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## Silla Buddhism and the Hwarang segi Manuscripts

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

### Silla Buddhism and the *Hwarang segi* Manuscripts

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Abstract

This article assesses the authenticity of the recently publicized *Hwarang segi* manuscripts by comparing the information they contain relating to the *hwarang* and Silla Buddhists and Buddhism to the information found in the traditional Chinese Buddhist materials and the Korean literary materials dating to the mid-Koryŏ period. The evidence suggests that the manuscripts are not "authentic" or "genuine," but are probably an in-progress historical fiction dating to the colonial period, because they concoct problematic genealogies for known figures, because they promote Buddhist identities for sixth-century figures that are anachronistic, and because they deploy specialized terminology inconsistently.

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The *hwarang* 花郎 (flower boys) were instituted in the first half of the sixth century, in generally the same period that Buddhism was accepted as a state religion by the royalty and aristocracy of Silla 新羅 (ca. 300-935). The exact nature of the relationship between the early *hwarang* organization and the nascent Buddhist tradition in Silla has long vexed students of ancient Korean society. The most influential studies of the *hwarang* generally ignore their relationship to Buddhism and Buddhist influences. The reason scholars demur from making suggestions is that the literary evidence is sparse and difficult to interpret and the connections to Daoism and "shamanism" appear more compelling.<sup>1</sup> With the publication of the putative *Hwarang segi* 花郎世紀 manuscripts in the late twentieth century, the question should be readdressed because the manuscripts contain new information related to known Silla Buddhists and introduce accounts of otherwise unknown Buddhists and the interrelationship between the *hwarang* and the Buddhist order.

Since the validity of the manuscripts themselves is still a matter of much debate, the purpose of this article is to assess the authenticity of the manuscripts by addressing the following question: How does the presentation of Silla Buddhists [End Page 19] and Buddhist-related themes and information in the *Hwarang segi* manuscripts compare to that of the traditional historical and literary materials? After a short introduction to the *Hwarang segi* manuscripts a brief review will follow of the connections between the *hwarang* and Silla Buddhism from the standpoint of the long-established texts. Finally the information

contained in the *Hwarang segi* manuscripts on Buddhists and Buddhist themes will be analyzed under three topics: (1) the monk Wŏn'gwang 圓光, (2) the householder Murim 茂林, and (3) the idea and identity of the *Mirŏk sŏnhwa* 彌勒仙花.

## The *Hwarang segi* Manuscripts

The *Hwarang segi* manuscripts consist of two handwritten documents in the calligraphy of Pak Ch'anghwŏ 朴昌和 (1889-1962), a scholar and one-time employee of the Japanese colonial government from 1933 to 1945.<sup>2</sup> In Korean scholarship the manuscripts have been labeled the *palch'webon* 拔萃本, or "extract," and the *p'ilsabon* 筆寫本, or "calligraphic copy." The extract contains preface and abbreviated accounts of the first fifteen *p'ungwŏlchu* 風月主, the term used in the manuscripts to refer to the leader of the *hwarang* recognized by the Silla government. The calligraphic copy contains fuller treatments of the lives of the fourth through thirty-second-generation *p'ungwŏlchu*. The final entries of the calligraphic copy take place around the year 682, suggesting that the manuscripts are putatively the work of Kim Taemun 金大問 (fl. 704), the author of the *Hwarang segi* mentioned in Koryŏ-period literature.<sup>3</sup> The owner of the manuscripts maintains that Pak copied them from an original held by the Japanese government, although there is no evidence to support this claim.

Since their publication in 1989 and 1995, respectively, the two *Hwarang segi* manuscripts have caused a great stir among scholars of ancient Korean history and religion. Korean scholars are divided sharply on the issue of the manuscripts' authenticity. Most Korean academics consider them to be "forgeries," though a group of scholars have accepted them as authentic and have deployed them to produce alternate histories of early Silla society.<sup>4</sup> The multitude of questions and issues debated in Korean academia regarding these manuscripts—such as the problematic circumstances of their history before their "re-discovery" and the question of which of the manuscripts was "created" first by Pak Ch'anghwŏ—are beyond the scope of this essay. The author of this

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