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Monks' Militia and the Spread of the Buddhist *Yŏnghŏm* (Wonder) during the Japanese Invasion in the Sixteenth Century

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Abstract: This paper explores the influence and significance of the activities of the monks' militia during the Japanese invasion of Chosŏn, from the perspective of the religious efficacy of Buddhism and the spread of the Buddhist concept of wonder. After examining the concept that the monks' militia played an important part in the war, fighting against enemies in major battles and constructing and defending fortresses, this paper proposes that the religious efficacy of Buddhism was revealed through the performance of burial and guiding ceremonies. Restoring the religious wonder of Buddhism, which had been criticized by the Confucian literati, Buddhist rituals for consoling the bereaved and praying for the welfare of the dead came to thrive. A dilemma existed between the principle of keeping the Buddhist precepts and the reality of fulfilling the demands of loyalty since the activities of the monks' militia greatly damaged the Buddhist community. While killing was a direct infringement of the values of the sangha, the monks violated this precept in the cause of protecting the state and practicing loyalty. In this situation, where there was such a dilemma between the Buddhist and secular worlds, these monks' prioritization of loyalty not only indicated the desperate national situation of the time but also reflected the social, cultural, and political context of the Confucian society of Chosŏn. This paper also explores how renowned generals of the monks' militia, including Samyŏng Yujŏng, emerged as heroes among the people, and memories of their deeds were transmitted through wonder stories. Yujŏng was highly praised as a symbol of Buddhist loyalty, and his heroic story was expanded and reproduced among the population through folk tales and novels. While the intellectuals of Chosŏn who followed Confucian values did not believe those wonder stories, the trauma that the war left behind demanded the appearance of wondrous heroes who helped people overcome that trauma, and this demand enabled Yujŏng to emerge as one of these heroic figures. The activities of the monks' militia, the religious efficacy of Buddhism, and the creation of the heroic narratives of the monks' militia generals prove that Buddhism had a firm foundation in late Chosŏn society.

Keywords: monks' militia; Japanese invasion in the sixteenth century; religious efficacy; Buddhist wonder; Buddhist loyalty; Samyŏng Yujŏng



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1. Introduction

In 1592, 200 years after Chosŏn was founded in 1392, Japan invaded Chosŏn. This was the so-called "Imjin waeran" 壬辰倭亂, which lasted for the following seven years until 1598. The Ming dynasty sent its army from China to help Chosŏn, since Japan allegedly planned to attack the Ming eventually. As such, the Japanese invasion was a war that involved the three East Asian countries of China, Japan, and Korea, and it caused a huge upheaval in the region. In China, there was a dynastic transition from Ming to Qing and, in Japan, the Tokugawa shogunate was founded at this time (Chŏng 2007).

In this national crisis that could have ended Chosŏn, monks throughout the Korean peninsula devoted themselves to saving the country. The monks' militia of about 5000 men played crucial roles in the military, participating directly in the battlefield, or defending fortresses. Since the monks' militia fulfilled the requirements of loyalty, it is also called the "righteous monks' militia" (*ŭisŭnggun* 義僧).¹ It was rare for monks to voluntarily organize

a militia and participate in war, not for their temple but for their country, in the history of Buddhism in East Asia, let alone in Korea. Thus, the monks' militia and monk-generals during the Japanese invasion have become the main subjects of research since the twentieth century, also attracting scholarly attention in relation to the state protection of Buddhism.²

While previous scholarship focuses largely on the activities of the monks' militia in the Japanese invasion and its historical meaning, this paper adopts an approach from the perspective of "the religious efficacy of Buddhism and the spread of wonder stories". It first gives a brief summary of the role of the monks' militia during the invasion and examines how guiding rituals for the dead (*ch'ōndo* 薦度) emphasize the religious efficacy of Buddhism. Since the participation of the monks' militia in the war directly violated the Buddhist precept of not killing others, there was an awareness at the time about the conflict between violence in the war and Buddhist teachings, as well as about the dilemma between loyalty to one's country and Buddhist precepts. Nonetheless, with the activities of the monks' militia, such renowned monk-generals as Samyōng Yujōng 四溟惟政 (1544–1610) emerged as heroes, and the stories about these monk-generals were transmitted among the people. Investigating not only the religious efficacy of Buddhism during the war but also the creation and spread of wonder stories, this paper argues that the foundations of Buddhism were more firmly laid down and even expanded following the activities of the monks' militia.³

2. The Monks' Militia: Saving a Country in Crisis

In April 1592 (the 25th year of King Sōnjo), Japan invaded Chosōn, under the pretense of "borrowing the road to Ming China" (*chōngmyōng kado* 征明假道). As the Chosōn army was defeated in Ch'ungju, Ch'ungch'ōng province, King Sōnjo 宣祖 (r. 1567–1608) fled northward, traveling through P'yōngyang to Ŭiju, a city near the border with China. At the request of the king, the Ming emperor sent soldiers, but it was the navy, led by Admiral Yi Sunsin 李舜臣 (1545–1598), along with the righteous army that drew off the force of the Japanese invaders in the war (M. Yi 2004; Changhŭi Yi 2007).

The monks' militia that rose up in various parts of the country also played a vital role in saving the country. In July 1592, King Sōnjo appointed Ch'ōnghō Hyujōng 清虛休靜 (1520–1604) in Mt. Myohyang, P'yōngan province, as the Sōn Kyo toch'ongsōp 禪教都摠攝, the supreme leader of the Chosōn Buddhist community.⁴ When the Son and Kyo schools were re-established during the reign of King Myōngjong (r. 1545–1567), Hyujōng passed the monastic exam and served as the highest-positioned *p'ansa* 判事 (Takahashi 1929, p. 374). He was wrongly accused and put in prison at the time of the treason of Chōng Yōrip 鄭汝立 (1546–1589) in 1589. Believing in Hyujōng's innocence because of his writings, King Sōnjo released him, granting him a royal poem and a royal painting.⁵ Hyujōng reportedly told the king, "I told old monks, who could not fight, to pray for the country and mobilized other monks to organize the monks' militia. How can we fear death as we receive the king's care and favor? We will give our lives to fulfill our loyalty".⁶

Sending out encouragement letters to temples throughout the peninsula, Hyujōng raised a militia of about 5000 monks. Many monks joined his cause, especially Hyujōng's disciples, including Ŭiōm 義嚴 in the Hwanghae province, Samyōng Yujōng 四溟惟政 (1544–1610) in the Kangwōn province, and Noemuk Ch'ōyōng 雷默處英 in the Chōlla province.⁷ In August, 800 monks, led by Kihō Yōnggyu 騎虛靈奎 of the Ch'ungch'ōng province, along with the scholar-official Cho Hōn 趙憲 (1544–1592) and his 700 righteous army soldiers, took back Ch'ōngju Castle from the Japanese army. Yōnggyu allegedly mobilized his monks by saying, "We are standing up for the country even though there was no court order. Do not join us if you fear death!"⁸ The joint militia of the monks and secular people of Yōnggyu and Cho Hōn all died in the battle in Kūmsan 金山, but it was through this fight that the loyalty and valor of the monks' militia began to be known among the Chosōn people (Y. Kim 2012, pp. 229–56).

In December 1592, 50,000 soldiers of the Ming army came to Korea and, in January of the following year, the Chosōn and Ming joint force took back control of P'yōngyang

Castle. In February of the same year, Kwon Yul's 權慄 (1537–1599) army won the battle for the fortress of Mt. Haengju and laid the basis for retaking the capital. Finally, in April of the year after the beginning of the Japanese invasion, Chosŏn took the city back and ousted the Japanese army toward the south.⁹ In this conflict, the monks' militia directly participated in some battles, for example, in battles in P'yŏngyang Castle and the fortress of Mt. Haengju. Hyujŏng's militia of 100 monks also guarded the king on his journey back to the capital in October 1593.¹⁰ In addition, the monks' militia transported military rice or reconstructed and defended mountain fortresses in southern parts of the peninsula. The militia also moved important national records, including a copy of the *Chosŏn wangjo sillok* (Veritable Records of the Chosŏn Dynasty 朝鮮王朝實錄) in Chŏnju that had escaped damage during the war, to a temple in Mt. Myohyang, P'yŏngan province.¹¹

I will now introduce some examples of the monks' militia battles. In Hwaŏmsa, Kurye, Chŏlla province, the abbot Sŏrhong 雪弘 died in battle alongside his 300 monks against the Japanese army. Afterward, Hwaŏmsa was burned to ashes, along with its main hall Changnyukchŏn 丈六殿 and the stone version of the *Hwaŏmgyŏng* 華嚴石經 (T. Kim 1993, p. 63). The monk-general Sinnyŏl 信悅, who defended Chinju Castle in the Kyŏngsang province, also joined Kwak Chae'u's (1552–1617) 郭再祐 righteous army in the battle of Kŏje. Sinnyŏl mobilized his monks to plant barley for military provisions and to make weapons. He also taught them how to shoot rifles and cannons.¹² The monks' militia also contributed to the sea battles, joining Yi Sunsin's navy. Around September 1592, 400 monks were assigned to the left headquarters of the Chŏlla navy. They distinguished themselves in battle, playing important roles such as stormtroopers (T. Kim 1993, pp. 293–330).

The supreme leader of the monks' militia in the war was called P'alto toch'ongsŏp (Supreme Commander (of the Monks' Militia) in the Eight Provinces). Immediately after war broke out, Ch'ŏnghŏ Hyujŏng served in this position. In the following year, after Chosŏn retook the capital, he stepped down due to old age, and his disciple Samyŏng Yujŏng became toch'ongsŏp. Just like his master, Yujŏng also passed the monastic exam that had been enforced during the reign of King Myŏngjong. A person acting as toch'ongsŏp was to assess and report on the military merit of the monks and grant the Sŏn'gwach'ŏp 禪科帖, a document given in reward for a monk's military service. In each province, there were monk-generals of Sŏn and Kyo who were appointed by Pibyŏnsa 備邊司, the Border Defense Council of the country.¹³ Most of the monk-generals came from Hyujŏng's lineage.

3. The Religious Efficacy of Buddhism That Shone during the War

During the Japanese invasion, the religious efficacy of Buddhism was recognized, just as its religious role was emphasized (Nam 2004). The essence of its religious role lay in dealing with death by proper burial and by performing a guiding ritual for the dead. To give an example of monks being mobilized for the burial of the dead during the war, on 1 October 1593, King Sŏnjo ordered the monks to bury the dead in and near the capital as soon as he came back to the city:¹⁴

Although dead bodies are piled in and near Hansŏng, I heard that officials cannot bury them. This is probably because of the lack of labor force. Usually, there were monks whose job was burying the dead. Now, while dead bodies are exposed to dews, there is no one who recover and bury them. How pitiful they are! As there are not enough people who can bury dead bodies in this disruption of the war, if monks are mobilized, they can bury all these bodies in and near the city. Discuss at Pibyŏnsa about whether Sŏn'gwa 禪科 (monks' work certificate) or Toch'ŏp 度帖 (monks' certificate) will be given to those who carry out this service.

The Chosŏn government, which had few available resources, assigned monks to the work of burying the dead during the war. Not only that, the rituals to pray for the otherworldly welfare of those who did not have surviving family or friends were also performed by monks. This meant that the Buddhist community, on behalf of the government, served those who were unable to have a proper burial and funeral in accordance with the Con-

fucian standard. Such a situation can be seen in the following writings of Puhyu Sönsu 浮休善修 (1543–1615), the founding patriarch of the Puhyu monastic lineage.¹⁵

At the moment that the mind to distinguish me and the other arises, the horror of hurting and killing takes place. People treat each other with resentment, and as the war continues, they retaliate against each other with their lives. Borrowing the Buddha's power, we rely on his help. Please settle an account with your majestic power. As the enemy, in high spirits, entered the capital right away, the king left the refuge, people suffered distress, dead bodies filled every pit, and blood was all over the city. Even those who avoided this horror of war faced hunger and death, and dead bodies, therefore, covered the field. Such horrendous sights hurt my mind. As spiritual souls and bodily souls are pent up, heaven becomes dark. As ghosts are coagulated, clouds become dark. Heaven feels pitiful for these innocent people. The royal order was issued to mountain temples to recover their remains, bury them in the field, and perform funerals toward stars to guide them in their postmortem fates. Shedding tears, we carry out the royal order, recovering remains and performing rituals to save those vengeful spirits. I wish that the war ends forever and the fate of the country is good. I pray that the spirits of the dead during the war resolve their deep sorrow and escape transmigration, as well as all suffering beings will be relieved with the Buddha's grace.

We can see from the records that *suryukchae* (water-land ritual 水陸齋) were performed to appease vengeful spirits. For example, as in the writings of Chönggwan Ilsön 靜觀一禪 (1533–1608), Hyujöng's disciple, "As the fortune of the world declines, people act out of principle. As the fate of the country is unfortunate, thieves over the sea invaded, and many people were killed by the enemies. As an epidemic spreads, dead bodies fill ditches and valleys. The spirits of those who died from hunger and cold wander around. Dead bodies are all over the streets and piled remains become hills. The vengeful spirits with nowhere to rely on and plea could not have met an opportunity to escape without the compassion of the Three Jewels (the three objects of veneration in Buddhism, i.e., the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha) and its power. I pray that the spirits of the dead who died unexpectedly young or away from their hometown reach the shore of enlightenment out of the wheel of suffering". Here, Chönggwan clearly declared the purpose of the *suryuk* ritual to be saving the vengeful spirits of those who died during the war.¹⁶

While the devastation caused by the long war lingered, religious activities to pray for the spirits of the dead through Buddhism continued. To give one such case from the *Veritable Records*, in 1606, eight years after the war ended, there was a large-scale *suryuk* ritual right outside of the northwestern gate of the city, where monks and lay followers joined together after the road was repaired. Many *suryuk* rituals of this time were sponsored by the royal family, and it is said that when there was a *suryuk* ritual, the markets in the capital closed, and the streets filled with people who wanted to watch the ritual.¹⁷ Many men became lay practitioners and many women, calling themselves "sadang" 社堂, walked the streets across the country wearing Buddhist robes. Even in the capital, quite a few people treated monks well, made offerings to the Buddha, and sponsored a Buddhist ritual. There were even scholar-officials who worshiped the Buddha. The *Veritable Records*, as expected, was critical of the situation.¹⁸

Buddhism was useful for the king and royal family in terms of its religious function. During the invasion, King Sönjo fled the capital and went as far as Ŭijju, P'yöngan province, which was near the border with China. This worsened public sentiment and, as a result, weakened royal authority. Samyöng Yujöng, who used to serve as the supreme leader of the Buddhist community as well as acting as a militia general, wrote the following postscript to the *Hwaömgjöng* that he published to commemorate the late King Sönjo and pray for the Buddhist wonder.¹⁹

King Sönjo realized the true wisdom that the mind is nothing but the Buddha and attained the right state of the unsurpassed and the unconditioned. Being born in many countries in accord with conditions, he will save not only good people but also people who hold resentment. Receiving as many lifetimes as he wishes, he will save humanly and heavenly beings.....Through this *Hwaömgjong*, the wondrous response of gods can be seen.....Since their power and merits help the country secretly, you will believe that the countless worlds will gain pleasure and benefits. The disasters will cease on their own and disappear, and all people will enjoy the pleasure of a peaceful time.

Praying for the end of the war, for peace, and the welfare of the country, as well as the longevity and other-worldly welfare of the king, through the religious efficacy of Buddhism became generalized. This practice contributed to the elevation of royal authority. During the late Chosön period, in many large temples, vowing tablets were enshrined in dharma halls to wish for the health and longevity of the king, queen, and crown prince.²⁰ These were symbols that ensured that the religious efficacy of Buddhism for the king and royal family was recognized.

After the end of the war, stabilizing public welfare and boosting the economy was one of the most important tasks for the government. The Buddhist community also helped with this task, actively participating in many restoration projects, such as rebuilding bridges, roads, and palaces. Furthermore, temples that had been destroyed began to be reconstructed, which was possible because the economic basis for temples was reestablished thanks to the increase in religious interest in Buddhism.

Further examples show the combination of the activities of the monks' militia, the wonders of Buddhism, and the religious work of temples. When the war reached its peak, Chaun Ch'ogwan 慈雲處寬, from the temple of Hwaömsa 華嚴寺, mobilized 300 monks at Hüngguksa 興國寺, Yösu, Chölla province, in 1593. They joined Yi Sunsin's remaining navy from Chölla province and participated in several battles themselves. After the war, recognizing Chaun's merits, King Sönjo gifted 600 *sök* of rice, which he used to perform a *suryuk* ritual for the war dead in Noryang 露梁, where Yi had died during the sea battle. Chaun also led the reconstruction projects for the temples of Hwaömsa and Hüngguksa.²¹ Another example is Kiam Pöpkyön 奇巖法堅 (1552–1634), Hyujöng's disciple. He rebuilt the main hall of Yujömsa 楡岾寺 on Mt. Kümgang and left the following writings, through which we can see that the religious hope for a Buddhist wonder was often expressed during the reconstruction of a temple after the war:²²

The heavenly mandate of Chosön has been renewed, just like Zhou 周, and the dignity of Chosön has also been restored, just like Han 漢. Everywhere in Chosön has become peaceful. As we are now having a golden opportunity that may not come even once in a thousand years, we will definitely reconstruct this large temple on this famous mountain. Queen pays attention to the Buddhist way with unwavering admiration, having merit field in her mind. Realizing the intent of royal ancestors visiting the temple themselves, she has an unending mind of respect. After the temple was burned, she made a special order to reconstruct it. A huge building has been built. Since it is said that such a work brought wonder in the past, how can it not do so now? Fortune will gather, and spirits will give their help. Who worries that disasters will come?

4. Dilemma between Precepts and Loyalty and Later Assessment

The activities of the monks' militia to save the country during the war that would decide the fate of the country changed social perceptions of Buddhism, resulting in a more favorable view. The Buddhist community also took pride in saving the world and consoling people.²³ Now, with its loyal merits, it could argue for a better status and better treatment in society.

Ch'öngmae Ino 青梅印悟(1548–1623) spoke highly of Samyöng Yujöng, his fellow student of the master Hyujöng, who had led the monks' militia as the supreme leader and

succeeding the master, saying: “Yujöng lamented that the blood smell and smoke appeared everywhere and people died. He felt heartbroken about the country turning to the bloody land. Without being able to see this situation anymore, he took off his Buddhist robe and relied on a sword to pay the debt to the country . . . Yujöng loving sentient beings with benevolence was like a Confucian scholar saving the country with ingenious strategies. Fulfilling loyalty to the king, he did not fall short of a loyal official who pacified the country”.²⁴

There were also negative aspects to the monks’ activities during the war, including their direct participation in the battle. The war, which lasted for seven years, inflicted huge personnel losses and material damage on temples and monks throughout the Korean peninsula. First, there was a significant loss in the monk population as many died in the battle or returned to secular life.²⁵ There was also a huge financial burden because too many monks were mobilized and temples were required to pay military provisions.²⁶ Most of all, the arson and plundering inflicted by the Japanese army, as well as the desolation of rice fields, brought about the loss of temple buildings and other assets, which eventually weakened the economic basis of the Buddhist community. Ch’öngmae Ino spoke of this difficult situation in another of his writings: “The misery of the war grows worse by the day and the labor duty becomes heavier by the year. The Buddhist community gets divided, and there is no pleasure in it. The pain and suffering cannot be said enough”.²⁷

There were many voices that expressed concern about the situation, saying that the monks’ activities during the war deviated from the traditional monastic norm as monks could not focus on their Buddhist training. One of Hyujöng’s disciples, Chönggwan Ilsön, warned, “What is really sad is that monks wear secular clothes, become soldiers, and get killed by enemies or flee to the secular world, being pushed here and there. Their secular habits reappear, and their intent to become monks is totally forgotten. They violate the Buddhist precepts for good and go forward for empty fame without turning back. The Sön practice will stop in the near future”.²⁸ Here, he bemoaned that although monks intended to save the country, they violated Buddhist precepts and went against their duty as monks, aggravating the overall situation regarding Buddhist training.

The activities of the monks’ militia that fulfilled the duty of loyalty elevated the social perception and status of Buddhism. From the beginning of Chosön, Confucian scholars criticized the monks for violating the ethics of filial piety and loyalty by abandoning their parents to enter the sangha and avoiding the state duties for the king and country. However, in the desperately dangerous national crisis caused by the Japanese invasion, monks outside the secular world stood up for their country and rendered distinguished military service equal to that of Confucian scholars and students. These contributions by monks were highly praised at the time of the war (Y. Kim 2016, pp. 87–119).

Although there was a dilemma that the activities of the monks’ militia violated Buddhist precepts, they were also recognized later on. The renowned Confucian scholar-official, Chang Yu 張維 (1587–1638), wrote an epitaph for Hyujöng, “[The master], in his later years, was unfettered without being bound by [the precepts]. Those who only looked at the appearance suspected that his action was against the precepts, while those with wisdom did not think of it as a sickness”.²⁹ Here, Chang emphasized Confucian principles, fulfilled by monks, over Buddhist values.

In the postscript to the *Punch’ungso nannok* (Record of Disturbance Written with Impetuous Loyalty 奮忠紓難錄) of 1739, which shows the Confucian literati’s attitude toward Samyöng Yujöng, there is a statement that says, “It is said that there are two schools in Buddhism. Some of those who focus on Sön claim that Master Samyöng was not pure in his approach to Buddhism and thus caused controversies. . . . That is because he was close to the Confucian way. If not, why are people in the Buddhist community and the royal court holding a ritual for the master?”³⁰ Here, it says that although monks participating in the war and violating the precepts might be controversial figures in the Buddhist community, their practices are honorable, as seen from the perspective of Confucian scholars.

Ŏ Yugu 魚有龜 (1675–1740) said, in his preface to the *Punch'ungso nannok*, “The master Samyöng raised a righteous army in response to the national crisis of the Japanese invasion with all his heart. His loyalty and valor stand with those of renowned righteous army generals. The state cordially rewarded him for his achievements”.³¹ Song Inmyöng 宋寅明 (1689–1746), who had served as the second vice-premier (*uŭijöng*), also praised Samyöng in his postscript to the same text, “How could he make people admire and respect him this much? Is what he had learned not betraying the king and parents and renouncing the moral codes that the Confucian school has criticized? He raised a righteous army and fulfilled his loyalty while facing the swords in a dangerous war. He was loyal to the king and devoted to morality. We can see that the true mind and true nature that Buddhism talks about lie right here”.³²

The shrine for holding a ritual for Samyöng Yujöng was constructed in 1714 in Miryang 密陽, after the Confucian literati of the region submitted a petition (Chang 2000; Ch'örhön Yi 2019). In 1721, P'yoch'ungsa 表忠祠 was built, wherein the state-funded ritual was performed in spring and fall. In 1738, it became a state-affiliated shrine, for which the king granted a hanging board (Chongsu Yi 2018; Cho 2000, pp. 507–25). Afterward, in 1789, P'yochungsa was built for his master, Ch'önghö Hyujöng, in Haenam. In 1794, Such'ungsa 酬忠祠 was built in Mt. Myohyang, where there was an official ceremony. As such, the state-level commemoration of the monks' loyalty continued.

King Chöngjo 正祖 (r. 1776–1800) praised Hyujöng's act of saving the country as an act of compassion, saying the following: “Buddhism puts the utmost importance on saving sentient beings. Moral precepts, meditation, and wisdom are, in the end, nothing but compassion. So, there is no teaching higher than compassion. Master Hyujöng first set up the flag of the dharma and became the eyes of human beings and heaven. [King Sönjo] granted his favor and gave special treatment to him. Realizing the intent of our school, he also relieved the national crisis and performed meritorious deeds, raising a righteous army for the king. He ended the bloody war with his own hands and saved the world with his expedient means, which people have relied on thus far. Finally, as his life ended, he became a teacher of the higher vehicle and reached the other shore. He saved the endless world and granted his compassion to the secular realm”.³³

5. The Heroization of the Monks' Militia Generals and the Transmission of Wonder Stories

High praise for the monks' militia generals during the Japanese invasion was not just proffered by the Confucian literati. The heroic aspect of the militia generals was emphasized in *yadam* (folk stories) and novels that were popular among the people, in the form of folk narratives. In particular, Samyöng Yujöng, who not only participated in battles along with his militia but also conducted post-war negotiations, emerged as an unparalleled hero among the people (Y. Kim 2018, pp. 299–321). Yujöng indeed displayed heroic actions during the invasion, and some of the examples were widely known, which served as a foundation for the creation of his wonder story.

When Yujöng passed away, Hö Kyun 許筠 (1569–1618) wrote an epitaph for him in 1612, describing an episode that had actually happened during the invasion: “When Japanese invaders came to Yujömsa 楡岾寺, Mt. Kümang, in 1592, they saw the master's extraordinariness. Their general paid respect to the master and released the monks they tied in hand. Declaring that the Buddha had appeared in the world to save sentient beings and fearing that Japanese invaders would recklessly kill people, the master went directly to the enemy camp to keep the teachings of compassion. The three enemy commanders paid respect to the master and the master admonished them not to enjoy killing”. Hö Kyun then described another episode, known as “a jewel in Chosön”, regarding Katō Kiyomasa 加藤清正 (1562–1611), one of the Japanese generals:³⁴

[Master Samyöng Yujöng] visited the Japanese camp three times in 1594. The general, Katō Kiyomasa, asked the master, “Is there a jewel in Chosön?” The master answered, “No, a jewel is in Japan”. Katō asked what this answer meant.

Then, the master answered, “People in Chosŏn now think of your head as a jewel. Thus, a jewel is in Japan.” Katō was surprised and impressed. The master went to Japan in 1604 with a royal epistle. Japanese people asked whether he was the master who had talked about the Jewel. Monks gathered around him to receive his teaching and the master removed their delusions. All bowed their heads to the ground to show their respect. When he met Tokugawa Ieyasu 徳川家康, the master said, “Since the living spirits of both countries are in distress, I will come to save them”. So Tokugawa, who was a Buddhist, paid respect to the master. When returning to Chosŏn, Yujŏng brought 1500 Chosŏn captives with him.

This record, written shortly after Yujŏng’s death, is relatively trustworthy. As time went on, however, stories of his wonder became more embellished. For example, in the *Sunoji* 旬五志 of 1678, a collection of various themed tales, Hong Manjong 洪萬鍾 (1643–1725) introduced an interesting, but historically dubious, story about Yujŏng: when the master went to Japan as an envoy, Japanese people burned charcoal fires and put him into the fire, when suddenly, rain poured from the sky and put out the fire. Japanese people revered the master as a living Buddha and carried him in a golden palanquin (Im 1989, p. 283). The *Punch’ungsŏ nannok* of 1739 gives the following dramatic story of Yujŏng’s wonder, as recorded by the monk Ch’wihye 就惠, although it comments on the story as being ridiculously absurd.³⁵

In the capital of Japan (Kyōto 京都), bamboo tents were set up with silk decorations on them, and folding screens were also set up with Japanese people’s poems and writings, as well as gold and silver decorations on them. Master Samyŏng walked by, glimpsing them, and he memorized all the writings without an error. . . . Attempting to test the master’s magical power, the Japanese king made an order to dig a pit of 10 *kil* (about 18 m), put an elephant and serpents into it, and cover it with glass, making it visible. The master threw a bead, found out that it was glass, not water, and went in there and sat. . . . The king ordered an iron horse to be made as a path and put a fire around the horse. The king told the master to come through, below the horse. The master prayed toward the west, and clouds suddenly came from the direction of Chosŏn, poured rain, and put out the fire. Japanese officials were shocked. Saying that the master was a monk of wonders and a living Buddha, they carried him on a gold wagon. When the Japanese king and officials gave jewels and valuables to him as gifts, the master did not receive them. He only asked for the head of Katō Kiyomasa for the reconciliation and peace between the two countries and demanded the release of Chosŏn captives. As a result, 3000 captives came back with him.

As can be seen in the memorialization of the writings on the screens, an elephant and serpents, as well as an iron horse, here added more interesting and magical elements than in the record in the *Sunoji*. In Yi Sugwang’s 李晔光 (1563–1628) *Chibong yusŏl* 芝峯類說 and Yu Mongin’s (1559–1623) 柳夢寅 *Ōu yadam* 於于野談, there are just factual episodes based on epitaphs for Yujŏng, such as the jewel story, but without unreal wonders with historicity, that is highly doubtful. This proves that as time went on, more wonder stories were created among the people, in which Yujŏng was depicted as a hero who saved the country.

The novel *Imjinnok* collects magical wonder stories that have Yujŏng’s activities as their main motifs. The anonymously penned *Imjinnok* is a type of historical novel such as those that several authors wrote from the early 17th century to the late 19th century. There are more than 59 different editions, including vernacular Korean and Chinese versions (Ch’oe 2001, pp. 17, 157). We have so many editions of the *Imjinnok* because the master, Yujŏng, was very popular among the people. He is the most frequently appearing figure in the folk tales compiled in the *Han’guk kubi munhak taegyŏ* 韓國口碑文學大系, totaling 45 appearances. Considering that there are just 31 and 23 tales for Kim Tŏngnyŏng 金德齡 (1567–1596) and Kwak Chaeu 郭再祐 (1552–1617), respectively, who were righteous army leaders during the Japanese invasion, and that there are also just 13 for Yi Sunsin, we can

appreciate the great recognition and popularity of Yujöng. Seeing that there are 18 for Yujöng's master Hyujöng (S. Kim 1997, p. 63), we can also see that stories of monks becoming militia generals to save the country met with positive responses. As such, in the late Chosön period, the heroized and deified image of the militia generals spread among the people through wonder stories.

Different from the Confucian literati's stereotypical understanding of him as "a monk of loyalty who contributed to the country," the master Yujöng in the novel *Imjinnok* is described as a national hero who subdued the Japanese king and admonished the ruling people of Chosön (Kyöngsun Yi 2005). In the novel, he is portrayed differently at different times of his life: as an ordinary person before entering the sangha, as a living Buddha or wondrous monk during the war, and as a guardian deity after his death. These different portrayals represent different images of him: a person in the secular world who experienced the pains and transience of life, a hero in fierce battles against invaders, and a savior in the postmortem world (Süngho Kim 2010). The elements of magic and wonder are more embellished in stories of his travel to Japan as an envoy, one of which can be seen in the novel, as follows (Im 1986, p. 174):

As Master Samyöng was on the ship, the dragon kings of the four seas rowed the ship fast to Japan and announced to the king of Japan that the living Buddha of Chosön had arrived. Doubting that there was a living Buddha in Chosön, Japanese people attempted to test the master. Samyöng memorized all the writings on the 180,000 screens set up on the sides of the road to test him and chanted a mantra in a hot iron room, thereby showing that he was a living Buddha. They also made him ride on a red-hot iron horse, but Samyöng summoned the dragon kings of the four seas, and they brought rain and flooded Japan. The Japanese king and his officials begged him to stop the rain. After receiving a letter of surrender that Japan would serve Chosön as its father country and admonishing the Japanese king, Samyöng stopped the rain. Hearing the news of the Japanese king's surrender, King Sönjo praised the master. The king appointed Master Sösan [Hyujöng] as the minister of defense (*pyöngjo p'ansö* 兵曹判書) and the chief of the royal guard (*howi taejang* 扈衛大將) and Master Samyöng as the chief of the royal brigade command (*öyöng taejang* 御營大將) and the general in chief (*towönsu* 都元帥).

Samyöng Yujöng led the monks' militia, acting as its supreme commander during the invasion, and received the senior third-grade position of associate, *ch'ömji chungch'u pusa* 僉知中樞府事.³⁶ After the war, he was dispatched to Japan as a *t'amjökksa* 探敵使, whose duty was to investigate the enemy. He had a meeting with Tokugawa Ieyasu on 4 March 1605, in Kyöto, and he also met with the monks of Gozan (Five Mountains 五山), exchanging poems with them. When returning to Chosön, he brought about 1000 captives with him.³⁷ Afterward, a diplomatic relationship between Chosön and Japan resumed with the exchange of official national letters in January 1607. Yujöng distinguished himself by his valor during the Japanese invasion and served as an envoy to Japan on behalf of the Confucian officials. These activities certainly made him emerge as a hero among the people of Chosön. As such, his wonder stories were widely circulated and transmitted through popular folk tales and novels.

6. Conclusions

This paper has explored the influence and significance of the activities of the monks' militia during the Japanese invasion, as seen from the perspective of the religious efficacy of Buddhism and the spread of the Buddhist wonder. It was a common phenomenon in East Asia that Buddhism developed in close relationship with the state. However, a scenario in which thousands of monks directly violated the precept of not-killing and participated in battles during the Japanese invasion is uncommon. After discussing the important role of the monks' militia in the war, fighting against enemies in major battles and constructing and defending fortresses, this paper showed that the religious efficacy of Buddhism was

revealed through the performance of essential burial and guiding ceremonies. Restoring the religious wonder of Buddhism that had previously been criticized by the Confucian literati, Buddhist rituals intended for consoling and praying for the welfare of the dead came to thrive.

The dilemma that existed between the ideal and the reality involved following Buddhist precepts while practicing loyalty. The activities of the monks' militia greatly damaged the Buddhist community. While killing was a direct infringement of the values of the sangha, the monks violated this precept in the cause of protecting the state and practicing loyalty. In a situation where this dilemma existed between the Buddhist and secular worlds, these monks' prioritization of loyalty not only indicated the desperate national situation of the time but also reflected the social, cultural, and political context of the Confucian society of Chosŏn. Even after the war, in which the efficacy of the monks' militia was proven, the militia continued to serve the state in the late Joseon period, for example, in defending mountain fortresses, and the state institutionally utilized the sangha for other state duties.³⁸ This was, in some sense, the cost that the Buddhist community paid for its stable existence, which imposed a significant economic burden.

This paper has also explored how renowned generals of the monks' militia, including Samyŏng Yujŏng, emerged as heroes among the people, and how memories about them were transmitted through wonder stories. Yujŏng was highly praised as a symbol of Buddhist loyalty, and his heroic story was expanded upon and reproduced among the people through folk tales and novels. In particular, wonder stories concerning his time as an envoy to Japan were created, in which he was depicted as a national hero who subdued Japan and admonished the ruling classes of Chosŏn. While those intellectuals of Chosŏn who followed Confucian values did not believe those wonder stories, the trauma that the war had left behind demanded the appearance of wondrous heroes who helped people overcome that trauma; this demand triggered the emergence of Yujŏng as one of these heroic figures. The activities of the monks' militia, the religious efficacy of Buddhism, and the creation of the heroic narratives of the monks' militia generals prove that Buddhism had a firm foundation in late Chosŏn society.

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Notes

- ¹ For a summary of the history of research on the monks' militia and the state duty imposition on the Buddhist community, see (Y. Kim 2023, pp. 93–122). For extensive research on the Japanese invasions, see (Hur 2013, pp. 53–80).
- ² For early research, see (Miyama Bōyo 1908; Huruya 1910; Tokiwa 1912; Takahashi 1924–1925). Some of the early research articles after the liberation include (Chōngsang 1959; S. D. Kim 1978). More recent ones are (T. Kim 1978; Stiller 2018, pp. 83–105).
- ³ For various aspects of late Chosŏn Buddhism, see (Y. Kim 2022, pp. 71–108).
- ⁴ All dates in this article follow the lunar calendar.
- ⁵ “Ch’ōhōdang chip sŏ” 清虛堂集序, “Sang Pongnae sŏ” 上蓬萊子書; “Ch’ōhōdang haengjang” 清虛堂行狀, *Ch’ōhōdang chip* HPC 7, pp. 659–60, 701, 735.
- ⁶ “Chaejo pōnbang chi” 再造藩邦志 2, *Taedong yasŭng* 36.
- ⁷ Sŏnjo sujŏng sillok 宣祖修正實錄 26, 1st day of the 7th month of the 25th year of King Sŏnjo; “Sŏsan haengjŏk ch’o” 西山行蹟草, *P’yōnyangdang chip* 2, HPC 8, pp. 254–55.
- ⁸ Sŏnjo sillok 宣祖實錄 29, 26th day of the 8th month of the 25th year of King Sŏnjo.
- ⁹ For the participation of the Ming Chinese army in the Japanese invasion, see (Han 1999).
- ¹⁰ “Ch’ōnghōdang Hyjjong taesa pimyŏng” 清虛堂休靜大師碑銘, *Han’guk kosŭng pimun ch’ongjip*, pp. 60–62.
- ¹¹ Sŏnjo sillok 53, 20th day of the 7th month of the 27th year of King Sŏnjo; Sŏnjo sillok 82, 7th day of the 11th month of the 29th year; Sŏnjo sillok 115, 8th day of the 7th month of the 32nd year.
- ¹² Sŏnjo sillok 48, 20th day and the 27th day of the 2nd month of the 27th year.

- 13 *Sŏnjo sillok* 41, 7th day of the 8th month of the 26th year; *Sŏnjo sillok* 83, 8th day of the 12th month of the 29th year. (Chongsu Yi 2012).
- 14 *Sŏnjo sillok* 43, 2nd day of the 10th month of the 26th year; *Sŏnjo sujŏng sillok* 27, 1st day of the 10th month of the 26th year.
- 15 “Chŏn chŏnsa mangnyŏng so” 薦戰死亡靈疏, *Puhyudang chip* 5 (HPC 8, p. 21)
- 16 “Suryukso” 水陸疏, *Chŏnggwanjip* (HPC 8, p. 33). This also prays for the welfare and longevity of the king, queen, and crown prince in this world, along with their rebirth in the Pure Land of the royal ancestors.
- 17 *Sŏnjo sillok* 200, 1st day and 2nd day of the 6th month of the 39th year.
- 18 *Sŏnjo sillok* 211, 4th day of the 5th month of the 40th year.
- 19 “Hwaŏmgyong pal” 華嚴經跋, *Samyŏngdang taesajip* 6 (HPC 8, p. 62).
- 20 *Yŏngjo sillok* 102, 6th day of the 8th month of the 39th year.
- 21 “Son Kyo yangjong Chirisan tae Hwaŏmsa sajŏkbimyŏng,” pp. 7–18.
- 22 “Kŭmgangsan Yujŏmsa pŏptang sangnyangmun” 金剛山楡岾寺法堂上樑文, *Kiamjip* 2 (HPC 8, p. 165)
- 23 “Wisong taesa so” 爲松雲大師疏, “Songun taesa chemun” 松雲大師祭文; “Pal” 跋, *Ch’ŏngmaejip* (HPC 8, pp. 152–56); “P’yohunsa pŏphoedang kwŏnsŏnmun” 表訓寺海會堂勸善文; “Changansa chungch’ang kwŏnsŏnmun” 長安寺重創勸善文; “Kŭmgangsan Changansa pŏptang chosŏng kwŏnsŏnmun” 金剛山長安寺法堂造成勸善文, *Kiamjip* 3 (HPC 8, pp. 176–81).
- 24 “Songun taesa chemun,” *Ch’ŏngmaejip* (HPC 8, pp. 155–56).
- 25 “Ŭlmi p’abyŏng pibyŏnsa kye” 乙未罷兵後備邊司啓, *P’unch’ungsŏ nannok* (HPC 8, p. 97)
- 26 *Sŏnjo sillok* 49, 1st day of the 3rd month of the 27th year; *Sŏnjo sillok* 53, 8th day of the 7th month of the 27th year; *Sŏnjo sillok* 64, 12th day of the 6th month of the 28th year.
- 27 “Tose” 悼世, *Ch’ŏngmaejip* (HPC 8, p. 150).
- 28 “Sangdo taejang nyŏnhyŏng” 上都大將年兄, *Chŏnggwanjip* (HPC 8, pp. 30–31).
- 29 “Ch’ŏnghŏdang taesa pimyŏng” 清虛堂大師碑銘, *Han’guk kosŭng pimun ch’ongjip*, p. 61.
- 30 “P’unch’ungsŏ nannok pal (Yun Bongjo 尹鳳朝),” *P’unch’ungsŏ nannok* (HPC 8, p. 107)
- 31 “P’unch’ungsŏ nannok so sŏ,” *P’unch’ungsŏ nannok* (HPC 8, p. 78)
- 32 “P’unch’ungsŏ nannok pal (Song Inmyŏng 宋寅明),” *P’unch’ungsŏ nannok* (HPC 8, p. 107)
- 33 “Chŏngjong taewang ŏje Sosan taesa hwasangdang myŏng pyŏngsŏ” 正宗大王御製西山大師畫像堂銘并序, *Ch’ŏnghŏdang chip poyu* 補遺 (HPC 7, pp. 735–36).
- 34 “Samyŏng songun taesa sŏkchang pimyŏng pyŏngsŏ,” (HPC 8, pp. 75–77).
- 35 “Odaesansŭng Ch’wihye sojang mun’go chunggi Songun sajŏk” 五臺山僧就惠所藏文彙中記松雲事蹟, *P’unch’ungsŏ nannok* (HPC 8, pp. 102–3). The collator of the text, Sin Yuhan 申維翰 (1681–1752), asked would-be readers not to argue about the authenticity of the story because the monk Ch’wihye had first heard it from the street and it was just not a credible story, simply intended to beautify the master Yujŏng.
- 36 *Sŏnjo sillok* 36, 27th day of the 3rd month of the 26th year; *Sŏnjo sillok* 37, 12th day of the 4th month of the 26th year; *Sŏnjo sillok* 57, 1st day of the 11th month of the 27th year.
- 37 *Sŏnjo sillok* 146, 3rd day of the 2nd month of the 35th year; *Sŏnjo sillok* 152, 20th day of the 7th month of the 35th year; *Sŏnjo sillok* 172, 14th day of the 3rd month of the 37th year; Kwanghaegun ilgi 35, 12th day of the 11th month of the 2nd year.
- 38 (Evon 2022, pp. 119–39; Evon 2023). The relationship between the Joseon Dynasty state and Buddhism presented in these books will be discussed in a separate paper.

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