'ilsŏng are four: a number associated with Death.

Similarly, in Kwansŏ (Hamhŭng), the sons from the blood mother are seven, while the sons from the stepmother are three, again: like the Samsin-Chesŏk, which makes the total number of Ch'ilsŏng deities ten: the number of the Underworld Kings.

The similarity between these stories and those of Samsin is evident. Seo Taesok (2001) argues that both are retelling of Chumong mythology: in this case, the water element (the mother's drawing) can be traced back to the goddess Ilsin (see §3), while the main narrative structure is that of the king Yuri – exactly like in the Chesŏk case. The main difference lies in the nature of the respective rituals: while

Chesŏk is mainly worshipped in a Buddhist fashion, Ch'ilsŏng is mainly worshipped in a Confucian fashion¹⁷³.

When Ch'ilsŏng survives the Chesŏk predominant presence, both deities are seen as complementary. Meaning that there is some sort of division of labor:

In the Hwanghae rites, a fan portraying Ch'ilsŏng is used during the Chesŏk rite to welcome the god. While Yung Sung-chan (2016) reports a funerary song (*sang'yŏ-sori* 喪興소리) sung in P'yongch'an, Kangwŏn, according to which Ch'ilsŏng oversees the human destiny and Chesŏk the good luck / blessings¹⁷⁴:

여보시오 벗님네들 / 이내 말씀을 들어보소 / 이 세상에 나온 사람 /
누 덕으로 나왔는가 / 석가여래 공덕으로 / 아버님전 뼈를 빌고 /
어머님전 살을 빌어 / 제석님께 복을 받고 / 칠성님께 명을 받아 /
이내 일신이 탄생하니

Here, my friends! / Please hear these words of mine! / He who came to this world,
/ by the virtues of whom he came [to life]? / By the good merits [*punya*] of the
Thus Gone Śākyamuni / he begged the bones from the father, / the flesh from the
mother, / from Chesŏk received the blessings, and / from Ch'ilsŏng obtained his
fate, / so that his own body came to life...

Similarly, Han Geum-soon (2008) reports a Buddhist section within in the Cheju island's *Yŏngdŭng-gut*, called "karmic causes elucidation" *Yŏnyu-dakkŭm*, with an almost identical wording¹⁷⁵:

¹⁷³ Seo Taesok (2001), 343-353

¹⁷⁴ Cho Hŭngyun & Pang Ch'anghwan (1997), 50-60; Yung, Sung-chan (2016), 79-85

¹⁷⁵ Han Geum-soon (2008), 491-6

우리 인간이 탄생할 때, 석가모니 부처님께 빌었던 공덕으로 아버지의 뼈를
빌고 어머니의 살을 빌고, 칠성단애가 명(命)을 이어 달라 빌고, 제석님 전에
가 복(福)을 내려달라고 빌어...

When we humans come to life, it is because we have prayed the Śākyamuni
Buddha for good merits [*punya*], our father for the bones, our mother for the flesh,
Ch'ilsöng for fate, and Chesök for blessings...

In both cases, the frame is clearly Buddhist and seemingly came from a single
source, now lost.

In the regions where Chesök absorbed the Ch'ilsöng prerogatives, the traces of the
Big Dipper god are evident: the “generic” Chesök can bears the title Ch'ilsöng-
Chesök, and Chesök-halmöni can be also called Ch'ilsök-halmöni – Ch'ilsök, the
“seventh night”, is a festival dedicated to the Big Dipper god. Another possibility
is the formulaic expression “X is Y-Chesök” (in this case “Ch'ilsöng / the Big
Dipper is Chesök”) that we have seen before¹⁷⁶.

Good luck and destiny surely can be overlapping concepts, and this is even more
evident within pre-modern agrarian societies when it comes to childbirth and
agriculture. Therefore, pairing, competition and even identification of these two
deities should not come with a surprise.

We can now draw some preliminary conclusions and pen a summary:

- Chesök is a “production deity”: its patronages include fecundity, childbearing, childbirth, offspring wellbeing, family's health, agriculture and husbandry, longevity, good luck, and destiny. Its faith is included in familiar, household ancestral cult, and in Cheju, the Three Chesök are believed to be the first shamans.
- We can distinguish three aspects of Chesök:

¹⁷⁶ Cho Hünghyun & Pang Ch'anghwan (1997), 47-60; Encyclopedia Planning Team (2013), *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs*, 166-9; Youm Won-Hee (2014), 37

- “Generic Chesök”: invoked during rites, it is the impersonal / collective version of the god. Its many names derive either from its “effigies” (earthenware jars: *tanji*, *ogari*) and its patronage / titles. It often syncretizes with other deities with which it shares “fields of actions” – typically, the household god Söngju and the destiny god Ch’ilsöng. This variety in names gave the surface impression that it is a “generic deity”.
- Tanggüm’aegi / Samsin-Halmöni: she has roughly same “dominions” of the “Generic Chesök”, with more emphasis on the fertility and childbirth. Her divine patronages are always implicit: she can give birth to a divine prole, but she is recognized as birth goddess only *a posteriori*, if ever. Likely, her name originally meant “valley goddess” or “village goddess” *tan(i)-kom*. She was originally a goddess of the earth, territory, (re)production and life.
- Three Chesök / Samsin: they oversee the children’s wellbeing up to a certain age. Iconographically, they are portrayed in Buddhist ropes, with a triangular paper hat (*kokkal*).
- The first account of Chesök’s origin story (*Chesök-ponp’uri*) is reported by the nineteenth century / early twentieth century’s *Mudang Naeryök*. The modern narratives are recorded from the Colonial Era on.
 - According to the *Mudang Naeryök*, Chesök as heavenly deity is identical with Tan’gun. The myth reported by the text is that of king Sansang of Koguryö (*SKS XVI*, Koguryö annals 4: King Sansang 山王): a re-elaboration of the Chumong myth with a focus on the mother side. The myth explains why Chesök is a childbirth deity.
 - In other parts of the *Mudang Naeryök*, Chesök is also the god of the T’aebaek mountain, an agricultural deity, a household deity, the highest of all gods and the mythical ancestor of all Korean people
 - Scholars have found that the narrative structure of *Chesök-ponp’uri* and the tale of Chumong often overlap:
 1. Intervention of a Heavenly god

2. The girl who will give birth to the Heavenly god's son is persecuted
 3. She is shielded by miraculous means
 4. The son(s) get recognized by the father.
- Other, similar narrative structures can be found in Koryŏ imperial house origin narrative and Late Koryŏ retelling of Chumong and Tan'gun mythologies.
 - We can thus infer that the modern *Chesŏk-ponp'uri* is a re-elaboration of Korean Northern kingdoms' foundation narratives, possible only during Koryŏ period, at least.
- Chesŏk "effigies" *sinch'e* are earthenware jars filled with rice, renewed periodically. The "effigy" is stored in the "inner chamber": a large storeroom, associated with the ancestor worship. Offerings to Chesŏk can be either "vegetarian", if the god is worshipped as a Buddhist deity, or with meat, if the deity is worshipped as an ancestor deity. Rice cakes (*ttŏk*) are the basic food consumed and offered during the Chesŏk-dedicated festivities.
 - Only the Samsin "effigies" show more diversity in shape, though not in *function*.
 - The "inner chamber" seems also dedicated to the Big Dipper deity Ch'ilsŏng. This is more evident in Cheju than in the mainland. This association can be traced back to Koryŏ culture.
 - The physical proximity between a chamber dedicated to Ch'ilsŏng and the Chesŏk "effigy" often led to the identification of the twos. In those regions when this does not happen, there is competition, as both are (also) destiny deities.
 - The Hamhŭng version of Ch'ilsŏng myth and some versions of the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri* underlines that destiny is often equated with death, as both deities are sometimes identified with the Ten Underworld Kings. Similarly, in those regions when Chesŏk absorbed Ch'ilsŏng, it is because they both are gods of good luck and destiny. In general,

luck, destiny and death are co-implied thoughts – this association of ideas was even more evident in pre-modern agrarian societies.

- In ancient times, it seems that there was a division of roles between the two gods: Ch'ïlsǝng gives human their destinies, Chesǝk gives them blessings.

In the next paragraph we will see Yǝngdǝng: a wind deity so similar to Chesǝk to be interchangeable, and yet so different to be unmistakable.

8 Yöngdüng and Chesök

Within the *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs*, Yöndüng is described as “the god that oversees the wind”, whose cult is both domestic and communitarian. She is “the god that reigns over it from the celestial spheres where she lives. This deity does not get involved in the affairs of the earthly world and of human lives throughout the year, with the exception of the first day of the second lunar month. when she descends on earth”. For these reasons, Yöngdüng is also know with the names of “[deity of the] second [lunar] month” Iwöl 二月 and “deity of the wind” P’ungsin 風神. There are other names, often regional variations (Yöndüng, Yöngdong, Yöngdu etc.), among which appears Chesök too. Here is a summary of the name / titles referring to this deity associated with its main distribution areas:

Region	Name
Hamgyöng	Yöngdüng-sin
Hwanghae-P’yöng’an	Yöngdüng-halmöni
Kyönggi	Yöngdüng-halmöni
Ch’ungch’öng-buk	Yöngdüng-halmöni (Yöngdüng-halmi), Yöngdong-halmöni, Iwöl-jisök, Iwöl-son-nim, Iwöl-p’ungsin
Ch’ungch’öng-nam	Yöngdüng-halmöni (Yöngdüng-halmi), Iwöl-Yöngdüng-halmöni, Iwöl-son-nim
Kyöngsang-buk	Yöngdüng-halmöni (Yöngdu, Yöngdu-halmöni, Yöngdu-halmanne, Yöngdüng, Yöngdüng-halmae), Iwöl-halmöni, Chesök (Chisök, Yöngdüng-jisök, Iwöl-jisök), halmanne
Kyöngsang-nam	Yöngdüng-halmöni (Yöngdüng-halmanne, Yöngdüng-halmae, Yöngdong-halmae, Yöngdong-halmang-ne), Chesök-halmöni (Chisök-halmöni, Chisök-halmae, Kurüm-jesök halma-ssi-ne, Yöngdüng-jesök, Param-jesök), Son, P’ungsin, Iwöl-halmöni (Iwöl-p’ungsin-nim-ne, Iwöl-halmae, Iwöl-halmam-ne)
Chölla-buk	Yöngdüng-halmöni (Yöngdüng-halmae), Iwöl-halmöni, Iwöl-Chesök-halmöni, Iwöl-Yöngdüng-halmöni
Chölla-nam	Yöngdüng-halmöni, Iwöl-halmöni, Iwöl-ham-sse
Cheju	Yöngdüng-halmang

Yöndüŋ faith is very important in Cheju, but spreads well outside the island. In fact, it seems that it affects the coastal and the mountainside regions, i.e. the windiest zones of the Peninsula. Yöndüŋ faith can be found in the central regions, the T'aebaek, Sobaek and Noryöŋ mountain ranges, as well as Kyöŋsang, Ch'ungch'öŋg, and some parts of Kang'wön. Yöndüŋ faith can be found in Chölla-nam as well, while is rare in Chölla-buk, Kyöŋggi and many parts of Ch'ungch'öŋg-nam. So, Yöndüŋ is mainly an islander goddess well known within the southeastern coast and some parts of the central regions. Likely, the cult spread from Sangju and Sönsan in Kyöŋsang in the fifteenth century, and by the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries was diffused up to Cheju¹⁷⁷.

What mythology surrounds Yöngdüŋ? The stories are short, often etiological, describing the correlation between the rising wind, the rain and the good harvest. They are summarized by the *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs*¹⁷⁸:

This deity does not get involved in the affairs of the earthly world and of human lives throughout the year, with the exception of the first day of the second lunar month, when she descends on earth. If the winds are strong on this day, it is believed that the deity is accompanied by her daughter, and if it rains, she is accompanied by her daughter-in-law, an interpretation based on the general notions of the relationship between mother and daughter and that between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law—the former defined by mutual rapport, the latter by conflict

Yöngdüŋ is a triple deity especially in Kyöŋsang region. Here, the deity descends three times: during the first day on the first month, called “day of the descent of Chesök” *Chesöŋ-nim-i naeryöonün nal* or “high heaven” (*sangch'ön* 上天); the ninth day of the same month, called “day of the descent of Chesök's daughter” *Chesöŋ-nim ttar-i naeryöonün nal* or “middle heaven” (*chungch'ön* 中天); and from the fifteenth to the twentieth, called or “low heaven” (*hach'ön* 下天). The

¹⁷⁷ Nam Hyang (2010), 295-319; Encyclopedia Planning Team (2013), *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs*, 190

¹⁷⁸ Encyclopedia Planning Team (2013), *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs*, 190.

nineteenth day is the “day of the descent of Chesök’s daughter” *Chesöng-nim ttar-i naeryöonün nal*, the twentieth day is the “day when Chesök’s leaves” *Chesöng-nim ttönanün nal*. Broader terms for these three periods are: “first”, “second” and “third wind” or “first”, “middle” and “last guest”. The daughter-in-law is associated with rain and poor harvest, while the daughter is associated with wind and plentiful harvest.

This association exists in Chölla too as fossilized expressions, referring to the weather of the first day on the second month: “rain Yöngdŭng” *pi-yöngdŭng* describes a windy day, a signal of a rainy year; “wind Yöngdŭng” *param-yöngdŭng* describes a clear sky; “fire Yöngdŭng” *pur-yöngdŭng* describes a droughty day. If it ever happens to rain, the weather is called “water Yöngdŭng” *mur-yöngdŭng* and indicates a rich harvesting year.¹⁷⁹

In Cheju, the Yöngdŭng faith is heavily dependent on the Ch’ilmöridang Yöngdŭng-gut, a huge festivity derived from the Koryö Lantern Festival (see §4.3). According to the *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs*, in Cheju Yöngdŭng is mainly a male deity, however during this festival we find seven forms, including a female one: a clue about how this festival put together several local traditions:

1. “Grandpa Yöngdŭng” Yöngdŭng-harŭbang
2. “Grandma Yöngdŭng” Yöngdŭng-halmang
3. “Emperor (大王) Yöngdŭng” Yöngdŭng-daewang
4. “Successful general (虎將) Yöngdŭng” Yöngdŭng-hojang
5. “Right-side general (右將) Yöngdŭng” Yöngdŭng-ujang
6. “Special supervisor (別監) Yöngdŭng” Yöngdŭng-byölgam
7. “Left-side (左首) Yöngdŭng” Yöngdŭng-jwasu

During the second lunar month, Yöngdŭng comes to the island either from the “Jiangnan Kingdom of the Son of Heaven” (see the previous chapter), or the “Dragon King Empire” Yowang Hwangje-guk 龍王皇帝國, or the “Land of the cyclops” Oenunbag’i-nara; they reach Cheju starting from the port of Pöktökkæ, Kwido; then, they go on the mount Halla, visiting “the Five Hundred Generals”

¹⁷⁹ Nam Hyang (2010), 298-319.

(Obaek-changgun 五百將軍); after this, they visit various places including the village of Kyorae, among camelias and peach flowers. Their coming brings prosperity: they sow new seeds for the new year on the land, and abalones, seashells and seaweed on the rocky beaches. According to the seventeenth century *Namsarok* 南槎錄, quoted by the *Haesang-ilsa* 海上逸史, quoted by the 1937's *Simjaejip* 深齋集, in ancient times it was also believed that, where Yōngdŭng passed by, the seasnails are all eaten by the deity, and therefore there their shells are empty.

There is also another Cheju myth, reported within the late seventeenth century's *Namsaillok* 南槎日錄: some Hansu village's fishermen, whose fishing boat was buffeted by the waves toward an island named "land of the cyclops" Oenunbag'i-nara, were told by Yōngdŭng to recite the name of Avalokiteśvara, so they would safely return home. They did so, but, when they stopped, the storm raged again, and they were brought back again to the Oenunbag'i-nara. Finally, the fishermen managed to come home invoking Avalokiteśvara's name¹⁸⁰.

As we can see, there is not a concluded narrative regarding Yōngdŭng: each story is a description of its powers, and how they are exercised ("patronages" in Dumézil's analysis). Therefore, we can continue describing its "dominions" seamlessly.

Fundamentally, Yōngdŭng oversees two natural phenomena: wind and sea tides. Rain is predictable from wind occurrences, and so its control is implied as well:

Yōngdŭng as a wind deity: this aspect is more widespread in the hinterlands, where Yōngdŭng is more known as "Wind God" P'ungsin than Yōngdŭng. Particularly, in Kang'wŏn region is also known as "wind deity" Param-sin, "wind general" P'ungsa 風師, "wind count" P'ungbaek 風伯 and "wind spirit" Piryŏm (Feilian) 飛廉. Wind is essential for agriculture, as from the wind a farmer could predict the rain from it. This is exemplified by the popular saying "the rain follows the good winds" *u-sun-p'ung-jo* 雨順風調. As the unpredictable gusts, Yōngdŭng

¹⁸⁰ Han Geum-soon (2008), 469-491; Nam Hyang (2010), 298-319; Encyclopedia Planning Team (2013), *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs*, 133-136 & 190.

is described as whimsical, capricious and fickle: if a bird eats a rice for *ttŏk* made for the festival dedicated to her (Yŏngdŭng-nal), she can kill it on the spot.

Yŏngdŭng as “the god of the second lunar month” Iwŏl: the second lunar month is the trait d’union between the farming and the fishing aspects of this deity. In fact, traditionally, the year’s agricultural work starts on the first day of the second lunar month. This day was called “day of farmers” *mŏsŭm-nal*, “slaves’ day” *nobi-nal*, “workers’ day” *ilkkun-nal*. During these days, rice cakes are gifted to the workers for their activity, and a share of the harvest is offered to the goddess Yŏngdŭng too. Yŏngdŭng festivities coincides both with “day of farmers”, on the new moon, and the full moon, the fifteenth day of the month. Thus, there is a correlation between the first wind of the year, calculated on the second lunar month, and with the tidal cycle as well, calculated on lunation.

The connections between Yŏngdŭng, second lunar month, wind and prosperity are well attested since 1749’s *Haksŏngji* 鶴城誌:

盈騰神 春陽發散之氣也 易名曰風神 (俗謂盈騰帝釋)

以二月初一日 (同風下降伺察 人間禍福故)

人家齋戒沐浴 又切禁商旅使不止宿

“Yŏngdŭng: is the *ki* of the spring heat’s spreading, it is called P’ungsin (the folk call it Yŏngdŭng-Chesŏk). / [It is celebrated] the first day of the second lunar month (with the fading of wind comes rain, cause of mankind fortunes and misfortunes). / [During the festival] people abstain from eating, wash themselves [ritually] and avoid stopping at the markets and travelling, avoiding even stopping for the night”

Comparable beliefs are ported in the Yu Man-gong 柳晩恭’s “quiet of *Hanma*” *Hanmajogam* 旱魔潮減 (nineteenth century) and again in the 1824’s “Song of the Wind God” 風神歌 by Ch’ae Chejong 蔡濟恭. Interestingly, within the “Song of the Wind God”, Yŏngdŭng is described similarly to Chesŏk, intended as a welth

deity (“during the harvest time, make [the crop] enter in our magazines” *ch’u-songgŭp-si ip kungch’ang* 秋成及時入官倉), and, both in the “quiet of *Hanma*” and “Song of the Wind God”, rice cakes are mentioned as offerings.

The second lunar month is likely influenced by the Buddhist customs as well: the Cheju Yöngdŭng-gut derives from the Buddhist Lantern Festival: the Yöngdŭng-hoe / Lantern Festival was celebrated during the second lunar month during the early Koryŏ period and gradually shifted to the fourth lunar month. In a sense, the second lunar month is also a Buddhist liturgical archaism (see §4)¹⁸¹.

Yöngdŭng as a sea tides deity: as a god of wind, Yöngdŭng is important to navigation. Moreover, its festivity is tied to the lunar cycles and so was rapidly associated with the tides. The rising and lowering of the sea make either safe or unsafe going by the waters and going by the waters is essential to fishing: the sensitivity toward these changes is called “sensitivity to the tides” *chosŏk-kam* 潮汐感. Another story about Yöngdŭng exemplify this natural cycle: Yöngdŭng descends on the earth during the high tide period. Depending on the region, this period is called “Yöngdŭng’s time” *Yöngdŭng-si*; on the other hand, the tide’s retreat is called “Yöngdŭng’s life” *Yöngdŭng-sari*¹⁸².

Here, we can clearly see some similarities and differences with Chesŏk. Among the similarities, both Yöngdŭng and Chesŏk are triple deities linked to weather and wealth, both they come from afar and are worshipped domestically and in the village as well. The fact that name “Yöngdŭng” clearly derives from the Buddhist Lanter Festival where Chesŏk was worshipped (Yöndŭng-hoe) points even to a total – yet simplistic – identification. As for the differences, this deity seems clearly more “specialized”, as linked to the wind, the tides, and only secondarily with the rain. The connection to agricultural wealth remains, but it less direct, while there is a unique connection to fishing; similarly, if Chesŏk is either the Three Brothers / Samsin, or the duo Tanggŭm’aegi-Three Brothers, or the family Sky deity-Tanggŭm’aegi-Three Brothers, Yöngdŭng group is formed by a mother / father

¹⁸¹ Han Geum-soon (2008); Nam Hyang (2010), 295-305 & 316-7.

¹⁸² Han Geum-soon (2008), 469-491; Nam Hyang (2010), 295-305 & 307-317; Heo Nam-chun & Hyun-jeung Lee (2018), 179-182. Cf. with Suh Young-Dae (2017).

(Chesök), a daughter, and daughter-in-law. The tasks division among the daughter and the daughter-in-law seems also reflecting the three weather gods (“Count of Wind” P’ungbaek 風伯, “Master of Rain” Usa 雨師 and “Master of Cloud” Unsa 雲師) from the Tan’gun myth, more than the “simple” Chumong or Tan’gun myth; finally, Yöngdŭng is clearly a more “traveler” god, to the point it is conflated with Son-nim, a wandering smallpox deity. About this last difference, we will discuss later.

So, Chesök and Yöngdŭng are quite similar yet different in “domains” and mythology: sometimes they overlap, sometimes diverge. A similar observation can be made about their rites. It seems that Yöngdŭng “effigies” maintained the functions of Chesök jars, but not the form.

Unlike Chesök, Yöngdŭng is not properly a “vegetarian” deity: rice cakes are the main offering in the mainland, but fishery products are the norm on the coasts. The connection to rice farming gets Yöngdŭng closer to Chesök, however here there are differences too: one of the first mention to Yöngdŭng and farming can be found in the Late Chosŏn’s *Kyŏngdojapchi* 京都雜誌. In this text, there are mentioned structures made of shoots of rice, used for the ritual preparation of plain *ttŏk* and half-moon-shaped, pine-aromatized meat-filled *ttŏk*. These cakes are called *songp’yŏn* 松餅, a term now associated with the Ch’usŏk.

Kyŏngsang: In Kyŏngsang-nam, parts of Chŏlla and Ch’ungch’ŏng, Yöngdŭng “effigies” are formed by interlaced pine or bamboo branches, fashioned so that they can hold a bowl or a gourd, containing water. The water is used for purification. The most complete description of this kind of instrument comes from Ulsan (Yŏngnam) and was made by Song Sŏk-ha 宋錫夏 (1915-1999): the *sinch’e* is formed by three bamboo stems intercrossed and bound together with attached colorful strings, five colored fabrics and white paper, while the bowl is made of gourd and the water contains flowers. The name can vary: “Yöngdŭng platform (*tae* 臺)” *Yöngdŭng-dae*, “bowl of the Wind God” *P’ungsin-daejŏp*, “water platform”

mul-dae, “water platform of Lord Chesök” *Chesöng-nim-mul-dae* etc. The day dedicated to celebrations for this deity is called Yöngdüng-nal, and its first description is from the early nineteenth century’s “Song of the Wind God”, which we have mentioned before. According to the song, *ttök* is prepared and offered, drums were played, and loess dust was spread in the courtyard to welcome the deity. Using loess soil to welcome the deity is still common, especially in the southern regions. In **Kyönggi and Kang’wön** there is also the custom of consuming rice cakes: here, the rice is grinded in advance on the full moon of the first month.

Chölla: In Chölla there are two possible “effigies”: a jar, a bowl. The first is found in Chölla proper, the second is also found in Ch’ungch’öng and Kyöngsang-nam. The bowl, dedicated to Iwöl, function exactly like the Chesök jar: rice is conserved as the “Iwöl’s meal” *Iwöl-pap* in the house main room, under the ancestor shrine. The rise, called “ancestor nourishment” *söngju-maegöri*, is preserved as food for the following spring, and in the meantime cannot be touched without purifying one hands with water. The other *sinch’e* is fundamentally identical to those of Kyöngsang: a bowl filled with clean water, held by straws. Here, the connection between the two “effigies” is evident. In Chölla, Yöngdüng is mainly an ancestral deity.

Chindo: In this island, the offerings to Yöngdüng usually consists in sea products. During the festivities, shellfishes are put on the “altar / platform of the grandma” *Halmanne-dae*. This “effigy” functions like those of the East Coast (see below). Typical of this island is its “Yöngdüng festival” *Yöngdüng-je*, when local spirits called “mulberry grandmas” *ppong-halmöni* are celebrated on the beach.

East Coast: Here, the Yöngdüng “effigy” is a carved wooden hook called “Yöngdüng’s hook” *Yöngdüng-kkakkuji* or, alternatively, a shelf. The best products fished in the first month are preserved on these sacred instruments, and, depending on the region, cannot be touched before the first day of the second lunar month. In absence of fish, the “effigy” can be also used to preserve seaweed. In the East Coast regions, the *Yöngdüng-je* is a community festival for the village tutelary deity.

Cheju: In Cheju, Yōngdŭng is mainly tasked of making grains, shellfishes and seaweed prosper. In fact, within the Yōngdŭng-gut, there is an entire section dedicated to this: the “donation of (seaweed and mussel) seeds” *Ssi-dŭrim*. In this festival, there is also a rite, consisting in a race between paper boat, called “Play of the Big Horses” Yangmahŭi 鬐馬戲. The race is between each village household, and it is believed that the boat, sent to the sea, will take the deity back to heaven. The fastest ship is the winner.

We can see from this overview that the Yōngdŭng *sinch'e* serves as a recipient for first fruits and supplies, food that cannot be touched and is occasionally associated with the ancestors. The food is not necessarily vegetarian, and this clearly depends on the main local activities: fish is more available on the coast than in the hinterland¹⁸³. Though, it seems that Yōngdŭng faith originated in Kyōngsang mainland (see before) and we therefore must assume the first offerings were in rice. We can suppose that Yōngdŭng and Chesōk were originally indistinguishable, but even not going so far, this commonality in the “effigies” point to common practices: the first one is the rice offering to the buddhas, a form of *pūjā* which likely originated before Koryō; the second lays in the term “platform” (*tae* 臺) used for Yōngdŭng: the character was also used to translate *maṇḍala*, symbolizing / synthetizing the true nature of the buddhas. Built on platforms (*tan* 壇), they are asperged with lustral water. The *maṇḍala*, were also part of the Yōndŭnghoe and the P'algwanhoe rites, thus the connection with Chesōk faith (see §5.3)¹⁸⁴; the third practice lays in the commoners' common sense: hooks and shelves are mainly used preserve fresh products, not differently from a jar storing rice supply for the coming months. The content varies but the function is the same. Associating them with

¹⁸³ Han Geum-soon (2008); Nam Hyang (2010), 298-316; Encyclopedia Planning Team (2010), *Encyclopedia of Korean Seasonal Customs*, 112-120 & 215; Encyclopedia Planning Team (2013), *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs*, 166-8; Yun Sung-chan (2016), 79-85; Heo Nam-chun & Hyun-jeung Lee (2018), 179; Cf. with the dedicated articles in the *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk Culture* (online version)

¹⁸⁴ Ian Joo (2021); Kim Sooyoun (2022), 51-8

household deities can be seen as a secondary outcome of associating ancestors with household wealth and-or overlapping the storage space with the area dedicated to the ancestral worship – and in fact neither of both gods are *always everywhere* ancestral deities too.

Other considerations:

The rice cake offering in both Yōngdŭng and Chesōk festivities is clearly influenced by the chronologically close festivities. The *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs*, for example, says that festivities to Chesōk may coincide with Ch’usōk, Lunar New Year and so on. Similarly, Yōndŭnghoe celebrations may overlap with those of Taeborŭm¹⁸⁵, the aforementioned “day of farmers” and, generally, the agricultural celebrations for the new farming year. Net of the differences, rice cakes are the typical food in all these festivities. It is futile trying to determine which generated which: the offerings for a prosperity festival or the offerings for a prosperity deity. What can be said for sure is that, in Korea, rice cakes are associated with agricultural wealth not differently that in China.

As for the seaweed (sea mustard) offering, it seems there is a separation of duties between these two gods. Yōngdŭng is believed to actively make seaweed prosper only in Cheju, nonetheless seaweed is offered to the deity in the mainland too. Seaweed is offered to Chesōk (Samsin) as well; however, the reasoning is different: while the association with the plant for Yōngdŭng seems a translation of agricultural cycle – seaweed have their seasons, can be farmed etc., for Chesōk the main association is to the childbirth. In this sense, when the two gods coexist like in Chōlla, Chindo and Cheju, there is a sort of division of labor: Yōngdŭng brings prosperity to the sea, and, with the products of the sea, offers are made to Chesōk, which bring prosperity to the household. In this, let us not be deceived by the fact that Yōngdŭng’s way of ensuring wealth seems near identical to Chesōk’s one: one brings prosperity to the seas, which ensures household wealth, the other brings

¹⁸⁵ “Great Full Moon”: fifteenth day of the first lunar month.

prosperity directly to the household. This connection is even closer in those regions where Yöngdüng and Chesök are both worshipped as ancestral deities.

8.1. Excursus: Samsöng and Mazu

There is only one characteristic that Yöngdüng has and Chesök has not: being a travel(er) deity. Despite this, as we have seen, Yöngdüng and Chesök often overlap in their basic patronages to the point of being (almost) one and the same. So: how is it possible that they are so similar while at the same time one is a household god and the other a navigation goddess?

A possible explanation comes from Suh Young-Dae (2017) who analyzed the nature of the ancient deity Samsöng and its possible relationship with the Chinese goddess Mazu 媽祖. However, unlike Suh Young-Dae, here we are not interested in Samsöng's nature *itself* as Mazu or Tan'gun (see §5.4.1): Samsöng *may or may not* be originally Tan'gun too. The point is that, even if Samsöng is a “simple” transposition of Mazu, we can find many aspects of this deity in Yöngdüng too, suggesting that there was a syncretism at some point of History.

What are these common aspects? According to the scholar analysis, Samsöng was 1) predominantly of feminine gender 2) a triplet deity 3) a deity who saves fishermen 4) associated with sea, wind and navigation 5) there is a travel taboo during its festivities. As for Yöngdüng, this taboo was applied both for the journeys by land (as per the 1749's *Haksöngji*) and by sea as well:

Sinjüng Tongguk yöji süngnam 新增東國輿地勝覽 (1530)

二月朔日 於歸德金寧等地 立竿
十二 迎神祭之 居涯月者 得槎
形如馬頭者 飾以彩帛 作躍馬戲

On the first day of the second [lunar] month, in Kwidök Kümnyöng and other places, they erect twelve [bamboo] poles for welcoming and celebrating the gods. Those who live in Aewöl build dummy

以娛 神 至望日乃罷 謂之然燈
是月禁乘船

horse heads, decorated with colorful silks,
and ride them to entertain the gods. With
the coming of the full moon, all ends in a
festival named Lantern Festival
(Yöndŭng). In this month, it is forbidden
taking a boat

Mazu was a shaman lived during Southern Song, deified between the Song and Yuan dynasties and likely adopted by Koryŏ king Ch'ung'yŏl 忠烈 (r. 1274-1308). Her association with other two deities – the “Dragon King” Longwang 龍王 and “Little Star” Xiaoxing 小星 or the birth goddess Lady Linshui 臨水夫人 – is attested since the faith origins in Fujian. According to Suh Young-Dae, Mazu was adopted as Samsŏng for her ability to ensure the safety of sea routes (see §5.4.1), and her cult spread mostly on Chŏlla-nam coasts, near the Han River. Mazu / Samsŏng temples were relocated in the mainland only after Japanese pirates' incursions, which forced many coast-dwellers to escape from the coasts. If Mazu, became a generic *sŏnghwang*, as Suh Young-Dae suggests, this does not necessarily mean she lost her patronage over travels. If this was the case, this Mazu / Samsŏng cannot be tell apart from the Yöngdŭng described within the *Haksŏngji*. Curiously, but with different reasons, Mazu too became generic a route protectress in China: after 1415, in Tianjin, she was worshipped as a transportation safety deity. Another, yet little, convergence can be seen in the official titles: Mazu and Samsŏng shared the title of “great queen / empress” *taewang* 大王, according to historical records of both, and it is interesting that the same title is shared with Yöngdŭng on Cheju Island, as well that all three deities are said to come from China¹⁸⁶. This supposed Chinese origin is likely another outcome of the Yuan interference:

¹⁸⁶ Han Geum-soon (2008), 469-488; Nam Hyang (2010), 298-307; Suh Young-Dae (2017); Heo Nam-chun & Hyun-jeung Lee. (2018), 179-181.

Heo Nam-chun and Hyun-jeung Lee (2018) analyzed the correlation between the Kuroshio Current (Kuroshio Kairyū 黒潮海流) sea routes and the presence of an “oceanic paradise” within Cheju and Ryukyu mythologies. This current is very important for navigation, as “it flows past Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Taiwan, and China”, touching specifically the Guandong, Fujian and Zhejiang provinces¹⁸⁷. The current also touches the Ryukyu archipelago, Japan and Cheju Island. The presence of this current explains some shared elements between the Yōngdŭng faith and the Ryukyu mytheme of Nirai Kanai 儀來河内, an idyllic island often associated with creation narratives (see the following chapter):

1. Both Ryukyu mythologies and Cheju Yōngdŭng faith revolves around a “deity presiding over abundance visiting the island from across the sea at regular intervals”
2. Communal rituals. Associated with “agrarian rituals” and origin of farming in Ryukyu, and with fishing in Cheju.
3. Similar customs during such rituals: “the making of boats, welcoming or sending off of boats, and offering of prayers”

The biggest divergence is that, in Ryukyu, Nirai Kanai is also believed to be the place from which the deity brought civilization. No such cultural element exists within the Yōngdŭng narratives.

Connections between Cheju and Ryukyu existed long before the Mongol Interference. And it is not by chance that there are other, more ancient “oceanic paradises” within Cheju mythology. The one mentioned by the two scholars are Iō Island 離於島 from the island’s goddess origin story, and the “Country of Jade Green Waves” Pyōngnang-guk 碧浪國 from the Cheju foundation myth (“Three Clans Myth”) – to which we can add the “Country of the Rising Sun” (Japan?) Ilbon-guk 日本國 from the *Koryōsa* account of the T’amna foundation narrative (*SKS* VII: Silla annals 7, king Munmu, year 7, month 2; *KRS* LVII, annals 11: T’amna Province). The “Country of the Son of Heaven from Jiangnan” seems to be a new addition, found mainly in the myths of Yōngdŭng and Chach’ōngbi 自請妃

¹⁸⁷ We must keep in mind that Mazu faith originated in Fujian.

, the grain goddess from the *Segyŏng-bonp'uri*¹⁸⁸. It is here where the Mongol Interference becomes relevant again: T'amna kingdom (耽羅, c.a 58BCE-1404CE) was conquered by Koryŏ in the early twelfth century but, after making Koryŏ its vassal, the Yuan court directly sent local governors (*daruyači* 達魯花赤) to the island. This made the polity independent again, at least on paper. The Mongols controlled Cheju Island for a century. In the words of Heo Nam-chun and Hyun-jeung Lee:

The Yuan took control of Goryeo's governance, elevated Tamna-guk's status from county to state, and established military and civil governors on the island there. The Yuan's aim in this was to emphasize that Tamna-guk was not subordinate to Goryeo but was directly controlled by the Yuan

At the time, the honorific term for China was "Realm of the Son of Heaven" Ch'ŏnja-guk 天子國, a terminology that passed from formal reverence to mythological narrative¹⁸⁹.

Therefore, the Mongol Interference puts in context and helps to explain two important characteristics of the goddess Yŏngdŭng: 1) the association with travels, mainly by the sea, and fishermen protection; 2) the divergence between the inland versions, where he is said to come "from the heaven", and the Cheju version, where she is said to come from a mythicized China (an "oceanic paradise").

The first characteristics can be seen as influence or syncretism with Mazu, the second is the outcome of the local history of Cheju Island.

The history of the island helps us to understand why the Yŏngdŭng-gut is so important in Cheju and, by contrast, why sometimes Yŏngdŭng is a "vegetarian" goddess and sometimes she is not.

Texts describing the Yŏngdŭng-gut started to be written since the first century after the foundation of Chosŏn. These texts usually disregard the Cheju local festivals as "primitive", "backward" and unorthodox from the Confucian point of view. Han Geum-soon (2008) sees in this harsh judgment an indicator of the Cheju costumes

¹⁸⁸ Itself a retelling of the T'amna foundation myth.

¹⁸⁹ Heo Nam-chun & Hyun-jeung Lee. (2018), 172-5 & 179-181.

archaism, meaning that Cheju customs were “stuck” to the Koryŏ times and that, at the same time, the new Neoconfucian hegemony was long to reach the island. As we have seen (§§4.3 and 4.4), we have many descriptions of the Lantern Festival from Koryŏ to Chosŏn. As per Cheju Island, still in the middle fifteenth century, the Yŏngdŭng-gut was still perceived as a Buddhist festival: the *T’amna-si samsib’ojŏl* 耽羅詩三十五絶 says that, during the festival, the Buddhist temple used to hang lanterns. The festival started to change between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century: according to the 1530’s *Sinjŭng-dongguk-yŏjisŭngnam*, the festival was now conducted as a series of ancestral rites (*chesa* 祭祀) with some residual Buddhist elements like decorated poles and colored silk; later, in the 1602’s *Namsarok*, the festival is described as more “domestic”. In this last text, we can find the first mention to Yŏngdŭng in Cheju, called “goddess Yŏndŭng / goddess of the Yŏndŭng festival” Yŏndŭng-sin 燃燈神. Apparently, only between the seventeenth and the nineteenth century that the name of the festival became the name of the deity associated with it, a transition coinciding with the emergence of phonological shifts: the name Yŏngdŭng-sin 靈登神 appears for the first time in the 1840’s *Tongguk sesigi* 東國歲時記, describing the Yŏngnam festivities (modern-day Kyŏngsang) – older accounts are ambiguous: the name can refer either to the rite or to the deity as well. According to Han Geum-soon, the start of divergences between Cheju and the mainland started with the Mongol Interference, while it was during the early Chosŏn that the Lantern Festival became a folk harvest festivity. Yet, despite the transformations, the modern-day Yŏngdŭng-gut still has many Buddhist elements¹⁹⁰.

We can draw some conclusions from this excursus:

First: the archaic elements of the Cheju Yŏngdŭng-gut and its strong yet residual Buddhist tones indicate that, probably Yŏngdŭng offerings were originally “vegetarian”, at least during communal rites. This means also that the mainland

¹⁹⁰ Han Geum-soon (2008), 463-9 & 475-496; Nam Hyang (2010), 298-9.

offering of fishes and seashells are an innovation derived from the goddess “dominions” over the sea and the absorption of the rite into the ancestral ones.

Second: the Cheju case indicates clearly that the Yōngdŭng-dedicated festivals derive both in name and in nature from the Koryŏ period’s Lantern festival. Moreover, the ancient sources are often ambiguous if they refer to goddess, her festival, or both. The Cheju case also suggests that the Yōngdŭng-gut is more archaic in the sense that it maintains its veneer of officiality, while the rites on the mainland may be the outcome of the local versions of the festival (see §4.4).

Third: the importance of the Yuan for the formation of the Yōngdŭng faith. Let’s recapitulate: Yōngdŭng either as a festival or as a goddess is attested in the mainland from the fifteenth century circa, and its diffusion to the southern coast and Cheju between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, the first unambiguous mention of Yōngdŭng as a goddess in Cheju is from the seventeenth; the Mongols to influence Cheju political status in the late thirteenth century and, during their century of dominion of the island, the Lantern Festival gradually chanced, maintaining its important status; the Chinese goddess Mazu was imported in Korea in 1274 and her faith spread into the mainland from 1350 circa on, coinciding with the Japanese Piracy, and likely during early Chosŏn time it was absorbed by local State-sponsored cults (*sŏnghwang*). It is interesting how the start of the Mazu and the Yōngdŭng faith roughly coincide chronologically but not geographically: Yōngdŭng faith cradle was in Yōngnam, by the Naktong River, while Mazu was popular in Chŏlla-nam coasts, near the Han River. We cannot but notice how both deities’ faith originated in proximity to the waterways. Since Yōngdŭng derives her name from a festival dedicated to the Koryŏ’s Chesŏk, it is possible that, originally, they were very similar gods (if not the same entity), and that she gradually absorbed the characteristics of Mazu with the progressive expansion of the cult toward the coasts.

Fourth: the peculiarity of Cheju Yōngdŭng faith is due to the local historical and geographical reality: the cultural area created by the Kuroshio Current (the “oceanic paradise” mytheme); the great importance of fishing in the local lifestyle (the sailors-saving goddess stories shared with / adapted from Mazu); the geographic

isolation and the short political autonomy granted by the Mongols (Yöngdŭng-gut importance and archaicism); and the cultural influence of Yuan China on the local Shamanism (the term “Country of the Son of Heaven from Jiangnan” for the “oceanic paradise”).

We can now draw some preliminary conclusions and pen a summary:

- Yöndŭng is a weather, travel, fishing, wealth and prosperity goddess. It is mainly female, and it is believed to come cyclically on earth on the second lunar month to bring prosperity (here her series of other names: “[Goddess] of the Second Month” Iwöl). In Kyöngsang is a triple goddess, in Cheju it has seven forms. Her offerings consist of rice, rice cakes, mussels and seaweed.
 - Yöndŭng is mainly an islander (Cheju, Chindo) goddess well known within the southeastern coast and some parts of the central regions.
 - Yöngdŭng either as a festival or as a goddess is attested in the mainland from the fifteenth century circa, and its diffusion to the southern coast and Cheju between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, the first unambiguous mention of Yöngdŭng as a goddess in Cheju is from the seventeenth century. Cradle of the Yöngdŭng were Sangju and Sönsan (Kyöngsang), by the Naktong River.
- Yöngdŭng oversees two natural phenomena: wind and sea tides. It is also tied with the second lunar month, when it is celebrated.
 - The second lunar month is a remnant of the Koryö Lantern Festival, from which Yöngdŭng derives its name. Nowadays, the connection is loose on the mainland and the coasts but somehow preserved on Cheju Island.
 - On the mainland and the coasts, the second lunar month is given a new meaning: the wind on this day determines prosperity in the coming year.
- Yöngdŭng and Chesök shares many similarities: both are triple deities linked to weather and wealth. Sometimes, they are even said to be one.

However, Yöngdüng is more a “traveler” deity (it is also identified with Son-nim) and its triplet nature is different: Yöngdüng group is formed by a mother / father (Chesök), a daughter, and daughter-in-law. The tasks division among the daughter and the daughter-in-law seems also reflecting the three weather gods from the Tan’gun myth, rather than the “family” of the Chesök / Chumong myth.

- When Yöngdüng and Chesök coexist (Chölla, Chindo, Cheju), there is a division of labor: Yöngdüng brings prosperity to the sea, and, with the products of the sea, and Chesök brings prosperity to the household. Thus, we can say that Yöngdüng brings prosperity indirectly, Chesök brings prosperity directly.
 - In these areas, both are seen as ancestral deities.
- Likely, Yöngdüng and Chesök were originally indistinguishable. This is noticeable by similar ritual practices and “dominions”.
 - It is likely that Yöngdüng was originally a “vegetarian (Buddhist)” and became a regular ancestor, prosperity deity with the faith expansion, similarly to Chesök.
- It is possible that Yöngdüng is the outcome of a syncretism with Mazu: in Korea, both faiths’ cradles were by a river, and they coexisted during the same period (thirteenth-fourteenth century). Likely, Yöngdüng gradually absorber Mazu’s prerogatives with her expansion toward the coast.
- The Cheju Yöngdüng faith’s situation is peculiar:
 - The Cheju Yöngdüng-gut is more archaic (officiality, Buddhism) due to isolation and relative autonomy under the Mongol rule.
 - The Cheju Yöngdüng is more akin to Mazu, more than the mainland equivalent, due to geography.
 - The Cheju Yöngdüng is tied to the “oceanic paradise” mytheme, shared with the cultural area created by the Kuroshio Current. The Mongol interference gave rise to a new term (“Country of the Son of Heaven from Jiangnan”) for this pre-existing mytheme.

9 The Creation Narratives

We have seen that, in the northern versions of the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri*, the creation myth can precede the story of Tanggŭm'aegi. We have also seen how, sometimes, the monk / Heavenly deity of the story takes the name of a creator deity from that story. The two narratives are thus paired in many Korean regions: in some cases, is very difficult to tell one story apart from the other. There is no consensus among the scholars if this configuration was more ancient or if the two stories were originally stand-alone. In the present work, what is more important is the structural relationship between the creation narratives and the Tanggŭm'aegi epic, regardless of if they were a single story or not.

The creation narratives in Korea can be divided into two categories: the northern ones and the southern ones. The northern ones can be found in Hamhŭng, P'yŏngyang and generally in North Korea, the southern ones are typical of Kyŏnggi region and Cheju Island:

Northern Version

1. Mirŭk (or P'an'go) separates Heaven from Earth
2. Mirŭk shatters second Sun and the second Moon, creating the stars / Sŏkka finds two Suns and two Moons near the mt. Sumeru, and later destroys one of each
3. Mirŭk invents clothing and agriculture
4. Mirŭk discovers the "origins of water and fire" with the help of small animals

Southern version

1. Ch'ŏnji-wang (or the Jade Emperor) orders a giant to separate Heaven from Earth
2. (Ch'ŏnji-wang marries Maehwa-puin / Ch'ongmaeng-puin)
3. (Sumyŏng-jangja impiety and punishment)
4. Birth of Taebyŏl-wang Sobyŏl-wang
5. The brothers shoot with an arrow the second Sun and the second Moon, creating the stars

Northern Version

5. Mirūk creates the men from golden beetles and women from silver beetles
6. Sökkka appears and challenges Mirūk for the dominion over the world
7. The two gods compete for dominion over the world with various challenges
8. Flower competition: the first one who makes the flower bloom will rule the world. Mirūk makes the flower bloom, but Sökkka tricks Mirūk and steals her flower
9. Mirūk leaves this world, cursing it
10. (Sökkka takes the Buddhist monastic vows and later has three children)

Southern version

6. The brothers compete for dominion over the world with various challenges
7. Flower competition: the first one who makes the flower bloom will rule the world. Taebyöl-wang makes the flower bloom, but Sobyöl-wang tricks his brother and steal his flower
8. Taebyöl-wang leaves this world, cursing it
9. (Journey of the brothers back to the father Ch'önji-wang, and final recognized by the father)

The northern versions are clearly tied to the Chesök faith, as part of the narrative of some versions of the Tanggüm'aegi narrative (*Seng-gut*, *Samt'aeja-p'uri* etc.), but can be independent as well (*Ch'angsega*); the southern versions are narrated within four different occasions: within the “Ritual for the Provincial Deity” *Todang-gut* as the “Words of the Earthware Steamer” *Sirumal*; as part of the “Great Ritual” *K'ün-gut*; within the “Divine invitation ritual” *Chogam-je* as the *Pep'o-doöp-ch'im*; and as a stand-alone narrative as the *Ch'önjiwang-ponp'uri*. Among these, the last three

are from Cheju, while the first can be also found in Kyōnggi region and by the Han River¹⁹¹.

While the Chogam-je is part of the Yōngdūng-gut, and so its relationship with the medieval Chesōk is clear (see before), the connection with the *Sirumal* is less evident and must be explained. The *Sirumal* is part of the “Ritual for the Provincial Deity”, a rite dedicated to the Todang-sin 都堂神, deity typical of the Kyōnggi region and part of the areas by the Han River. The *sinch'e* of Todang-sin is described by the *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs* as “embodied as a tree or in the form of *teojutgari*, an earthenware jar filled with rice and draped with a conical straw bundle”, held in in the village shrine. The rite is Confucian in nature, and the male shamans *hwaraeng'i* are also involved (see §§2.3 and 4). During the *kut* the deity is invoked “for peace and good fortune in the community”, and “the ritual’s procedures promote communal productivity, which signifies that this deity serves not only as a tutelary god but also as a symbol of good harvest”¹⁹².

The key differences between the two narratives are mainly nominal: here the Heavenly deity is “Ruler of Heaven and Earth” Ch’ōnji-wang 天地王 or “Ruler of Heaven” Ch’ōnju-wang 天主王, and there is “[Regional] Temple’s Big Dipper Deity” Tang-Ch’ilsōng 堂七星; the Heavenly deity’s wife, “Bright Wife” Ch’ongmaeng-puin 聰明夫人 of the *Sirumal* is “Plum Wife” Maehwa-puin 梅花夫人 from *Ch’ōnjiwang-ponp’uri* with another name. Both are clearly Earth’s deity; similarly, “Great Star King” Taebyōl-wang 大別王 and “Small Star King” Sobyōl-wang 小別王 brothers from *Ch’ōnjiwang-ponp’uri* are in all identical to “First Door” Sōnmun’i 先門이 and “Second Door” e Humun’i 後門이 from *Sirumal*. Both couples are rival creation deities. The only noteworthy difference between the two narratives is the section narrating the brothers’ quest for father recognition,

¹⁹¹ Seo Taeseok (2001), 258-261; Choi Won-oh (2008), 1-2, 11 & 20-37; Encyclopedia Planning Team (2013), *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs*, 47, 52-3, 90, 154 & 243; Lee Chang-yoon (2016), 94-100.

¹⁹² Choi Won-oh (2008), 1-2, 11 & 20-37; Han Geum-soon (2008), 471-4; Encyclopedia Planning Team (2013), *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs*, 47, 52-3, 90, 154 & 243; Lee Chang-yoon (2016), 94-100.

found only in some *Ch'ŏnjiwang-ponp'uri* versions. As for the punishment of Sumyŏng-jangja, which will be discussed later, it is likely that originally was a stand-alone narrative, later incorporated into the creation myth¹⁹³.

It is clear from this overview that both Tanggŭm'aegi and the southern creation narrative are sung during agricultural festivals and celebrate production. The key difference are the magnitude and the focus: Tanggŭm'aegi is a household deity mainly focused on childbirth, according to its narrative, while the creation narrative is a cosmogonic village ritual. It is possible that the Chesŏk faith influenced a local *sŏnghwang* festival, or vice versa, but is difficult to prove.

As per the northern narrative, scholars who analyzed the myth have pointed to several elements: Mirŭk (Maitreya) 彌勒 is a giant, a female, nature deity, while the flowers are linked to Death by association with funeral flower arrangement. Consequently, the challenge of making the flower bloom, common to both the northern and the southern narrative must be intended as a Life-Death rivalry. In the Kim Ssangdol and Chŏn Myŏngsu versions of the *Ch'angsega*, the “big appetite”, “big clothes” of Mirŭk are emphasized. Similarly, the characteristic of a nature deity is shown in the ability to create humans from beetles and to make the flower blossom. Sŏkka (Śākyamuni) 釋迦, on the contrary, by winning over Mirŭk with trickery, embodies a new relationship with the world and Death, i.e. Culture as opposite to Nature. As for the Mirŭk as a goddess, most evidence are indirect and can be highlighted only by comparison with similar myths. The most direct clue within the *Ch'angsega* itself is the ability of the deity to create, however it is not a sufficient proof: in some northern version the deity is called with the name of the Chinese “cosmic man” P'an'go / Pangu 盤古, and in the southern version it is a giant who separates Heaven from Earth on the orders of the supreme Heavenly king. Looking outside Korea, we found other myths regarding a cosmic rivalry ending in the world creation: in Yonagumi Island (Ryukyu), Śākyamuni (Sāka) and Maitreya (Miruku) are explicitly described as a man and a woman; in Tokunoshima Island, Amaterasu 天照 competes against all the other gods for the dominion over the

¹⁹³ Waida Manabu (1991), 96-8; Kim Heonsoon (1994), 96-106 & 122-4; Seo Taeseok (2001), 248-261.

humans; finally, in an Inner Mongolia's creation myth, the goddess Maidar (Maitreya) re-creates the Sun and the Moon after a cosmic deluge¹⁹⁴. Other elements are more sophisticated: the separation of Heaven and earth and the creation of human from beetles, in this sequence, are mythemes found with some variation within the *Huainanzi* 淮南子, where these endeavors are attributed to the primordial goddess Nüwa / Nügua 女媧.

9.1. Outside Korea:

Before we mentioned the *vexata quaestio* of if the creation narratives must be considered part of a cycle comprising the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri*. Though this framing of the problem does not interest us *per se* as much as the structure of the Chesŏk narrative, it became useful if coupled with another problem: to what extent the mythemes combination from the Korean creation narrative is coherent with other combinations, Korean or not? This circumvention of the issue can help to solve two difficulties: first, the cultural distance between the Korean and non-Korean myths forces us to focus on the differences, and by extension on the narrative structures (mythemes, *topoi* etc.), the object of our research; second, the relationship between the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri* and the creation myths will appear less obvious when taken again into account, counteracting our bias of an expected logical coherence within the same culture. This is why Marcelle Detienne suggests not comparing narratives from neighboring populations¹⁹⁵.

One of the first comparative analysis of this creation narratives was Waida Manabu (1991). His work is focused on the origins of the “flower contest” mytheme and took in analysis similar stories found in the Ryukyu Islands, Korea and Central Asia. To the myths reported by Manabu, we will add other three myths from the Chinese Yugurs, Chinese Evenks, and Inner Mongolia's Oirats, all reported by Schipper et al. (2001) in their volume about Chinese minorities creation narratives. To maintain

¹⁹⁴ Waida Manabu (1991), 87–109; Kim Heonsun (1994); Schipper et al. (2011), 293-4; Lee Chang-yoon (2016), 119-123.

¹⁹⁵ Detienne (2008), 22-40.

focus, we will report only a few numbers of narratives among these, while for the other we refer to the respective authors. The stories are selected according three criteria: there is a couple of deities contributing to the creation, there is no “flower contest”, and the protagonist is a Buddhist figures. Briefly, they are both different and close enough to the Manabu series to permit a significant comparison¹⁹⁶:

Ryukyu:

Within the Ryukyu Islands there is a great variation, depending on the archipelago. Here we will take four narratives as an example:

Miyako (Miyako group): The god of the Hirara’s temple (Harimizu / Pyarumizu utaki 漲水御嶽) had seven children, among which Miruku-potoke (Maitreya-bodhisattva), who came from Tang China to Miyako to multiply the humans on the island. Miruku was bad-looking, while his brother Saku-potoke (Śākyamuni-bodhisattva) was good-looking. Miruku descended from Heaven to Earth, lowering human and animals, while Saku welcomed them. Humans did not know how to procreate, so Miruku cut their tails so they could have sexual intercourse. Then, Miruku lowered the horse and the cow, then he gifted humans with seeds and fruits, wheat and millet, sweet potatoes and rice. By eating them, humans became what they are now. Finally, the two gods decided to call the island Miyāku (Miyako).

Yonagumi Island (Yaeyama group): Miruku (Maitreya) was a woman and Sāka (Śākyamuni) a man, both wise and handsome. They have a dispute over the island’s dominion. They opted for a contest: the first who will see a flower bloom by the bedside will win the dispute. During the night, Sāka stole the flower from Miruku and won. Miruku, defeated, sailed for Andu¹⁹⁷. By leaving the island, the place became sterile, and so inhabitants cyclically call back the deity with abundance’s festivals.

¹⁹⁶ Waida Manabu (1991), 80-103; Schipper et al. (2011), 197-219 & 279-324.

¹⁹⁷ Maybe Andu (Antioch) 安都, capital of Daqin 大秦, the mythicized version of the Roman Empire.

Yoron (Amami group): Miruku and Sāka disputed for the rule over the world. They made a contest: the first one who sees the flower bloom in a pot will win. Sāka replaced the flower from the pot and won. Miruku, sailed for the Dragon King's palace, but brought the fire with her, and Sāka needed the animal's help to re-discover the fire.

Tokunoshima (Amami group): In the beginning, Amaterasu and the other deities created humans from mud. It rained, and when the gods wiped the figures with a towel, they created deformities. Then, they argued about who would have rule over mankind. They opted for a challenge: the one able to make a flower bloom over a dead tree would have been the ruler. Amaterasu felt asleep, and the other gods replaced the tree. Angered, Amaterasu decreed that was the origin of thieves.

Oirats (Inner Mongolia):

After the deluge, the goddess Maidar (Maitreya) re-emerged from the sea. There was only the Sumeru mt. Maidar asked a turtle to hold the Earth over its back, and asked two deity, one male and one female, to become the Sun and Moon. Maidar cyclically comes back to Earth, and Oirats sacrifice a cow and a sheep to her.

Buryats (Russia):

Among the Russian Buryats there are two versions, second of which with a variation.

The first one is the dispute between Šibegeni-Burqan (Śākyamuni) and Maidari-Burqan (Maitreya): humans were created from mud. The issue arose about who would have animate them, so Maidari and Šibegeni decided to put a candle on a plate and go to sleep in front of the clay figures: those whose candle will be lit, and flower in the pot will blossom, will be the winner. Šibegeni woke up at midnight and replaced Maidari's candle and transplanted the flower. Šibegeni became the winner, but since Maidari knew about the deception, he cursed: "you deceived us, so the people that you'll create will be deceiver!". In this myth, it is mentioned the

supreme Buryat deity Esege-Burqan (Esege Malan tngri) too, but he has no role in the events.

The second one is a heredity dispute. In the first variant describes the succession of Churmas tengri (Qormusta tngri) and his three sons: Shingybyl, Tolty Khan and Sagadai; the second one describes the dispute among the nine Esege Malan's sons. In both variants, the issue is about who would have rule over the human world. In the version with Esege Malan, the middle son (the fifth one of the nine), called Mahai Danjin, took the youngers' side and sent the older ones on the Earth, who created "evil creatures" like snakes out of spite. In the version with Churmas Tengri, Churmas tried to resolve the dispute by telling his sons to go to sleep with a pot nearby. Those in whose pot a flower would have bloom, will be the world ruler. The oldest son, Shingybyl Khan, woke up in the night and replaced his pot with that of the youngest one, Tolty Khan. The next morning, Tolty Khan realized the deception by the power of books. Tolty Khan became the Death deity Erlik and cursed the living beings with a short lifespan.

Yugurs (China):

In origin, there was the sky and the sea, but no land. Śākyamuni asked to the Green Dragon and the White Elephant to transform the sea into land. They fail, so Śākyamuni himself used a "horse-like" pillar to support the heaven. The sea retired and thus the land appeared.

Evenks:

Chinese version: Burhan-bagasi ("Lord Buddha") creates humans from mud, but when there is no more mud, he must take it from under a sacred, golden turtles, dwelling in the cosmic ocean. The god is helped by the first shaman, Nišan, who stunned the animal using bow and arrows. The turtle ends up supporting the Sky's weight, and its legs became the world's four pillars.

Russian version: The supreme deity Buga creates the world's land by sending the fire over the primordial ocean, burning a portion of it. When he descended on Earth,

he met the “Devil” Buninka, who wishes to create too a world for himself. Being unable to do so, he wishes at least to destroy Buga’s creation. Buga then challenged Buninka to order a pine to grow into a lake (or the cosmic ocean), otherwise Buninka shall recognize Buga as omnipotent. When the Buga’s pine grew on command, while Buninka’s one cannot stand on itself, Buninka recognized Buga’s superiority.

Manabu recognized the following pattern: first, the strong dualism of the creator figures; second, the brotherhood between them; third, two possible developments: either a “flower contest” or an inheritance issue. However, we purposely chosen additional narratives to overcome our biases, and consequently we must recalibrate this framework. Here, the work of Schipper et al. (2011), and specifically that of Wang Xianzhao (“Minority Creation Myths: An Approach to Classification”, pp. 197-219), can assist us. Wang systematically classified several creation stories from the Chinese minorities, using the motifs as reference points. Thus, he divides these myths according to the following macro-categories: general creation types (e.g.: if there is a creator and what its nature is), process of creation (e.g.: production, transformation), results of creation (e.g.: world creation, mankind creation) and eventual complexities and intersections of the above types. Wang Xianzhao used these criteria for standardize the classification of a great number of myths with an equally great variety¹⁹⁸. In the present work, we need fewer categories:

- Couple status: declared brotherhood (BR) / non-brotherhood (NBR)
- Third authority figure: none (N) / active (A) / passive (P)
- Couple relationship: collaboration (COL) / generic conflict (CON) / “flower contest” (FL) / heredity issue (HER)
- Other motifs: mankind creation (MAN), civilization (CIV), creation of Sun and Moon (SM), bow and arrow (BA)

¹⁹⁸ Waida Manabu (1991), 103-6; Schipper et al. (2011), 200-218.

		Couple Status		Authority				Relationship				Other motifs						
		Korea		Ryukyu				Oirats	Buryats			Mongols		Yugurs	Tatars	Evenks		
North	South	Miyako	Yonagumi	Iromote	Yoron	Toku	Maidari		Esege	Churmas	Mainland	Borders	China			Russia		

We can now make an analysis of these mythemes and motifs:

Brotherhood motif: When the brotherhood is explicitly mentioned, usually there is a third figure of authority, usually the father; while, where the brotherhood is not mentioned, either there is no figure of authority, or it is passive (Buryat myth of Esege Malan), or it is active and coincides with one of the contenders.

Here we can mention two particular cases: the Tokunoshima creation myth, where Amaterasu is both a contender, the queen and the sister of the other gods, her contender over mankind dominion; and the Oirat creation myth, where Sun and Moon are twins unrelated to the creator goddess Maidar, who commands them to participate in the creation.

This clearly does not disprove the Manabu's thesis of brotherhood / twinhood between the two creation deities, it however shows how it was not problematized enough: the inheritance dispute motif and the explicit mention of a brotherhood within the narrative are clearly correlated.

Couple relationship motifs: In most narratives there is the conflict motif, and the "flower contest" can be regarded as a subtype of this motif. The conflict motif, however, can be represented by this subtype alone.

As seen before, the heredity theme usually implies the presence of a passive, authority figure. This figure is active only within the Buryat Churmas myth. Moreover, there is some correlation between the theme of inheritance and the "flower contest" mytheme, though not always consistent (Buryat Esege Malan myth). The narrative itself is not always distinguishable from the more general theme of a conflict over dominion (Korean northern myths, Ryukyu, Tatars).

We can here distinguish four extreme, specular cases: 1) in the Yugur myth, where Maitreya asks for collaboration of other entities, but they fail and the deity creates the world alone; 2) the Chinese Evenks' and Miyako's myths, where the creator deity obtains the collaboration of another deity and they succeed in creating the world; 3) the Russian Evenks' myth, where the creator deity creates the world alone, there is an initial conflict between the creator deity and his rival, a "flower contest" and the final collaboration (submission) of the rival deity; 4) the Cheju creation myth, where there is an initial collaboration in completing the creation among the

twin gods and then rivalry over the world rule ending with a “flower contest”. We can easily say that the Russian Evenks’ myth type seems the closer one to most of the narratives overall.

Other motifs: There is a clear correlation between the theme of mankind’s creation and the theme of culture’s creation. Often the conflict between gods starts over the mankind’s creation (Tokunoshima, Tatars, Buryats), while in other cases the object of the dispute is the fire, symbol of culture (Iromote, Yoron).

The archery theme is linked with the double Sun and Moon only in the Korean case, while, among the Chinese Evenks, it is linked to the “pillars of Heaven” mytheme. The story of an archer shooting down multiple Suns cannot but remind us of the Chinese Hou Yi 后羿 myth, reported in the *Huainanzi* and in the *Shanhaijing*. The mytheme itself is likely of Siberian origins¹⁹⁹.

Making a comparison between the North Korean *Ch’angsega* and the Oirat creation narrative, new details emerge about the Korean northern creation myth: in the Oirat myth, Sun and Moon are said to be originally a male and a female gods; in the *Ch’ansega* myth, men are created from a golden beetle and women from a silver beetle; the trait d’union is a variant of the *Ch’ansega*, according to which Sökka found the couplets of Sun and Moon near the Meru mt., respectively on a silver and a golden plate – it is also interesting how the Meru mt. appears both within the Oirat myth and this variant²⁰⁰.

Other considerations: The presence of a Buddhist figure is independent from the conflict theme. In fact, there are cases where the creator deity is a Buddhist figure and there is no conflict (Miyako, Yugurs, Chinese Evenks), and cases where there is no Buddhist figure and there is conflict (Cheju, Russian Evenks). All other myths share both Buddhist figure and conflict themes. This again confirms the Manabu’s thesis of Buddhist theme as a veneer added to earlier creation narratives.

¹⁹⁹ Sem (2022), 122

²⁰⁰ Kim Heonsun (1994) 185-186 & 245-246; Schipper et al. (2011), 293-4

Specificities of the Korean case: We can list the elements that appear only in the Korean creation narratives simply by exclusion: marriage of Heaven and Earth deities (Cheju); shooting to double Sun and Moon, shared with China and Siberia; passage to collaboration to conflict (Cheju); Changja punishment (Cheju and *Seng-gut* – see hereafter); story continuation as the tale of the loser deity’s sons (both north and south); link to agricultural prosperity rites, shared with Miyako Island. Most of these elements comes from Cheju, which means that the northern creation narratives are relatively more “standard” when compared with the others. Moreover, the marriage of Heaven and Earth deities’ motif, the Changja punishment’s motif and the tale of the loser deity’s sons’ motif are all optional, but this does not necessarily mean that all these elements are later additions.

Now we can answer the first part of our question: to what extent the mythemes combination from the Korean creation narrative is coherent with other, non-Korean combinations? We have seen that Korean creation narratives are relatively “standard” compared with others in the area: there is a conflictual dualism two creator deities, solved by a “flower contest”. Particularities of the Korean case are the following: within Cheju version, the conflict is preceded by an initial collaboration; the shooting of a couplet of Sun and Moon, tied with China and Siberia’s myths maybe remnant of a mankind creation myth; and the connection with agricultural rites. All other features (the marriage of the Heaven’s god and the Earth goddess, the story of Changja, the tale of the two brothers / son of the creator deity) are found only in Korea.

9.2. The Creation Myth’s Many Layers

Now we can try to answer the second part of our question: to what extent the mythemes combination from the Korean creation narrative is coherent with other Korean combinations? Or, said differently: what is the relationship between the creation narratives and other Korean myths?

Most scholars have noticed a shared continuity in themes and narratives structure between the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri* and the creation myths, even among those scholars who denying they were originally part of the same tale.

One of the first scholars proposes of a thematic continuity between the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri* and creation narratives was Kim Heonsun (1994): according to his reconstruction, the Tanggŭm'aegi tale is a development of the creation narrative after the defeat ("death") of the creator deity: the creator deity became the monk from the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri*, following the northern version framework. Moreover, the two brothers from the southern versions have the same clan's name of the Three Chesŏk, Pak, and they are similarly tested with riddles. For Kim Heonsun, both stories share the same structure derived from the Chumong epic and Sŏk T'arhae 昔脫解 foundation myth (*SKY II*, prodigies 2: Kaya chronicles). A similar position was taken by Seo Taeseok (2001), who recognized the same structure from the two narratives, derived both from Chumong and Tan'gun myth, Seo Taeseok too emphasized the connection with the three brothers' quest's narrative. Finally, Hong Taehan (2011) argues that the presence of the creation narratives within the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri* northern versions (Kanggye, Hamhŭng and P'yŏngyang) is a remnant of the Tanggŭm'aegi tale's "prototype": the continuity lies in the change of perspective, from a story with male to a story with a female protagonist. In any case, the original story is the creation narrative and the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri* is an addendum²⁰¹.

On the contrary, Lee Chang-yoon (2016) argues that there is not an original continuity between the two narratives. He nevertheless recognizes the thematic continuity in the modern versions of both myths: Mirŭk embodies the world fertility but Sŏkka usurpation deprived the world of this fertility, making it sterile, therefore Sŏkka must use Tanggŭm'aegi fertility's powers, making her pregnant, re-establishing the world original status. Similarly, there is an analogy between the creation of the world by Mirŭk and the creation of a new family / house of Sŏkka / monk in the Tanggŭm'aegi tale. The analogy is however imperfect, since Sŏkka /

²⁰¹ Kim Heonsun (1994), 68-73, 106-109 & 128-129; Seo Taeseok (2001), 248-261; Hong Taehan (2011), 315 & 338-9.

monk is incapable of building his house, while Mirūk succeeded in building the world, and this because the nature of the two deities. This continuity did not originally exist in ancient times for three main reasons: 1) the common, main motif of the creation narratives is conflict, while the main theme of the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri* is fertility; 2) despite the narrative structures share many analogies, there is no real synthesis with the Chesŏk: in the northern foundation myths there is not any character like Mirūk, and the only possible parallel is the rivalry between Haemosu and Hwabaek narrated in the *Tongmyŏng'wang p'yŏn* (see §§3 and 5.1.1). This is because the structure of the northern foundation myths is that of a Heavenly deity descending on earth to marry a goddess, a structure present only within the southern creation narratives. Moreover, within the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri*, the creation narrative can be replaced with a naturalistic, philosophical narrative of Chinese origins (e.g. some versions of the *Seng-gut*); 3) between the two stories remains a gap: the creation myth concerns the gods' universe, the Tanggŭm'aegi myths concerns the human universe. The distance is emphasized by the change of protagonists: within the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri*, Tanggŭm'aegi is the protagonist, not the monk. This makes likely that the creation narratives may be later, Confucian addendum to the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri*²⁰².

We can thus summarize the *status questionis*, adding other elements derived from the previous analyses:

Elements in favor of continuity:

- Shared roots: analogy with the *Tongmyŏng'wang p'yŏn* (Haemosu vs Hwabaek) in the northern versions, with the Tan'gun story in the southern versions, and with the Chumong myth for both (brothers' tale addendum).
- Macrocosm-microcosm analogy: creation of the world by Mirūk = building of a house by Sŏkka. In both cases there is a passage from disorder to order.
- Thematic continuity: Mirūk world is chaotic yet fertile (alive), Sŏkka world is regulated yet sterile (dead). Therefore, Sŏkka tries to remedy to the

²⁰² Lee Chang-yoon (2016), 112-126.

world's infertility with the help of Tanggŭm'aegi. Tanggŭm'aegi similarly is also killed (sterility / sowing analogy) and resuscitated by her sons (birth / blooming analogy)²⁰³.

- Narrative continuity: identification of Sŏkka from the northern versions with the monk / Heavenly god from the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri* and between the two creator deities from the southern versions with the Three Chesŏk.
- Marriage of Heaven and Earth motif: analogy between the Ch'ŏnji-wang and Maehwa-puin / Ch'ongmaeng-puin marriage, and the monk and Tanggŭm'aegi marriage. Both are based on the northern foundation myths.
- Shared ritual setting (context-depending).

Elements against continuity:

- Narrative discrepancy: in the northern narratives, the monk / Heavenly deity from the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri* is often identified with Sŏkka, the god “of this world”, and not with Mirŭk, the creator god defeated in the “flower contest”. In the southern myth, both deities are equated with the Three Chesŏk and the Earth goddess role is not emphasized.
- Different themes: in the creation narratives, the protagonist is different from the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri*: in one case, the protagonist is a male deity (Sŏkka / Sobyŏl-wang) defeating a female creator (Mirŭk / Taebyŏl-wang) over the world dominion, in the other case is the protagonist is a girl / fertility goddess giving birth to three gods. Similarly, the monk liaison to the two stories has different powers: in the creation narratives is incapable of creating life, maybe because is a Death god, as we will see, while in the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri* he makes the protagonist pregnant even naturally or by magical means, as it is clearly the Heavenly deity Chesŏk.
- Conflicting motifs: the creation narratives are built around a conflict over the human world, while the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri* is built around the supernatural

²⁰³ This is explicit only in some versions of the Cheju's *Ch'ogong-bonp'uri*, in the other variants Tanggŭm'aegi is buried alive with in a stone coffin or in a cave, which is clearly a reminiscence of the same death-rebirth theme. See §§7.2 and 10.1.

fertility of the protagonist. Similarly, the creation narratives are story of two gods in a world of gods, while the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri* is (at least formally) a story of humans in a human world.

- Independent ritual settings (context-dependent).

We must bear in mind that the Korean shamanic chants are in some way “modular”: sections from the narratives can be added or taken away, and so the connection between two stories, all depending on the ritual context. In this sense nowadays the creation narratives and the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri* can be found both independently and together, and this may change the meaning of both stories as a whole – in this case, the function determines the essence. So, the connection between the two stories (marriage of Heaven and Earth, the sons' tale) makes sense only in the context, and it is impossible without the context to tell if they were originally there.

That being the case, we must make another comparison, this time with two Korean myths: the *Samsŭng-Halmang-ponp'uri* and the smithery myth from the *mengdu-gosa*, both from Cheju and both linked to the Three Chesŏk faith.

The first narrative is the smithery origin story from the *mengdu-gosa*: this parallel is doubly interesting, because the *mengdu-gosa* story is embedded within the *Ch'ogong-bonp'uri*, the Cheju equivalent of the mainland *Chesŏk-ponp'uri*, story which can be preceded by the creation narrative, thus creating a sort of leitmotif. There are two versions:

First version: the Three Brothers invoke “the Metal-Iron Son from East Sea” Tong'i-wadang Ssoech'ŏr'i-adŭl to create the *mengdu* (see §§2.3.2 and 7.2). The smithery deity succeeds, creating the *mengdu* for the Three Brothers.

Second versions: the Three Brothers invokes Tong'i-wadang Ssoech'ŏr'i-adŭl to create the *mengdu*, but the deity failed the task, so the Three Brother's father makes the Heavenly deity Chŏn'gyŏngrok descend on earth by invocations to the Jade Emperor and a wild boar sacrifice. As consequence, the two gods, Ssoech'ŏr'i-adŭl

and Chŏn'gyŏngrok, enter in competition. Finally, Chŏn'gyŏngrok prevails, creating the *mengdu* for the Three Brothers.

The *mengdu-gosa* is technically a ritual to Heaven, from which the divinity of the *mengdu* comes from, and to the smithery deity, which creates the *mengdu* material form. It is however well possible that, in precedent versions of the myth, the *mengdu* was created only by Ssoech'ŏr'i-adŭl, identified with the Jade Emperor. Proof for this comes from a parallel with the origin tale of Samsŭng-halmang (Chesŏk-halmŏni)²⁰⁴, which will now see.

The second narrative is the *Samsŭng-Halmang-ponp'uri*, in various versions (*Chasa-bonp'uri*, *Tong'i-Yonggung Ttanim'agi-bonp'uri* and *Myŏngjinguk Ttanim'agi-bonp'uri*). It is the story of how Samsŭng-halmang became a birth goddess. Samsŭng-halmang is the Cheju equivalent of Chesŏk-halmŏni, the divinized form of Tanggŭm'aegi.

Samsŭng-halmang was originally “the daughter of the Myŏngjin King” Mengjin'guk Ttanim-agi, a servant in the “Kingdom of Long Life” Mengjin-guk 明珍國. At the beginning of times, the Jade Emperor indicts a competition between Ttanim-agi and another servant from the “Dragon King Kingdom” Yowang-guk 龍王國 of the East Sea: the contest consisted in creating new life. This conflict turns into a “flower contest” of sort, as Ttanim-agi managed to grow a magical flower able to create life, winning over her rival and establishing the “Western Paradise's Flower Field” Sŏch'ŏn-kkotpat 西天꽃밭, then dominion of the deity Igong / Hallakkung'i (see the next chapter). Thus, Ttanim-agi was bestowed by the Jade Emperor with the role of goddess of childbirth, while her contender became “Old Samsŭng” Kusamsŭng-halmang or “Goddess of the Other World” Chŏsŭng-halmang, the goddess of child death who takes the souls of dead infants from the childbirth goddess²⁰⁵.

²⁰⁴ Kang So-jeon (2012), 24-8 & 121-130; Yohan Yoo (2021), 347-350.

²⁰⁵ In the *Munjŏng-bonp'uri*, a mainland version of the Cheju's *Segyŏng-bonp'uri*, the child death deity is the “Emperor Living Buddha” Saengbul-daewang, twelfth of the Fourteen(sic!) Underworld Kings: Lee Soo ja (1993), 37-42

This myth is associated with the “Expelling of Kusamsŭng-Halmang” Kusamsŭng-naem rite or “Plucking of the Evil Heart Flower” Aksim-kkot kkökk’ŭm. This rite is dedicated to both Samsŭng-Halmang and Igong / Hallakkung’i: here, the shaman impersonates Ttanim-agi sneaking into the “Western Paradise’s Flower Field”, trying to steal the “flower of death” from Kusamsŭng-Halmang. The setting is made by an altar, on which is set a pot with a flower bouquet. The shaman / goddess pretends to sleep, then she “wakes up” to steal the flower, all while reciting the *Igong-bonp’uri*. This passage is prosaically called “flower theft” *kkot-t’am*. The “death flower” is then plucked to avert a premature child death and allow a new birth. In this case, the flower theft is celebrated²⁰⁶.

We can now analyze our findings:

The *mengdu-gosa* myth in its archaic form is more akin to the Chumong epic and the Kŭmwa story (because of the sacrifice: see §§3 and 7.1), while, in the modern versions, the conflict theme has clear parallels both within the Korean myth (Haeburu and Kŭmwa, Sök t’arhe) and in the other East Asian creation narratives. The conflict theme is likely an innovation in this myth, and so we can argue that in the Korean southern creation narrative it was not present as well, thus it was more alike to the northern foundation myth (marriage of Heaven and Earth) – at least in some versions.

The *Samsŭng-Halmang-ponp’uri* highlights an important, recurring theme in Korean myths: the magical flowers capable of giving life, killing or resurrecting, flowers found in the “Western Paradise’s Flower Field”. This theme can be seen, among the others, within the *Igong-ponp’uri* and in the *Ch’ilsŏng-bonp’uri* (see §7.4), but it is strangely absent in the creation narratives, despite being linked to related, fertility myths as the *Chesök-ponp’uri* and the *Samsŭng-Halmang-ponp’uri* by extension. Both in the northern and in the southern creation myths, the flower has no intrinsic power: its importance lays in being a proof of the deity in creating

²⁰⁶ Waida Manabu (1991), 96-8; Lee Soo Ja (1993), 20-7 & 37-42; Kang So-jeon (2012), 121-130; Lee Kyung Hwa (2022), 114-6.

life, and in being object of a pact. Moreover, the theme of *Samsŭng-Halmang-ponp'uri* is the creation of childbirth, and while Mirŭk / Taebyŏl-wang is clearly a Life's deity, it is strange that the contest is not over creation of life but over the dominion of the human world. Therefore, it is possible that some archaic Korean creation narratives were stories about a rivalry between a primordial Life goddess and a primordial Death god over a magical flower capable of create life on earth, and where the Life goddess won stealing this magical flower, as suggested by the ritual play. In this contest, the authority figure was maybe a judge on the model of the Tan'gun myth, if ever present.

The northern creation narratives seem to follow the frame of the *Samsŭng-Halmang-ponp'uri*, however the “flower contest” is conducted in a very Central Asiatic way (dominion over the human world, powerless flower). The ending is ambiguous: it retrieves the Life vs Death theme only when paired with the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri*, otherwise is again very “standard” compared to other area's myths. Its unicity is the motif of creation of men and women from the Sun / golden beetle and Moon / silver moon. On the other hand, it shares with the southern narrative the theme of a creator giantess, the destruction of double Sun and Moon. We cannot however exclude that these were not archaic, autonomous narrative coalesced within these two.

		<i>Ch'angsega</i>	<i>Ch'ŏnjiwang</i>	<i>Samsŭng</i>	<i>Mengdu</i>	<i>Buryats</i>	<i>Yugurs</i>	Evenks	
								<i>China</i>	<i>Russia</i>
Stake	<i>Life-Death</i>	(implied)	(implied)	✓		(outcome)			
	<i>World rule</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓
	<i>Other</i>				✓			✓	
Flower	<i>Absent</i>				✓		✓	✓	
	<i>Powerless</i>	✓	✓			✓			Tree
	<i>Magical</i>			✓					
A u	<i>Absent</i>	✓					✓	✓	✓

		<i>Ch'angsega</i>	<i>Ch'ŏnjiwang</i>	<i>Samsŏng</i>	<i>Mengdu</i>	<i>Buryats</i>	<i>Yugurs</i>	Evenks	
								<i>China</i>	<i>Russia</i>
	<i>Passive</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			
	<i>Active</i>	(Mirŭk?)		(judge)	(judge)	(judge)	(Maidar?)	(Burhan?)	(Buga?)
	Heaven-Earth marriage		(✓)		(implied)				
Creator giantess		✓	✓				(✓?)	(✓?)	
Double Sun and Moon's destruction		✓	✓					Turtle	

Thus, we can see the following strata within the Korean creation myth:

- Archaic types:**
- a) Life goddess and Death god rivalry, magical flower theft
 - b) Marriage of Heaven and Earth
- Central Asian type:** Twin deities' rivalry over the human world, "flower contest"
- Other motifs:**
- 1. Giant goddess
 - 2. Double Sun and Moon
 - 3. Shooting to Sun and Moon
 - 4. Man from Sun / golden beetle and women from Moon / silver beetle

What was the correlation with the archaic Korean creation myths and the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri*?

If we confront the hypothetical archaic type b with the modern *Ch'ŏnjiwang-ponp'uri* / *Sirumal*, the hidden structure becomes transparent, and so a possible continuity: the Heavenly god / monk marries the Earthly goddess / Tanggŭm'aegi, and they either creates the world, or / and they give birth two sons: the Life goddess / Ch'ogong and the Death god / Igong (for these naming see §§7.3 and 10.1) a.k.a. the Three Chesŏk. In this variant, maybe the third Chesŏk may have been the

Heavenly deity himself, a deity that oversees both life and death, a destiny's god – nowadays identified with Samgong in Cheju and Ch'ilsŏng in the mainland²⁰⁷.

If we confront the hypothetical archaic type a with the modern *Ch'angsega* / *Seng-gut*, the narrative is less linear: if the Life deity overcomes the Death deity and gives birth with the Earthly goddess / Tanggŭm'aegi to the Three Chesŏk. Here, the fertility theme is clearly highlighted, however the Tanggŭm'aegi's role is diminished; if, however, is the Death deity that overcomes, as in the modern creation narrative, we have an alteration of Life and Death within the tale, where the Tanggŭm'aegi's role is exalted. This is the structure described by Lee Chang-yoon (2016) and Yung Sung-chan (2016).

We can now draw some preliminary conclusions and pen a summary:

- The Korean creation narratives and the Tanggŭm'aegi tale exist in a “modular” relationship, meaning that they can absolve their narrative and ritual functions both jointly and independently.
- The creations myths are also, implicitly, a Life goddess-Death god rivalry tale. The female nature of the creator deity is more explicit in the northern myths (*Ch'angsega*, *Seng-gut*).
- Making a cross-comparison with similar creation narratives present in China, the Ryukyu islands and in Central Asia, we can make draw the following conclusions:
 - The northern creation myth has relatively more elements in common with the Central Asian counterparts compared to its Cheju equivalent, meaning that is more “standard”.
 - The Cheju creation narrative shares relatively more elements with native myths such as the *Samsŭng-Halmang-ponp'uri* and the *mengdu-gosa*.
 - The Buddhist themes were likely a veneer added to preexisting narratives, this both in Korean and outside.

²⁰⁷ This identification is suggested by the *Sirumal*, where the Heavenly god is called Ch'ilsŏng, if this is not another mask for Chesŏk (see before).

- We can count by contrast the peculiar elements of Korean creation narratives: marriage of Heaven and Earth deities (Cheju); shooting to double Sun and Moon (shared with China and Siberia); passage to collaboration to conflict (Cheju); Changja punishment (Cheju); story continuation as the tale of the loser deity's sons (both north and south); link to agricultural prosperity rites (shared with Miyako Island). Most of these elements are found in the Cheju version only.
- There is, however, an important element present in almost all other Korean Life-Death myth but lacking from the Korean creation myths: the magical flower motif. Within the creation myths, the flower is in fact powerless, identical to the merely symbolic flower of Ryukyuan and Central Asian creation narratives.
- Thus, we can deduce the following points:
 - There were likely two main types of narrative: A) Life goddess and Death god rivalry, centered on the theft of a magical (life-creating) flower; B) Marriage of Heaven and Earth.
 - The type A narratives were centered to the theme of Life-Death rivalry, on the *Samsŭng-Halmang-ponp'uri* model.
 - The type B narratives were on the *mengdu-gosa* model, a derivation from the northern foundation / agricultural myths (see the §§3, 4.5 and 5.1).
 - Likely, these two types were not necessarily mutually exclusive.
 - A new, Central Asian type was then added to the combination. This myth is essentially a twin deity rivalry over the human world myth, where the flower object of theft is merely a symbol of victory / power.
 - In absence of ancient textual sources, the only possible guess is that this type was introduced during the Mongol interference period at least, if not even during the Khitan wars.
 - At some point in History, the new Central Asian type mixed with the former ones, creating the modern northern and southern types.

Traces of all three types can be traced back within the narrative / thematic inconsistencies.

- The relationship between the modern creation narratives and the *Chesök-ponp'uri* is complicated: in the modern forms, when they are told together, both discontinuity and thematic unity can be seen. It is possible that, if the ancient creation myths were more centered on the Life-Death rivalry theme, there were two possible outcomes, context-dependent:
 - Main: Life goddess wins over the Death god → Tanggŭm'aegi role diminished
 - Variant: Death god wins over the Life goddess → Tanggŭm'aegi role exalted
 - Sökka / Taebyöl-wang victory variants are nowadays a minority of cases, considered aberrant.
 - The Life-Death theme is also emphasized with the inclusion of the Changja tale within the Cheju creation myth and as part of the *Senggut*, after the creation myth and before the *Chesök-ponp'uri*. This story was originally an independent tale (see also the next paragraph).

9.3. Excursus: *The Many Lives of Sumyöng-jangja*

“Long-Life Avaricious” Sumyöng-jangja 壽命長者, also known with many other names (“Thousand-year-old Avaricious” Ch’önnyön-jangja 長者千年, Sama-jangja, Samhwa-jangja, Sama-dung’i etc.), is a recurrent character within the Korean mythology, usually symbol of greediness, impiety and wickedness, and thus often punished by the gods. He appears in some *Ch’önjiwang-bonp’uri* versions, some northern variants of the *Chesök-ponp’uri* and in all *Igong-bonp’uri* versions. His main tale is however narrated by the *Changja-bonp’uri* or *Changja-p’uri*. Since it appears in many myths directly or indirectly linked to the Chesök faith, we will briefly take its story into account, especially regarding two elements: the disrespect for the gods and its consequent punishment, and, marginally, the magical flowers’ motif.

Most versions of the *Changja-p'uri* comes from the Honam area (Ch'ungch'öngnam, Chölla), and within the Hamhüng's *Hwangch'ön-honsi* and *Honswi-gut*, the Cheju's *Maenggam-bonp'uri* and the Kyöngbuk's *Haewöñ-p'uri* as well. Other versions are found within some *Chesök-ponp'uri* versions (Kanggye, Hamhüng) as premises for the Tanggüm'aegi tale, where the story is independent from the creation narratives²⁰⁸:

Honam versions

Version A:

1. There are three protagonists (Uma-jangja, Chesök-changja, Sama-jangja): the first is filial, the second is lustful, the third is evil, i.e. unfilial
2. Because Sama-jangja does not worship the ancestors, the ancestors complained to King Yama / Sama-jangja mistreats a monk
3. Yama sends his emissary (*chösüñg-saja*) to the Sama-jangja house
4. Sama-jangja's daughter-in-law (*myöñuri*) begs for the father's life making offerings

Version B:

1. Sama-jangja was extremely greedy, and neglected the ancestors' rites
2. The Ten Underworld Kings pays an undercover visit to Sama-jangja, the man mistreats them / Sama-jangja mistreats a monk
3. The Ten Underworld Kings appear in dreams to Sama-jangja. The daughter interprets the dream: the father will die
4. Sama-jangja prepares the rites for the Death emissaries (*chösüñg-saja*), begging them
5. The Death emissaries were convinced to take Uma-jangja

²⁰⁸Seo Taeseok (2001), 368-376; Choi Won-Oh (2008), 131-145; Hong Taehan (2016), 305-314 & 413-423; Lee Kyung Hwa (2022), 165-6.

Honam versions

Version A:

5. Yama wars Sama-jangja and his daughter-in-law with a dream
6. Sama-jangja dies
7. The daughter-in-law goes to King Yama court to persuade the king of Hells
8. Finally, Sama-jangja is resuscitated

Version B:

- instead of the culprit. Uma-jangja is physically identical to Sama-jangja, but filial and generous
6. The Ten Underworld Kings discover the cheating, and send another emissary: Yi Ch'unbaek
7. Finally, there is a compromise: the establishment of the funerary rite of "Horse [Grievances] Purification" Mal-Ssitkim-gut, where a "sinless" horse is sacrificed.

Kwanbok (Hamhŭng) versions

Version A (*Hwangch'ŏn-honsi*):

1. Three twins (Songnim-dong'i, Idung'i, Sama-dung'i) pray the harvest deity
2. Bones appear in the twins' gardens

Version B (*Honswi-gut*):

1. Three twins (Songrim-dong'i, Usu-dung'i, Sama-dung'i) cut a tree
2. After fifteen years, bones appear in the fallen tree's trunk

Kwanbok (Hamhŭng) versions

Version A (*Hwangch'ŏn-honsi*):

3. King Yama visits the twins' house, attracted by the prayers to the bones
4. The twins try to escape Yama by making rites
5. The twins cheat the Death emissary (*chŏsŭng-saja*) with their surrogates
6. The three twins became immortals

Version B (*Honswi-gut*):

3. The first twin dreams of the bones, and after twenty-nine years he prepares rites to cheat Death
4. The other twins imitate the oldest one
5. The three twins manage to live up to eighty-one years

In Cheju, the myth is focused on Changja's parents, and it contains a prologue:

Cheju version (*Maenggam-bonp'uri*)

1. A couple (Chunyŏn'guk and Sosaman) prays hundred-year-old bones to have a child
2. Sosaman met her previously dead daughter
3. The couple have a son: Changja
4. The couple is visited by a Death emissary (*chŏsŭng-saja*)
5. The emissary is flattered with offering, and begged not to take anyone with him

Cheju version (*Maenggam-bonp'uri*)

6. The emissary comes back to King Yama
7. The couple managed to live up to 5600 years with various subterfuges

Hong Taehan (2016) made a general outline of all these variants, including all the possible ending²⁰⁹:

1. Sumyŏng-jangja is greedy and does not worship the ancestor, and / or, in some versions, he mistreats a monk
2. Sumyŏng-jangja dreams of his death
3. Sumyŏng-jangja consults a diviner, decide to do good deeds and finally welcomes the Death emissary (there is a great variation on the details)
4. Possible endings:
 - a) Sumyŏng-jangja has his life spared
 - b) Sumyŏng-jangja deceives the Death emissary using Uma-jangja, and he saves his own life
 - c) Sumyŏng-jangja treats well the Death emissary and he is forgiven (popular in Chŏlla-nam)
 - d) Sumyŏng-jangja deceives the Death emissary using Uma-jangja, but he fails and ends punished

²⁰⁹ Hong Taehan (2016), 413-423. Kim Heonsun (1994) also reports a version of the *Seng-gut* where Changja and his family are punished by “the Sage of the Kŭmgang Temple” with their pots taking life, worms consuming the copper columns, mushroom growing in the rice bags and finally the house transformed into a pond. A similar punishment (mushrooms on the rooftop) also may also appear in some creation narrative’s version as a warning to Changja: Kim Heonsun (1994), 271-285, cf. with Oh Jeong-mi (2015).

The *Changja-p'uri* is intoned during the funerary purifying rite of Ssitkim-gut, particularly important for the Chölla “hereditary” shamans (see §2.3.2). The rite is aimed at placating the dead’s grievances with ritual water²¹⁰. Hong Taehan, then, analyzed this kind of rites’ relationships as follows:

dead ↔ deity; deity ↔ shaman; shaman ↔ living person; living person ↔ dead

This contrasts with the regular rites, where the living person and the shaman are ritually connected to each other (ritual specialist-client) and both to the deity, creating a triangle. Specifically, this rite serves to preserve the link between the living and the dead / cosmic order (*pax deorum hominumque* to say it in Latin). The myth highlights this order: the story of Changja shows that Life and Death are not separated, and that the mortal destiny can be changed, ultimately exorcizing the Death itself. Similarly, the *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs* writes that rites like the Ssitkim-gut serves to appease “the spirit of the dead” and to pray “for the well-being of the living”²¹¹.

The juxtaposition of Life and Death also appears within the rites for childbirth and the children wellbeing. Among these, it is in the *Igong-bonp'uri* where Changja is punished by the gods: as we have seen in the previous paragraph, the Igong myth is recited during the Cheju Kusamsŭng-naem, used to steer the newborn away from the infant death goddess. The myth can be also narrated alone within the Puldo-maji, with the same purposes²¹².

If, within the *Changja-p'uri*, the guilts of Sumyöng-jangja are hoarding wealth and disrespect the gods, within the *Igong-bonp'uri* the sins are even greater: enslaving a child deity and his mother, violating and killing the woman, and finally mistreating her son. We will discuss the Igong narrative later, more extensively: for now, what concerns us is the punishment of Changja.

²¹⁰ We can hypothesize, relying on the Honam *Changja-p'uri* narrative, that in ancient times this rite involved a horse sacrifice, making it really close to the Cheju scapegoating ritual of *aeng-magi*: Choi Won-Oh (2008), 137-145. See also §2.3.3 for further details about the *aeng-magi* rite.

²¹¹ Hong Taehan (2016), 305-314 & 423-7. For details about the rite, see: Encyclopedia Planning Team (2013), *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs*, 84-5, 96-7, 102, 123-5, 142-3, 220 & 236.

²¹² Waida Manabu (1991), 96-8; Lee Soo ja (1993), 20-4. It worth remembering that Chesök-halmöni / Samsin-halmöni is also known as Puldo-halmang in Cheju (see the §§7 and 10.2).

Within the *Igong-bonp'uri*, the deity gives a collective punishment. Collecting all the variants, the 'complete' sequence is usually the following:

1. "laughter's flower", which makes the Changja's clan laughter painfully
2. "battle's flower", which make the Changja's clan members assault each other
3. "destruction's flower", which make all the clan members die but the Changja's second daughter, who hid herself

Only within two known versions there are specific punishments for the Sumyŏng-jangja's daughters:

Igong-bonp'uri – Cho Hŭldae mansin version

천년장젠 한락둥이 굿는냥 문딱 매와놓난, 그 앞이서 한락둥인 웃음꽃을
내여놓난, 다들 해삭해삭 웃어가난 맬망꽃을 내여놓난 문딱 맬망하연
죽어불었구나.

그영하연 한락둥인 천년장제치 큰딸애긴 가난할 꽃 을 주고, 셋딸애긴
맬망꽃을 주고, 청태국 마귀할망은 부제될 꽃 주고.

As for Ch'ŏnnyŏn-Changja, Hallaktung'i gathered [all his clan]; Hallak-tung'i laid down the laughter's flower in front of them, and everyone laughed loudly, then laid down the destruction's flower, and everyone forgot and then died. Then, Hallak-tung'i gave the poverty's flower to the Ch'ŏnnyŏn-Changja's eldest daughter, gave the destruction's flower to the third daughter, and gave the wealth's flower to the old witch Ch'ŏngt'aeguk [who helped him / her].

Igong-bonp'uri – Ko Sang'on mansin version

삼죽일론이 몬 매와 앓이난, 할락궁인 웃음웃일 꽃을 내여 놓난,
삼죽일론이 몬 해삭해삭 배설이 그차지도록 웃어가난, 이젠 맬망꽃을
내여 놓난,

몬 멜썰어지듯 삼죽일론이 몬 죽어가는구나. [...] 큰딸애기영 셋딸애긴
나오라가난 불붙는 꽃을 내여놓난 매딱 불붙언 죽고,

Now that the entire clan was gathered sitting, Hallakkung'i laid down the laughter's flower, and the entire clan laughed so loud that their bowels almost turned over, then he laid down destruction's flower, and the entire clan died as it was wiped out. [...] The eldest daughter and the third daughter came out [the house], and he laid down the fire's flower, and suddenly they caught fire and died.

Sometimes the “destruction's flower” *melmang-kkot* is also called the “sure flower that destroys the wickedness” *sure-melmang'aksim-kkot*, and it is used specifically against Sumyöng-jangja, there seen as the wicked being (“with an evil heart” *aksim* 惡心) par excellence. This is the same flower that cause the children's death within the Kusamsüng-naem rite and thus has a specular function of the “flower of life” (and the “flower of resurrection”, see the next chapter). This has led Lee Soo ja (1993) to argue that this section of *Igong-bonp'uri* is an etiological myth about the origin of human mortality²¹³. If Lee Soo ja hypothesis is correct, the *Igong-bonp'uri* may have parallels both within *Changja-p'uri* and the Cheju creation myth. In fact, we can also see some parallel between the daughters' punishment and Cheju creation narrative: on one hand, death and poverty are the result of Sobyöl-wang / Sökka flower theft and, on the other, in some version Changja is punished by the Heavenly fire and thunder gods.

The punishment of Sumyöng-jangja is an optional element within the Cheju creation narratives: the story was likely an autonomous myth inserted within the *Ch'önjiwang-bonp'uri* for ethical (in the sense of *ethos*) and etiological reason. To

²¹³ Waida Manabu (1991), 96-8; Lee Soo ja (1993), 27-33; Yang Yong-jun (2014), 15-24.

explain this hypothesis, we must see why and how Sumyŏng-jangja is punished in this narrative:

The overall story structure is akin to the *Changja-p'uri*. However, the plot development can take many alternative ways: the starting point is always the greediness and-or lack of filial piety of Changja. The reason for his punishment varies from version to version:

- A. Greediness
- B. Lack of filial piety (mistreating the parents)
- C. Irritating King Yama i.e. impiety toward the ancestors
- D. Lending rice mixed with sand to Ch'ongmaeng-puin (the Earth Mother), who offered them to Ch'ŏnji-wang (the Heaven Father), who noticed the fraud – here the entire Changja's family is punished
- E. Involving an innocent woman named Pak U / Pak Yi in his schemes

Similarly, there is also a great variation in the punishment assigned by Ch'ŏnji-wang:

1. Changja repents, donate its wealth and his forgiven by the Heavenly god (identical to the *Changja-p'uri* endings a and c)
2. Ch'ŏnji-wang sends “divine generals” to the Changja's house: either wind and fire or wind, thunder and fire. Sometimes the entire Changja's clan is annihilated
3. Changja is transformed into insects, either by the “divine generals”, by Taebyŏl-wang and Sobyŏl-wang or Sobyŏl-wang against Ch'ŏnji-wang will. In the version reported by Choi Won-Oh (2008), Changja's house is set on fire by the “divine

generals” and his sons reborn as vultures and his daughters as maggots, as karmic retribution²¹⁴

Interestingly, in some versions, Ch’ŏnji-wang preaches the Buddhist doctrine of causal chain (*nidāna*, in *yŏn* 因緣) to persuade Changja to repentance.

According to Kim Heonsun (1994), this story was originally independent from the creation narrative because of the theme of wicked punishment, typical of the folktale. When it was incorporated within the *Ch’ŏnjiwang-bonp’uri*, the story gained a new meaning: the establishment of order / justice by the supreme deity against the chaos / wickedness represented by Changja. The similarities with the *Changja-p’uri* are evident, according to Kim Heonsun, and the narrative can in fact be read as a story about human mortality as well. Lee Chang-yoon (2016) makes a similar reading: mankind’s shortcomings come from Changja, particularly his greediness, and justice becomes possible only after Changja punishment by Ch’ŏnji-wang. Because the *Ch’ŏnjiwang-bonp’uri* does not shift its focus on prosperity like its northern counterpart, and instead there is the leitmotif of trickery (greediness, the flower theft), the Cheju creation myth should be read in the light of Changja punishment story. Kwon Tae-hyo (2017) too considers the mytheme of Changja punishment independent from the *Ch’ŏnjiwang-bonp’uri*. Like Kim Heonsun and Lee Chang-yoon, Kwon Tae-hyo sees the Changja punishment as a part of Chaos transformation into Order. However, and this is a hint of its original autonomy, the myth is “out of phase” with the creation narrative sequence: the relationship between Life and Death is fuzzy, and the theme of the punishment should logically come at the end of the creation narrative. Kwon Tae-hyo sees the origin of this story in the “Changja Pond” folktale, and not in the *Changja-p’uri*. Interestingly, the “Changja Pond” folktale is almost identical to the *Seng-gut* narrative reported by Kim Heonsun, chanted as prelude to the Tanggŭm’aegi tale and as continuation of the northern creation myth²¹⁵.

²¹⁴ Cf. below with the “Changja Pond” folktale and the *Seng-gut* narratives: Kim Heonsun (1994), 271-285; Oh Jeong-mi (2015).

²¹⁵ Kim Heonsun (1994), 96-106, 122-4 & 271-285; Choi Won-Oh (2008), 28-37; Lee Chang-yoon (2016), 116-9; Kwon Tae-hyo (2017), 36-62. See Oh Jeong-mi (2015) for the “Changja Pond” tale.

We can now make a comparison between these tales, to which we add the “Changa Pond” folktale, synthesized as follows by Oh Jeong-mi (2015):

1. In a village lives the greedy Changja
2. A monk goes begging for alms to him, but Changja refuses to give them
3. Changja’s daughter-in-law (*myŏnŭri*) gives alms to the monk
4. The monk says to the daughter-in-law to climb up a mountain without looking back
5. Changja’s house is submerged, the daughter-in-law looks back
6. The daughter-in-law is transformed into stone

Another version of this story, more detailed and where the deity’s punishment dynamics are even more transparent, is found within the *Seng-gut* narrative, mentioned before.

Scholars have also noticed a parallel between the Tanggŭm’aegi myth, the *Changja-p’uri*, the *Igong-bonp’uri* and the *Son-nim-gut*: the *Son-nim-gut* is a myth about a triplet of traveler smallpox deities, narrated during illness exorcistic rituals. In this story, the greedy character called Kim Changja 金長者 is punished by the gods for his inhospitality along with a boatman who did not help them to cross a river²¹⁶:

	Guilt	Punishment	Restoration
<i>Changja</i>	a) Greediness b) Impiety toward the ancestors (lack of filial piety) and the gods c) Mistreating a monk d) Mortality (bones omen)	Death (visit by a Death emissary)	a) None b) Forgiveness (wealth donation) c) Substitution with Uma-jangja d) Horse sacrifice e) Trickery (Kwanbok, Cheju)

²¹⁶ Kim Heonsun (1994), 271-285; Choi Won-Oh (2008), 14 & 211-221; Encyclopedia Planning Team (2013), *Encyclopedia of Korean Folk beliefs*, 121-2 & 163; Oh Jeong-mi (2015); Hong Taehan (2016), 393-413; Kwon Tae-hyo (2017).

	Guilt	Punishment	Restoration
Igong	Mistreating a god, killing his mother	1. “Laughter’s flower” 2. “Battle’s flower” 3. “Destruction’s flower”	Mother resurrection with other magical flowers
Ch’önjiwang	a) Greediness b) Lack of filial piety c) Impiety toward the ancestors d) Mistreating the gods (rice fraud)	a) Destruction by the “divine generals” (fire, wind, thunder) b) Transformation into insects	(Wealth donation)
Seng-gut	Mistreating a monk / “the Sage of the Kūmgang Temple”	1. Pots taking life 2. Worms consuming the house copper columns 3. Mushrooms growing in the rice bags 4. House transformed into a pond 5. Daughter-in-law transformed into stone	None
Sonnim	Mistreating the Sonnim gods	Death by smallpox	None

There are other tales that include a punishment story, similar to those of Changja: the *Cho’gong-bonp’uri*, Cheju equivalent of the mainland *Chesŏk-bonp’uri*, and the *Ch’ilsŏng-bonp’uri*. Here, the antagonists are respectively an official who imprisons and kills their mother Tanggŭm’aegi, and the gods’ stepmother, who also killed the protagonists’ mother (see §§7.2 and 7.4):

	Guilt	Punishment	Restoration
Ch’ogong	Killing the Three Brother’s mother	(Not mentioned)	Mother resurrection

	Guilt	Punishment	Restoration
<i>Ch'ilsǒng</i>	Killing the Ch'ilsǒng mother	Transformation into insects	Mother resurrection by a magical flower

We can see that there are some recurrent patterns: within the *Changja-p'uri*, the *Igong-bonp'uri* and the *Sonnim-gut*, mistreating a “guest” deity is cause of death. The deadly curse can be explicit (the “grim reaper” visit, the smallpox) or used as pretext to show the god’s powers (magical flowers). The punishment in the *Seng-gut* / “Changja Pond” story is even more drastic: the deity leaves no survivors, and the house is wiped out by a deluge, becoming a pond, a fate not dissimilar to that reported in some *Ch'ǒnjiwang-bonp'uri* versions, where the house is burned to the ashes and the Changja offspring reborn into animals. It can be hypothesized that the motif of insect transformation (metamorphosis) is both moral and etiological. This is evident by seeing how the same kind of pests appears in the Central Asian creation myths as result of the wicked / envious creator deity’s actions, i.e. unpleasant things exist in the human world as result of immoral actions. In this case, being either Changja or the Ch'ilsǒng’s stepmother, there is clearly a continuity between their behavior and their curse²¹⁷.

We can now deep further into the analysis and see what the nature of Changja is, the meaning of his punishment and the relationship between these myths, the creation narratives and *Chesǒk-ponp'uri*:

Changja’s nature and his punishment:

Changja has all the characteristics of a mask, a stock character representing all reprehensible actions a human could do: be unfilial, unwelcoming and greedy. His immorality puts him into a precarious position with the deities, here clearly standing for the *ethos* of his fellow humans. Because he is so stereotypical, Changja is also

²¹⁷ This is even clearer in the *Ch'ilsǒng-bonp'uri*, where the stepmother transformation into insects is contrasted with the gods’ mother rebirth as a deer, sacred animal both in Siberia and in China.

an easily adaptable character: new meanings can be added to Changja misfortunes depending on what punishment he incurs, and in what context the story is re-told.

Lee Soo ja (1993) describes the *Igong-bonp'uri* Changja as “wicked” because the flower which kills him, and hypothesizes he was originally a deity himself, capable of killing another deity, the Hallakkung'i mother²¹⁸. Similarly, the *Son-nim-gut* Changja is “selfish” according to Choi Won-Oh (2008), which makes him fundamentally identical to the Changja of *Changja-p'uri* according to Hong Taehan (2016): a hoarder terrified by the human mortality, thus a character associable with famine. Another “sin” of Changja is inhospitality: a trait showed both in the *Son-nim-gut* and the *Seng-gut* / “Changja’s Pond” folktale, where the man’s selfishness is contrasted with his daughter-in-law hospitality. We can see from these analyses that a trait from one story is often shared with the others. We can also divide all these narratives into several main strands: the greediness theme, the inhospitality theme, the lack of filial piety theme and the mortal doom of mankind theme. Except for the *Igong-bonp'uri*, the *Son-nim-gut* and the *Seng-gut* / “Changja’s Pond”, all other Changja myths loosely associated with the creation narratives and the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri* could take any of these directions. We can also see that a recurrent theme is the fear for the Death and the human relationship with deities, elements stressed by Lee Soo ja and Hong Taehan²¹⁹.

Changja is thus perpetually condemned to death by the gods, so scholars have also seen in this character a symbol for mankind’s mortal destiny: according to Lee Soo ja, the Changja’s death in the *Igong-bonp'uri* explains why humans are mortal beings; for Seo Taeseok and Hong Taehan, an identical symbolism appears in the *Changja-p'uri*, a story centered on the relationship with the after death, where the bones discovered in the tree are a death omen. Hong Tehan also retraces the same theme in the *Sonnim-gut*, where the river, engine of the story, is seen as a liminal space between Life and Death, coherently with an illness deity. This is coherent with the ritual nature: the *Changja-p'uri* is chanted during funeral rites, and the

²¹⁸ The Hallakkung'i / Igong mother shares many godly prerogatives with Tanggŭm'aegi, see the next chapter.

²¹⁹ Lee Soo ja (1993), 20-4 & 27-33; Choi Won-Oh (2008), 14 & 211-221; Oh Jeong-mi (2015), 153-161; Hong Taehan (2016), 305-314 & 393-432; Lee Kyung Hwa (2022), 165-6.

Son-nim-gut during illness exorcisms – in this sense, only the creation myth could be a pure explanation of human death origin, though *a posteriori*. The ritual setting also explains the theme of greediness and riches redistribution: it is during Confucian funerary rituals (“soul return” *panhon-je* / *fanhunji* 返魂祭, “three mourning days” *sam’u-je* / *sanyuji* 三虞祭 etc.) that food is commonly shared. Is however Hong Taehan himself who also point that the Changja narratives exorcise the fear of Death telling how fate can be overcome, here clearly referring to the variants where Changja remains unpunished²²⁰.

Thus, it is possible to assert that the main destiny of Changja is death, if only because it seems the main theme of the *Changja-p’uri* and the *Son-nim-gut* – the *Seng-gut* / “Changja’s Pond” folktale seems more complicated: see thereafter. There is however a difficulty in this analysis of *Changja-p’uri* story and its derivation, the creation myth’s Changja section: in some versions Changja remains unpunished or is even able to successfully cheat Death itself. The variants where Changja gains immortality (*Honswi-gut*) may be an influence of middle-Koryŏ / early Chosŏn Daoism, and particularly of rites such as the “corpse liberation” *shijie* 屍解. However, this Daoist influence is never “pure”, as it mixes with other, native elements such as the scapegoat rite and the dead resurrection by a shaman narrative²²¹.

Changja tales, the creation narratives and *Chesŏk-ponp’uri*:

We can then conclude that the Changja punishment tales are centered around the Death theme. How do these tales interact with the other myths associated with them, specifically the creation narratives and the *Chesŏk-ponp’uri*? This question can be also reframed as follows: which story is the origin of the Changja’s punishment within the Cheju creation myth: the *Ch’angja-puri* or the “Changja’s Pond”? The “Changja’s Pond” story is currently found only as a sequence within the *Seng-gut*

²²⁰ Lee Soo ja (1993), 20-4 & 27-33; Seo Taeseok (2001), 367-81; Hong Taehan (2016), 305-314 & 393-432.

²²¹ For further details about the *shijie* rituals, see Pregadio (2013). 649-650, 896-7 & 1092-4. See also §§2.3.3, 5.3.2 and 5.4.3 for the middle-Koryŏ folk Buddhō-Daoism.

after the creation narrative, while the *Ch'ŏnjiwang-bonp'uri*, the Cheju creation myth itself, seems incorporating an aberrant version of *Ch'angja-puri*, with unusual variety of possible outcomes.

This question in these terms is raised Kwon Tae-hyo: the scholar, making a parallel with the Greek myths of Lycaon, king of Arcadia, and Deucalion and Pyrrha²²², formulated the following analyses: 1) the myth of Changja is a story about mankind mortality, and so it is unusual that, in the *Ch'ŏnjiwang-bonp'uri*, it is place in *medias res* and not at the story end, after the world creation; 2) intended as a punishment story, the Ch'ŏnji-wang / Jade Emperor sentence is unusually lenient: the parallel with Lycaon myth suggests that, in this part of the story, mankind annihilation is expected. However, this element seems absent in the *Ch'ŏnjiwang-bonp'uri* sequence; 3) the absence of a collective destruction of mankind by the gods is partially resolved if we return to the nature of Changja story as a story about mankind mortality, i.e. as a myth about *the origin* of human mortality; 4) the original flood story is preserved within the “Changja’s Pond” folktale, the flood narrative’s nature of this tale and its relationship with the creation myth (world creation → wicked punishment → flood → world re-creation) is highlighted by the cross-comparison with the *Ch'angja-p'uri* and the Lycaon myth.

Kwon Tae-hyo’s analysis is undoubtedly ingenious, however it is self-contained within the Cheju Island cultural landscape. In fact, it exists a rite when the Changja story comes after the creation narrative: the Seng-gut of the northern regions, mainly Hamgyŏng. The rite is composed by various independent myths, and indeed the sequence is creation narrative → “Changja’s Pond” → *Chesŏk-ponp'uri*. It is also possible, as Lee Chang-yoon suggests, that these stories share a recurrent character called with different names²²³. Therefore, simplifying the sequence of

²²² According to various versions of this myth, Zeus once heard of Lycaon’s wickedness, and appeared in Arcadia disguised as a human, wanting to test the king. When the twos met and the god nodded to his divine nature, the king sacrificed a slave (or a child) to see if the god was able to tell apart human flesh from animal flesh. Zeus, disgusted, transformed Lycaon into a wolf, destroyed his palace with fire, and decided to punish humanity with a flood. Deucalion and Pyrrha will be the only survivors of the disaster.

²²³ I.e.: Mirŭk, Kangbangdek the carpenter, the Sage of the Kŭmgang Temple and the monk from Hwanggŭm mt. monastery

stories from the Seng-gut on the Cheju creation narrative model as suggested by Kwon Tae-hyo, we will have the expected sequence of creation-impiety-deluge.

Some Changja story's variants present in the Seng-gut are even more detailed than the "Changja's Pond" folktale. One of these details hint toward a flood myth nature: in fact, Kim Heonsun reports that one of punishment given to Changja was that his house "thousand-year-old copper columns" will be eaten by worms. Interestingly, in the northern creation myths, Mirūk separated Heaven from Earth like it was "a kettle's lid" and erected "copper pillars" to support it. On one hand, the pillars pillar-eating worms cannot but remind us of "world snake" Níðhöggr gnawing at the "world's tree" Yggdrasil's roots from the Norse mythology (Snorri's *Edda*); on the other hand, if we read this motif as a flood cause, there is a parallel with the Chinese flood myth as reported in the *Huainanzi*, according to which the Earth was flooded because the Heaven's pillars crumbled. There is another element shared with the Cheju creation narratives: the possible presence of an Earth goddess. This reading is presented by Oh Jeong-mi, who noticed the only positive character in this myth, the daughter-in-law, is equally punished, transformed into a rock: it is thus possible that the daughter-in-law's fate was not originally a punishment, but an apotheosis into a mountain goddess. This is an interesting observation, because, as we have seen, in one version of the Cheju creation narrative, Changja hosts both the Heaven's god and the Earth's goddess, thus, if we read the "Sage of the Kūmgang Temple" as the creator god as Lee Chang-yoon does, we have a possible parallelism. Another interesting parallel would be the Oirat creation narrative (see the previous paragraph), according to which, after the flood, only the Primordial Ocean and the Sumeru Mountain were left from the old world, i.e. the pond and the rock²²⁴.

If these observations are correct, we can thus deduce that the choosing of the "Changja's Pond" folktale over the *Changja-p'uri* as additional story to be included into the creation myth can be seen either as a byproduct or as a cause of the changing of theme of the creation narratives themselves: from a Life/Death-centered story to

²²⁴ Kim Heonsun (1994), 79-80 & 250-285; Lee Chang-yoon (2000), 90-4; Oh Jeong-mi (2015) 153-161; Kwon Tae-hyo (2017), 36-62. For other flood narratives in Korean folklore see also: Choi Won-Oh (2008), 51-2; Riotto (2021), 248-9, 266-9 & 277-8.

world creation/dominion-centered story. This likely led to the loss of importance of the “Changja’s Pond” folktale itself as a cosmological myth as well:

Ancient Seng-gut structure:	1. Life-Death rivalry (creation myth) 2. Flood and Death origin (Changja’s Pond) 3. Birth / Agriculture origin (Tanggŭm’aegi)
Modern Seng-gut Structure:	1. World creation (creation myth) 2. Household god origin (Kangbangdek myth) 3. Sage of the Kŭmgang Temple origin / “Emille bell” 4. Death origin (Changja’s Pond) 5. Birth / Agriculture origin (Tanggŭm’aegi)

The prevalence of either the “Changja’s Pond” or the *Changja-p’uri* within the ritual sequence clearly affected the meaning of following myth too, i.e. the *Chesŏk-ponp’uri*. In fact, the “Changja’s Pond” variant stresses even more the role Tanggŭm’aegi not as a Life deity, but as a minor creator deity of sort, needed to repopulate Earth after the deluge; on the other hand, the *Changja-p’uri* variant stresses even more the role of Tanggŭm’aegi as Life / Earth goddess, contrasting both with the Death god Sŏkka and the first mortal, Changja – this is again the structure described by Lee Chang-yoon (2016) and Yung Sung-chan (2016). In this sense, it is interesting how the narrative variant incorporating the *Changja-p’uri* is found in Cheju Island, where the Life-Death rivalry theme is less transparent and the *Chesŏk-ponp’uri* is autonomous from it (see the previous paragraphs).

The magical flowers’ motif and their mythemes:

The motif of the magical flowers is particularly important within the *Igong-ponp’uri*. This motif is also present within the where *Ch’ilsŏng-bonp’uri*, a story with similar structure but where Changja does not appear. Both narratives follow the same pattern: the antagonist kills the protagonist’s mother → the antagonist is

punished → the protagonist's mother is resurrected with a magical flower. Notably, among these two, it is only within the *Igong-ponp'uri* that Changja's is killed with a flower. In fact, within the *Ch'ilsǒng-bonp'uri*, the evil stepmother is transformed into insects. This mismatch is reconciled confronting these narratives with other ones where Changja is also transformed into insects i.e. some *Ch'ŏnjiwang-bonp'uri* variants. Similarly, the contrast between the “destruction's flower” and the “flower of resurrection” within the *Igong-ponp'uri* is perfectly coherent within the shared ritual context and its Life-Death rivalry theme (see before).

In both cases, divine justice is shown as a form of revenge, one life for one life: the culprit takes a life, the culprit's life is in turn taken, then the victim's life is taken back i.e. the prize of killing is being killed. But, if this dynamic is identical, why there is a difference in treatment: why the Ch'ilsǒng evil stepmother is not killed while Changja is? Or, put in another way: why the *Ch'ilsǒng-bonp'uri* highlights the morality²²⁵ while the *Igong-ponp'uri* highlights the mortality? Unfortunately, we can only make educated guesses: 1) it depends on the functions of Ch'ilsǒng rites, birth and longevity, which toned down the Death-related aspects of the deity, although present (see §7.4); 2) a secondary meaning of the metamorphosis is simply death, therefore there is no real difference; 3) there is a strong Buddhist ethics' influence, according to which moral actions have direct consequences on one's mortal destiny. This is strongly suggested by a comparison with those versions of the *Ch'ilsǒng-bonp'uri* where the sons of Changja reborn as animal. All these hypotheses are not mutually exclusive.

A similar reasoning could be made about the presence of the magical flower within the story: if the action of Changja and the Ch'ilsǒng evil stepmother are functionally comparable, the presence of the “destruction's flower” does not directly depend on the guilty, but on the nature of the deity who take revenge on him. In other worlds magical flowers are an explicit manifestation of Changja's destiny / doom, or of the deity's might, which is almost the same. Clearly, Changja as a character “attracts” such motifs, as a symbol of mortal destiny: the difference between this or that story lays only on how he is punished.

²²⁵ See the paragraph's beginning.

As a final note, we can notice how both stories are narrated in specular yet interconnected contexts: the *Igong-bonp'uri* is a story about the Death origin told during childbirth rites; *Changja-p'uri* is either a myth about the origin of Death or a myth on Death cheating, told during funerals; finally, *Ch'ilsǒng-bonp'uri* is told during the rites for good luck, longevity and childbirth (see §§7.3-7.4). While the dynamics are similar, if not identical (Death exorcism), how and in what terms these dynamics are essential to the story depends on the contexts, functions and uses of the respective rituals during which these same stories are chanted.

We can now draw some preliminary conclusions and pen a summary:

- The Korean creation narratives and the Tanggŭm'aegi tale exist in a “modular” relationship, meaning that they can absolve their narrative and ritual functions both jointly and independently.
- The creations myths are also, implicitly, a Life goddess-Death god rivalry tale. The female nature of the creator deity is more explicit in the northern myths (*Ch'angsega*, *Seng-gut*).
- The relationship between the modern creation narratives and the *Chesǒk-ponp'uri* is complicated: in the modern forms, when they are told together, both discontinuity and thematic unity can be seen. It is possible that, if the ancient creation myths were more centered on the Life-Death rivalry theme, there were two possible outcomes, context-dependent:
 - Main: Life goddess wins over the Death god → Tanggŭm'aegi role diminished
 - Variant: Death god wins over the Life goddess → Tanggŭm'aegi role exalted
- The Changja punishment is an independent story, then incorporated within the creation narrative as an optional addendum. Changja is fundamentally a stock character whose role is to explain human mortality, connected with moral guilt: the myths where he avoids his doom are always connected to moral and ritual rectification.

- Changja stories are typically told during childbirth, illness and funeral rites. This because his myths can be both a way to exorcise Death and to explain / justify its presence within the human world.
- The incorporation of this story within the creation narrative was gradual: the most common theme of the Changja's story (mortality) was coherent with the creation narratives' themes (Life vs Death). However, we can in fact find two versions of this story in two different versions of the creation narratives, with two different main themes:
 - Human mortality: *Changja-p'uri* (likely) → Cheju Island's *Ch'ŏnjiwang-bonp'uri*
 - Flood myth: "Changja's Pond" → Hamgyŏng region's *Seng-gut* narrative
- It is possible that, in ancient times, these two versions were interchangeable, however the flood myth presence made the whole stories' sequence shift meaning to a myth about Life-Death origins toward a "pure" cosmogonic narrative.
 - Thus, the presence or absence of the Changja narrative within the creation myth can either exalt or obscure the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri* ritual role. This variation is clearly context-dependent (shaman training, client needs, ritual scopes etc.).

10 Hallakkung'i

“Prince Sukhāvati” Allakkuk-t'eja 安樂國太子, a.k.a. Hallakkung'i, the “Second Prince” Igong 二公, is the deity “guardian of the flowers” *kkot-kamwŏn* 꽃監員 in the remote “Western Paradise’s Flower Field” Sŏch'ŏn-kkotpat 西天 꽃밭. Hallakkung'i is a Death and Destiny deity: the flowers he / she oversees can give life, kill and resurrect, from the analysis of them a shaman can foresee people's life. Thus, the “Flower Field” is both the Afterlife and a liminal space where human destiny is determined and Hallakkung'i / Igong is the entity that manages human life and death²²⁶.

We have seen in the previous chapters how the origins' myth of Igong, the *Igong-bonp'uri*, is tied to the Chesŏk faith and narratives: the Igong's myth is narrated during the childbirth rites for Samsŭng-halmang / Chesŏk-halmŏni, the magical flower motif, present within the *Igong-bonp'uri*, is shared with the creation myth and the *Ch'ilsŏng-bonp'uri*, parts of the Chesŏk ritual apparatus. The origins' myth of Igong itself shares many themes with the *Chesŏk-bonp'uri* and the *Ch'ilsŏng-bonp'uri*, as we will see.

Therefore, we can deduce the existence of a network of deities composed by Chesŏk, Samsŭng and Igong. Yet, Igong patronages are the opposite of those of Chesŏk: one is a Childbirth deity, the other is tied to Death and even Cot Death. This tense connection is perfect starting point for the analysis of what we might call a limit case.

What is the content of the Igong origin's narrative? A good synthesis was made by Yang Young-jun (2014)²²⁷:

Prelude:

1. The poor Chimjin-guk and the wealthy Imjin-guk are worried because they have no children

²²⁶ Waida Manabu (1991), 96-8; Lee Soo Ja (1993), 41-3; Choi Won-Oh (2008), 17-8.

²²⁷ Yang Yong-jun (2014), 10-28.

2. They are told that, if they offer sincere prayers, they will have children.
So, they decide to pray together
3. The poor Chimjin-guk makes an offer full of devotion, Imjin-guk a
superficial one
4. Chimjin-guk wife gives birth to Sara-Doryŏng, Imjin-guk to the
daughter Wŏn'gang-am'i
5. Sara-Doryŏng and Wŏn'gang-am'i wedding

Introduction:

6. A messenger invites Sara-Doryŏng to become the Western Paradise's
Flower Field's official
7. Sara-Doryŏng leaves for the Flower Field with his pregnant wife
Wŏn'gang-am'i
8. Wŏn'gang-ami falls ill
9. The couple goes to Chae'in-jangja house
10. Mother and not-yet-born child are sold to the man as serfs / slaves
11. Childbirth, to the son are given a recognizable name and mark

Crescendo:

12. Chae'in-jangja asks Wŏn'gang-am'i for cohabitation, Wŏn'gang-am'i
refusal
13. Wŏn'gang-am'i is punished with slave labour
14. Hallakkung'i escapes
15. Wŏn'gang-am'i death
16. Hallakkung'i enters the Western Paradise's Flower Field

Trials:

1. For three times, Hallakkung'i crosses the waters separating the Flower
Field from the human world

2. He / She meets the Jade Emperor's maidens (*kungnyŏ* 宮女) / Seven Daughter (Ch'ilsŏn 七仙)
3. Hallakkung' tries to speak to them, but get ignored
4. To get noticed, Hallakkung'i injures one of his / her fingers and dips it into the pond's water
5. The pond got contaminated by the blood's impurity
6. When the maidens go to the pond to draw for the Field's flowers, because now the water is contaminated, the flowers wither
7. The maidens report the incident to Sara-Doryŏng, the Field's guardian

Apex and ending:

17. Hallakkung'i obtains the magical flowers
18. Changja's clan punishment
19. Wŏn'gang-am'i is resurrected, Hallakkung'i apotheosis

This is a summary of the *Igong-bonp'uri* narratives. Clearly, many variations story variations exist. In four versions – those of Pak Pongch'un *mansin*, Cho Hŭldae *mansin*, Ko San'ung *mansin* and Ko Taejung *mansin* –, Changja original intent is to kill Wŏn'gang-am'i after her refusal, but he is dissuaded by his daughters and only then he sends the woman to forced labor – in these versions, Wŏn'gang-am'i has a clear prominent role; in the Pak Pongch'un version, moreover, she is subsequently tortured by her son, who presses a heated pot-lid against her in order to force her to disclose the identity of his / her father.. In other versions (notably those of Cho Hŭldae *mansin*, Ko San'ung *mansin*), Hallakkung'i is gifted by Wŏn'gang-am'i with a cereal congee (*pŏmbŏk*), and when, in this version, Changja makes his dogs chase after him / her, Hallakkung'i saves him / herself giving the mother's gift to the animals. In some tellings (again Cho Hŭldae and Ko San'ung), Hallakkung'i finds out about Wŏn'gang-am'i death only retrospectively, upon

meeting with his / her father in the Flower Field: in these accounts, Wŏn'gang-am'i was tortured and subsequently beheaded. At times, additional trials intervene between Hallakkung'i's departure and the arrival at the Flower Field; Pak Pongch'un's version, for instance, reports two such episodes:

Igong-bonp'uri – Pak Pongch'un mansin version

그때 헌집 고치는데 잇스니 거긔들고 못기를, 서천꽃밭을 어딴로 가느냐
무르니, 여기서 우리와 갓치 연삼년 일을 하면 알려주마 하니, 연삼년 잇스
후에 다시 무르니, 가당보면 발뚱 뜰 물이 잇고 적음턱이 뜰 물이 있으니
넘어가 라 하니, 가다가 이물을 넘어가니, 가마귀 일곱머리 울엄거늘,
너이들 어찌하야 우느냐, 칠선왕 가마귀니다. 너의들 무엇을 먹고 사는가.
버레를 먹고 삼니다하니, 버레를 잡아내여 주고 서천꽃밭 가는 길을
무르니, 신녀 세 사람이 울고 있을 터이니, 무려보라 하거늘, 과연
기나가고 보니, 삼신녀가 울고 있으니, 어떤 신녀길네 우느냐 무르니,
우리는 옥황신녀온대, 죄를 주고 벌러진 동의에 물을 잉어오라 하니, 못
잉어가고 울고있음니 다 하니, 할락궁이가 마의 정당 췌 정당을 거더다가
엮어메고, 송진으로 막아서 물을 질어주고 서천꽃밭을 무르니 가치가다가
이것이 서천꽃밭임니다 하고 가버리니.

At that time, I was repairing an old house, once I took one [of the carpenters] and asked him: "Where is to go to the Western Paradise's Flower Field?". He answered he: "If you work with us for three years, I will tell you". After three years, he said: "If you go ahead, you will find a lump of earth surfacing from water, and a small hill also surfacing from water. Walk through them." When I

Igong-bonp'uri – Pak Pongch'un mansin version

was going through the water, I heard a cry of seven crows. “Why are you crying?” “We are the crows of the King of the Seven Fairies [i.e. the Jade Emperor]” “What do you eat?” “We eat worms”, I took some worms and gave to them and asked about the way for the Western Paradise’s Flower Field. The animal said to me: “There are three goddesses crying, ask them”. And, indeed, forward there I saw three goddesses crying. “What goddesses are you, why are you crying?”, I asked, “We are the goddesses of the Jade Emperor, and we were ordered to draw water with a broken jar, but we are failing and so we cry” they said. Hallakkung’i took three cane necks and three hoe’s necks, he / she bound them together and sealed them with resin, then drew water and asked about the Western Paradise’s Flower Field. The goddess behind him answered: “This is the Western Paradise’s Flower Field”, and then she left.

The crows encountered in this episode are likely to represent another sacred entity of the Underworld, and the act of feeding them clearly constitutes a trial in its own right²²⁸, while the riddle of the broken jar is explicitly a test of wisdom. Aside from these divergences, the motif of crossing water is present in all versions of the narrative. More broadly, the theme of trials in the Other World is shared with the Paridegi myth. In almost every version, the father explains the nature and powers of the magic flowers and directly hands them to Hallakkung’i. In a minority of versions (those of Pak Pongch’un *mansin*, Ko San’ung *mansin*, and Han Saengso *mansin*), however, the protagonist makes immediate use of the flowers for the purpose of revenge, without receiving any prior explanation: the difference between the mainstream and these alternatives lays in the fact the Hallakkung’i appears already to possess knowledge of the flowers’ powers. Moreover, whereas in most versions is mentioned only the set of flowers required for the mother’s rebirth, the version transmitted by An Sa’in *mansin* additionally refers to a specific “flower of

²²⁸ Cf. with the human-flesh-eating Stymphalian birds, part of the Heracles Labors in the Greek mythology.

rebirth,” *tohwansaeng-kkot* 道還生꽃. As in the *Chesŏk-ponp’uri*, usually the narrative ends in an apotheosis: Hallakkung’i assumes the father’s role as “flowers guardian”, while his / her parents become respectively “Father Other World” Chŏsŭng-abang and “Mother Other World” Chŏsŭng-ŏmŏng. This, however, represents only one of several possible endings²²⁹.

The versions discussed above constitute the corpus of *Igong-bonp’uri* narratives transmitted on Cheju Island. There is, however, evidence that mainland variants of this narrative also existed. One such example is the “Song of the Ag’yang Prince” *Ag’yang-wangja-norae* 岳陽王子 노래 from Kimhae region. This version closely parallels the Cheju tradition, while displaying several notable differences:

- The queen is childless, and she conceives only after receiving a blessing from a Buddhist monk
- The Flower Field of the Western Paradise is explicitly identified as the place where the Buddha resides
- The inclusion of the “Song of Rebirth in the Pure Land” *Hwangsang-ga* 往生歌, sung when the son reunites with the father
- The protagonist, Prince Ag’yang 岳陽王子, is summoned to Heaven by his father on a flower-adorned palanquin, in the presence of his deceased mother.

Another attested variant is the “Invocation to the Lord from the Godly Western Paradise” *Sinsŏn-Set’yŏn-nim Ch’ŏngbae* 神仙西天 衞請拜 from Kanggyŏng (P’yŏngbuk region). This is a brief narrative concerning the origins of the “flower of evil” and the “flower of life”. It may be summarised as follows:

1. Queen Wŏn’ang and Emperor San’asu set out to obtain the magical flowers in the Western Paradise / Sukhāvātī.

²²⁹ Yang Yong-jun (2014): 15-28.

2. Upon arrival, they find that the flowers have all withered because of natural calamities (seven years of drought and nine years of floods).
3. The couple is held responsible for this catastrophe and is ordered to proceed to the court of the Jade Emperor.
4. Wŏn'ang, however, is pregnant and cannot continue the journey.
5. San'asu instructs his wife to name the child Annak-tung'i if male and Annak-nyŏ if female.

At this point the narrative breaks off abruptly. The text is recorded within a ritual sequence preceding the “Invocation to the Sage Lords” *Sŏng'in-nim Ch'ŏngbae* 聖人 召請拜, which is plausibly to be understood as another version of the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri*. Taken together, these three variants may ultimately derive from the early Chosŏn compilation *Wŏr'in-Sŏkpo* (月印釋譜 fifteenth century) “The Moon's Reflection on the Buddha's Genealogy”.

Other versions are reported in the Buddhist apocryphal text “Stories of the Precedent Buddhas” *Sŏkpo-sangjŏl* 釋譜詳節 as “Sutra of Prince Sukhāvati” *Allakkuk T'aeja-gyŏng* 安樂國太子經 and in the “Biography of Prince Sukhāvati” *Allakgukchŏn* 安樂國傳, both of Koryŏ period and deriving from various chronicles of the Kirim temple: the 1705's “Kirim Temple Foundation Records” *Kirim-sa chungch'ang-gi* 祈林寺重創記, the 1740's “Account on Deeds related to the Kirim Temple of Silla on the Hamwŏl Mountain” *Silla Hamwŏl-san Kirim-sa Sajŏk* 新羅含月山祈林寺事蹟 and the “Additional Scroll to the Account on Deeds related to the Kirim Temple” *Pyŏlpon Kirim-sa Sajŏk* 別本 祈林寺事蹟 (date unknown); as well as related painting: the “The Buddhist Painting of King Sala from Kirim Temple” *Kirim-sa Sarasu-wang-t'aeng* 祈林寺紗羅樹王幀, the 1576's “Narrative Painting of Prince Sukhāvati” *Allakkuk-t'aeja-jŏn pyŏnsang-do* 安樂國太子傳變相圖, and the eighteenth century's “Painting of the Three World's

Buddha” *Samsebur-hwa* 三世佛畫. Despite being dated way after the fifteenth century, these chronicles suggest that the temple’s foundation legend, source of our myth, dates back at least to the Unified Silla period. These stories can be summarized as follows:

1. Kwang’yu *sōng’in* 光有聖人²³⁰ of the Imjōng Temple 林淨寺, from India (“Kingdom of Brahman” Pōmmara-guk 梵摩羅國) asks his disciples to visit King Sala (Sarasu-wang 紗羅樹王) from Western India (Sōch’ōn-guk 西天國), so he collected eight disciples and went with them
2. The king welcomed the saint and offered his eight palace maidens to be of the guest’s service
3. The Saint convinces the king to attend a rite at his temple, so the king decides to departure for the “Kingdom of Brahman”, leaving his earthly possessions. The Queen Consort Wōn’ang 鴛鴦夫人 decides to follow her husband
4. Queen Wōn’ang, pregnant, could not make it through the hard journey, and falls ill. Desperate, she asks to be sold as slave and donates the money for the Buddhist alms
5. The queen and the yet-to-be-born child are sold to the “wealthy man” Chahyōn (Chahyōn-jangja 子賢長者) for 2,000 pieces of gold. The king tells the queen to name their prince “Sukhāvatī”
6. Queen Wōn’ang is severely mistreated by her new master, Prince Sukhāvatī managed to escape the household after seven years, discovering his missing father, king Sala
7. Meeting with the eight maidens, the prince knows about the king Sala whereabouts, and gets recognized by him

²³⁰ 聖人 *shengren* / *sōng’in* is conventionally translated as “saint”, it indicates a Daoist sage, or a Buddha / Bodhisattva. It renders the Sanskrit *sādhu*, *ṛṣi* etc.

8. Returning to his mother, Prince Sukhāvātī accidentally discovers that his mother Queen Wŏn'ang was killed and cut into three pieces by Chahyŏn
9. Prince Sukhāvātī, crying, recollected his mother's remains, and prays Amitābha so she could reborn into the Sukhāvātī Western Paradise
10. Riding the "Salvific Dragon Boat" *Chŏb'in-ryongsŏn* 接引龍船, Amitābha himself greets the prince, praising him for his filial piety. Then, the buddha miraculously resurrects Queen Wŏn'ang,
11. Mother and son ride the "Salvific Dragon Boat" towards the Sukhāvātī Western Paradise

There are some variations among these versions as well: within the *Allakkuk T'aeja-gyŏng*, King Sala is identified with the Jade Emperor; there is a brief mention to magical flowers with the power to give life back to the mother; and, during the ending, all characters obtain Buddhahood: respectively, King Sala is revealed to be Amitābha, Queen Wŏn'ang is Avalokiteśvara, Prince Sukhāvātī is Mahāsthāmaprāpta and Saint Kwang'yu is Śākyamuni. As can be seen, the more a version is ancient, the more the Buddhist influence is visible²³¹.

This myth has generated a wide range of scholarly interpretations, largely owing to the richness and abundance of its attestations. Lee Soo-ja (1993), comparing the *Igong-bonp'uri* with other myths that feature Changja and the Flower Field, argues that it should be understood as an etiological myth explaining the origin of human mortality. She further suggests that the flower motif may originally have occupied a more prominent position within the narrative, in a manner consistent with the ritual contexts associated with it.

²³¹ Lee Soo Ja (1993), 15-8 & 43-8; Hung-Youn Cho (1999), 55-6; Choi Won-Oh (2008), 17-8 & 258-263; Pak A-ram (2014), 20-49 & 35-40.

Hung-Youn Cho (1999), by contrast, interprets the Igong narrative fundamentally as a variation on the mythic themes of Paridegi, transformed under the influence of the growing cult of Amitābha. Within this framework, the Flower Field is seen as the principal surviving trace of the story's original shamanic structure. Pak A-ram (2014) advances the opposite reading, arguing that the *Igong-bonp'uri* originated as a Buddhist folktale that was later absorbed into shamanic tradition. In support of this view, she notes that the earliest accounts do not contain the shamanic motif of magical flowers. According to Pak A-ram, the narrative is primarily based on the tragic story of Queen Kosala Devī (“Vaidehī”; Wijehūi / Weidixi 韋提希) and her son, King Ajātasattu / Ajātaśatru (Asase / Asheshi 阿闍世), as recounted in the *Amitāyur-dhyāna Sutra* (*Foshuo Guan Wuliangshou Jing* 佛說觀無量壽經). The myth also draws on other Buddhist narrative traditions, such as “the legend of Princess Miao-shan”, which gained prominence from the Song dynasty onwards, and the chapter 27 of the *Lotus Sutra*, where the virtuous King Śāleन्द्रa — a model for King Sala — is mentioned. It is noteworthy that in these sources the narrative focus rests primarily on the female protagonist and her suffering, a thematic emphasis that is comparatively weakened in the *Igong-bonp'uri*.

Pak A-ram also noticed some Daoist influence, particularly in the “Biography of Prince Sukhāvati” version. These include references to the Jade Emperor, his seven daughters or maidens, the “white-haired elderly man” *paekpal-no'ong* 白髮老翁 and the “heavenly child servants” *ch'ōndong* 天童.

By contrast, Yang Yong-jun (2014) interprets the myth primarily as a rite-of-passage narrative, centered on the fundamental dyad of death and rebirth and on the desire to overcome fate in order to attain legitimacy for divine promotion. The trajectories of the protagonists follow a common pattern of suffering → resolution of suffering, where hardship is frequently expressed in terms of poverty. In this interpretation, the Flower Garden is central: it constitutes both the point of departure and the narrative's culmination functioning as the “ultimate aim of life for the main characters”. The Flower Garden is characterized by three fundamental features: it is a realm in which death and regeneration coexist; it is the destination the

protagonists seek, offering the possibility of a new existence — whether in the afterlife or in the Heaven of the Jade Emperor; and it is a space that embodies the aspiration to transcend one's predetermined destiny.

From this perspective, the Flower Field may be understood as a liminal space: a domain in which the individual becomes “dead to society” prior to a “new birth” or “rebirth”, in accordance with the structure of rites of passage as theorized by Arnold van Gennep²³².

All these studies take a different approach: Lee Soo Ja describes the myth in etiological terms: the story tells the origin of Death among humans; Hung-Youn Cho focused on the mytheme shared with Paridegi; Pak A-ram takes a philological approach, seeing in the myth a “secularization” of a Buddhist tale; and Yang Yong-jun interprets the narrative in terms of its social functions, as a rite of passage tied to childbirth and death. What interest now is: what is the relationship between the *Igong-bonp'uri* and the *Chesök-ponp'uri*? To build a systematic framework, we will use the previous findings about Chesök, Ch'ilsöng the creation narrative (§§7, 7.4, 9 and 9.3) as well as the abovementioned studies on Igong faith.

10.1. *Parallels with the Chesök narrative*

Since the *Igong-bonp'uri* has frequently been read as a myth of Death, scholarly comparison has most often been drawn with the origin narrative of Paridegi / Parigongju, the psychopomp goddess and shamanic ancestress. Although the thematic architecture is undeniably analogous, the narrative mechanics of the *Igong-bonp'uri* appear to derive in large part from the same narrative reservoirs as the *Chesök-ponp'uri* and – though less extensively – from the mainland *Ch'ilsöng-bonp'uri*. Four points of convergence may be identified.

First, in its modern tellings the Igong origin story is explicitly multi-generational: it begins with the fathers of the deity's parents (Chimjin-guk and Imjin-guk) and

²³² Lee Soo Ja (1993), 27-33; Hung-Youn Cho (1999), 55-6; Pak A-ram (2014), 21-49, 67-74 & 80-3; Yang Yong-jun (2014)

culminates in the protagonist's apotheosis, either alone or together with his/her parents. Moreover, the principal turning points are (i) the fulfilment of a prayer for childbirth and (ii) the child's recognition by his / her father. These elements correspond closely to the tale of King Sansang transmitted in the *Mudang Naeryŏk*. If this alignment is accepted, the *Igong-bonp'uri* shares the same overarching plot structure as the modern *Chesŏk-ponp'uri* accounts²³³. On this basis, it is at least plausible to suggest that the *Igong-bonp'uri* – like the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri* – may represent the product of a syncretic process in which a Buddhist narrative was interwoven with northern Korean foundation-myth materials and re-elaborated during the Koryŏ period (see §§3, 4, 5, and 7.1). That said, firmer evidence is required before this can be advanced as a secure conclusion.

Second, the torture and killing of Wŏn'gang-am'i has a close parallel in narratives concerning the Ch'ilsŏng gods and Tanggŭm'aegi. The affinity with Tanggŭm'aegi is particularly striking, insofar as the description of Wŏn'gang-am'i's death in some versions is framed in distinctly agrarian terms²³⁴.

***Igong-bonp'uri* – I Sŭngsun mansin version**

어느 동안 어머니 열두 신뎌 우의로 왕대뿌루기가 꼬장꼬장 났더라.

그 때엔 할락궁이 설운 어머니 누워난디 흑인드 내뵈니까.

방울방울 고리안동벽 설연(設宴) 하여간다.

어머니 조은 얼굴 조은 신체 열두 신뎌

왕대 뿌루기 뽕족뽕족 얼거지고 트러져 나난 법으롭서

고리안동벽 하민 가운딜로 고망 딸랑 댕삽하영 찢르는 법 아님네까.

²³³ Seo Taesok (2001), 323-365; Shin Yeon-woo (2009).

²³⁴ Yang Yong-jun (2014), 25-6 & 24-8.

이공은 꽃불힉네다

After some time, above mother's twelve divine ribs, / jagged bamboo stakes
rose stiffly and sharp. / At that moment, Hallakkung'i lay beside his sorrowful
mother / and cried out in bitter grief. / Drop by drop, a ritual banquet (*sōryōn*)
was being prepared with many *kori-dongban*. / The beauteous countenance, my
mother's beautiful body, the twelve ribs, / with the sharp and twisted bamboo
roots coming through, / didn't they skewer the *kori-dongban*, opening a hole in
the rice with the bamboo leaves? / The Second Prince is the flowers root.

Igong-bonp'uri – An Sa'in mansin version

어머님 죽여 청대밭, 흑대밭, 푸른 띠밭에 던졌던 법으로 청대 같은
청사록, 흑대 같은 흑사록이 사악한 열두 풍운을 주는 법입니다

As the mother was killed and thrown in the blue bamboo fields, in the black
bamboo fields and in the green bamboo; the fields of blue bamboo, blue like the
blue *sarok*, the fields of black bamboo, black like the black *sarok*, came to
bestow the baleful twelve winds.

We can see there a direct matching with the Tanggūm'aegi fate, as reported in many
versions of the myth (see §7.2):

너그 아홉성제 달라들 어서 당곰아가씨를 뒷동산에다가/돌함 속에다 갖다
두며넌 추버두 지가 죽구/목이 말러두 지가 죽구 배가 고파두 지가야 죽을
터이니

You, nine celestial rulers, come rushing in and / take Tangom'agassi and place her on the back hill, / inside a stone enclosure; / then, even if she freezes, she will die by herself, / even if she thirsts, she will die by herself, / even if she hungers, she is bound to die.

Clearly, Queen Kosala Devī (“Vaidehī”) is also subjected to torture and death; the crucial issue here, however, is not the mere presence of violence but the mode of its narrative presentation and symbolic framing. Wŏn'gang-am'i, the mother of the Ch'ilsŏng gods, and Tanggŭm'aegi all display features that align them with an Earth- and fertility-oriented figure – one whose logic follows an agrarian cycle of death/burial/sowing → rebirth/resurrection/harvest. If this reading is correct, we would expect King Sala to exhibit traits comparable to those of the Heavenly God/monk associated with the Hwanggŭm Mountain monastery in the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri* – and these expectations is, in fact, borne out.

Third, King Sala's status at first appearance is markedly ambiguous. Like Chesŏk, he is said to come from “Western India” (cf. §7), yet the monk Kwang'yu – who arrives from the “Kingdom of Brahman” – shares comparable authority and, in practical terms, appears as the king's counterpart. Only at the point where the narrative begins to detach itself from its Buddhist textual substrates is King Sala explicitly identified with the Jade Emperor; this is the case of the *Allakkuk T'aeja-gyŏng*. Interestingly, the magical flower motif appears in for the first time exactly within the *Allakkuk T'aeja-gyŏng*: The copresence of the flowers and the Jade Emperor likewise occurs in the *Samsŭng-Halmang-ponp'uri*, which is ritually connected to the modern versions of the Igong-bonp'uri (see §9.2). On these grounds, it is plausible to suggest that the two narratives began to circulate in tandem from the emergence of this version onwards, during the Koryŏ period. In a similar vein, King Sala's role in the punishment of Changja can be placed alongside the Jade Emperor (Ch'ŏngji-wang)'s punishment of the same figure in the Seng-gut narrative and in the Cheju creation myth.

Fourth, the motif of water-crossing provides a further point of convergence. Just as the three Chesŏk in Cheju's *Ch'ogong-bonp'uri* establish their temple “in the land

of raw silk on the western river, within the sacred waters”, and as the Son-nim deities traverse a river, Hallakkung’i too must cross waters in order to reach the Flower Field. This parallel may be understood as a shared mytheme. The Ch’ogong are ancestral gods of shamans (see §§7.2-7.3) and are therefore associated with psychopomp functions; the Son-nim, for their part, constitute a triad of smallpox deities invoked during illness – that is, in a liminal condition between life and death (see §9.3). Hallakkung’i, positioned at the intersection of Life, Death, and Destiny, could thus be expected to attract the same narrative motif. This does not, of course, exclude the presence of a rite-of-passage structure; rather, it helps to account how such a structure took shape within the narrative tradition.

Taken together, these considerations support the hypothesis that, during transmission, the *Igong-bonp’uri* was progressively influenced by the *Chesök-ponp’uri*, owing to their proximity in ritual settings and functional aims.

10.2. *Ritual Context: Flowers and Rice Cakes*

We have seen (see §§9.2, 9.3, and 10) the ritual contexts in which the *Igong-bonp’uri* is narrated: within the “Expelling of Kusamsüng-Halmang” (Kusamsüng-naem) rite – also known as the “Plucking of the Evil Heart Flower” (Aksim-kkot kkökk’üm) – a childbirth ritual addressed to Samsüng-halmang / Chesök-halmöni, in which the shaman, imitating the Life Goddess, “steals” a magical flower from the Child Death Goddess. Here, it is necessary to examine this ritual sequence in greater detail in order to clarify the role of flowers and their connection to Hallakkung’i and Chesök.

After the shaman has seized the flower, he or she proceeds to “interpret” it in the “Flower Interpretation” (Kkot-p’uri) rite: observing the spray’s leaves and buds, the officiant can determine whether a son will be born and can divine the child’s future destiny. Immediately after Kkot-p’uri comes the “Encounter with Igong” (*Igong-maji*), during which bell-shaped rice cakes (*kori’an-dongban*) are offered to the “Guardian of the Flowers”.

These rice cakes (*ttŏk*) are pierced through the centre with a bamboo leaf and wrapped in paper. They represent the death of Wŏn'gang-am'i and serve as a prelude to her resurrection.

Within the Aksim-kkot kkŏkk'ŭm and Kkot-p'uri rites, the magical flower is a markedly polysemic object whose meaning shifts according to context: it is not the same “flower” in the Ttanim-agi / Samsŭng-halmang myth, in the Hallakkung'i / Igong myth, in the ritual play performed during Aksim-kkot kkŏkk'ŭm, or in the divinatory procedure of Kkot-p'uri. In the Samsŭng-Halmang-ponp'uri, the flower is magically grown by the goddess and possesses the power to generate life; by contrast, the flower that the goddess steals from the “Goddess of the Other World” is a “flower of death”, whose plucking prevents a child's premature death. The flower of Kkot-p'uri is the medium through which the unborn child's future is foretold, even though only moments earlier, within the ritual play, it could be “read” as a flower of death. This complex chain of signification is mirrored in the *Igong-bonp'uri* itself, where the deity both resurrects his / her mother through one set of flowers and annihilates Changja and his clan through another²³⁵.

One account – Ko San'ong *mansin*'s version – introduces a further suggestive detail: the “flower of giving life to a Buddha” *saengbul-kkot* 生佛哭. Yang Yong-jun (2014) does not pursue this reference, treating it as a secondary addition. Yet *saengbul* can plausibly be connected to another figure associated with Samsŭng-halmang, namely Saengbul-halmang, venerated in the Puldo-maji ritual. This goddess appears as another aspect of Ttanim-agi / Samsŭng-halmang: she is described as always carrying flowers in her hands, and her role is helping with rising children. Saengbul-halmang role is specifically tied to the offspring future: she determinates the gender and social role by choosing his / her magical flower either from the East, the West, the North, the South or from the Center – we can easily see in this a mythical transposition of the “Flower Interpretation” rite. At the same time, *saengbul* is also associated with a child-death deity, the “Emperor Living Buddha” (Saengbul-daewang 生佛大王), who appears in the *Munjŏng-bonp'uri*, a mainland analogue of Cheju's *Segyŏng-bonp'uri*. This god is described as the twelfth of the

²³⁵ Waida Manabu (1991), 96-8; Yang Yong-jun (2014), 15-28 & 56-8.

Fourteen Kings of the Underworld and is tasked with taking the souls of young children – a function closely comparable to that of the “Goddess of the Other World” Chösŭng-halmang. This resonance becomes particularly suggestive given that, depending on the version, Wŏn’gang-am’i herself may be divinized as “Mother of the Other World” Chösŭng-ŏmŏng²³⁶.

In this light, the “flower of giving life to a Buddha” is not a trivial embellishment but a meaningful addition that clarifies and extends the network of relations linking the myths and rites associated with Igong and Samsŭng-halmang.

A comparable polysemy – and the same structural ambiguity – also characterizes the *kori-dongban*, the rice cakes offered to Hallakkung’i / Igong in the Igong-maji rite. Where present, descriptions of Wŏn’gang-am’i’s death are typically offered as an etiology for the ritual rice cakes: they are pierced with bamboo leaves as a mnemonic of Wŏn’gang-am’i being pierced by bamboo roots. Yang Yong-jun (2014) suggests that this feature implies that Igong-maji was not originally oriented towards mourning Wŏn’gang-am’i’s death as the premise for her resurrection – an inference that would also align with Pak A-ram (2014)’s argument that the myth originally centered on the tragic female figure²³⁷. From this perspective, the rice cakes might be read primarily as symbols of Death.

However, three considerations complicate any univocal interpretation.:

- The Igong-maji follows directly upon Kkot-p’uri and Kusamsŭng-naem / Aksim-kkot kkökk’üm, both of which are childbirth rites.
- cakes are more generally symbols of wealth and prosperity and are strongly associated with deities of (re)production such as Chesök and Yöngdŭng; in particular, flower-decorated rice cakes (e.g. *otki-ttök* and *Chesök-ttök*) are offered to childbirth and agricultural deities across a wide geographical range, from northern regions to Chindo Island (see §§7.3 and 8)
- The co-presence of Life and Death themes is also evident in the Chölla region’s Ssitkim-gut – a funerary rite during which the *Changja-p’uri* is

²³⁶ Lee Soo ja (1993), 37-42; Choi Won-Oh (2008), 13, 57-61 & 226-231; Yang Yong-jun (2014), 15-28 & 56-8

²³⁷ Pak A-ram (2014), 20-49 & 35-40; Yang Yong-jun (2014), 15-28 & 56-8.

recited – and within mainland Ch’ilsŏng belief, where the deity is likewise invoked for childbirth and children’s protection (see §§7.4 and 9.3).

Accordingly, the *kori-dongban* can function simultaneously as symbols of Death and of Life: they may be offered for Wŏn’gang-am’i’s death, as suggested by the myth; for her resurrection, as suggested by the ritual sequencing; as propitiatory objects for childbirth, as in their broader ritual usage; or as offerings to a deity associated with Death and Destiny.

In sum, both ritual objects – the flowers and the rice cakes – are persistently ambiguous and polysemic. Their meanings may shift not only between myth and rite but even within a single ritual sequence (flowers: Life → Death → Life; rice cakes: Life and Death at once). The coexistence of opposing thematic valences is, in this context, functional rather than anomalous: it enables both shaman and client to privilege what is most immediately salient. A shaman may foreground Wŏn’gang-am’i’s death and resurrection as a cathartic means of addressing anxieties, whereas a client may focus primarily on the ritual play and the practical efficacy of divination and propitiation rather than on the Igong narrative as such. Even among shamans, Igong and Wŏn’gang-am’i may be framed variously — as Death deities, as a Destiny deity who resurrects his/her mother, or as a Childbirth goddess indistinguishable from Samsŭng-halmang.

It is precisely this ambiguity – and the consequent freedom to select among meanings – that has allowed these rites to adapt and endure, and that, by extension, has enabled a narrative such as the *Igong-bonp’uri* to be incorporated within them. A similar logic may be observed in the apparently contradictory features of Chesŏk belief and, more broadly, in Korean shamanism as a whole.

10.3. *On the Western Paradise’s Flower Field*

The Flower Field of the Western Paradise constitutes a widespread and significant motif within Korean mythology. It is explicitly mentioned in the *Samsŭng-Halmang-ponp’uri*, the *Igong-bonp’uri*, and the *Chijang-bonp’uri*, where it forms

an integral element of the respective narratives²³⁸. The motif may also be traced in other traditions, both on the mainland and on Cheju Island: it appears implicitly in the *Ch'ilsöng-bonp'uri*, while the act of world creation described in the *Samsüŋ-Halmang-ponp'uri* exhibits clear parallels with the *Segyöŋ-bonp'uri* and with broader creation myths (see §§8.1 and 9). A comprehensive treatment of this theme lies beyond the scope of the present study; the focus here is rather on what the Flower Field motif reveals about the nature of Igong and Chesök belief.

The analysis may be articulated in four points.

First, the Flower Field displays two seemingly contradictory yet complementary characteristics. On the one hand, it functions as a liminal space situated beyond the realm of the living, transcending the binary of Life and Death and constituting a threshold between successive rebirths. On the other hand, it is the site where Destiny is determined by the deities associated with the Field: Ttanim-agi / Samsüŋ-halmang, King Sala / the Jade Emperor, Hallakkung'i / Igong, and the stone statue of “Lady Kṣitigarbha” (Chijang-agi 地藏아기). The flowers of this Field govern human Fate on Earth, bringing about Birth, Death, and – exceptionally – Resurrection. As far as can be ascertained, neither Buddhism nor Daoism presents this motif in a comparable form; it is therefore generally regarded as native to Korean shamanic cosmology.

Second, if King Sala is understood as another manifestation of the Heavenly God / Chesök, his assistance to Igong in the punishment of Changja may be interpreted as an indirect form of divine retribution, comparable to that described in the *Seng-gut* (“Changja’s Pond”) and in creation narratives (see §9.3). Within the *Igong-bonp'uri*, however, the centrality of the Western Paradise’s Flower Field accentuates the inevitability of the unfolding events, situating Changja’s fate within a broader cosmological order.

Third, the punishment of Changja in the *Igong-bonp'uri* operates on two interrelated levels. On the one hand, the flower that ultimately kills him is the same

²³⁸ For an analysis of the *Chijang-bonp'uri*, the Flower Field and their ties with liminality and rebirth themes see Han Jin-oh (2009) and Kwon Bok Soon (2021).

flower destined for all human beings, allowing the myth to be read as an account of the origin of human mortality, as argued by Lee Soo-ja (1993). On the other hand, the narrative emphasizes that Changja has committed a transgression against the gods, aligning the story with other traditions such as the *Son-nim-gut* and the “Changja’s Pond” myth (cf. §9.3). A similar coexistence of these themes is observable in the *Ch’ilsǒng-bonp’uri*, though with a crucial difference: by including the mother’s rebirth, the *Ch’ilsǒng* narrative retains a more explicit Buddhist inflection.

Fourth, the *Igong-bonp’uri* clearly incorporates Buddhist elements as well. In the *Ag’yang-wangja-norae*, the Flower Field is explicitly described as a Buddha’s abode, and the protagonist’s original name, “Prince Sukhāvātī”, points to a strong influence from Pure Land and Amitābha devotion. Likewise, the *Chijang-bonp’uri* manifests a pronounced syncretism with Kṣitigarbha belief. At the same time, several features suggest Daoist influence: these include the explicit identification of the Heavenly God with the Jade Emperor and the localization of the Flower Field in the distant West – a direction associated both with the Buddhist Sukhāvātī paradise and with Mount Kunlun 崑崙山, the abode of the Queen Mother of the West (Xiwangmu 西王母)²³⁹.

On the basis of these observations, a synthetic interpretation may be proposed.

- The motifs of the magical flowers and the Flower Field, taken in isolation, are clearly shamanic – or at least cannot be satisfactorily traced to either Buddhism or Daoism – and are shared by the *Samsǔng-Halmang-ponp’uri*, the *Igong-bonp’uri*, and the *Chijang-bonp’uri*. By contrast, the theme of divine judgement and destiny, even when articulated through the Flower Field, appears to have been progressively reconfigured through Buddhist influence.
- Buddhist themes, particularly those associated with Pure Land and Amitābha devotion, may plausibly be traced back to the Unified Silla period. Daoist elements become clearly identifiable only from the Koryŏ

²³⁹ Han Jin-oh (2009), 45-53; Pak A-ram (2014), 20-49 & 35-40.

period onwards, although an earlier presence cannot be categorically excluded.

- Finally, the convergence of motifs concerning destiny and divine judgement, together with Buddhist and Daoist elements and the association with Ch'ilsöng belief, points to a development shaped by Koryö-period Chesök faith, and more specifically to Chesök's emergence as a heavenly judge of human actions (see §§4.5, 5.2.1, 5.3.4, and 5.4.4).

Taken together, the evidence suggests that the *Igong-bonp'uri* and its associated rites should not be approached as a coherent doctrinal system with fixed meanings, but rather as a dynamic ritual-mythic complex whose internal tensions are constitutive of its efficacy. The persistent polysemy of central symbols – most notably flowers and rice cakes – does not indicate narrative inconsistency or historical accretion alone but reflects a structural logic in which Life and Death, Destruction and Regeneration, Destiny and Agency are deliberately held in productive suspension. Within this framework, myth does not function as an explanatory narrative in isolation, but as a flexible reservoir of images that can be selectively activated within ritual performance according to situational needs. The *Igong-bonp'uri* thus exemplifies a broader pattern in Korean shamanism, wherein overlapping layers of Buddhist, Daoist, and indigenous cosmologies are not harmonized into a unified theology but remain partially dissonant, allowing ritual actors to negotiate uncertainty, contingency, and transformation. It is precisely this openness – this capacity to accommodate contradiction without resolution – that underpins both the longevity of the Igong tradition and its continued ritual relevance.

11.4. *Excursus: The Three Princes*

There is a term within the *Igong-bonp'uri* used to describe either the protagonist Hallakkung'i or all the characters divinized at the story end, depending on the version: “flowers' root”. This term likely refers to the role of Igong as the “origin” of all magical flowers. This role, usually assigned to Ttanim-agi / Samsüng-

halmang, is explicitly given to Igong within the *Sinsŏn-Set 'yŏn-nim Ch'ŏngbae* (see before). What concerns us is that, when the role is assigned to Igong only, there is always a pairing / contrast with Ch'ogong, i.e. the Three Chesŏk²⁴⁰:

Igong-bonp'uri – I Yong'ok mansin version

위(位)가 돌아갑네다. 제(座)가 돌아갑네다. (중략) 초공은 신뿔리웨다.
이공은 꽃뿔리, 아님네까. 이공본이라허믄, 우리 인간 살다근, 열다섯 십
오세 안네에, 죽으면 서천꽃밭디 들어간덴 허곡, 또 한가지, 이공본이라
허민 저승 서천꽃밭디 강 꽃 번성을 시경, 인간에 살아 잇는 자순덜,
번성시켜, 줍센 헤연 이공본이 나온 법입네다

Status change. Positions change. (Omissis) The First Prince [Ch'ogong] is the gods' root. The Second Prince [Igong] is the flowers' root, aren't they? It is said that the Second Prince's origins story tells that, if we human die by fifteen, we go to the Western Paradise's Flower Field, and that, talking about the Second Prince's origins story, he makes the Flower Field flourish in the afterlife, making the offspring, who live among humans, prosper; thus was born the Second Prince origins story, who gives us the possibility of a long life.

Igong-bonp'uri – Yang Ch'angbo mansin version

초공 임정국 상시당 하늘님, 초공은 신뿔리, 이공은 꽃뿔리,
이공서천도산국

²⁴⁰ Lee Soo Ja (1993), 24-7; Yang Yong-jun (2014), 10-12.

The First Prince is the gods' root, the Second Prince is the flowers' root, the Second Prince is [from] the Western Paradise Tosan Kingdom²⁴¹.

Igong-bonp'uri – Ko Sun'an mansin version

초공 난수생 / 신을 풀어 일부 한잔 시켰수다.

어간 텬긴 / 이공 서천도산국, 초공은 신뿔리여 이공은 꽃뿔리 아님네까.

The First Prince is the difficult deliveries' [god], / being called, he protects. / The Second Prince is [from] Tosan Kingdom from the Western Paradise, the First Prince is the gods' root, so how could not be the Second Prince the flowers' root?

We have seen (§7) how in Cheju Island the Three Chesök can be called respectively: “the first prince” Ch'ogong 初公, the “second prince” Igong 二公 and the “third prince” Samgong 三公. At the same time, Ch'ogong is the collective term for the Three Chesök, Igong is the title for the Death and Destiny deity Hallakkung'i, and Samgong is the “proactive fortune / attitude” *chönsang* goddess²⁴².

This nomenclature reflects the “Great Ritual” K'ün-gut, a now obsolete collective ceremony for all the gods. Scholars believe that K'ün-gut was made of twelve sequences / rites, described as follows:

1. *Ch'önjiwang-bonp'uri* / Ch'ogam-je (to Ch'önji-wang)
2. *Saengbul-halmang-bonp'uri* / Puldo-maji (to Saengbul-halmang, the birth goddess)
3. *Ch'ogong-bonp'uri* / Ch'ogong-maji (to the Ch'ogong / Chesök)
4. *Igong-bonp'uri* / Igong-maji (to Igong)
5. *Samgong-bonp'uri* / Samgong-maji (to Samgong)
6. *Kangnim-ch'asa-bonp'uri* / Siwang-maji (to the Ten Underworld Kings)

²⁴¹ An alias for the Western Paradise's Flower Field.

²⁴² Lee Soo Ja (1993), 30-7 & 46-8; Kang, So-jeon (2012), 32-5. See Choi Won-Oh (2008) for a comprehensive description of Samgong: Choi Won-Oh (2008), 17 & 235-241.

7. *Maenggam-bonp'uri* or *Saman'i-bonp'uri* / Maenggam-je (the story of Changja)
8. *Segyöng-bonp'uri* / Segyöng-maji (to Chach'öngbi, the agriculture goddess)
9. *Ch'ilsöng-bonp'uri* / Ch'ilsöng-maji (to Ch'ilsöng)
10. *Munjön-bonp'uri* / Munjön-maji (to the Munjön, the door guardians)²⁴³
11. *Ponhyang-bonp'uri* (to the village deity / deities)
12. *Chosang-bonp'uri* (to the ancestor deities)

All these narratives are structured hierarchically, following the narrative thread: universe creation (Ch'önji-wang) → mankind creation (Saengbul) → human world order (Ch'ogong) → problem of Death (Igong). At the same time, the “Great Ritual” seems centered around the childbirth and agriculture. Therefore, we must bear in mind that the Igong origin narrative was inserted in this context. A similar ceremony was likely held in the Peninsula mainland, as reported by the 1930 *Chōsen fugeki no Kamiuta* 朝鮮巫覡の神歌: while in Cheju the sequence is Ch'önji-wang → Saengbul → Ch'ogong → Igong → Samgong, this document reports that, in Kanggye and P'yöngyang regions, the sequence was *Mau-nim-ch'öngbae* (= Ch'ogam-je) → *Söngjo-nim-ch'öngbae* (to the ancestors) → *Söng'in-nim-ch'öngbae* (= *Chesök-ponp'uri*) → *Sinsön-set'yön-nim-ch'öngbae* (= *Igong-bonp'uri*) → *Wan'gu-nim-ch'öngbae* (= Emille bell legend). From these elements, Lee Soo Ja (1993, 2001) drew the following conclusions: 1) the magical flowers are a recurring motif present through all the K'ün-gut: it is present within the creation myth, the story of Saengbul-halmang, the story of Chach'öngbi etc. 2) another element of K'ün-gut is the recurrence of twins motif, as well as the theme of marriage of the Heavenly Father and the Mother Earth. Thus the likely original purpose of childbirth and agricultural propitiation 3) the sequence Ch'ogong-Igong was originally present in the mainland too, where it was likely preceded by rite to the household god (Söngju 城主)²⁴⁴ – this would also explain why within the Seng-

²⁴³ In Cheju, the Ch'ilsöng origin narrative is repurposed as the Munjön myth, while the Ch'ilsöng myth is the origin narrative of how the Ch'ilsöng came to the island – with an evident syncretism with the local snake goddess myths. Cf. §§7.3-7.4.

²⁴⁴ Lee Jiyoung (1991), 196-201; Lee Soo Ja (1993), 30-48; Lee Soo Ja (2001).

gut the narratives to the household deities are told after the creation narrative and before the Changja and the Tanggŭm'aegi / Chesŏk myths.

What could this tell us about the Chesŏk faith? To answer this question, we must look after what Lee Soo Ja *did not* noticed:

Considerations on the Third Prince: we have seen before (§§7.1, 7.4 and 10.1) how the Korean northern foundation myths were the bases for the myth of Chesŏk and Ch'ilsŏng and likely influenced the Igong myth as well. We have also seen how there is a strong “proximity” between these three deities: Chesŏk and Ch'ilsŏng were worshipped together since the Koryŏ period, while there is evidence that, in the Korean mainland, Igong was known and worshipped along with Chesŏk.

Here a series difficulties arise: why the Cheju sequence Ch'ogong-Igong-Samgong includes a myth clearly not influenced by the Chumong narrative, why Ch'ilsŏng myth is not chanted soon after the Ch'ogong-Igong-Samgong sequence, despite being closer to that narrative and being a deity with a similar patronage (Destiny), and finally why a story derived from the Emille bell legend was chanted both in Kanggye and P'yŏngyang regions (as per the *Chōsen fugeki no Kamiuta*) and within the Seng-gut in relation to Chesŏk faith?

The *Samgong-bonp'uri* is a story about two beggars and their daughter. The couple had two daughters but became rich after the birth of their third one. While the older daughters told their parents they became rich by their virtue, the youngest told them that they became rich by destiny. Upset, the parents banned her from home. However, as soon as the daughter was gone, the family became poor again. Finally, the parents reconciled with the daughter, expelling evil spirits from their house. This story is maybe a derivation from the Sŏdong 薯童 story from the *Samguk Yusa* (SKY II, prodigies 2: “King Mu of Paekche” *Mu-wang* 武王) and has clearly no connection neither to Tan'gun nor to the Chumong narrative²⁴⁵.

Similarly, neither the *Wan'gu-nim-ch'ŏngbae* nor the story of Sage of the Kŭmgang Temple from the Seng-gut rite have connections with the Tan'gun or Chumong

²⁴⁵ Choi Won-Oh (2008), 17 & 235-241.

myths. They are, instead, derivations from the “legend of the Emille bell”. This relatively simple story tells about how, when king Kyōngdōk of Silla (景德王, r. 742-765) wanted to cast a bell for the Pongdōk temple 奉德寺 in honor of his deceased father, despite the many attempts, no bell produced a sound. Then, Buddha himself appeared to a temple monk, telling him how to cast the object; thus, following those instructions, a village child was given to the monk by his mother, casted into the metal, and so bell was forged. This is why the bell’s sound remembers that of baby crying for his mother. Derived myths, such as the *Wan’gunim-ch’ōngbae* e and the *Seng-gut* dedicated section, emphasized the injustice of the sacrifice, condemn the mother decision to sacrifice her son, and tends to placate the child’s spirit. Within the *Seng-gut*, it is added that the bell shards were then used to forge the shamanic drums²⁴⁶.

Finally, we have seen how the *Ch’ilsōng-bonp’uri* narrative likely derives from both the Chumong and king Yuri narrative. In this story, the protagonists’ mother is killed by a woman which later becomes their stepmother, then the protagonists discover the godly nature of their father, and, at the end of the tale, the protagonists resurrect their blood mother and punish the evil woman (see §7.4)²⁴⁷.

Within the Cheju “Great Ritual”, the *Samgong-bonp’uri* follows the *Igong-bonp’uri*, while the *Munjōn-bonp’uri* (Ch’ilsōng origin myth) is the ninth narrative chanted, after the stories of Segyōng and Changja; within the Kanggye and P’yōngyang sequence (“All Invocations [Rite]” *Toch’ōngbae* 都請拜), the Chesōk short narrative is followed by the Igong’s one, and then by the Emille bell; within the *Seng-gut* narrative, the Emille bell legend precedes the Changja myth, which in turn precedes Chesōk myth, the end of the rite.

We cannot but suppose that the rite configuration derives from its use: the “Great Ritual” derives from a great rite for prosperity (as we have seen before), as so does the *Seng-gut*, as it ends with the Chesōk myth. However, the Cheju “Great Ritual” and the northern *Toch’ōngbae* seem having shifted toward a more general rite for all deities – hence the inclusion of the Igong myth; on the other hand, the *Seng-gut*

²⁴⁶ Lee Jiyoung (1991) 196-201; Kim Heonsun (1994), 270-2; Lee Chang-yoon (2000), 90-4.

²⁴⁷ Seo Taesok (2001), 323-365

seems more focused on the *Chesök-ponp'uri* “backstories” – hence there the Emille legend makes sense only in relationship with the precedent and the following story, and only indirectly with the Chesök myth; finally, we have seen how Chesök and Ch'ilsöng were worshipped together since the Koryö period, leading to the modern-day syncretism / competition between the two deities for the role of Destiny-overseeing god (see §§5.2.1, 5.3.4, 5.4.4, and 7.3-7.4).

We can thus suppose a competition between the Samgong, Ch'ilsöng and Emille bell narrative for the patronage of Destiny – competition absent within the Seng-gut ritual, where the theme seems absent and the Emille bell legend is read as a tale about the Heavenly deity and an unjust mother, not unlike than the story of Changja.

While the patronage is the same with slight variations (Fortune, Luck, Destiny), the respective narrative of each competitor shows a different “strategy”: while Samsong story suggests that one needs to invoke the goddess descent to bring good luck; the *Wan'gu-nim-ch'öngbae* / Emille bell legend emphasize the might powers of the monk / Heavenly god and the tragedy of the child sacrifice needed to change the course of event (cast the bell); finally, the Ch'ilsöng narrative stresses both the familiar theme and the might of the godly protagonists, worshipped to turn the Fate on one's side. Thus, we have three different ritual strategies, corresponding to three different mythical motifs:

Narrative	<i>Samgong-bonp'uri</i>	<i>Wan'gu-nim-ch'öngbae</i>	<i>Ch'ilsöng-bonp'uri</i>
Motif	goddess recognition	human sacrifice	magical flower, rebirth
Ritual strategy	goddess descent	invocation, (shamanic instruments? ²⁴⁸)	invocation / descent

This competition is somehow specular to that between Chesök, Söngju, Ch'ilsöng and Yöndüng for the household and wealth patronage (see §§7, 7.4 and 8).

²⁴⁸ Educated guess based on the parallel with the *Seng-gut* narrative.

We can also notice that, since Igong faith was de facto no longer extant in the mainland, the “guardian of the flowers” role was somehow likely taken by Ch’ilsöng due to the deity’s common patronages, hence the brief appearance of the magical flower motif within the narrative even in the mainland – if it was not already present with other connotations.

Connections to a hypothetical Changja myth: the presence of a deity triplet composed by a Life god, a Death god and a Destiny god may be attested cross comparing the Changa myths. In fact, some traces of a possible lost narrative are scattered across the *Changja-p’uri*, the *Chesök-ponp’uri* and the *Igong-bonp’uri*.

One of the Honam area version of the *Changja-p’uri*, describes Sama-jangja family: the oldest, Uma-jangja, filial; the second, Chesök-changja, lustful; and the youngest, Sama-jangja himself, unfilial and greedy. Similarly, the Kwanbok (Hamhŭng) version describes the group as composed by three twins: Songnim-dong’i, Idung’i and Sama-dung’i (see §9.3). It is easy seeing in the lustful Chesök-changja a mask for Chesök as a god of reproduction; similarly, Songnim-dong’i and Idung’i could be easily identified respectively with the Söng’in (i.e. Chesök) and Igong.

One could correctly point out that, in the Honam version, Uma-jangja is not the first element of the triplet and not Chesök-changja, and thus this would be a weak parallel. However, in the same region, Uma-jangja is also the sosia of Sama-jangja given to King Yama instead of the protagonist, a mythical transfiguration of the horse sacrificed as the client’s substitute / scapegoat. Similarly, the three twins within the Kwanbok (Hamhŭng) version act exactly like Samgong at the end of her story, casting away the wicked spirits (in this case the “grim reapers”).

Another element is found within the *Igong-bonp’uri*: in those versions mentioning the Changja’s daughters’ punishment (Cho Hŭldae *mansin* version and Ko Sang’on *mansin* version), the middle one always save herself. In fact, the oldest one (*k’ŭn ttar-aegi*) is either punished with the “poverty’s flower”, while the third sister (*set-ttar-aegi*) is punished with the “destruction’s flower” – or both with the “fire’s flower”, while the second sister, the middle one, save herself by hiding from Igong

(see §9.3). This is interesting because, if we assume a triplet of deities as described before, Igong would be exactly the middle child of the trio.

Finally, in the Coastal regions, Tanggŭm'aegi can be also called by the name of "lady Sama" Sama-ssi. This is reported by Hong Taehan (2016) – Yi Namsun *mansin*'s *Chesŏk-ponp'uri* version from Yŏngwŏl, Kangwŏn²⁴⁹. As far as we know, there is only one Sama in Korean mythology: Sama-jangja. The Tanggŭm'aegi alternative suggests the possibility that either the monk / Heavenly God and Sama-jangja are the same character or, if we take the *Igong-bonp'uri* and the *Ch'ilsŏng-bonp'uri* as comparison, that he became his new husband after the monk departure / death (see §§7.4 and 10).

The story emerging from these clues can be reconstructed as follows: 1) Tanggŭm'aegi marries Sama-jangja – we do not know if after being abandoned by the monk and against her will, like in the *Igong-bonp'uri*, or after the monk is killed by Changja, like in the *Ch'ilsŏng-bonp'uri*; 2) Tanggŭm'aegi has three godly children, the first controlling Life, the second controlling Death and the Third controlling Destiny; 3) for unknown reasons, the second child (Igong) kills the father, his clans and the other children – this is ambiguous: maybe the daughters Changja had before marrying Tanggŭm'aegi; 4) the three children becomes immortal casting away wicked spirits / defying Death. Unfortunately, the data are few, scattered and unclear, and we cannot go beyond a prudent conjecture.

We can now draw some preliminary conclusions and pen a summary:

- Hallakkung'i / Igong, is the deity "guardian of the flowers" in the remote "Western Paradise's Flower Field", i.e. a god / goddess of Death and Destiny. This deity is strictly tied with the motif of magical flowers, shared with Ttanim-agi / Samsŭng-halmang (from the *Samsŭng-Halmang-ponp'uri*) and Chijang-agi (from the *Chijang-bonp'uri*).
- The origin myth of Hallakkung'i (*Igong-bonp'uri*) has strong Buddhist tones, and it is probable that it developed as follows:

²⁴⁹ Hong Taehan (2016), 287-305.

- The Buddhist story kernel is made by the tragic tale of Queen Kosala Devī “Vaidehi” and her son, King Ajātasattu / Ajātaśatru, and the “the legend of Princess Miao-shan”. The story was originally more focused on the female protagonist and was adopted as the foundation narrative by the Kirim temple during the Unified Silla period.
- Daoist and Shamanic elements, such as the presence of the Jade Emperor and the Western Paradise’s Flower Field, were added when the story started to be popularized by the Koryŏ period.
- Parallels with the Chesŏk origins narrative (*Chesŏk-ponp’uri*) and the Ch’ilsŏng origin narrative (*Ch’ilsŏng-bonp’uri*) were likely added to the narrative along with the gradual adoption by shamans of the story within a ritual setting (from Koryŏ-period on?).
 - Chesŏk parallels: the prologue about the protagonist grandparents, the father’s agnition, the additional trials, and the re-telling of the Igong’s mother murder scene as a death-and-rebirth scene.
 - Ch’ilsŏng parallels: mother resurrected by a magical flower, Changja punishment.
- The motif of the Western Paradise’s Flower Field, central within the *Igong-bonp’uri*, underwent a parallel stratification along with the related narratives’ evolution: originally a shamanic motif, the Flower Field it is equated with the Buddhist Sukhāvatī and the underworld domain of Kṣitigarbha, and with the Kunlun mountain from the Daoist Xiwangmu faith. The connection with a Heavenly Deity’s judgment is likely a (partial) development from the Koryŏ period’s Chesŏk faith.
- Despite being a story about a deity of Death and Destiny, the *Igong-bonp’uri* is chanted during childbirth rites and Igong is worshipped along with Samsŭng-halmang (Aksim-kkot kkŏkk’ŭm → Kkot-p’uri → Igong-maji).
 - The polysemy of the Igong rites and faith are interconnected as well: the rites during which the *Igong-bonp’uri* is chanted involve a flower that signify both Life and Death; to Hallakkung’i are offered rice cakes (*ttŏk*) which both recall the death-and-rebirth of the god’s

/ goddess' mother, but are usually given to (re)production deities as Chesök. We can find a similar coexistence of Life and Death theme within the *Chesök-ponp'uri* and the *Ch'ilsöng-bonp'uri* as well.

- In older times, Igong was worshipper along with Chesök too (“Great Ritual” K’ün-gut and “All Invocations Rite” *Toch’öngbae*). The conjunct worship with Chesök was known in the mainland as well, while nowadays Igong is mainly a Cheju Island deity and in the mainland his / her patronages were assumed by Chesök and Ch’ilsöng.
 - It is possible that in the mainland the third element of the trio (Samgong) competed with Ch’ilsöng and the “Emille bell legend” for the role of God of Destiny and Fortune.
 - The presence of a deities’ trio composed by a god of Life, a god of Death and a god of Destiny is likely testified in the Changja myths’ cycle too. Though it is difficult to prove it.

11 Qormusta tngri

Within Buddhism Śakra devānām Indra was adopted as the protector of Buddha (*dharmapāla*) since the ancient times. Therefore, the spread of Buddhism and the spread of (post-)Vedic deities like Indra into other population mythologies are loosely correlated. This was not just the case of Korea, but also of Central Asia too, and specifically the case of Qormusta tngri (Khormusta tengri, Hormusta tngri...) among Mongol-Buryats. This makes this Central Asian Sky Father functionally identical to the Korean one, and yet also highly divergent from it: both Chesök and Qormusta are partly derived from Indra and native deities, but, in many aspects, they do not resemble each other. This is the basis for another limit case for our study. Qormusta is particularly interesting for our analysis of the Chesök faith for a series of important divergences:

- Traditionally Mongols were nomadic and semi-nomadic people whose mean of subsistence was husbandry, commerce and raiding. This contrasts with the Koreans, sedentary and (traditionally) agrarian people since the proto-Three Kingdom Period, at least.

- The Mongolian shamanism is the direct outcome of ancestor worship: the ancestors give protection to the livings against illness (see the §2.1.1). While there may have been historically similar dynamics in Korean shamanism (see §§2.1.2, 2.3.1, 3 and 5.4), the role of Korean shamans was considerably less prominent than that of their Mongolian “colleagues” for the most part of their respective Histories. Moreover, Mongolian shamanism influence came not only from China, but from the western regions as well, i.e. from Mazdeism, Manichaeism, Nestorian Christianity and Islam.
- Similarly, the relationship between Mongolian Buddhism and Mongolian shamanism was more problematic than that between Korean Buddhism and native shamanism: there was not the precedent of Bon assimilation by the monastic clergy, not following the Koreans the Tibetan Buddhism(s), and every attempt to suppress the native cult encounter a stubborn resistance (see §5.4.2). This was not the case of Mongolia after the Yuan dynasty fall, with fierce suppression campaigns against shamanism conducted by regional lords (*khan*) under the Dalai Lama’s aegis²⁵⁰.
- The assimilation of Indra into local pantheons followed different paths: the identification with this or that deity varies between groups, and sometimes Buddhist (if not late-Vedic) elements are more evident; similarly, being absent the Chinese mediation, there is not a single deity from which Indra absorbed the characteristics, like the Jade Emperor, but likely several ones – as we will see. Generally, Indra / Qormusta is seen as a “recent” acquisition by the Mongolian pantheon.

A description of Qormusta cannot but start with his peculiar name: Qormusta seems in fact derived from the Mazdean god of light Ahura Mazdā. The name likely reached the Mongols via a Manichaean mediation from the Turfan city, in the Tarim Basin’s Qocho Uyghur Kingdom (Gaochang 高昌, 843-fourteenth century c.a). To the name Qormusta are often added the titles “god / *deva*” *tngrī* (*tengri*, *tenger*), “king” *qan* or “king of gods” *qan tngri*, explaining his status within the pantheon

²⁵⁰ Heissig (1980), 1-36, 24-44.

of either the “thirty-three” or “ninety-nine” gods of the Mongolian shamanic pantheon²⁵¹. Despite this etymology, Qormusta has little to nothing to do with the Mazdean supreme deity, and has more characters shared with Indra, other Mongolian sky deities, and even Brahmā – this one likely due to a multiple mediation²⁵².

Qormusta among the Mongols:

Among Mongols, Qormusta is the king of gods, master of the sky gods and god of thunder. Likely, many of his patronages originally belonged to “Blue Eternal Sky” Köke Mönke Tngri (Khukhe Munkhe Tengri), other ones are distinctly Indic, like the rule over the “thirty-three gods”, clearly a derivation from the Indra’s court of thirty-three *devas* (*Trāyastriṃśa*) (see §5.3.4). The “thirty-three gods” sometimes multiply, becoming “ninety-nine”, due to the symbolic value of the three as number of “strength and succession of clan and tribal traditions”, as per Dugarov (2016). The ninety-nine number is especially important in the Buryat Epic of King Gesar prologue. Another influence, this time likely of Tibetan origins, is the identification of Qormusta with Esru-a / Esrün (Brahmā): in some Tibetan versions of the same epic, Gesar is said being either son of Tsangpa Karpo (Tshangs-pa dKar-po = Brahmā) or of Gyajin (brGya-byin = Indra), and since the epic was adopted both in Mongolia and in Buryatia, hence a possible origin of the double identification. Within the folk chants, Qormusta tngri is also credited with the origin of fire (“Qormusta tngri lit the fire” and Buddha struck the light) and is said to dwell “at the Center”, while other *tngri* are said to dwell in specific regions of the world i.e. North, South, East, West, on the Buddhist *maṇḍala* model²⁵³.

Overall, the most important role played by Qormusta in Mongolia is in being the “father” of Temüjin Genghis Khan (Temüjin Čingis Qayan) 鐵木真成吉思汗 / Yuan Taizu 元太祖 (r. 1206-1227), or, otherwise, by Genghis Khan in being the

²⁵¹ The numbers are purely symbolic.

²⁵² Heissig (1980), 47-67; Abzhet & Zhuldyz (2016); FitzHerbert (2016b), 318-320; Tsyrendorzhievna (2021).

²⁵³ Heissig (1980), 47-59; Abzhet & Zhumashova (2016), 201; FitzHerbert (2016b), 318-320; Dugarov (2019), 585; Tsyrendorzhievna (2021)

“incarnation”, “regeneration” or *avatar* of Qormusta tngri. During Temüjin’s times, Qormusta was in fact already associated with political authority. Genghis Khan was worshipped on the Chinese ancestor cult’s model since the thirteenth century and continued in the Ordos region since the twentieth century, despite the Buddhist persecution of the seventeenth century. The great khan is worshipped as a “Heaven-born” within the ancestral cult, and as a still-ruling *khan* who takes care of his subjects. However, it is within the folklore, epics and mythology that the ties with Qormusta are stronger: the first text to mention Qormusta as the father of Temüjin are the *Secret History of the Mongols*, though not explicitly, and explicitly in the “White Chronicles” *Čayan Teüke*, redacted under the reign of Khubilai Khan, as well as in the and the in the seventeenth century “Golden Summary” *Altan Tobči*. Other sources of the time are the wedding prayers and the thirteenth century *Ballad of Genghis Khan’s Two Grey Stallions* and the *Conversation of the Orphan Boy with the Nine Orluks* – curiously, many customs credited to the *khan* in these folk sources are also attributed to the Tibetan emperor Songtsen Gampo (Srong-bTsan sGam-po, r. 618-649) in other ones.

What kind of Genghis Khan emerges from these sources? He is a conqueror “of the twelve rulers and the foreign peoples”, who “assembled” his people, creator of rituals and of strong drink. His birth was marked by his mother’s visions of “a man as yellow as the sun” entering her tent and predicting her that “these brothers of yours must be the sons of eternal heaven”; like the Gautama Buddha of the legends, Temüjin was gifted by his heavenly father with a nephrite cup “for his previous good deeds”, however this was “full of *rashiana* drink”; finally he dedicated his conquests to Qormusta, his father. The description of the great khan as a strong drinker resonates with the Buryat description of his heavenly father, de facto making Temüjin the deity’s earthly equivalent.

This deified khan was then incorporated both by the local Buddhist faith and within the near populations: the first Buddhist prayer to “protective spirit of the imperial descendants of Genghis Khan, of the Esru-a of the Earth, favored by Heaven” dates to 1690; another one, equating the khan with “War-Banner god” Sülde tngri the god of Horses and War, was written in 1730; and by the eighteenth century is again

described in another prayer as a “white lay devotee (*upāsaka*)”, bestower of *siddhis* (tantric supernatural abilities) and protector of the Dharma (*dharmapāla*)²⁵⁴.

Qormusta among the Buryats:

Among the Buryats, Qormusta is “newer” deity even compared to the Mongols’ case. This is well shown by the local King Geser Epic’s version (likely medium of acquisition), where the king of the god’s name shows a great variation: Khurmuust, Khurmas, Tyurmas, Surmas, Khormos, Hermos, Khirmas etc. Here, Qormusta has roughly the same characteristics as his Mongol (Khalkha) equivalent: he is the king of deities, whom he rules over, deities symbolically numbered as thirty-three or ninety-nine; he controls thunder, lightning etc. The key difference lays within the local pantheon structures: while the Mongolian Qormusta took his characteristics mainly from “Blue Eternal Sky” Kōke Möngke Tngri, the Buryat Qormusta took his patronages from the native Thunders’ deity, “Heavenly Shooter” Huhedei Mergen tngri and the primordial arch-deity Esege Malan tngri. Other Qormusta patronages include blacksmithing and handicraft and the protection of Buryat people.

The Buryat Qormusta is often ironically (and comically) described as a joyful drunkard: Khuran-noion, *tngri* of Rain and one of the Qormusta’s doubles, sometimes forgets about his responsibilities under the alcohol influence, causing droughts on Earth; Qormusta himself organizes alcoholic feasts with other sky *tngri*s with no reason out of “to pass the time, since there are too many idle days in the year.” Such banquets are so excessive that can cause the deities to fall asleep for human generations, and sometimes the soul of some god rebirths on Earth while his body is asleep, living a mortal life until the god wakes up again – such mythical festivals likely reflect the ancient summer ritual of *tailgan*. This characterization reflects the cultural, local attitude toward strong drink that we have already seen reflected in the mythical Genghis Khan among the Mongols. Another source of this

²⁵⁴ Heissig (1980), 59-69; Abzhet & Zhumashova (2016), 201-3; FitzHerbert (2016b), 318-320; Dugarov (2019), 586-590. Genghis Khan was later conflated with another equestrian war deity: “Warrior god” Dayičin tngri, roughly derivation of the Tibetan *dralha* (*dra-lha* / *dgra-lha* / *sgra-bla*) and *pawo* (*dpa’-bo*) gods’ category. See: Charleux (2025), 2-13 & 24-7.

description can be found its origins in the late Vedic (and late Buddhist) descriptions of Indra as a hero indulging in *soma* intoxication.

In the Buryat versions of the King Geser Epic, Qormusta is described as having a counterpart and rival: “the Red Father / Elder” Atai Ulaan tngri (Atay Ulayan tngri) or, in more archaic versions, “the Fierce Red One” Galta Ulaan tngri (Yaltu Ulayan tngri). Likely originally a solar deity, Atai Ulaan rules over forty-four of the ninety-nine *tngri*s in the Sky’s East, while Qormusta rules over the other fifty-five. Qormusta and Atai Ulaan waged a war against each other, ending with Qormusta’s victory and with Earth being ravaged by demons. This situation forced the king of gods to send one of his three sons, Geser, to liberate Earth from the danger. Some versions of the epic link the Qormusta drinking addiction to this cosmic fight, adding to the plot a parodistic tone of sort:

- Tushemilov version: Qormusta was a guest of Atai Ulaan palace, passing the time drinking at Eastern Sky god’s place “from the new moon to the full moon”.
- Ekhirit-Bulagat version: Atai Ulaan was defeated, and his offspring is destroying the Earth, so the gods indict a council. Qormusta got drunk along his way to the council. When Qormusta finally reaches the meeting, the gods have already decided in his absence to send Geser (Cf. with the Ungin version, according to which Qormusta enjoys hunting so much that he selflessly forgot about his appointed meeting with Atai Ulaan).
- Khangalov version: Qormusta wanted to ask the arch-goddess Manzan Gurme about which of his sons send to Earth, but on his way he got drunk with the sun god Pison Sagan and spent all the night at the host’s house.

Like his “brother” Genghis Khan, Geser Khan is equally described as a hero lover of strong drink, equating the heroic figure with his divine father²⁵⁵.

The identification between Qormusta (Churmas) with Esege Malan is made evident within the Buryat creation’s narrative. In fact, there are two versions among the Buryats (see §9.1), one of which sees Qormusta as a judge. Both variants are

²⁵⁵ Dugarov, (2019), 580-590; Tsyrendorzhievna (2021).

reported by Waida Manabu (1991), the one with Qormusta as a character is from the Alarsk district²⁵⁶:

Khan Churmas Tengri [...] had three sons: Shingybyl, Tolty Khan, and Sagadai. They got into an argument among themselves about which of them [after the abdication of their father] should rule over the world. [...] Khan Churmas Tengri attempts to dissolve the succession dispute by a flower contest: The father gave each of them a golden vessel [i.e. a vase] and said: “Leave here and go to sleep! Everybody should put this flower in front of him; the one in whose vase flowers would appear should rule the world.” The eldest son awoke [in the midst of night] and noticed that there were flowers coming to bloom in the vase of the youngest brother [referring to Tolty Khan]; he transplanted them in his own vase and then went to sleep again. Early in the morning they awoke and saw the flowers in the eldest brother’s vase. But the youngest brother came to know by the power of books that the flowers have been stolen [...] “You have stolen the flowers. Now you should rule over the world and I, as there is nothing else, will be Erlik. But in protest I will say that your people will live no longer than hundred years, and your animals no longer than forty years; I will continue to take away from you the best of people and animals”.

Comparison with Chesök in the Korean context:

Apparently, Qormusta has almost nothing in common with the Korean Chesök: Qormusta reflects the *ethos* of a nomadic, pastoral and “heroic society” (love for hunting, drinking, and military deeds), while Chesök reflects a sedentary and agrarian society (patronage on agrarian wealth and prole). Moreover, Qormusta cult was not shaped by a Daoist mediation like Chesök was.

This superficial divergence coexists with a “gray area” and clear convergence points: the first point is the clear (partial) derivation of both deity from the Indo-Buddhist *deva* king Indra. This undeniable commonality presents however its

²⁵⁶ Waida Manabu (1991), 100-3.

intrinsic difficulties: while Koreans follow Sinitic Mahayana Buddhist, Mongols and Buryats follow the Tibetan Buddhist schools (Nyingma and Sarma). So, while there are points of contact, the way of thinking and the general cultural structure is different: on one hand, within Koryŏ imperial court, Chesŏk was paired with his court of Four Heavenly Kings other war deities, and astrological gods (see §§4, 5 and 7); on the other, Qormusta is inscribed at the center of *maṇḍala* made by the Sky sections, from which he rules over his thirty-three or ninety-nine gods. While the function remains the same (Heavenly regality), the form does not.

Convergence points emerge when we look closely at the Koryŏ-period situation. We can thus count three similarities:

- Like the Chesŏk of the Koryŏ imperial court, Qormusta is a deity protector of the empire, and strictly tied with the imperial clan propaganda. Like Qormusta represents a significant part of the Genghisid imperial cult, so does Chesŏk for the Koryŏ Wang cult – and before Chumong for the Koguryŏ ruling clans (see §§3-4).
- Like the Chesŏk was seen as a warrior deity which brings protection to the kingdom by giving strength to the army and fear among the enemies (see §4), so Qormusta tngri is said among Buryats to be the protector of the Buryat people.
- Like his Korean counterpart, Qormusta too received two kinds of worship: one folk, where it is conflated with the local Sky Father (Köke Möngke Tngri / Hwan'in), and one Buddhist. Like in Korea, at some point there was *de facto* a conflation within the two cults, though through different paths.

We have already seen (§9.2) how the relationship between the modern-day Chesŏk, the Korean creation myths and the Buryat creation myths are connected: all these creation narratives show a dualism, eventually the *topos* of the *deus otiosus*, and, as for the case of Tolty khan and Shingybyl / Erlik, the theme of struggle between Death and Life – even though the story development is different.

We can now draw some preliminary conclusions and pen a summary:

- Qormusta tngri is the Mongol and Buryat king of gods (*qan tngri*), gods usually, symbolically numbered as thirty-three or ninety-nine. Qormusta also has patronages over rain, thunder etc., de facto making him a near-perfect equivalent of the Indo-Buddhist Indra. Qormusta's name comes from the Mazdean arch-deity Ahura Mazdā, likely acquired with a Manichean Uyghur mediation, while his functions within the Mongolian pantheon are “taken” from Köke Möngke Tngri, and within the Buryat pantheon from Esege Malan tngri and Huhedei Mergen tngri.
- Among Mongols, Qormusta is sometimes equated with Esru-a / Esrün (Brahmā), while among Buryats he fought against the god of Eastern Sky, Galta / Atai Ulaan tngri, viz. in the local Geser epic's prologue. In both cases, the king of gods is said to dwell at the Sky's center, and he is often portrayed as an alcohol-lover.
 - Among the Buryats, Qormusta also is the protagonist of the creation myths along with Esege Malan tngri, and he is said to oversee blacksmithing, handicraft and the protection of Buryat nation.
- The divinized persona of the national hero Temüjin Genghis Khan is said to be the earthly form of Qormusta tngri, to be the son of the gods' king. Like Qormusta, the mythical Genghis Khan is said to be a strong drinker and the perfect ruler. Similarly, both Qormusta and Genghis Khan are venerated in a similar yet separated way both by local shamans and Buddhist clergy. Genghis Khan is also equated with “War-Banner god” Sülde tngri and “Warrior god” Dayičin tngri, deities of Horses and War.
- There are many similarities between the Mongol-Buryat Qormusta tngri and the Korean sky deities, and with the Koryŏ period's Chesŏk in particular:
 - Like the Chesŏk of the Koryŏ imperial court, Qormusta is a deity protector of the empire, and strictly tied with the imperial clan propaganda. Like Qormusta represents a significant part of the Genghisid imperial cult, so does Chesŏk for the Koryŏ Wang cult – and before Chumong for the Koguryŏ ruling clans.
 - Like the Chesŏk from the Koryŏ imperial propaganda was seen as a warrior deity which brings protection to the kingdom by giving

strength to the army and fear among the enemies, so Qormusta tngri is said among Buryats to be the protector of the Buryat people. In Mongol-Buryat case, this characteristic is extended to the Qormusta's sons too: Genghis and Geser Khan

- Like his Korean counterpart, Qormusta too received two kinds of worship: one folk, where it is conflated with the local Sky Father, and one Buddhist. Clearly, history and dynamics of these two syncretism cases are different.
- The Buryat Qormusta, as deity which oversees over blacksmithing, can be compared with the Cheju Island's *mengdu-gosa* myth about the Jade Emperor / Chesök, Chön'gyöngrok and Ssoech'öri-adül. If this is the case, the commonality of patronages is likely an archaicism in both pantheons of a period when smithery was considered a shamanic, magical activity.

11.1. *Excursus: Gesar Khan of gLing*

The Gesar epic is one of the most successful Central Asian narratives: started as the national Tibetan epic, it was soon adopted by Mongols, Buryats, Kalmyks and other. As we have seen, Gesar is said to be one of the sons of Indra (Qormusta in Mongolia, Gyaji in Tibet) and thus could be easily compared with Chumong and other Korean kingdom mythical founders, but there is a difference: while Chumong surely was not a historical figure, as far as we know, Gesar is likely modelled after a marginal historic figure. What interests us in our comparison attempt is not the origins of the story, but the comparable elements, and this regardless of if Gesar is closer to Arthur Pendragon rather than to Chumong, in his story's fortunes.

The parallel with Chumong is not secondary: we have seen how the Tanggüm'aegi narrative takes many elements from Chumong myth. Thus, what interest us in this Tibeto-Mongolian epic is exactly how Qormusta is to Gesar is almost exactly how Chesök is to Chumong within his myths and, by extension, how the monk / Chesök is to the Three Chesök within the *Chesök-ponp'uri*.

What is the story of King Geser? What follows is a summary – the episode division is based on the “standard” seven chapters of the Mongolian version²⁵⁷:

Ladakhi-Tibetan versions

1. The world is in a state of chaos, ravaged by demons and evil rulers. Padmasambhava, Avalokiteśvara or, in Ladakh, the shaman-hero *Palle Gopo* (*dPal-le rGod-po*), seeing the grim situation, convokes the council of gods and buddhas to prevent the destruction of the Dharma; The council does not listen until the appearance of three *Hor* (Turkestan) demon-kings, enemy of Buddhism
2. Either *Indra* or *Brahmā* has three sons: *Donkar*, *Donlek* and *Dondrup* [*Donden*, *Donyo*, and *Dondrup* in Ladakh]. The council then decides to make *Dondrup* birth on Earth as *Joro* / *Joru*; *Joro* is born as an ugly and gauche boy, he however possesses magical powers, thanks to which he became king of *Ling* (*gLing*) assuming the new name of *Gesar* (*Ge-sar* or

Mongolian versions

1. The world, ravaged by demons and evil rulers; the council of the gods agrees to send a powerful deity to restore the role and rule the world as *Cakravartin*; *Qormusta tngri* (*Indra*) has three sons: *Ameen*, *Weele*, *Tagus*. The council of the gods sends *Tagus*, the youngest, to the mission; *Tagus* reborn on Earth as *Ĵoro*, son of *Sanglun*. *Ĵoro* is an unattractive boy and yet a joyful prankster with formidable powers. The young hero is perpetually in conflict with his uncle *Čotong* and his brother *Rongsa* and often fights demons; one day, *Ĵoro* marries the beautiful *Rogmo* against all *Čotong* attempts of having her for himself, then he assumes the name *Geser*; romantic interlude with *Aĵu Mergen*, daughter of the dragon king

²⁵⁷ Heissig (1980), 47-65; Francke (2000) xvi-xxxii; Fitzherbert (2016b), 307-314; De Rachewiltz & Li (2017), 7-19.

Ladakhi-Tibetan versions

- “the newly born one” sKye gSar)
3. Gesar marries his first wife 'Brug-mo ('Bru-gu-ma in Ladakh). Then he battles his evil uncle Khro-thung, who tried to kill him and possess his wife
 4. Gesar wages war on China (rGya-nag), where the emperor's wife is a Buddhism-hating demon. The emperor's daughters are all incarnations of Tārā, which causes problems to the hero.
 5. After having restored Buddhism in China, he wages war against Hor (Turkestan), Iran, Mongolia and other northern and southern kingdoms. In the Ladakh version, Gesar wages war against 'aGro-yul and Lho-yul (two Tibetan provinces)
 6. **Tibetan version:** Gesar goes for various quests, searching for precious stones, pearls, and exotic objects. He travels to Kashmir and India, conquering Nepal on his way. **Ladakhi version:** while Gesar lives with Dze-mo, forgetting everything, the last king of Hor, Gur-dkar,

Mongolian versions

2. Geser and his good brother Ĵasa Šikir, along with thirty companions, defeat an ogre (*manyus*) who transformed himself into a giant tiger. From the tiger's skin and fur, they create shields and helmets
3. Geser journey to China (Kitad) to assume control of the country; the Chinese emperor Güme qayan cannot rule the State due his great sorrow for the empress death, so Geser buries the empress, soothes the emperor, and brings new order to the administration; before leaving, Geser marries the emperor's daughter Güne Ȳooa
4. Geser is ill. His evil uncle Čotong and his principal wife Rogmo blame Arulya Ȳooa, another Geser's wife known also as “Myriad Joys” Tümen Ĵiryalang; Arulya Ȳooa is banish to the North, where she marries a twelve-headed ogre; Geser travels north, fights and kills the ogre, conquer the country and settles there for nine years; Arulya Ȳooa gives Geser a magic potion that

Ladakhi-Tibetan versions

- conquers Ling and makes 'Brug-mo his wife. Both protagonists had children with the respective kidnappers. (Gesar was constantly given a magical potion erasing his memories). At some point, Gesar remembers his mission, and in a frenzy kills his new family, then he rescues his kingdom. Since his wife did not help him against Gur-dkar, she undergoes a severe repentance before the happy ending
7. Gesar descends into Hell to save his mother

Mongolian versions

- makes him forget all about his past
5. War with Siraiyol (Šaraiyol = Hor), Geser goes to land conquest with his brother Ĵasa Šikir and other companions, who are all killed one by one during the fights; Geser then ends his bewitching, punishes Arulya Ÿooa and returns home; the hero punishes Čotong, penetrates Siraiyol fortresses and rescues his wife Rogmo
 6. An ogre disguises himself as a great lama and deceives Rogmo, who in turn convinces the husband to receive the lama's consecration. The false consecration turns Geser into an ass; Geser is then saved by Aĵu Mergen, the dragon king's daughter of the first chapter, and by the power of Qormustatngri; Geser, returned human, kills the ogre, punishes his wife and show gratitude to Aĵu Mergen
 7. Geser finds out that his mother, Gegše Amurčila, is dead and has gone to Hell (Tamu / Tamag), he follows her into the

Ladakhi-Tibetan versions

Mongolian versions

underworld, punish Erlik, god
of Death, for his unjust
punishment and makes the
mother reborn in the land of
bliss

We have seen in the previous section how the Buryat versions of the epic expand the theme of a cosmic battle within their prologues, describing the war between Qormusta and Atai Ulaan / Galta Ulaan²⁵⁸. This is clearly not the only element with significant variations: another variation is the hero's father, who significantly changes from version to version:

- a. Gyajin (brGya-byin) = Qormusta tngri (= Indra)
- b. Tsangpa Karpo (Tshangs-pa dKar-po = Brahmā)
- c. "Great White luminous God" Lhachen Odenkar (Lha-chen 'Od-ldan-dkar)
- d. Avalokiteśvara / Padmasambhava / Samantabhadra / Cakraśamvara / Hayagrīva

Interestingly, while Gyajin / Qormusta is a near perfect transposition of the Indic Indra, Tsangpa Karpo is not the perfect equivalent of Brahmā, but rather the Tibetan version of the typical Central Asian Sky Father²⁵⁹. The transmission of Tibetan Gesar epic into Mongolia could explain why the Mongols sometimes conflates Qormusta (Indra) with Esru-a / Esrün (Brahmā) within their mythology.

The historical / legendary kernel and its early development:

We have relatively scarce sources about the ancient war hero whose story created the basis for the King Gesar of Ling epic: the *Khotanese Chronicles*, survived in

²⁵⁸ Dugarov, (2019), 580-590; Tsyrendorzhievna (2021).

²⁵⁹ Fitzherbert (2016b), 316-320.

the Tibetan edition named *Li-yul lung-bstan-pa*, a few Chinese sources and some numismatic evidence.

Known as “Caesar of Rome” Frum Kēsar²⁶⁰ (r. 737-745), the legendary king and general was heir of Tegin Khwarāsān *shāh* (Wusun Teqin Sa 烏散特勤灑, 680-737 c.a) to the throne of the ‘Turki-shāhi’ dynasty, in Kābul: a Khorasani kingdom formed as a breakaway from the Khalaj confederation – from there the ethnic designation of as “Turk” *dru-gu* for the hero in some epic’s versions. Born during the relatively slow conquest of Central Asia by the Umayyad caliphate, Frum Kēsar obtained the throne after his father’s abdication, with the Tang placet.

Why this peculiar name? There are many hypotheses, not mutually excluding: first it was likely a homage to the Roman emperor Leo III the Isaurian (r. 717-741), whose victories against the Umayyads gained fame and prestige in Central Asia when the Arab armies turned eastward; secondly it is an appropriation of the symbolic value derived from the designation, since a Khorasani ruler could never arrogate pretenses over the titles of his more powerful neighbors²⁶¹, and Byzantium was far away enough to not protest; it is also possible, yet less probable, that the name / title was approved by a Byzantine envoy at the Tegin *shāh* court.

Part of the anti-Arab resistance in the Region, Frum Kēsar styled himself as a hero against the invaders: “Frum Kēsar, the lord, the prince, who smote the Arabs and thereby saved prosperity” we read on his coins. To counter the Umayyads, the Khorasani ruler pursued alliances with the neighboring Hephthalite kingdoms and marital relationships with the Khotanese rulers, maybe with Kashmiri too. Thus, Frum Kēsar policies created a network mainly based on Buddhism, thanks to which he countered the Arab armies in Balkh and Termez.

Thus, the Tibetan Gesar’s epic was born thanks to a Khotanese intermediation. This also explains why the mythical kings is often associated with Pehar (Pe-har / dPe-dkar), another mythical ruler who, like Gesar of Ling, is said to protect fortune: Pehar too was originally a Central Asian figure, specifically the Mazdean “god”

²⁶⁰ Phrom / Khrom Ge-sar in the Tibetan sources, Fulin Jisuo 拂菻爾娑 in the Chinese ones.

²⁶¹ Respectively: “King of Kings” of the Sassanian Empire, “Son of Heaven” of China, and “*khagan (qayan)*” of the Turko-Hephthalites.

yazata Farn (Avestan: Khvarenah). Known in Khotan as Phārra, the deity eventually sought his way to Tibet, becoming King Pehar. Another parallel with Gesar is the warrior-king Bahrām Chubin, who also fought the Arab armies and occupied the Sassanian throne from 590 to 591. Again, like Frum Kēsar, Bahrām Chubin was posthumously immortalized by a dedicated epic (the *Bahrām-Chubin-nāme*), later incorporated within the Ferdowsī’s *Shāhnāme*, and finally ascended to the divine status becoming the legendary savior Bahrām Varjāvand in the late Mazdean apocalyptic literature²⁶².

So far, we have explained why the mythical Gesar of Ling it is said to be a warrior-king and a protector of Buddhism. Remains to explain why his kingdom bears the name Ling (gLing).

The title may come from the Kingdom of Lingsang: Fitzherbert (2016b) argues that “it is possible, though it remains a conjecture, that the consolidations of the epic in Ladakh and Baltistan in the west may also have taken place after the fourteenth century, after the epic was transmitted by settlers from the eastern regions”. This kingdom, born after the fragmentation of the Tibetan Empire, was in fact ruled by a dynasty claiming to be scions of the Gesar’s nephew Drala Tsegial (Dgra-lha rTse-rgyal). This would be coherent with one of the first Tibetan accounts, the “Singular Volume of the Langs Clan” *Rlangs kyi po-ti bse-ru*, which reports that Gesar was contemporary to Changchup Drekol (Byang-chub ’Dre-bkol), another semi-legendary figure allegedly lived by the eleventh century, as well as the many attempts to “historicize” the hero as an Eastern Tibetan chieftain named Sengchen “Gesar” norbu (Seng-chen Ge-sar nor-bu), lived during the Era of Fragmentation (842-1253). On the other hand, Francke (2000) notices that the Ladakhi region of Leh (sLas) was known by ancient inscriptions and folklore as “market, Gesar’s throne” Khrom-ge-sar-gdan-ma, and its local rulers too also claimed a descentance from Gesar, through the line of the last Tibetan emperor Langdarma (gLang Dar-ma, r. 841-2)²⁶³. The sources are few, so drawing a definitive conclusion is unlikely.

²⁶² Grenet (2022), 39-49.

²⁶³ Francke (2000) xvi-xxxii; Fitzherbert (2016b), 300-1.

Gesar (Ge-sar) among the Tibetans:

The fortune of Gesar as epic and mythical figure is linked to the incense-offering ritual of *bsang*: a Bon rite from Western Tibet, only partially buddhicized. The first *bsang*'s attestations are from the seventeenth century, but it is well possible that the custom dates back at least to the thirteenth century. The *bsang* is a rite for the propitiation of worldly (*'jig-rten-pa'i*) deities and spirits, and specifically the *lha* (*deva*) “above”, the *klu* (*nāga*) “below”, and the *gnyan* “in the middle” i.e. on the mountains – a frequent triptych within all the Gesar epic's versions. More specifically, these gods are invoked for “raiding (*jag*), trading (*tshong*), hunting (*lings*), travelling (*lam*) and a general defender of the home and protector of well-being and health in the vulnerable highland tent dwelling life”, as described by FitzHerbert (2016a). This protective power then made associate Gesar with the category of “enemy-gods [deities which protect against enemies]”: the *dralha* (*dra-lha* / *dgra-lha* / *sgra-bla*) and the *pawo* (*dpa'-bo*), as well to a trio of guardian and destiny's gods, presented in the epic as his sisters: Dongtsong Garpo (Dung-chung dKar-po), Arjawalori Udgari (kLu-sbrul 'Od-chung), and Dschamtso Dari Udam (Tha-Ie 'Od-phra)²⁶⁴.

The “adoption” of Gesar as the deity of the *bsang* ritual created an overlap first and then a substitution between Gesar and the previous Bon deity associated with the same rite: Gekho (Ge-khod), to the point that “Gesar (Ge-sar)” can be presented as a “New Gekho (Ge[-khod] gSar)”. Again, in the terms of FitzHerbert (2016a):

Ge-sar, like Ge-khod, is a son of the gods in the Upper Realm (though in Gesar's case of the Buddhist “converted” forms), mixed with ancestry in the Middle and Lower Realms; who incurs karmic contamination through his violent deeds; who retreats from action and has to be spurred into revival; who visits the hell-realms; and who is cultically associated with the cycle of seasons and the sun

²⁶⁴ In Mongolia they are also Gesar's aunts.

Moreover, the *bsang* ritual is associated with a dualistic framework, which is reflected within the Gesar epic as the war between the god-armies (*lha dmag*) of the “White Side” (*dkar phyogs*) and demonic armies (*bdud dmag*) of the “Dark Side” (*nag phyogs*), a well-known *topos* in Central Asia. Similarly, the association with “the cycle of seasons and the sun” is reflected in the identification between Gesar and Dondrup (Don-grub), son a deity with clear solar characteristics: “Great White luminous God” Lhachen Odenkar (Lha-chen ‘Od-ldan-dkar). In this crescendo, the two Sky gods Gyajin (Indra) and Tsangpa Karpo were linked to Gesar as well, as strictly tied to imperial regality²⁶⁵.

Despite these heavy adaptations, Gesar was never fully accepted by Bon religion nor by Tibetan Buddhism: it was too “bon-esque” not to cause a certain embarrassment among the lamas who fought against the native faith, and too “Buddhist” for the bon monks who resisted against the Buddhism persecutions. At the same time, Gesar became the “vehicle” through which Buddhism overcame Bon absorbing many of its characters, as writes FitzHerbert (2016a).

The cooptation of Gesar by Buddhism was somehow unavoidable, due to the epic’s origins. Other factors who helped the incorporation into the new religion were the parallel between the descend of Gesar from the heavens, which mirrors the legendary descend of Śakyamuni Buddha from the Tuṣita (dGa’-lDan) Heaven, as well as his descended into the underworld to save his mother, which has a direct parallel in the Maudgalyāyana / Moggallāna legend – likely entered within the epic by a Tang intermediation.

The absorption of the epic within Tibetan Buddhism was gradual and likely occurred between the thirteenth-fourteenth and the seventeenth centuries, viz. from the first *bsang* ritual texts including the hero and the first mentions of Gesar within semi-historical document (the aforementioned “Singular Volume of the Langs Clan”), to the last extant versions of the *bsang* ritual text and the official adoption of the king of Ling as national symbol.

The Lang (rLang) clan is particularly important for the rise of Gesar faith in Tibet: after the demise of the Mongol Empire, the clan gained the supremacy over Central

²⁶⁵ Hummel (1974); FitzHerbert (2016a), 1-25; Fitzherbert (2016b), 300-320; Charleux (2025).

Tibet with Changchup Gyaltsen (Byang-chub rGyal-mtshan, d. 1364), who then established the Pagmodru / Phagmodru Dynasty (Phag-mo-gru, 1354-1618). This new ruling clan fashioned itself as emperors of a new Tibetan Empire, including Gesar into its propaganda. The adoption of Gesar was maybe helped by the intermediation of the Lingsang Kingdom mentioned before, which enjoyed close relationships with the new dynasty. This middleman could also help explaining a peculiarity of Gesar's Buddhist cult: this deity was not, originally associated with the Nyingma (rNying-ma) school, as one would expect, but with the Kagyu (bKa'-brGyud). The Lingsang Kingdom in fact favored Kagyu and Sakya (Sa-sKya) lineages over Nyingma. The Gesar epic was eventually adopted by the Nyingma, but not before the mid-late seventeenth century²⁶⁶.

Gesar (Geser Khan) among the Mongols and Buryats:

The patronage of Gesar as deity (*tnгри*) among Mongols and Buryats are an adaption of those of the Tibetan Gesar, specifically of the Gesar emerged after the fall of the Mongol Empire. The characteristics of the Mongol-Buryat mythical "universal ruler" Cakravartin are comprehensively reported by Heissig (1980):

He is a protective deity of warriors and of herds, especially the herds of horses, and he also bestows good luck at hunting. [...] Power over demons and devils is also ascribed to him. He is both 'the destroyer and oppressor of the angry demons' and also the force which 'grinds into dust the enemies and devils who alarm the state and religion'. [...] One makes offerings to him because he is 'the supporting-beam of the dwelling-house and the railings of the cart'. [...] Geser Khan is also requested for protection and good fortune for the ruler and the princes themselves: 'May you graciously protect the vow of the ruler!'. We also hear, in connection with the wind-horse flag (*kei mori*), the symbol of good fortune for tent and settlement 'Graciously allow the wind-horse flags of the ruler to arise and unfold like a cloud in summertime.' Most of the requests however are concrete: 'Deign to protect

²⁶⁶ FitzHerber (2016a) 1-25, Fitzherbert (2016b), 300-316; Kwanghun Jung & Kim Hyunju (2021); Charleux (2025).

the flocks and to guard them from being lost to the enemy', [...] Geser Khan however has his home 'above the high white rocky peaks in a house of cloud and mist'. He is regarded as 'Son of Heaven' or as 'incarnation of the *tnгри* who rule all those who live on the earth', though he is also called 'embodiment of Garuda', or the king of the birds. This function of protective deity of flocks and property, of health and long life, is unimportant however compared to Geser Khan's function as a war-god. In this role he has entrusted to him primarily the protection of the warrior, the attainment of victory over his enemies and their destruction. In this connection he is omnipresent.

The cult of Gesar came into Mongolia (Inner and Outer) between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, along with the diffusion of his epic. In Mongolia too Geser cult was vehiculated by the *bsang* ritual, however with new stratifications added to it: the king of Ling was not only conflated with Gekho, but with Pehar too. Geser was also associated with the "enemy-gods" *dralha*, intended both as a group and a single deity i.e. as Dayičin tngri, and the Four Heavenly Kings (Lokapāla), intended as the Dharma protectors, and particularly with the guardian of the North: Kubera / Vaiśravaṇa (Bišman / Jamasaran = lCam-sring). Interestingly, all those figures are either of Central Asian origins or influences, and are all usually portrayed as armed horsemen.

In the Mongolian epic of Geser, the hero's companions are either three hundred sixty, thirty-five, or thirty (like the gods at the Qormusta tngri's court), but they are never deified as it is in the case of the Tibetan version of the epic. On the other hand, in the Buryat version, the battle between the "White Side" and the "Dark Side" from the Tibetan epic is reframed as the war between Qormusta, king of the gods, and the rebel deity Galta / Atai Ulaan tngri, as we have seen.

A further layer to Gesar as a mythical figure was added during the Qing rule over Mongolia, when the "Lord of the Ten Quarters" was conflated with Guandi 關帝, the Lord of War²⁶⁷. The cult to Guandi was officialized in 1594 by the Ming emperor

²⁶⁷ The divinized persona of the Chinese general Guan Yu 關羽 (d. 219 or 220), hero of the Three Kingdoms Period.

Wanli 萬曆帝 (r. 1572-1620) and then the faith expanded northward among Mongols and Tibetans, where Guan Yu was known by his courtesy name “Long Cloud [King]” Yunzhang 雲長, literally translated as Trinring Gyelpo (sPrin-Ring rGyal-po) in Tibetan and as Būrinriyin jalbuu (Birenrin Jalbuu) in Mongolian. Like Geser, Guandi too was identified with Kubera / Vaiśravaṇa and Yamantaka by the late eighteenth century. Between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, numerous temples were built to Geser-Guandi in Mongolia, as well as dedicated temple within pre-existing Buddhist monastic complexes. The official identification between Geser and Guan Yu was made in 1716 by the Qing emperor Kangxi 康熙帝 (r. 1661-1722). The identification of both figures with Kubera / Vaiśravaṇa in the form of ḡamasaran (lCam-sring) became particularly important, as tied with divination and exorcism. The head of the Geluk (dGe-lugs) school in Mongolia was believed to be an incarnation of Geser’s horse.

Finally, by the nineteenth century, Geser and Genghis Khan were sometimes fused in a single figure: both are portrayed as Cakravartin, both are said to be sons of Qormusta / Indra, and both are called “enemy-god” *dralha* – Geser-Guandi was even called “great Süld (*ikh Süld tenger*) of the Chinese Empire”: let’s keep in mind that Genghis Khan too is identified with Sülde tngri, the main equestrian war deity among Mongols. Nowadays, Geser and Genghis Khan are explicitly identified by some Buryats, and the identification likely persisted for a time in Mongolia too, as some Buddhist paintings (*thangka*) does not clearly distinguish between the two figures²⁶⁸.

Korean parallels:

Gesar gyalpo / Geser khan cult can be compared with the Chesök starting from two different points: its role as presented in the hero’s birth narrative; and, other hand, with his functions.

²⁶⁸ Walther Heissig (1980), 93-10; De Rachewiltz & Li (2017), 5-11; Tsyrendorzhievna (2021); Charleux (2025), 10-23 & 27-9.

FitzHerbert (2016a) reconstructed the origins' story of Gesar from the various versions of the epic as follows:

1. the hero is one of the sons (normally three) of a high-god in the Upper Realm
2. the god-child is the youngest child or the middle child, never the eldest
3. His name is Dondrup, or some variant thereof
4. the god-prince is reluctant to take the mission
5. the god-princes compete in contests or draw lots to see who will go
6. A reconnaissance of the human realm is undertaken in the form of a bird
7. the god-son demands prerequisites for accepting the mission; these include armor, weapons, a horse, and spirit helpers
8. the god-son dies in the heavenly realm

The Lower Ladakhi version (oral narrative, early twentieth century) and the Guide manuscript versions (Amdo region, near the Blue Lake, likely nineteenth century) seem the more archaic, while the Lingsang xylograph's version (Dzong-go monastery, Kham region, early twentieth century) is said to be more authoritative, however it is also heavily influenced by Vajrayāna Buddhism like other, later versions.

We will start our analysis with the Ladakhi and Guide versions²⁶⁹:

Epic of Gesar, king of Ling – lower ladakhi version recorded by A. h. Francke ([1905] 2000)

The shaman-hero Palle Gopo (Dpal-le rgod-po) witnesses the ongoing [cosmic] battle between the forces of the White Side and the black Side: he sees a white bird battling a black bird, a white yak battling a black yak. He kills the black yak with his slingshot, and in recognition of this heroic deed, a divine apparition offers him many gifts. Although he refuses these gifts, he demands that one of the three sons of the king of the heavens be sent to rule the land of ling. The

²⁶⁹ FitzHerbert (2016a), 307-320.

apparition agrees to this and returns to the upper realm of gods. Some time later, Palle Gopo himself goes to the upper realm of gods to reassert his demand for a god- prince to be sent to the world, but is rebuffed by the king of the gods, mighty Gyajin (Brgya-byin). So he journeys to the lower realm of water-spirits (*klu/nāga*) hoping to obtain a horse. Again he is not successful, so he journeys to the middle realm of the “seven refuges” (*skyabs bdun*), again in the hope of buying a horse. The deities of the middle realm grant him a marvelous horse and on it he re-ascends to the upper realm, this time brandishing a sharp sword. he again demands a god- prince, and this time the gods consent. The king of the heavens, mighty Gyajin, has three sons: Donden, Donyo, and Dondrup. The first two refuse the mission, but the third expresses willingness. The three sons then compete in a series of horseback contests set by their father, and the youngest son, Dondrup, wins them all. his jealous older brothers, thinking this will mean he will be exempt from the unwanted mission to the human realm, torment and bully him. in fact it is the younger son who is sent. First, in order to undertake a reconnaissance of Ling, he transforms himself into a beautiful bird and descends onto the house of Akhu Trotung (A-gu Khru-thung), who shoots him away firing an arrow. The bird then returns to the upper realm. Dondrup then makes demands concerning the prerequisites for his mission: a mother, a castle, a horse, brothers, a bow and arrows, a protecting goddess Kurmen Gyalmo (bKur-smān rgyal-mo [*sic*]), and a wife. Then Dondrup dies. He enters the body of his human mother Gongza lhamo (Gog-bzang lha-mo) in the form of a hailstone that falls into her bowl and that she swallows.

Epic of Gesar, king of Ling – Guide manuscript version, summarized from Damdinsuren (1961)

in the upper realm of gods, the father Tsangpa Karpo and mother Bumchong Gyalmo (‘Bum- skyong rgyal-mo) have three sons named Donkar, Donlek, and Dondrup. Dondrup is strong, brave, intelligent, and skilled in heroic arts. At this time demons are flourishing in the middle realm, so all the buddhas and

bodhisattvas hold council and decide that a divine being must be sent as an incarnation to relieve the human realm of its suffering. he father Tsangpa Karpo calls his three sons before him and says: “you three are [as precious to me] as the eyes in my forehead, but one of you must go alone to the land of men, to defeat the four demons of extremity, to press down the haughty, and be a lord over the black-headed ones. you three, decide among yourselves.” he three sons confer, but since all are reluctant, they cannot agree. he god-child Dondrup suggests they draw lots using arrows, pebbles, and dice. in the morning they draw lots with arrows, and Dondrup is chosen; at midday with pebbles, and Dondrup is chosen; and in the evening with dice, and again it falls to Dondrup karmo. he divine mother bumchong Gyalmo says to her son: “you are selected, so you must go. but first you must ascertain what the situation there is like — if it is pleasant you can go yourself, but if it is terrible, then I your mother will go in your place.” Dondrup then transforms into a fantastic bird with a body of gold, turquoise, and conch, four black talons of iron, and speckled eyes of agate, and lies down to the human land of upper White ling to make a reconnaissance. The bird is seen by Akhu trotung (A-khu Khro-thung), who takes it to be a bad sign and fires an arrow at it. it is then seen by Sengtak Dirbu (Seng-stag ldir-bu), the future human “father” of the hero, who recognizes it as a good sign and sets about preparing offerings. The bird then lies back to the upper realm of gods and there enjoins his mother and father to grant him the requisites for his heroic mission: namely, a horse and saddle, a sword, a bow, arrows, a spouse, a horse steward, and so on, including as “translator” the female divinity Ane Gongmen Gyalmo (Gong-sma rgyal-mo). he then dies, and his memorial *chorten* in the upper realm of gods is known as the Nyangde Chorten (Myang-‘das mchod rten).

In ling, the 50-year old barren woman Ma Gagtsa lhamo (Sma ‘Gag-tsha lha-mo) sees a miraculous apparition in the sky while milking the ‘*bri* (female yak), and she becomes pregnant with the hero-child.

While the Amdo version can be seen as a trait d’union with the later versions, since both mention an “apparition”, the Ladakhi version can be easily compared with the

Chesok-ponp'uri (Puyŏ, Sŏul, Ch'ungch'ŏng, Kyŏnggi versions), according to which the protagonist got pregnant after swallowing a grain of rice (see §7.2). The motif seems to have been popular enough across the region to be known as well by the Manchu, as testified by the Jurchen-Qing imperial foundation narrative, which also mentions a bird (cf. with §3)²⁷⁰:

Manzhou Shilu (Manju-i yargiyan kooli) 滿洲實錄, I

滿洲原起於長白山之東北布庫哩
山下一泊名布勒瑚里初天降三仙
女浴於泊長名恩古倫次名正古倫
三名佛庫倫浴畢上岸有神鵲銜一
朱果置佛庫倫衣上色甚鮮妍佛庫
倫愛之不忍釋手遂銜口中甫著衣
其果入腹中即感而成孕告二姊曰
吾覺腹重不能同升奈何二姊曰吾
等曾服丹藥諒無死理此乃天意俟
爾身輕上升未晚遂別去佛庫倫後
生一男生而能言熒爾長成母告子
曰天生汝實令汝以定亂國可往彼
處將所生緣由一一詳說

Manchu origins begone on Bulhūri Lake, on the foot of a mountain named Bulkūri, northeast of Long White Mountain. Three heavenly maidens came to bath in the lake, their names were Enggulen, Jenggulen and Fekulen. Finished the bath, on the bank (of the lake), Fekulen found a vermillion fruit which a divine magpie had placed on her clothes. From the color it seems very fresh, so Fekulen didn't like the idea of discard it, and it took in her mouth while dressing; but, during that, some bite of the fruit came directly in her throat. Because she suddenly became pregnant, she said: "I think that, because of the weight in my belly, I'm unable to ascend, what could I do?", the other two older sisters answered: "We already took the cinnabar elixir and gained immortality. As for you, wait for the heavenly providence: when your body will become light again, ascend (with us).", not too late,

²⁷⁰ Pai Hyung Il (2020), 251-4; Durrant (1979).

they ascended. Fekulen gave birth to a boy, already able to speak. After he surprisingly grown up, his mother said to him: “Heaven gave birth to you so you could rectify the State, which is in turmoil, for this reason you can go forth!”

A hailstone, a grain of rice, a vermillion fruit: clearly this element can be associated with atmospheric phenomena and agriculture as a medium of the Heavenly god actions. In the Korean case, maybe the rice grain of rice can also be seen as a transformation of the egg delivered by Lady Yuhwa from the Chumong myth (see after), however it is interesting how, among many possible outcomes, Korean shamans’ “choices” seems to have been coherent with the neighboring peoples’ mythology.

As for the Lingsang version, the narrative mimics for a long part of the story the Buddhist sutras and tantric texts, so we will analyze the sections more comparable with the other versions of the same epic²⁷¹:

Epic of Gesar, king of Ling – Lingsang version translated by Kornman, Khandro, and Chönam (2012)

In the period after the disintegration of the Tibetan Empire, since Guru Padma sambhava’s job of taming and “binding by oath” the spirits of Tibet has remained unfinished, Tibet becomes mired in conflict, demonic pollution, and suffering. bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, moved by compassion, supplicates the lord Amitābha (‘Od-dpag-med), who replies with a prophetic instruction. in the “heaven of the 33,” there is a god-child named Dondrup, whose father is Lhachen Odenkar (Lhachen ‘Od-ldan-dkar, “Great God White with luminosity”) and whose mother is

²⁷¹ FitzHerbert (2016a), 307-320.

Manda Lhamdze. if this child is born as a human, says Amitābha, he will be a hero capable of “taming the hard- to- tame” and bringing peace and happiness to the snowy land of Tibet. [...] A little while after this, there appears [...] a resplendent god-child blazing with light. his divine child, called Thopa Gawa (Thos pa dga’ ba, Joyful to hear), gives a teaching on cause and fruition and receives elaborate empowerments from Padmasambhava and each of the five cosmic Buddhas in turn.

Later, Padmasambhava invokes the assistance of the native gods of Tibet, all of whom pledge oaths of allegiance to Thopa Gawa, who then makes his demands—the prerequisites without which he cannot take the mission. he demands a middle realm mountain divinity (*gnyan*) as a father; a lower realm water- spirit (*klu mo*) as a mother; a wife who is a *ḍākinī* (*mkha’ - ’gro*: sky-faring female guardians of the esoteric teachings); a land “endowed with splendor and glory”; subjects who will serve faithfully; armor, weapons, and a horse. Padmasambhava then looks out over the Tibetan plateau and describes its geography as if from the air. He settles upon Ling, in the east of the Snowlands, as the hero’s destined land. Padmasambhava then poisons the lower realm of *klu*, and this gives him the pretext for going there to ostentatiously cure the pestilence that he has in fact caused; he thereby extracts a promise from the *klu* king to send a daughter to the middle realm to be the hero’s mother. The god-child later enters the womb of the *klu-mo* princess Gongza (’Gog bza’) while she is sleeping with her human husband Senglon (Seng-blon). During her sleep, she dreams she is making love to a handsome golden man in golden armor, who, we are told, represents the mountain deity Ger-’dzo.

According to FitzHerbert (2016a), Abzhet and Zhumashova (2016), the element of a “man in a golden armor” or “golden man” apparition is typical of the Inner Asia: the whole narrative is “is very common to many legends about the birth of the rulers. They were supposed to be created by the Sunlight and had the power to rule the Earth.” Thus, the same motif is found within the *Secret History of the Mongols*, referred to Genghis Khan (“Every night a man as yellow as the sun would enter my

tent by the light from the smoke-hole or by the place light enters at the top of the door”), as well as within Turkic, Islamic context, as it the case of *Oguzname*, the origin story of Oguz Khan, founder of the Oguz Turkic people:

In the early morning sudden light entered to the tent of Oguz qaghan. This light turned to the blue wolf. She spoke to him as a man: Hey, Oguz, you are going to Urym. Hey, Ogyz, I will lead you there

Here the parallels with Central Asia seem to end. In fact, while Abzhet and Zhumashova may be right in ascribing the motif’s fortune in the steppes to a Mazdean Influence²⁷², more difficult is to find the same influence within the Korean and the Chinese context.

In fact, the same motif is found within the birth narrative of the later Tang / early Song Daoist deity “Black Emperor” Xuandi 玄帝 / “True Warrior” Zhenwu 真武:

***Yuanshi tianzun shuo Beifang Zhenwu jing* 元始天尊方真武經**

Once, the King of Pure Bliss and the Queen of Virtuous Victory dreamed of swallowing sunlight. Upon awakening the Queen was pregnant. The pregnancy lasted fourteen months. At noon of the third day of the third month of the first year of kaihuang 開皇 (Inaugural Luminary), corresponding with the year of jiachen 甲辰, [a boy] was born in the palace. He was born with divine intelligence and grew up to be brave and fierce. He refused to ascend the throne, concentrating instead on self-cultivation in order to assist the Jade Emperor. He swore to eliminate the evil demons under heaven and to save and protect all beings. Day and night, he repeated this vow at the palace. The king could not stop him. Thus, the prince bid farewell to his parents, left home, and went to Mt. Wudang to cultivate the Way for forty-two years. After his cultivation was completed and the [karmic] fruit matured, he ascended to heaven in broad day light. The Jade Emperor, knowing the prince to be brave and fierce, ordered him to guard the

²⁷² Abzhet & Zhumashova (2016), 203; FitzHerbert (2016a), 307-320.

Yuanshi tianzun shuo Beifang Zhenwu jing 元始天尊方真武經

north and granted him the position of Zhenwu in order to eliminate the demons and sinners under heaven

Associated with the North, Zhenwu origin story also resonates with that of Geser, as both draw heavily from Śakyamuni Buddha mythical birth narrative. In Zhenwu case, the plot's basic elements are:

1. Zhenwu's parents are the King of Pure Bliss and the Queen of Virtuous Victory
2. they dream of swallowing sunlight and an overlong pregnancy,
3. Zhenwu's birthday on the third day of the third month of the first year of *kaihuang*, corresponding with the year of *jiachen*,
4. Zhenwu's indifference towards the throne and his interest in assisting the Jade Emperor with eliminating evil forces
5. his abjuration of his palace

In the most ancient version of the story, Zhenwu is said to be born as a normal human prince, who only later reached divinity thanks to Daoist practices. Like Geser and Genghis Khan, Zhenwu is a “divine general”, leading other gods into battle against demons (see §5.4.1). Like Geser Khan, the Daoist god is depicted as a fierce martial deity with “loosened hair” and “bare feet” and his waist wrapped in a white “cavalier's skirt”. Zhenwu is said to have assisted king Wu of Zhou 周武王 (r. 1050-1043 BCE) against the “wicked” emperor Zhou of Shang 商紂王 (r. 1075-1046 BCE), while in later Yuan and Ming texts he is said to have fought against the “Demonic King of Six Heavens”, both episodes reminding the war of Gesar of Ling against the Hor kingdoms. It is highly probable that the Yuan court made Zhenwu a protector of Buddhism, if not equating at least correlating him with Mahākāla. His imperial cult continued untouched even during the Ming rule²⁷³.

²⁷³ Liu Jingyu (2011), 12-24; Lagerwey (2016).

The parallels here are pale clear, and they need further investigations. For what concerns us, Zhenwu too is (indirectly) associated with imperial might and (directly) with military deeds, even if he is not a “universal ruler” like Gesar of Ling or Genghis khan.

Chumong, founder of the Koguryō empire also has all these characteristics, declined as those of a “Son of Heaven” (see §§3, 4 and 5.1)²⁷⁴:

***Moduru tomb epitaph* 牟頭婁 墓誌, lines 3-5**

惟昔河伯之孫日月之子鄒牟聖王
元出北夫餘天下四方知此國郡最
聖...

In ancient times, there was the heavenly king Ch’umo, grandson of Habaek and son of the Sun and the Moon, originally come from North Puyō. In all four directions under the Heaven, he is known as the first emperor of this kingdom...

***Samguk Sagi* 三國史記, XXX, Koguryō annals**

始祖東明聖王，姓高氏，諱朱蒙 [一云鄒牟一云衆解]。 [...] 其舊都有人，不知所從來，自稱天帝子解慕漱，來都焉。及解夫妻薨，金蛙嗣位。於是時，得女子於大白山南優漱水。問之曰，“我是河伯之女，名柳花。與諸弟出遊，時有一男子，自言天帝子解

The first ancestor was the emperor Tōngmyōng, whose clan name was Ko and whose name was Chumong [also called Ch’umo and Chunghae]. His origins go like this: [...] In the old capital there was a man, he didn’t know where he had arrived and called himself son of the Heavenly Emperor Haemosu when he arrived in the city. Then, Haeburu passed away and Kūmhwa inherited the throne.

²⁷⁴ Noh Taedon (2014), 13-27; Xu Stella (2016), 51-2

慕漱，誘我於熊心山下，鴨渌邊室中私之，即往不返。父母責我無媒而從人，遂謫居優渤水。”金蛙異之，幽閉於室中，爲日所炤，引身避之，日影又逐而炤之。因而有孕，生一卵，大如五升許。王棄之與犬豕，皆不食。又棄之路中，牛馬避之。後棄之野，鳥覆翼之。王欲剖之，不能破，遂還其母。其母以物裹之，置於暖處，有一男兒破殼而出，骨表英奇。年甫七歲，嶷然異常，自作弓矢射之，百發百中。扶餘俗語，善射爲朱蒙，故以名云。

At that time, (the man) meet a woman on the south of Taebaek Mountain, on the Ubul Waters. Asked (about herself) she said: “I am the daughter of Habaek, my name is Yuhwa, I’ve come here to play with my brothers. That time there was a man calling himself Heavenly Prince Haemosu, he led me to feet of Ungsim (“Bear-Heart”) Mountain on the edge of Yalu River, in his private court. As he approached (me) he never returned. As I became a mother, he didn’t ask to marry him but to become his attendant I scolded him, and I was banished on the Ubul Waters.” Kūmhwa found it unusual and secluded (them) in his palace, that made the sun shine, making (Yuhwa) body avowing it, (but) as the sunlight illuminated her again, that caused her to become pregnant, giving birth to an egg as big as six *toe*. The king then threw it away to pigs and dogs, but none of them eat it., so it threw it again in the street, but cows and horses avoided it, so again it threw it in the fields, but birds covered it with their wings. The king tried to cut open the egg but was unable to destroy it and returned the egg to his mother. She wrapped the egg with those things in a hot place and a boy came out of the shell, his appearances were wonderful. He was

seven years old and his tallness uncommon, he himself build bow and arrows and made a hit at every shot. Because it means “Good Archer” in Puyŏ language, it was named Chumong.

We have seen (§3) that the Sky gods of the northern Korean kingdoms can be ascribed to the Siberian cultural sphere. This, however, does not automatically exclude that the imperial pageantry showed in the myth in the persona of Chumong could come from or be influenced by Central Asian models as well. Surely, the direction of acquisition is difficult to historicize. It can equally come from the Xiongnu 匈奴 or from the Göktürks 突厥 or even be indigenous. In any case, the motif is another variation on the theme of a Sky god manifesting his might – in this case by the Sun. In Koguryŏ case, this element is even re-adapted with the agricultural tones, as shown by the Tonmyŏng festival, strictly associated with the Chumong imperial cult (see §§3-4).

As for the patronage comparison, let us make order first: the following is a summary the Tibeto-Mongolian Geser Khan’s patronages:

- Gesar is the ideal warrior-king, a divine emperor strictly tied with kingship both in Tibet and in Mongolia.
- Gesar is a protector of Buddhist Dharma, the State and the people (= Kubera / Vaiśravaṇa, Genghis Khan)
- Gesar is the medium through which divination and exorcists against evil spirits are made (= ǰamasaran)
- Gesar is a divine general which protects against enemies and demons, and he oversees raiding, trading, hunting, travelling, herds and horses. He generally ensures good luck, well-being and health, and he is typically invoked in battle for victory (= Pehar, Guandi).

Here, there are differences with the Korean case (Chesök and Chumong) immediately recognizable, while others are not. The clearest difference is the nomadic warrior *ethos* as shown by the Gesar's nature of "conqueror" rather than "founder" or (euphemistically) "unifier" and "pacifier", this titles were also given to non-mythical rulers as T'aejo – both of Koguryō and Koryō – as earthly "Sons of Heaven", following classical Confucian ideological lines; on the other hand, remembering that the main mean of sustenance in the steppes are the husbandry, commerce and pillaging, we can surely make a parallel with Chesök as a sky deity overseeing over rain and seasons, tied to agriculture i.e. the main Korean mean of sustenance – in fact, the equivalence is highlighted by the shared connection with fortune.

The unexpected element here is that Gesar patronages over Buddhism and State's defense have a closer parallel with Koryō period's Chesök patronages, rather than Chumong's: in Medieval Korea, Chesök was portrayed during State festivals as a fierce, warrior and protector deity, granting the army courage and blisses, identical to a Buddhist war deity (Mārīcī); Chesök was tied with good luck and fortune by Koryō Buddhists, Daoists and shamans; moreover, the shamans' possessions by Chesök are also well attested (see §§4-5).

We have seen before how it is not the first instance of a transference of prerogatives from the Sky father to his heroic son: this was the case with the mythical Genghis Khan too. In this case, the phenomenon helped us in our investigation: the distribution of patronages clearly reflects the Society and its History. In the Korean case, Chesök is influenced by Daoist and Confucian models, and so seems more of a quiet Chinese ruler, becoming a Buddhist martial deity only when needed; on the other hand, Qormusta is more of a Buddhist ruler, active in the heavens but not (always) directly in the human world. As the Earth is more a patronage of his sons Geser and Genghis Khan. Here is likely reflected a chieftainship society's structure rather than a Sinitic bureaucratic, centralized administration: like the *khan* has his companions and his generals, so Qormusta has his sons and court, and so Geser and Genghis Khan have their comrades and helper spirits / deities – this contrasting e.g. with the Korean creation narratives, where the Fire and the Thunder are the generals

subordinated to the king Chesök, or with the “scripture reading shaman” and their Daoist-derived “Heavenly bureaucracy” (see §§2.3.2 and 9).

We can now draw some preliminary conclusions and pen a summary:

- King Gesar of Ling (Ge-sar, Geser Khan) is a mythical figure of Tibetan and Mongolian religion, epic and folklore. He is portrayed like the ideal Buddhist king, perfect warrior, destroyer of demons. Minor son of either the king of gods (Gyajin / Qormusta / Indra), the supreme Sky Father (Tsangpa Karpo), a solar deity (Lhachen Odenkar) or directly a Buddha (Avalokiteśvara / Padmasambhava / Samantabhadra / Cakraśamvara / Hayagrīva), Gesar is sent to the Earth to fight the three demon-kings of Hor.
- It is possible to trace the evolution and strata of the mythical figure of Gesar, broadly:
 - The historical-legendary kernel, consisting of the tales about the wars conducted by Frum Kēsar (r. 737-745), king of the Kabuli ‘Turki-shāhi’ dynasty, against the Umayyad caliphate in Inner Asia, during eighth century – as reported by the *Khotanese Chronicles* (*Li-yul lung-bstan-pa*).
 - Appropriation of the figure, now legendary, by Lower Ladakhi and Lingsang Kingdom’s ruling clans (eleventh century?) via the Khotanese intermediation.
 - Appropriation of Gesar by Bon religion, identified with the deity Gekho (Ge-khod) and associated to the *bsang* offering rite by the thirteenth-seventeenth centuries.
 - Transformation into a Buddhist figure under the aegis of the Kagyu (bKa’-brGyud) school, active in Lingsang by the thirteenth-fourteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Then, elevation to imperial propaganda of the Pagmodru / Phagmodru Dynasty (Phag-mo-gru, 1354-1618). Finally, appropriation by the Nyingma (rNying-ma) school by end of the seventeenth century.

- Spread of Gesar epic in Mongolia between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, both by the epic and the *bsang* ritual. Gesar is also incorporated in local folklore and religion for his practical advantages (protections of travelling, herds etc.) and identified with other figures such as Pehar, Dayičin tngri and Kubera / Vaiśravaṇa (ġamasaran = lCam-sring). Among Buryats, the cosmic battle from the epic's prologue is translated as a war between Qormusta, father of Gesar, and the rebel deity Galta / Atai Ulaan.
- Official identification during the Manchu dominion over Mongolia between Geser khan and Guandi 關帝, deified form of the general Guan Yu 關羽 (d. 219 or 220) between eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Later, in the twentieth century, folk identification with Genghis Khan too.
- Gesar / Geser patronages are power over the evil spirits; protection of flocks and property, of health and long life; protection of warrior; safety in travels; good luck at hunting; protection of Buddhism; protection of the State. Many of these patronages are shared with Qormusta tngri and Genghis Khan, among Mongols and Buryats.
 - In the Mongolian context, as per their martial aspects, Geser and Genghis Khan seems more “active” deities than their father Qormusta tngri. On the other hand, the Medieval Chesōk (equivalent of Qormusta) was invoked in war; conversely, Tan'gun, Chumong and the other mythical kings, sons of Chesōk were more celebrated for the Statecraft and for being dynastic founders rather than for being conquerors.
 - This reflects the difference in Society, lifestyle and *ethos* between ancient Koreans and Mongols.
- Describing Gesar's mythical birth, all the epic's versions present a common, Central Asian *topos*: the hero is the son of the Sky Father, he is created / conceived by Sunlight and will rule over the entire Earth. A variant of this theme is the presence of a motif associated with atmospheric phenomena

and agriculture as a medium of the Heavenly god actions (a hailstone, a grain of rice, a vermillion fruit).

- This kind of narrative is shared by the Korean foundation myth of Chumong of Koguryŏ, and later by the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri*; the Jurchen-Manchu Qing dynasty's foundation myth of Fekulen; and by the origins' stories of the Daoist "divine general" Xuandi 玄帝 / Zhenwu 真武 (associated with the North).
- We can thus suppose that Chumong myth's idea of regality was likely influenced / derived from Inner Asian models. Similarly, the *Chesŏk-ponp'uri* seems having been influenced by neighboring myths' *topoi*.

11.2. *Excursus: The Old Boru / Borontai*

Beside the narratives we have seen, Qormusta tngri also appears in a type of folktales centered around the misfortune of a human called "The Gray One" Boru. As we will see, this story bears many resemblances to the punishment of Changja and other characters tied to Chesŏk: it is a story of a godly force who judge the human actions.

One of the first accounts was recently translated by Nosov Dmitrii (2017)²⁷⁵:

About Old Borontai (Mongolian version)

Once upon a time there lived an old man called Borontai. He had a good gray horse, a poor gray horse, [and] 10 gray sheep. Once, while the old man was riding his poor gray horse and shepherding his ten gray sheep, a dappled white sheep with a white muzzle gave birth to a snow-white lamb. The old man was happy and said, "I will sacrifice this lamb to my Khormusta-tengri." On his way back home, two ravens appeared that plucked out the lamb's eyes. The old man, seeing

²⁷⁵ Jila Namu (2006), 169; Nosov (2017), 113-8.

this, got enraged, mounted his good gray horse which could outrun birds, caught the ravens, plucked out their eyes, and let them go. The two ravens flew to Khormusta [and] complained about the man. Khormusta-tengri sent two wolves telling [them], “Feed on old Borontai's good gray horse which outruns birds”. The old man sensed the wolves coming to feed on his good gray horse and left his poor gray horse in the place where his good gray horse used to be kept, leaving his good gray horse outside. At night, the two wolves came and ate the poor gray horse. In the morning, the old man mounted his good gray horse, caught the two wolves and skinned [their] behinds. Then, after stitching the hides to their heads, he let them go. The two wolves went to Khormusta-tengri to tell [him about everything]. Khormusta-tengri, angered, sent seven devils with the order to dispatch old Borontai. Having learned about them coming, the old man locked the door of his yurt [and] began coiling dry horse *argal* [dried manure used as fuel] in a large caldron stirring it with a thorny stick of *caragana* [a species of leguminous plant]. When the seven devils came and began watching through [a hole in the wall] of his yurt, the old man hit [them] with the stick taking it out from the *argal* boiling [in the caldron]. Thus he pierced the eyes of the seven devils, so people say. When they reported back to Khormusta, too, he got even angrier and sent Tengri the Thunderer with orders to kill old Borontai with a lightning bolt. Old Borontai heard about that, saddled his good horse, took his coral sword and rode northwards. After Tengri the Thunderer turned into ashes everything on that gray hill, [the old man] immediately came back on his good gray horse and chopped Tengri the Thunderer's calf through to the bone for having completely burnt the gray hill, so people say. Tengri the Thunderer also reported everything to Khormusta. When the old man learned that Khormusta said, “I will go myself and see if this is true or not”. Then he his ten gray sheep, slaughtered his dappled white sheep with the white muzzle, spread a clean white carpet, cooked various best dishes, and prayed saying, “May you arrive, Khormusta-tengri, may you arrive”. Khormusta-tengri arrived and [asked], “Well, old man, why did you pluck out the eyes of my two ravens?” “Khormusta-tengri, after they pecked out the eyes of my gray lamb with a white muzzle that I

had intended to sacrifice to you, [I] felt insulted, so I plucked their eyes out”. “You had the right to do that”. “But why did you skin the two wolves alive?” [Khormusta-tengri] asked. “After they had fed upon my poor gray horse on which I shepherded my ten gray sheep, I got angry and took my revenge”, [old Borontai] said. “You had the right to do that, too”. “When they tried to kill me, but failed, having beheaded my wife and children, when they cut the wall of my yurt in which [I] was sitting, hiding my head, [I] was enraged and [thus] took my revenge”, he said. “Again, you had every right to do that”. “Why did you, then, chop through the calf of Tengri the Thunderer?” he asked. “That was my revenge,” [he] said, “for his having struck the gray hill on which my ten gray sheep grazed, when he had failed to kill me with his lightning”. “Old Borontai is not guilty of anything. May you be wealthy and have many children”. Having said this, he went away. The old man became rich, had many children, and lived happily ever after, [so] they say.

Old man Borolzoi who never existed (Irkutsk’s Balagan Buryat version) – M.N. M. N. Khangalov publication (1990)

Two ravens peck out old Khoredoy’s lamb’s eyes. He tears one eye from each of them and gives them to his lamb. The ravens complain to Esege-malan. Wolves kill a limping stallion, and the old man skins them. The wolves complain to Esege-malan. The old man pours boiling water over nine *shulmuses*. The *shulmuses* complain to Esege-malan. Esege-malan comes to old Khoredoy and asks him, why he tore out the ravens’ eyes, skinned the wolves, and burned the *shulmuses*. The old man explains the situation. Esege-malan, satisfied with the answers, leaves him in peace.

Nosov then summarizes the general structure of the story as follows:

In the first part, the hero keeps being attacked by enemies of increasing strength, but his abilities allow him to defeat them all. Later, the hero and Khormusta-tengri have a talk during which the hero consistently rejects all charges.

This folktale plot is surprisingly simple; therefore, it is easier to make a comparison between other similar, more elaborate narratives and this one rather than the other way around. As per the Korean case, likely the most similar stories are the narratives about Changja's punishment, and particularly the *Changja-p'uri*, the creation narratives and the *Seng-gut* / "Changja's Pond" (see §§9.3 and 10):

The human protagonist:

The old Boru / Borontai is a heroic figure with a comical turn: all his misfortunes are a series of tit-for-tat against unavoidable non-human forces (predators, spirits, atmospheric agents) and yet Boru stubbornly overcomes the dangers thanks to his wit. Even more, Boru always acts rightfully: no recrimination against the protagonist stands intact when he rejects at the presence of the highest judge Qormusta, king of the gods – contrasting this with the previous escalation of actions, it creates a comical effect.

Changja, on other hand, is associated with wickedness (lack of filial piety, disrespect for the gods, greediness), wickedness which is the cause of the mortal doom of the culprit and his attempt to avoid Death by ritual means. In fact, Changja stories are typically told during childbirth, illness and funeral rites – this confers to the stories a cathartic / explanatory role, not necessarily tragic nor comical.

The main difference here is clearly the presence of guilt: within the *Changja-p'uri* of Honam, Changja is condemned to death because of his impiety, in some version he even tries to deceive them, and it's only by the intervention of his daughter-in-law he is saved; similarly, within the creation myths, Changja is culprit of being either greedy or impious toward the deities, and he's punished by the gods ("divine generals") of Wind, Fire and Thunder. Only in few versions he manages to save himself; a near-identical dynamics is found within the *Seng-gut* / "Changja's Pond": because of his disrespect toward a deity, his house's pillars are eaten by worms, mushrooms grow in his rice bags and finally the house is transformed into a pond.

The only exception to this element is the *Changja-p'uri* in the Hamhŭng and Cheju version: in the Hamhŭng version, Changja is not responsible for anything in particular, as the bones he discovered in a field are a bad omen, independent from

any guilt (though some versions add that the excessive bones worship angered the gods, who felt neglected), and similarly, here Changja successfully deceives the Death most of the times. Therefore, this story draws a scenery where Death is unavoidable but with extreme intelligence, exactly like predators, spirits and thunders are unavoidable but for the wise, old Boru. This parallel is even clearer in Cheju, where the protagonists of the story are the old parents of Changja.

If we read both narratives as a battle within wit and inhuman forces, as narratives on how humans can (or tragically cannot) overcome Fate, the commonality between Boru and Changja becomes clear.

The god-judge:

Both Qormusta with Boru and the Korean gods with Changja acts impartially: Qormusta is the judge who oversees a dispute as the final sentence; the Korean gods either present a formal complaint to Yama, king of the Underworld (*Changja-p'uri*) or are shown no respect by the man if not directly deceived (*Changja-p'uri*, *Seng-gut*, *Ch'ŏnjiwang-bonp'uri*). It is interesting to notice how in the Cheju creation narratives and likely the *Seng-gut* too, the supreme judge of Changja is the supreme Sky Father, i.e. Chesŏk, the equivalent of the Mongolian Qormusta – even more that in the Buryat version the supreme deity is Esege Malan, the creator god. Maybe we can see in this a reflection of the common Buddhist idea of Śakra as a judge of human action (see §§5.4.4 and 9.1).

There are also some clear parallels within the Boru and Changja respective misfortune. In fact, their means of subsistence are targets of attacks for both cases: Boru was deprived of a horse, the family and the hill where his ten sheep grazed; while Changja is deprived of rice supplies (*Seng-gut*), his entire family and clan (*Ch'ŏnjiwang-bonp'uri*, *Seng-gut*, *Igong-bonp'uri*) and his house (*Ch'ŏnjiwang-bonp'uri*, *Seng-gut*). Clearly, the difference of possessions reflects a difference of lifestyles: Boru reflects a nomadic pastoral society, Changja a sedentary agricultural one.

There are both similarities and differences between the Changja tales and this of Boru. In fact, while Changja is annihilated by the “divine generals” of Wind, Fire and Thunder within the *Ch’ŏnjiwang-bonp’uri*, Boru is similarly put in danger by “Tengri the Thunderer” (Huhedei Mergen tngri). What Chesök / the Jade Emperor lacks and Qormusta has are animals seen as the deity envoy, his totem. In this specific case, crows and wolves, faithful agents of the Mongolian king of the gods²⁷⁶. Finally, an absolute difference is how Chesök and Qormusta are seen in relation with the wicked spirits: Chesök cannot be directly associated with evil spirits, as the Korean deities have clearly an exorcistic functions, especially against illness (see §§2,3 and 5.4) and the only exception is Sonnim, which *prevents* smallpox by incarnating it (see the §§9.3 and 10.3); Qormusta seems on the other hand having an authority of sort over the *shulmus* who killed Boru’s family. Curiously, both Boru and Changja seem able to deal with spirits.

The misfortunes of both protagonists reflect the respective dangers of their lifestyles: for the ancient Mongols, predators praying on their herds, fire on their pasture field and “demons” killing their relatives (illness? Wars? Disasters?) are clearly the main worries; for ancient Koreans, fires, winds, floods, mold, clan infights and illnesses were more compelling. In both cases, the dangers were clearly seen as deities’ actions.

The restoration process was also seen differently: as for Changja, the way of forgiveness passes either by rituals (*Changja-p’uri*) or by redistribution of wealth (*Changja-p’uri*, *Ch’ŏnjiwang-bonp’uri*). Moreover, the ritual action is often ascribed to a female figure, while the shamanic role of Changja is relatively minor (*Changja-p’uri*, *Sonnim-gut*, *Seng-gut*); Boru on the contrary acts directly, punishing animals, spirits and gods. His way of acting is justified even for Qormusta, who finally approves his feud. This difference, again, reflects a different environment, less forgiving, and a different *ethos*, according to which even deities cannot escape the feuding usually reserved to humans, if their actions are unjust.

²⁷⁶ Jila (2006). One could even extend the comparison including the eagles “dogs of Zeus” from the Greek mythology (e.g. as in Aeschylus *Prometheus Bound*).

We can now draw some preliminary conclusions and pen a summary:

- In Mongolia and Buryatia there are a series of folktale centered around the “old, gray” Boru / Borontai “who never existed”. In these stories, the hero is attacked by increasingly stronger forces (crows, wolves, evil spirits, the Thunder god), which he defeats them all. All these forces asked permission for their actions to Qormusta tngri, king of the gods, who, in the second part of the story, present himself directly in front of Boru / Borontai. The man explains how all his actions were justified, and Qormusta tngri leaves the hero in peace.
- The story of Boru / Borontai can be compared to the various tales of Changja from the Korean mythology – the main parallels are the *Changja-p’uri*, the *Seng-gut*, and the *Ch’ŏnjiwang-bonp’uri*:
 - Both Changja and Boru battle with non-human forces who put them in danger. The main difference is that Changja is responsible for his faith by his own actions.
 - Both in Korean and Mongolian cases, the hero must face natural forces signifying the natural dangers for a nomadic pastoral a sedentary agricultural lifestyle respectively. In both cases, the Sky Father figure is usually involved.
 - The resolution is also a reflection of their different *ethos*: for Changja, a way to mend ties with Chesök / Yama is offering rituals or giving up his wealth; Boru can deal with both crows and wolves (agents of Qormusta) and evil spirits with wit, taking a just revenge.

12 Conclusions

At the outset of this study, we asked how Śakra devānām Indra – the Vedic king of the gods and slayer of Vṛtra – could become, in Korea, three youthful deities presiding over childbirth (Chesōk 帝釋), protagonists of narratives centered on an enigmatic monk, an unfortunate mother, and her divine sons. We have also asked what the relationship is between the modern and the ancient Chesōk, and by extension the position of Chesōk within Korean pantheon. By the end of this enquiry, it is possible to sketch a genealogy of this deity (or, more accurately, of these deities), without any pretense of exhaustiveness.

As for the first question, we have seen how the modern Chesōk myth appears to derive, in important respects, from the ancient Tan’gun and Chumong foundation myths, the so-called Northern foundation narratives. The Chumong myth was adopted and reshaped by ruling clans within Puyō and Koguryō and then subsequently taken up by Unified Silla. Under Koryō, the Tan’gun myth was elevated into a national narrative intended to unite the kingdom’s subjects: the Sky deity was conceived as a near equivalent both to the Confucian concept of “Heaven” Tian 天 and to the Buddhist Śakra (Indra), thereby serving the aims of imperial ideology and state propaganda. In the Koryō kingdom, Chesōk was intended in various way depending on the religious affiliation and social stratum, all these different versions of the same deities contributed to shape the characteristics of the modern days’ Chesōk.

As for the second question, we have seen how the contemporary Chesōk is a “production deity” whose patronage encompasses fecundity, childbearing and childbirth, children’s wellbeing, family health, agriculture and husbandry, longevity, good fortune, and destiny. This cult is embedded in household and ancestral practices. On Cheju, the “Three Chesōk” are also held to be the first shamans. All these derivative characteristics started as development of the deity’s “patronages” from Koryō period on, such as its association with Ch’ilsōng and

Yöngdüng. The development of other characteristics, such as the relationship with Igong can only be deduced by the myth-ritual structure of both cults other, scattered evidence.

As for the relationship with other deities within the Korean pantheon, the answer is multifaceted:

The relationship between Chesök and Ch'ilsöng is particularly intimate. They are often co-worshipped due to shared concern with destiny and spatial proximity; indeed, the Chesök “inner chamber” may originally have been dedicated to Ch'ilsöng. In many regions the two are conflated, and earlier materials suggest a functional differentiation: Ch'ilsöng assigns destiny, whereas Chesök confers blessings.

A comparable relationship obtains with Yöngdüng, whose patronage overlaps substantially with Chesök and who is likewise conceived as a triad of deities associated with weather and wealth. Yöngdüng differs, however, in being more overtly a “traveller deity”. Where Yöngdüng and Chesök coexist (Chölla, Chindo, Cheju), a division of labor is often articulated: Yöngdüng brings prosperity to the sea, and Chesök to the household; both may be framed as ancestral deities. In Cheju, the Yöngdüng faith seems more archaic.

In some versions, the *Chesök-ponp'uri* is embedded within native creation narratives. This insertion likely reflects an older Life-Death rivalry theme within Korean creation mythology, while the optional inclusion of Changja's punishment within the narrative further intensifies the rivalry theme. Both in the ancient and in the modern versions, a variation within the creation narratives can highlight or obscure the childbirth-oriented ritual role of the *Chesök-ponp'uri*.

We finally took into analysis the relationship between Chesök, Hallakkung'i / Igong and Qormusta tngri, both taken as limit-cases:

Igong is an Otherworldly figure associated with death and destiny. It is plausible that Chesök and Hallakkung'i / Igong once formed part of a triadic configuration of deities presiding over Life, Death, and Destiny. In fact, Chesök and Igong are

connected through shared mytheme and practices, and it is well possible that the Igong origins' story was influenced by and modelled on the *Chesök-ponp'uri* model by proximity.

Qormusta tngri is the king of the gods within the Mongol and Buryat pantheon, loosely based on the Indo-Buddhist Śakra. Qormusta shares many patronages with the Koryŏ period's Chesök: regality, war, protection etc. The configuration of these patronages is, however, dependent on the respective societies: Qormusta role is more tied to the nomadic warrior ethos, while Chesök reflects more the sedentary agrarian society's worries. Two myths related to Qormusta, the Geser khan epic and the Old Boru tale, also highlight two important elements: the lateral, yet present Central Asian influence within the Chumong myth, and the different approach with the gods among Korean and Mongolian people.

Throughout this study, we used the methods outlined by Marcelle Detienne, adapted to the Korean case: outlining the local specificities, we used the apparent differences to mark the similarities and vice versa we searched for the differences among the apparent similarities.

We have not assumed that there was ever a single, unified Chesök. Rather, we have analyzed the deity's mythic structure and its historical predecessors in relation to a broader constellation of gods, practices, and beliefs. Boundaries between related deities are rarely fixed; attending to this network has made it possible to identify less obvious characteristics and relationships.

In any case, the central conclusion remains that Chesök cannot be treated as a singular entity. It exists only within a dense network of deities, rites, and shared historical inheritances – above all those shaped in the Koryŏ period – further forged through regional interaction among shamans over time.

From a theoretical perspective, the case of Chesök demonstrates that Korean religious traditions are best understood not through the lens of discrete deities or linear transmission, but as relational constellations shaped by ritual practice,

political history, and cosmological negotiation. Chesŏk is neither a simple survival of the Buddhist Śakra nor a purely indigenous Sky god, but the product of a long process of reinterpretation in which imperial ideology, Buddhist soteriology, Daoist cosmology, and shamanic ritual logic intersect without fully stabilizing into a single theological form. What emerges instead is a deity defined by function rather than essence, whose identity shifts according to ritual context – court or village, birth or death, prosperity or judgement – while retaining a recognizable structural core. This functional plasticity, far from indicating doctrinal incoherence, constitutes the very mechanism through which Chesŏk could mediate between Life, Death, and Destiny across centuries of political and religious change. More broadly, the Chesŏk complex illustrates how Korean shamanism operates as a historically grounded yet adaptive system, capable of absorbing external religious forms while preserving its own cosmological priorities. In this sense, Chesŏk is not an anomaly but a paradigmatic case of how ritual traditions endure: not by resisting change, but by transforming it into structure.

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