

**EXCERPT FROM THE KORYŎ SA: PAK CH'Ō, ANTI-BUDDHIST
MEMORIAL**

Introduction

Neo-Confucianism, which interpreted Confucian doctrine through the teachings of the Chinese scholar Zhu Xi (1130-1200), was a socially activist and reformist philosophical movement that began to become influential on the Korean peninsula late in the Koryŏ period. Pak Ch'ŏ (1367-1454) was a member of Koryŏ's National Academy during the reign of its last king, Kongyang (r. 1389-92). He expresses hostility towards Buddhism typical of Neo-Confucian scholars at the end of Koryŏ, but contrary to the relatively tolerant attitude of most scholars and officials earlier in Korean history. During the Chosŏn dynasty, which began in 1392 following a coup led by General Yi Sŏnggye (1335-1408), Neo-Confucianism would further gain influence to become the central state ideology and a blueprint for social reform—and Buddhism would be increasingly driven to the margins.

Selected Document Excerpt with Questions (Longer selection follow this section)

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Excerpt from the Koryŏ sa:
Pak Ch'ŏ, Anti-Buddhist Memorial

What kind of man is this Buddha who makes a son that should carry on the family line betray his father and sever the affection between father and son; who makes men resist the Son of Heaven and destroy the righteousness between lord and minister; who says that for men and women to live together is not the Way; who says that for men to plow and women to weave is not righteous, thus severing the way of generating life and blocking off the source of food and clothing; and who thinks that through his way he can transform all under heaven? ...

[Translated by John Duncan]

Question:

1. What is wrong with Buddhism for Pak? What sort of Buddhist practices might he have been thinking of when he gave his long list of Buddhist failings?

Longer Selection

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Excerpt from the Koryŏ sa:
Pak Ch'ŏ, Anti-Buddhist Memorial

I, His Majesty's subject, have heard that it was after heaven and earth existed that the myriad things came into being; that it was after the myriad things existed that man and woman came into being; that it was after man and woman existed that husband and wife came into being; that it was after husband and wife existed that father and son came into being; that it was after father and son existed that king and minister came into being; that it was after king and minister existed that senior and junior came into being; and that it was after senior and junior existed that ritual and righteousness were established. This is the universal way of the world and the normal law of all times that cannot be disregarded even briefly. If it is abolished, heaven and earth will not tolerate its abandonment, the sun and moon will not shine, the ghosts and spirits will carry out executions jointly, and all the generations under heaven will concur with the joint beheading.

What kind of man is this Buddha who makes a son that should carry on the family line betray his father and sever the affection between father and son; who makes men resist the Son of Heaven and destroy the righteousness between lord and minister; who says that for men and women to live together is not the Way; who says that for men to plow and women to weave is not righteous, thus severing the way of generating life and blocking off the source of food and clothing; and who thinks that through his way he can transform all under heaven? If his way were really carried out, humanity would be finished in a hundred years. Heaven would carry on above and earth would bear below, but the only things to grow would be grasses and trees, birds and beasts, fishes and turtles, and dragons and snakes. How, finally, could the Way of the Three Bonds and the Five Relations endure?

This Buddha was originally a barbarian whose language was not like that of China, whose dress was weird, whose mouth did not speak of the kingly way of old, and whose body did not wear the sacerdotal clothing of the kings of old. He gave false revelations of three unhappy ways (to the hell of fire, of blood, and to the asipattra hell of swords) and incorrectly propounded the six ways of sentient existence, ultimately leading the foolish and ignorant to seek senilely for merit, fearing not the norms and carelessly violating the basic law. Furthermore, although life and death and longevity and brevity originate in nature, although power and fortune and punishment and virtue are linked with the ruler of men, and although poverty and wealth and nobility and baseness derive from accumulated merit, foolish deceiving monks all attribute these things to Buddha, thus stealing the authority of the ruler of men, treating arbitrarily the power of creation, dimming the eyes and ears of the people, plunging all under heaven into corruption, living in intoxication and dying in a dream without ever realizing it. Thus they build palaces and halls, which they serve; they decorate them with stone,

wood, copper, and iron which they form; and they shave off the hair of commoner men and women whom they make reside there. Even though the Buddhists' palaces surpass the palaces and halls of Chieh of Hsia [trad. 2205-1766 B.C.], the beautiful palace and Deer Terrace of Chou of Shang [trad. 1766-1122 B.C.], the Chang-hua Terrace of King Ling of Ch'u [740-330 B.C.], and the A-p'ang palace of the First Emperor of Ch'in [221-209 B.C.], do they not all come from the resources of the people? How distressful! Who will correct this situation? It can only be set right after he who is above demonstrates propriety by cultivating himself with virtue and instructing those below and leads the people to know wherein the principle of heaven resides.

...

[Translated by John Duncan]

Questions:

1. What is wrong with Buddhism for Pak? What sort of Buddhist practices might he have been thinking of when he gave his long list of Buddhist failings?
2. What, for Pak, might be the consequences of abolishing or denying such relationships?
3. Pak begins by writing of the creation of heaven and earth and of human relationships. In what way, for him, do these relationships constitute "ritual and righteousness"? What might be some concrete examples of what he means?