

## Biographies of Underprivileged in the *Samguk sagi* (三國史記) Chronicle

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Biographies of the medieval *Samguk sagi* (三國史記) and *Samguk yusa* (三國遺事) chronicles depict the people not only of noble descent and noble mind, but also these who, despite of their low birth, possess the qualities usually attributed to the kings, ministers, scholars and warriors, i.e. moral standards. These lowborn overcome by their deeds their determination and illustrate Korean conception of nobleness, rightness, and wisdom – the qualities of *kunja* (君子), as well as illustrious women *yŏllyŏ* (烈女) present chastity, fidelity etc. We presume this is only stylization, an artificial fulfillment of the Chinese traditional literature categories, creation of obligatory quotas of the moralist portraits relevant to Chinese diversity.

In this paper we will concentrate on the biographies of the *Samguk sagi* chronicle, which deal with the people of the low descent, especially soldiers, advisors, scholars, illustrious sons, daughters and faithful women as the prototypes of the later extensive but monotonous biographical literature. We suppose that except the primary message of preserving examples to the future generations, this literature accentuates two cardinal concepts, which are more important than *oryun* (五倫); these go across the social strata and do not know the opposition noble/low. Koreans are equal in *hyo* (孝), filial piety, and in *ch'ung* (忠), loyalty. These standards are crucial for the social functionality and not only in Korean ancient times.

Key words: 列傳, chronicles, historiography, , 三國史記, 三國遺事, tradition, the early Confucianism, 孝, 忠, paragon of virtues, stratification

An obligatory part of every Korean biography consists of the data relevant to the protagonist's birth and family background. If it is not possible to ensure him or her appropriate parents, i.e., parents of the noble descent, the author summarizes this negative fact into the statement *that nothing is known* about his or her background. And everybody is aware that this personality, despite of his or her low birth, is remarkable, that he or she has been worth of writing down, highlighting; that he or she are exempla of his or her qualities or achievements.

Society stratification all over the world had been considered as something absolutely natural. Nevertheless, with the rise of Confucianism and its categorization, every status received additional evaluative criteria. In Korea, to be *soin* (小人) meant also to possess a substantially lower qualification for moral deeds. In this way it was also morality what was stratified; thus every social class was prescribed different expectations. Confucius's statement – everybody has to behave according to his status (king as king, minister as minister and son as son)<sup>1</sup> - was widely disseminated. Therefore, the extent of common people duties was not that broad, everybody was asked only for simple things respective to his position. Korean vision of that order was demonstrated by one of the most known *hyangga*<sup>2</sup> from the late 8<sup>th</sup> century, *Anminga* (安民歌):

*King is the father/vassals affectionate mother/the people are simple but happy children./The children know the favors of their parents./Human beings who lead their lives by loitering about are fed and led./Where do they go when they leave this land?/They should know the way to preserve the nation./When the king, his subjects, and the people do things worthy/the country will enjoy peace./*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Konfucius: *Rozpravy*, XII. 11. Prague: Mladá fronta 1995, p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> Story in the *Samguk yusa* chronicle refers to the year 765. King asked Ch'ungdam for the text/song that will restore national order and confidence and Ch'ungdam composed *hyangga* *Anminga*.

<sup>3</sup>安民歌曰：君隱父也，臣隱愛賜尸母史也，  
民焉狂尸恨阿孩古爲賜尸知民是愛尸知古如，  
窟理叱大盼生以支所音物生此盼喰惡支治良羅，此地盼捨遣只於冬是去於丁，  
爲尸知國惡支持以，支知古如，後句，君如臣多支民隱如，  
爲內尸等焉國惡太平恨音叱如。 In: *Samguk yusa* (1960), p. 185. This poems paraphrases Confucius's *Lunyu* (II. 3); nevertheless, similar thoughts are scattered in the whole *Lunyu* text, also in other classics. At the time of the chronicles' compilation these concepts became quite routineous.

Korean conception of *paeksŏng* differed from the Chinese original model. Moreover, Chinese tradition worshipped and preserved “nobleness in the humbleness” and people of originally low descent could be rewarded by official titles and posts, as e.g. Jiang Taigong<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, in China morality and ethics often took place beyond the official life, which Koreans accentuated during the early and late medieval eras, especially during Chosŏn.<sup>5</sup>

The shift of the original Confucian concepts in Korea was reflected by various literary texts. The oldest stories, especially biographies, preserved in *Samguk sagi* (三國史記) and partially in *Samguk yusa* (三國遺事) chronicles from 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries illustrated the requested human characters and models of behavior. There, for the first time, appeared not only characters of the noble descent and noble spirit, but also people who *although not born as nobles*, possess the qualities, usually attributed to kings, statesmen and generals as the most frequent paragons of virtues. Examples of these biographies, i.e. biographies of people who overcome their determination, demonstrate Korean concepts of virtuousness, righteousness, justice and wisdom, the attributes of the nobleman *kunja* (君子), as well as fidelity and chastity for the virtuous women *yŏllyŏ* (烈女). Thus chronicles attempted, in accordance with the Chinese models, to create illustrious portraits that would serve as examples for the future generations.

### **Society Stratification is an Unchangeable Status Quo**

Stratification in Korea is not a product of the historic era. The first references appeared in mythology, where not only classes, but also slavery was mentioned. Slavery in Korea was a very distinct phenomenon till the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the state slavery was abolished in 1801 and private in 1894; also a strict social structure with unchangeable limits between the privileged and underprivileged functioned during Korean history. In this way, Koryŏ founder Wang Kŏn wrote to his counterpart Kyŏn Hwŏn after he plundered Kŭmsŏng in 927: “... *the king was forced to humble himself and call himself your son, so, the distinction of rank was disturbed and the high and the low were in the great anxiety...*”<sup>6</sup> In principle, Wang Kŏn did not reproach Kyŏn Hwŏn for his crimes, but for violating the social order.

Simply put, the whole sum of inhabitants since the historic era was divided into the ruling and the ruled; this status was hereditary and violence of rules always meant a fall, never advancement.<sup>7</sup> All status limits were fixed and neither merits nor educational level of somebody were

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<sup>4</sup> Notoriously known was the character of Chinese Jiang Taigong (Lu Shang, 11<sup>th</sup> century B.A.), fisherman from the Wei river, Zhou dynasty king’s counselor. Jiang served as a model for this type of characters.

<sup>5</sup> During Chosŏn era *kunja* (君子) could be the only person who was born and belonged to *sadaebu* (事大部) .

<sup>6</sup> *Samguk yusa* (1993), p. 222.

<sup>7</sup> It is not necessary to mention the system of bones and other Silla stratification distinctive features; nevertheless, the rigidity of this system influenced also the strata consciousness as well as evaluation of people.

taken into account. There were also strict limitations for marriages etc. These limits were not legalized during ancient times, but they were fixed, developed and incorporated into national codes during Chosŏn era. Although social equality was promulgated as a part of *kabo*<sup>8</sup> reforms, Korean society did not change its point of view; many prejudices were preserved for relatively long time and the classification by birth did not vanish even in the modern era.

### **Biographical Literature and People of the Low Descent**

Official *Samguk sagi* chronicle<sup>9</sup> presents 50 biographies of various size<sup>10</sup> (volumes 41-50). Unofficial *Samguk yusa*<sup>11</sup> mentions personages not only important, but also attractive or distinctive. This difference comes from the basic seizing of the material; the whole text of *Samguk yusa* followed the Buddhist trend of depiction. As such it stresses miracles, curiousness etc., therefore the historic images are less strict and more colorful.

It is obvious that at the time of early chronicles' compilation ethic codes and models of behavior existed. They were also stratified, but some – mainly fictitious or folklore – characters approached the expectations that were attributed to the elite. Fulfillment of these expectations logically anticipated advancement, estimation, evaluation, advantages unimaginable for the people limited by their birth. *Samguk sagi* chronicle presents such model situations and mentions characters that demonstrate eligible norms by their deeds or behavior.

Let us concentrate at the *yŏljŏn* part of the official chronicle and the characters of the low descent but model behavior. In principle, two types of commoners prevail: *brave soldier* and *illustrious son or daughter*. Among others, the whole of ten volumes of *yŏljŏn* contains an *advisor* of the low descent (represented by a humble countryman, not a member of the hereditary elite – Ŭl Pchasŏ; this character is not believable as offices are guaranteed only to the elite); an *outsider*, who, at the end, marries a princess and becomes a general of Koguryŏ (this story was taken from folklore and its plot is also beyond belief) and *scholar prototypes* represented by Kangsu, Ch'oe Ch'iwŏn, Paek Kyŏl etc. (their biographies as well as anecdotes are artificially elaborated as ancient times in Korea did not value education. Education was not necessary even for government

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<sup>8</sup> The concept of social equality did not function in reality for a relatively long period as there were other laws (also customs) that opposed it.

<sup>9</sup> It is not necessary to present the compiler of the chronicle Kim Pusik (金富軾), but we have to be aware that he is responsible for the text and, what is obvious, he is the author of all the evaluative parts of the chronicle. We could only speculate that he also selected the appropriate characters for the *yŏljŏn* parts. As a supporter of the Korean everlasting dependence on China he could adapt Chinese cultural models and tried to arrange Korean history and its protagonists according to the Chinese patterns.

<sup>10</sup> The extent of the biography reflects also the importance of the figures for the future generations; three volumes Kim Pusik dedicated to his ancestor, Kim Yushin; i.e. *yŏljŏn* of "other" people contain vols. 44-50.

<sup>11</sup> *Iryŏn*'s (一然) biographies have other ideological basis. Nevertheless, his secular heroes are of the similar qualities.

posts. This type of character reflected the shift of values of the following dynasties). Chronicle presents – maybe for completeness of originally Chinese prototypes – a *famous calligrapher* (Kim Saeng) and a *painter* (Solgŏ). Episodic portraits belong to *brave soldiers* (e.g. Yŏlgi, Piryŏngja) and several short biographies reflect the beginning of the tradition of appraising *filial piety, illustrious sons* (Hyangdŏk, Sŏnggak), *daughters* (Sŏl, Chiŭn) and *wives* (Tomi's wife) from the lowest strata. Although these characters and their deeds are exaggerated, biographies mirrored the requests of the time of the chronicles' compilation and they form the basis for the following medieval norms.

In principle, the most frequent biographical portrait of *Samguk sagi*, as a result of the wars during Samguk and T'ongil Silla period, is a portrait of warrior, even general or soldier. In the critical moment, this *brave, loyal soldier* does not hesitate to sacrifice himself for his country and its honor. Many stories of noble heroes similar to Kim Yushin were preserved; nevertheless, volume 47 of the *Samguk sagi* chronicle incorporates quite realistic stories of *hwarangs* and other soldiers of the not appropriate descent. The noble descent was not requested during mobilizations and wars and the very function of every warrior was distinct. Above all they could influence a battle or clash. The situation was as follows: the army has no further moral power to win and one unique deed of a single person (death, sacrifice) provides new motivation to the whole army. This functions as Kim Yushin labeled in the allegedly hopeless state: „*We hear the saying: Shake a coat by its collar and all the fur will fall smooth, lift the head-rope and the whole net will open ... Can't I be the collar or head-rope now?*”<sup>12</sup> His example was followed by many famous and anonymous heroes during Korean history.

In the official chronicle there were anonymous heroes (we presume not of the noble descent); somewhat later plenty of these stories were adapted and enriched by names of the heroes, by “facts” about their families, more episodes were added and all that was shaped by folklore to the full biography with distinctly a-historic motifs.<sup>13</sup> Some of the particular deeds were attributed to *hwarangs*; they are not requested to be the elite and as such only few of them were granted full biography. Others were mentioned in the biographies of the statutory proved courtly nobles. Demonstration of the soldiers' deeds is, however, limited to the manifestation of *ch'ung* (忠), loyalty to the king and to the country.

The second category, which we mentioned as feasible for the people of the low descent, is represented by *filial sons, filial daughters and the faithful wives*. Whereas in the previous and following type of biographies it was presumed that only the noble possess requested qualities, these

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<sup>12</sup> *Samguk sagi* [ha], vol. 41, p. 302.

<sup>13</sup> There are plenty examples of stories where the originally unknown hero is identified, he receives name, family, episodes which do not have the close connection with the deed. These anecdotes were transformed into unofficial stories and later modified into popular *kodae sosŏl* (古代小説) genre. As to the historiography, all the historical works followed official *Samguk sagi* version of biographies.

stories stress the universal, thus equal Confucian principles (virtues). Unlike the era of the compilation of the first chronicles the era of Samguk and T'ongil Silla does not prescribe Confucian norms for the whole society.<sup>14</sup> However, such virtues as e.g. to serve his or her parents or, to be faithful etc., are natural in every society of every time.<sup>15</sup> What is interesting, this simple devotion or love to the parents of the lowborn was considered – also in the medieval times – as something amazing, as more than standard. This could be demonstrated on the dramatic exclamation placed at the end of the text of *Ch'unhyangga*: ...such devotion is rare in our time and for today wives [from the literati families]; less to the kisaeng!<sup>16</sup>

Biographies of both medieval chronicles contain two motivically similar model stories of illustrious sons Hyangdök and Sönggak, who fed their parents with their own flash; parents survived the critical moments and the sons were rewarded by officials. Two girls – Söl and Chiŭn also served their parents, mothers respectively, and worked as serfs. The scenario is quite identical. For demonstration let us quote the evaluation of Chiŭn's deed according to the *Samguk yusa* chronicle text:

*... Hyojong heard these words, took pity on the mother and daughter and he sent them hundred sök of grain. His parents offered the needy family a suit of clothes and his followers collected one thousand sök of grain to help them. When this story became known to Queen Chinsöng, she bestowed on the dutiful daughter five hundred sök of grain and a fine house to live in with her mother. She sent soldiers to guard the house from thieves. A monument in recognition of her good conduct was erected at the entrance to the village called Hyoyang (孝養). This house was then donated to the temple called Yangjongsa.<sup>17</sup> This reward is rather exaggerated: her behavior is natural and it is not mentioned that she suffered. It seems this story's purpose is exemplary.*

The story of Tomi's wife forms an interesting biography with unique motifs of repeated tryouts of the main character. Tomi's wife is famous for her beauty and the king insists that he will be able to seduce her. Tomi is

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<sup>14</sup> In the Samguk and T'ongil Silla period Confucianism had not such influence as during the following dynasties; the proficiency of classics was limited on the scholar strata and these were mostly not of the hereditary elite.

<sup>15</sup> Steles and monuments are sporadically erected in this period; nevertheless, this could be more extent in the medieval dynasties. All the people mentioned in the chronicle's biographies of this category are incorporated into the books of model behavior as e.g. *Samgang haengsildo*, 三綱行實道), i.e., their biographies are canonized.

<sup>16</sup> *Hanguk p'ansori jip*. Söul: Sömundang 1975, p. 64.

<sup>17</sup> *Samguk yusa*, 1993, p. 599. 郎聞之潛然，送穀一百斛，郎之二親亦送衣袴一襲，郎之千徒，斂租一千石遺之。事達宸聰，時眞聖王賜穀五白石，并宅一廬，遣卒徒衛其家，以儆劫掠。旌其坊爲孝養之里，後捨其家爲寺，名兩尊寺。 In this entry both the girl and her mother were granted by redundant reward which is beyond reality; beside of the grain for more than ten years they received house; significant were also soldiers who had to guard this new property.

convinced she will keep her chastity: „*Who knows human heart? Nevertheless, as my wife is concerned, she will defend herself even after my death*”<sup>18</sup>, he said. Tomi’s wife – after such declaration of confidence – has to behave accordingly and, finally, when she escapes from the trap, she is rewarded by finding her husband. Her fidelity is appreciated by Koguryŏ people, who provide the couple with all necessary things for their life. This story is evidently of a folklore tradition, but, apparently, Kim Pusik historicized it. We agree with Peter H. Lee, that this biography is unreliable and baseless, created “for didactic purpose”.<sup>19</sup> Stories of illustrious sons and daughters only begin with the above mentioned, as well as Tomi’s wife story creates prototype of the later popular stories of the women fighting for their love, for their fiancés and husbands. Protagonists of these stories are mostly of low descent and Ch’unhyang presents an incomparable model.

Somewhat absurd biography of Ondal is obviously a story of a folklore basis with a lowborn protagonist, the story of an *outsider*, which postulates the illusion that everybody can reach the top of the society. When the Princess P’yŏnggang did not want to eat, Simpleton Ondal (literally 바보) was the hound, intended to make her eat. Facing this hound too frequently, she felt herself an Ondal’s fiancée. Once she had to marry another man, she insisted to marry Ondal and was expelled from the palace with no chance but to really marry him. In the official biography of the *Samguk sagi* chronicle, Ondal became not only her husband, but the biography continued by description of his rise: it was unimaginable for a husband of a princess to work in the field; the princess educated him and thus he gained qualities, relevant to the elite; the king accepted him as his son-in-law and incorporated him into the Koguryŏ elite. Such characters did not exist in reality. Let us point out, that Ondal became not only a distinguished horseman and an archer as well as a general, but he also had to change his “qualities” for his new position. Certainly, it was unbelievable that he could be accepted by those, who were born as elite. Ondal is a character, which exceeded the Korean system of model prototypes; however, there are plenty of such characters in the world folklore. He was obviously interesting for the compiler of the chronicle and therefore he was incorporated among the small number of the lowborn. We suppose this happened not only for his fame, but in order to demonstrate the qualities, he proved as a son and a husband. An outsider overcame his birth stigma not by his own endeavor, but thanks to his wife and her family. Last but not least this happened thanks to the folklore. Tradition is able to turn the unthinkable into the user’s acceptable form.

Chinese tradition valued *advisors*, especially those of low descent. Everybody in the East Asian region knows Jiang Taigong, the fisherman, who became the emperor’s advisor. Other stories tell about commoners, who, due to their moral qualities, were able to restore the order of the state. However, among the biographies in the official *Samguk sagi* chronicle,

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<sup>18</sup> *Samguk sagi* [ha], p. 462-464.

<sup>19</sup> *A History of Korean Literature*. Ed. By Peter H. Lee. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2003, p. 131.

there is the only one person of this type.<sup>20</sup> Ŭl Pchasŏ was called up to the capital, as he did not belong to the court or to the factions, thus, personally uninvolved in the politics, he could be unbiased. These preconditions made him the proper candidate for the state management. What is significant, his opponents pointed out his low descent when they requested the king to withdraw him from this high position. The divergence from the Chinese tradition can be observed immediately after his arrival to the capital; Ŭl Pchasŏ did not want to be only an advisor, he requested the king to provide him with titles and office, relevant to his new position and power. He was thus appointed the state minister and served the country till his death. It is symptomatic, that in Korea he could not only arrange the state affairs and withdraw. The conception of the temporary administrator of the country that stands out of the bureaucratic system is unthinkable. The commentary of the chronicle compiler Kim Pusik is obvious; he evaluated the king's doing on the background of Chinese rulers: „*The wise rulers of the ancient times selected outstanding individuals without restrictions and they used their services without hesitation... it was the only way wise and talented people could reach high positions and rule, in this only way the principles of rule could be explained, improved and the safety strengthened. The king (Kogukch'ŏn) decided to summon Ŭl Pchasŏ from the remote area paying no attention to the opinion of the people around him and promoted him to a higher post than the other officials, he also promoted the man who recommended Ŭl Pchasŏ. All this can be considered as following the principles of ancient rulers.*”<sup>21</sup>

In the biographies of *Samguk sagi* there are not many portraits of exceptional *scholars* or *artists*.<sup>22</sup> These are very popular from Koryŏ dynasty, but not really valued during Samguk and T'ongil Silla. Thus, in the *yŏljŏn* part of the official chronicle, in volume 46, Kim Pusik presented Kangsu, Ch'oe Ch'iwŏn and Sŏlchong, as well as other remarkable scholars, but only in short entries or, he enumerated their names, respectively.<sup>23</sup> Kangsu, one of the most respected literati of T'ongil Silla<sup>24</sup> became famous because of his ability to explain the epistle of the Tang emperor. He was described as one of the literati, who preferred freedom and he even proclaimed this unconcern as the service to the country. On the other side, Ch'oe Ch'iwŏn<sup>25</sup>, the great proponent of Confucianism of the T'ongil Silla, was discriminated because of his improper descent. Frustrated, he finally desisted from his attempts to reform the system of “bones” and opted for the secluded life. There are scholars in ancient Korea, but they were not esteemed in general and their fame was not supported by the public appreciation. Education was neither requested, nor needed; later, it was attributed to the elite and there it became a status quo.

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<sup>20</sup> It is not unambiguous Ŭl Pchasŏ was of the low descent; we suppose he did not belong to the hereditary elite concentrated in the capital of Koguryŏ. Nowadays, the story plot dates back to the relatively ancient era of the break of 2 – 3 centuries and, in this time the system could allow the real exceptions.

<sup>21</sup> *Samguk sagi* [sang], p. 408.

<sup>22</sup> Due to the Buddhism the ancient time artists are not ranked into the lowest strata as in medieval Korea.

<sup>23</sup> Mainly of the elite.

<sup>24</sup> Kangsu, allegedly 7<sup>th</sup> -8<sup>th</sup> century scholar.

<sup>25</sup> Ch'oe Ch'iwŏn (857 - ?), esteemed by Koryŏ and Chosŏn dynasties.

Volume 48 contains stories of other famous Samguk and T'ongil Silla characters of low descent; Master Paek Kyŏl, painter Solgŏ, calligrapher Kim Saeng etc. The story of Paek Kyŏl<sup>26</sup> is a celebration of a category quite fictitious in Korea – the humble freedom. Nevertheless, in materialistic Korea this behavior was a mere exemplum without any background. Kim Saeng's<sup>27</sup> biography, on the other hand, is a purposeful one (Koreans have their Wang Xizhi) and such is also Solgŏ's<sup>28</sup> story: his painting of a pine was realistic to such an extent, that birds tried to sit on it. Comparison with China and Chinese models and patterns are evident, obvious is the aim to overpower these models. In this way, most distinct are biographies and anecdotes of Buddhist monks and presentation of their miracles.<sup>29</sup>

### Models and Reality

To sum up the content and purpose of biographies, lowborn are continually considered as people of low descent. Nevertheless, they were able to fulfill the normative of the elite, or, to replace it temporarily. It was not more than temporary state; none of them ever overcome the limits, given by his or her status. They were granted with mainly material rewards and many of them, especially scholars, rejected them; the proper reward or estimation represented these posthumous biographies of *Samguk sagi*. What is evident, no lowborn has the full biography, i.e. the line which begins by birth, continues by episodes of education, initiation, demonstration of the preparation to the big deeds, heroic or moral episodes and ends by description of the grandiose death and enumeration of offspring. In the biographies of the underprivileged no offspring are mentioned. We should conclude by the observation that these rewards are only temporary, belong to particular person and that heroes never have the opportunity to enter other social category.

In rigidly stratified Korea, material and posthumous rewards were the maxima. It was also absurd to suppose that people out of the chosen elite behave exemplarily in the sense of accepted morality. If they achieved something exemplary, they did not do it for history. In principle, they simply had no other way out. Soldiers were brave according to the situation

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<sup>26</sup> Paek Kyŏl is a protagonist of the lovely story with the Song of the Mill. He does not take care of the domestic (earthly) affairs and instead of it he plays zither. At the moment his wife reproaches him he composed the Song of the Mill that evokes the sounds of the running mill. Although in the official chronicle there are no mentions about his ancestors, today encyclopedia attribute him famous father, Pak Chesang.

<sup>27</sup> Kim Saeng (711-791), according to the Korean tradition a great calligrapher; better a great imitator of the style of Wang Xizhi. His biography pointed out the fact he was able to imitate his style in such way, the Chinese did not believe it was not the calligraphy of "their" Wang Xizhi.

<sup>28</sup> Solgŏ, allegedly lives in the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>29</sup> E.g. Ichadon, the first martyr of Korean Buddhism who in the *Samguk yusa* was compared to his Chinese counterparts as the loyalty is concerned (子推割股, 未足比其苦節; 弘演剖腹, 詎能方其壯烈). *Samguk yusa* (1993), p. 281. This attitude to the Korean heroes is more evident in *Haedong kosŭngjŏn*.

(battles) the others behaved according to their family state (filial sons, daughters, wives, respectively). The calligraphers, scholars and artists were chosen because of their talents; nevertheless, their deeds were not exemplary; they only served awakening of the national pride. As it was also mentioned, some of these prototypes were artificially created according to their Chinese models and later they are not stressed so much. The only shift in the evaluation of people in the later dynasties was their education. Nevertheless, education in Korea was selective and the descent was decisive even for the first round of the kwagŏ (科擧), i.e. kwagŏ examinations were not allowed to everybody as e.g. in China. As for the chungin and their chapkwa (雜科), this kind of exams are not considered as something what could be education for elite.

### **Why Biographies of the Underprivileged?**

Beside the very small part of the hereditary elite, everybody was disadvantaged in ancient Korea. Elite was differentiated during centuries and the number of these who were not allowed to reach power increased rapidly. The reason for that was the strong primogeniture law, elite classification criteria etc. Some of these laws and orders were in force till the opening of Korea in late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>30</sup> Also prejudices from the Chosŏn era remained in the modern Korean society. Economic elite is not considered an elite yet, the proper elite could be only a scion of a noble family. In modern era, where money and power are crucial signs of every success, evaluation of people according to the rigid Confucian concepts could indicate that the deeply rooted hypocrisy survives.

What was the aim of the broad biographical literature in Korea? Beside of the basic message to preserve models for future generations, two important concepts were accentuated. These go across the social strata and do not know the concept of the opposition noble/low. Koreans are equal in *hyo* (孝), filial piety, and in *ch'ung* (忠), loyalty. These standards are crucial for the society's functionality not only in the Korean ancient times.

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<sup>30</sup> See e.g. articles of *Tongnip sinmun* and *Tongnip hyŏphoe* discussion.

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