

**EXCERPTS FROM THE KORYŎ SA: THE TEN INJUNCTIONS OF WANG  
KŎN (KING T'AEJO)**

**Introduction**

Wang Kŏn (877-943), subsequently known as King T'aejo (r. 918-943), founded the Koryŏ dynasty (918-1392) by winning control over the peninsula after decades of battle and revolt that followed upon the dissolution of Unified Silla into regional powers at the end of the ninth century. Kaesŏng became the site of the main Koryŏ capital, and Wang Kŏn spent years trying to consolidate his authority. His ten injunctions were given towards the end of his life, in 943. They reveal the mixture of beliefs, assumptions, and religious foundations that he held to be the basis of his rule and legitimacy.

**Document Excerpt with Questions** (Longer selection follows this section)

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*Excerpts from the Koryŏ sa:*  
**The Ten Injunctions of Wang Kŏn (King T'aejo)**

2. Temples and monasteries were newly opened and built upon the sites chosen by Monk Tosŏn according to the principles of geomancy. He said: 'If temples and monasteries are indiscriminately built at locations not chosen by me, the terrestrial force and energy will be sapped and damaged, hastening the decline of the dynasty.' I am greatly concerned that the royal family, the aristocracy, and the courtiers all may build many temples and monasteries in the future in order to seek Buddha's blessings. In the last days of Silla many temples were capriciously built. As a result, the terrestrial force and energy were wasted and diminished, causing its demise. Vigilantly guard against this.

*[Translated by Hahm Pyong-Choon]*

**Questions:**

1. What relation does Wang Kŏn suggest between Buddhist institutions and the state? Why might he have promoted state support for temples and the like?
2. Geomancy is an important emphasis of injunction 2 and of injunction 5, where Wang Kŏn suggests that Koryŏ's kings should spend almost a third of the year not in Kaesŏng but in the alternative, Western Capital of P'yŏngyang. What are the underlying assumptions about how location and the placement of buildings and cities affect the fortunes of individuals and

states? How do we conceive of the relationship between the environment and human affairs? How have other societies?

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*Excerpts from the Koryŏ sa:*  
**The Ten Injunctions of Wang Kŏn (King T'aejo)**

1. The success of every great undertaking of our state depends upon the favor and protection of Buddha. Therefore, the temples of both the Meditation and Doctrinal schools should be built and monks should be sent out to those temples to minister to Buddha. Later on, if villainous courtiers attain power and come to be influenced by the entreaties of bonzes, the temples of various schools will quarrel and struggle among themselves for gain. This ought to be prevented.

2. Temples and monasteries were newly opened and built upon the sites chosen by Monk Tosŏn according to the principles of geomancy. He said: 'If temples and monasteries are indiscriminately built at locations not chosen by me, the terrestrial force and energy will be sapped and damaged, hastening the decline of the dynasty.' I am greatly concerned that the royal family, the aristocracy, and the courtiers all may build many temples and monasteries in the future in order to seek Buddha's blessings. In the last days of Silla many temples were capriciously built. As a result, the terrestrial force and energy were wasted and diminished, causing its demise. Vigilantly guard against this.

3. In matters of royal succession, succession by the eldest legitimate royal issue should be the rule. But Yao of ancient China let Shun succeed him because his own son was unworthy. This was indeed putting the interests of the state ahead of one's personal feelings. Therefore, if the eldest son is not worthy of the crown, let the second eldest succeed to the throne. If the second eldest, too, is unworthy, choose the brother the people consider the best qualified for the throne.

4. In the past we have always had a deep attachment for the ways of China and all of our institutions have been modeled upon those of T'ang. But our country occupies a different geographical location and our people's character is different from that of the Chinese. Hence, there is no reason to strain ourselves unreasonably to copy the Chinese way. Khitan is a nation of savage beasts, and its language and customs are also different. Its dress and institutions should never be copied.

5. I have achieved the great task of founding the dynasty with the help of the elements of mountain and river of our country. The Western Capital, P'yŏngyang, has elements of water in its favor and is the source of the terrestrial force of our country. It is thus the veritable center

of dynastic enterprises for ten thousand generations. Therefore, make a royal visit to the Western Capital four times a year — in the second, fifth, eighth, and eleventh months — and reside there a total of more than one hundred days. By this means secure peace and prosperity.

6. I deem the two festivals of Yöndŭng and P'alghan of great spiritual value and importance. The first is to worship Buddha. The second is to worship the spirit of heaven, the spirits of the five sacred and other major mountains and rivers, and the dragon god. At some future time, villainous courtiers may propose the abandonment or modification of these festivals. No change should be allowed.

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10. In preserving a household or state, one should always be on guard to avert mistakes. Read widely in the classics and history; take the past as a warning for the present. The Duke of Chou was a great sage, yet he sought to admonish his nephew, King Ch'eng, with *Against Luxurious East (Wu-i)*. Post the contents of *Against Luxurious Ease* on the wall and reflect upon them when entering and leaving the room.

[Translated by Hahm Pyong-Choon]

**Questions:**

1. In injunction 4, Wang Kŏn defines Koryŏ's relations to China and to Khitan, one of several semi-nomadic peoples in what is now Manchuria with which Koryŏ would later fight wars. How are China and Khitan different for Wang Kŏn? Why had China sometimes been a model for Koryŏ or Silla before it, why might it not consistently be, and why might Khitan never be?
2. Look at injunction 10. How does Wang Kŏn see the role or function of history and the classics, and how does this role or function compare with that envisaged in other historical situations?