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# The Activities and Significance of Temple Fraternities in Late Chosŏn Buddhism

Sangkil Han

## Abstract

The Chosŏn dynasty is said to have been a period of venerating Confucianism and persecuting Buddhism. So long has the period been so considered that when Chosŏn Buddhism is talked about, it never fails to include mention of its waning and ailing situation throughout the period. However, if we consider the Korean temples of our day, which display classic Chosŏn style, not only in terms of tangible cultural properties such as paintings and statues, but also intangible ones such as music, chanting, and ritual, I claim that Buddhism, though stressed, continued to develop steadily during the Chosŏn dynasty, at least to such an extent that it could influence contemporary Korean Buddhism. This study focuses on of the engines of this development within the *sach'algye* (寺刹契, temple fraternity). These arose in response to the persecution that lasted throughout the Chosŏn dynasty and caused the demise of many Buddhist temples due to economic hardship. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a variety of temple fraternities came into existence and prospered throughout the country. In turn, these groups enabled temples to revive their religious and economic influence in society. Temple fraternities were organized in order to promote a pious faith in Buddhism, infuse the disciplinary mind of Buddhism into their members, and further aid temples by augmenting temple properties, restoring buildings, and providing necessities for religious ceremonies. Historical documents can verify 268 recorded temple fraternities. Each was aimed at providing a particular form of Buddhist service work (佛事, *pulsa*) and they fit into seven different groups.

**Keywords:** Temple fraternity, *sach'algye*, late Chosŏn Buddhism, *kapgye*

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## The Financial Impoverishment of Late Chosŏn Buddhism and the Advent of Temple Fraternities

The Chosŏn period was the darkest in the history of Korean Buddhism. In order to construct a new nation, the rulers rooted their beliefs in Confucianism, and the Buddhist influence that had led the Koryŏ dynasty was erased. In the process, the human and material foundation for Buddhism was gradually lost. Owing to this historical fact, when Chosŏn era Buddhism is spoken of, decline and stagnation are the first words most people mention. That is to say, because the premise is set with the fixed notion that this was an “anti-Buddhist era,” Chosŏn era Buddhism has come to be excluded as a topic of interest, even among scholarly researchers. However, if we consider both the tangible and intangible cultural assets of contemporary Korean Buddhism, it is not just the material culture, the Buddhist engravings, statues, paintings and the like, but the many intangible cultural practices, like *pŏmp’ae* (梵唄, Buddhist singing), *yŏmbul* (念佛, chanting the Buddha’s name), and *yebul ūisik* (禮佛儀式, Buddhist ritual services), that are inherited traditions from this era. In other words, the Korean Buddhism we see today is in fact almost entirely the preservation of the appearance of Chosŏn era Buddhism. If this Buddhism was so destroyed during the period of anti-Buddhism, why is it that contemporary Buddhism adheres so closely to the mold of that era? More than anything, we can point to the training and education of the monastic order and the faithful spirit of the laity. I submit that the concrete aspect undergirding all of this can be found within the prevalence of *sach’algye* (寺刹契)—temple fraternities.<sup>1</sup> It is within the records of these organizations that I wish to examine in a definitive way the realities of Chosŏn Buddhism. In short, I would argue that even amongst the anti-Buddhist policies of the Chosŏn dynasty, the Buddhist world persevered through the possession of a tenacious spirit of survival and that the primary economic force supporting that drive was the *sach’algye*.

The official governmental anti-Buddhism policies of the Chosŏn era developed gradually throughout the length of the Chosŏn dynasty. Countless temples were merged and abolished and monks were defrocked and those that remained faced numerous predations brought on by the yangban bureaucratic society. The expulsion of Buddhism developed in earnest with the ascension of Taejong (r. 1401–

1418). The ostracism of Buddhism continued until the middle of the sixteenth century and the reign of Ch'ungjong (r. 1506–1544), resulting in the weakening of the economic foundation of the temples and the casting out of many of the monks therein.<sup>2</sup>

The result of the Buddhist suppression policies was the rapid immiseration of the *sangha*. The social order of late Chosŏn was greatly unsettled. As a result, the Buddhist world as well underwent swift transformation. After the Imjin invasions and the Manchu invasion of 1636, the citizenry was subjected to corvée labor and as a result, many people sought escape by becoming monastics. With the increase of such monks and nuns who had only entered the *sangha* as a means of survival, the social perception of Buddhist monastics only worsened. Indeed, a new category called *yisaek* (異色), totally outside the traditional four ranks of scholars, farmers, artisans, and tradesmen, was used to denigrate monks and nuns.

Amidst this period of social contempt, the Buddhist world faced exploitation in various forms and was mobilized for all sorts of manual labor. The most harmful of these labors was the papermaking duty, *chiyŏk* (紙役). Temples had been required to submit paper as tax payment to the government from the onset of the Chosŏn dynasty, but with the implementation of the Uniform Land Tax Law (*taedongbŏp*), paper production shrunk and the paper tax burden increased dramatically. Even before this, commoners had been required to supply paper as a tax, but with the *taedongbŏp* and rules calling for the substitution of rice as a payment instead of paper, agricultural fields that had previously been dedicated exclusively to paper mulberry trees were quickly converted to dry and wet rice paddies. The production of paper mulberry thus dropped drastically and with it, ultimately, an attendant shortage of paper. This left the temples as the primary suppliers of paper for the entire nation. During the reign of King Hyŏnjong (r. 1641–1674), in the case of Chŏlla province, large temples were required to supply some 80 quire of paper and small temples, 60, resulting in the flight of many monks from the monasteries and the impoverishment of their temples. Every temple in the nation thus either deteriorated into a paper production facility or another site for supplying some form of tax payment. What was worse, in cases where paper mulberry could not be cultivated owing to geography, such as at Yangsan's T'ongdo-sa, Ŭisŏng's

Koun-sa, and Yŏngbyŏn's Manhap-sa, in order to meet tax material quotas, such temples were forced to come up with special income to pay for the import of tax materials from other regions. Temples were not only faced with this public extortion, however. Regional strongmen would also commandeer forced extractions. At temples in remote mountain areas, precious lumber and fruits were demanded, as were exquisite handicrafts, as they became sites of plunder for the local yangban bureaucracy.

It was against this social background that this specific type of fraternity emerged, the *sach'algye*. They came about through strident efforts to guarantee the material means of support for their own community during a period of extreme economic privation. Generally speaking, *kye* are groups of people working together contributing a fixed amount of money over a certain period of time to either provide for mutual insurance in times of need or to achieve a community determined goal of some sort (Kim Samsu 1964, 41–97). Though similar societies existed earlier during the Silla and Koryŏ eras, they only began to become important with their wide proliferation beginning in the Chosŏn period.

### The Characteristics and Types of *Sach'algye*

*Kye* had already taken root within each strata of Korean society before this time. From the seventeenth century onward, *chokkye* (族契), *tonggye* (洞契), *hakkye* (學契), *sanggye* (喪契) and other various sorts of *kye* structures had already appeared in Chosŏn society. Sociologists and historians share the views that according to the particular nature of each *kye*, its social structure would be adjusted to match its particular focus, functioning as either a cooperative or profit-driven social organization. For the most part, if we observe the particular qualities of rural based self-governing bodies or labor forces in the middle ages, we can interpret these organizations as cooperative communities, while the example of their voluntary participation arising from each of their various activities offers a convincing argument that they were social organizations in pursuit of profit. At any rate, we have generally come to define the *kye* as an enduring organized group of people, intentionally constructed by its members

through their voluntary participation and mutual consent, in the pursuit and achievement of specific goals.

However, in the case of the *sach'algye*, these characteristics are somewhat different. Though it is based on voluntary participation and deals fundamentally with economic activities, the ultimate goal is determined in its pursuit of Buddhist activities. Whether money is gathered for the purposes of bringing about one's birth in the Pure Land, the conservation or expansion of a temple, or the construction of a Buddha statue or similar Buddhist object, the *sach'algye* was an organization constructed and operated for the purpose of carrying out *pulsa* (佛事), or Buddhist service work. In short, a *sach'algye* could be used as a general designation for any of the various organizations that were formed on the basis of Buddhist belief, whether for the purpose of carrying out religious practices or expanding the faith, or for providing for the provision and maintenance of Buddhist properties, temples, or ritual objects. Thus, rather than referring to these organizations simply as "interest groups," it should be said that their nature as faith communities is much stronger than that appellation would imply.

We can know about the prevalence of various types of *sach'algye* via a careful examination of the historical materials that remain pertaining to Chosōn-era Buddhism, including temple chronicles, restoration records and sign boards that remain in contemporary temples, as well as other engravings and the like. Taken together, the collected data point to 268 *sach'algye* during the late Chosōn period.

The first of the *sach'algye* to emerge were the *kapgye* (甲契). An abbreviation of the term *tonggapgye* (同甲契), these were mutual-support organizations formed by people of the same age to share the expenses in the procurement of supplies. They emerged in the middle of the sixteenth century, the first example being the Samyōng Taesa's *kap'oe* (四溟大師의 甲會) established in 1564 (the 19<sup>th</sup> year of King Myōngjong). The *hoe* (會) here is another designation for *kye* (契). This *kapgye* was an organization comprised of those who had entered the monkhood in their early twenties with Samyōngdang, aimed at the promotion of their fellowship and the support of their spiritual practice. It was founded for the direct purpose of encouraging their spiritual faith and cultivation. Later, during the temple restoration movement of the late Chosōn,

though the trend favored *kye* founded for more economic purposes, there is no dearth of examples pointing to the presence of *kye* devoted to faith movements and spiritual practice, as well. Thus, we can say that throughout the Chosŏn period, the *sach'algye* were established to serve the twin purposes of overcoming the economic privation that resulted from the anti-Buddhist policies of the era and encouraging spiritual practice and inspiring the faith through group solidarity. These *sach'algye* survived until 1910.

Though *sach'algye* emerged in many different guises and with many different names during the Chosŏn era, of these the most common were the *kapgye* and the *yŏmbulgye* (念佛契). *Kapgye* had spread nationwide by the end of the eighteenth century and had become so prevalent as to be the primary mechanism of financial support for most every temple. *Yŏmbulgye* were mass-based faith organization comprised of both monastics and laypeople, and while their mutual collection of revenue was also important, they are most worthy of mention for the leadership role they played in the rise of the *yŏmbul* faith movement. On a fundamental level, the *sach'algye* were formed via the joint participation of both monastics and lay people, and even at the level of the small temples, they served the purpose of leveraging the participation of believers towards the pooling of resources to make it possible to carry out Buddhist service work.

By the late seventeenth century, with the Buddhist world in a state of devastation, the temple fraternities became the primary means of support making possible the maintenance of monasteries, the restoration of shrines and temple buildings, as well as other various faith-related activities. These societies could comprise as few as ten or as many as hundreds of contributors and they took many forms. They contributed to a variety of activities, including both those related to temple assistance and restoration, and also to faith related works, such as meditation and worship sessions as well as practice-based communities (*kyŏlsa*).

Below I will examine the ways in which the *sach'algye* were formed and how they were organized and managed, as well as explain the various examples of activities these organizations supported. I will provide details as to the precise aid offered to the maintenance of temples and how Buddhist service work was supported. In the process, I would also like to investigate the significance

of *sach'algye* within the Buddhist world of late Chosŏn. Through an examination of such administrative documents as the *kye* records (契案, a document noting the goals of the *kye* and its membership list), *moyŏnmmun* (募緣文, donation request), *kwŏnsŏnmmun* (勸善文, donation request) and other various materials, it is my aim to ascertain more clearly the material conditions of the Buddhist world from the seventeenth through the nineteenth century, and further, to evaluate more generally the condition of late Chosŏn Buddhism.

### The Establishment and Administration of *Sach'algye*

#### 1) Proposal, recruitment, and founding

There were numerous stages in the formation process of a *sach'algye*. First, the goal and activities of the group, as well as the scope of its participation, had to be planned. Next, the group sponsors would locally publicize the association in search of members. Such publicity work is called *kwŏnsŏn* (勸善). Finally, those who supported the goals and activities of the group would gather to form the *kye*, drawing up documents to record its goals, regulations, activities and member registry. During this process, a *kwŏnsŏnmmun* (勸善文) or *tongch'ammun* (同參文), documents used to publicize the *kye*, were created. This sequential process would differ slightly depending on the type of *kye* being established. For example, in a *kapgye*, where members were all of the same age, or a *ch'ŏnggye* (聽契), founded by the monastics in a single temple, the member recruitment would be skipped. However, in the case of a *pullyanggye* (佛糧契, a *kye* set up to provide the materials or agricultural lands necessary in running a temple), where the majority of members would be from the laity, in order to gain sufficient membership, there was a need to draw up a *kwŏnsŏnmmun* in advance. In other cases, a *kyemun* (fraternity announcement) stressing the merit of religious donation activities would be widely distributed in order to recruit members.

Though the specific process in the formation of a *kye* might differ according to the nature of the *kye* in question, they would generally share the basic steps outlined above. Let us first look at an example of a *tongch'ammun*, a document



drawn up in order to first recruit members. Written in 1772 for the formation of a *manilhoe* (萬日會) at Yŏngwŏn-am (靈源庵) in Hamyang, Kyŏnsang province, it says, “looking for hundreds of people with minds joined together and of similar karma, we dedicated ourselves to long-term practice and decided on a 10,000 day devotion” (HPC 10:261b8–9). Given the fact that in the effort to create this *manilhoe*, the recruitment was aimed at reaching hundreds of people and stressed the importance of the practice of Buddha recitation, we can surmise that this document served as a *kwŏnsŏnmun*. If we examine a few other documents that describe the situation of other *manilhoe* at this time, we can presume the existence of *tongch’ammun*.<sup>3</sup> In 1887, during the establishment of a *manilhoe* at Taedun-sa in Haenam, donations and *kye* members were solicited via a recruitment document (HPC 10:1093c–1094a). Also, sometime before 1889, a *Manilhoe t’ongch’am kyemun* (萬日會同參契文), written by Chisŏn Tongmyŏng (知宣 東溟, 1839–1889) to recruit *kye* members, used language that emphasized the divine powers of the Pure Land faith (*Tongmyŏngyugojip*, DUL, D810.819). In 1895, the *Kosŏng-gun Okchŏn-sa Ch’ŏngnyŏn-am manilgyewŏn mojipmun* (固城郡玉泉寺青蓮庵萬日契員募集文), a document calling for members to join the *manilgye* at the Ch’ŏngnyŏn hermitage at Okch’ŏn-sa, used simple sentences written only in *hangŭl* with the intention of making it easy enough for the masses to read and thus to gather widespread participation.<sup>4</sup>

As it was not always easy to encourage economic participation in the formation of a *sach’algye*, it was necessary to include a powerful incentive linking one’s participation with the awaking of the Buddha mind, and this took place precisely through the use of documents like the *kwŏnsŏnmun*, *tongch’ammun*, or the *mojipmun*. In an anti-Buddhist society, the ability to preserve the Buddhist faith was reliant on the strength of the common people, and the *sach’algye* were likewise made possible through them. However, the economic status of the common people was constrained within fixed limits, and thus, in order to exhort them to participate, it was through documents such as the *kwŏnsŏnmun* and *t’ongch’ammun* that the worth and religious merit of these activities had to be explained.

The social rank of *sach’algye* members can be roughly divided into three categories. The first are the *kapgye*, *ch’ŏnggye*, *mundogye* (門徒契) and other such *kye* composed of monastics. The second are the *pullyanggye*, *tŭngch’okgye*

(燈燭契, *kye* organized for the donation of lamps and candles used to light the Buddha halls), and other lay associations. *Yōmbulgye* and other such groups established by both monastics and laity comprise the third category. Though these distinctions were not strictly delineated, the social rank of *kye* participants was largely in order with the character of the *kye* in question.

In the formation of a *kye*, there were few situations where strict restrictions were placed on the qualifications for membership. The only cases where this would be true would be with a *ch'ōnggye*, formed by managers at a temple who were in charge of specific temple duties, a *mundogyē*, where participants were in the same disciple lineage of a master, and the *pullyanggye*, formed by those who labored in particular area of work. Outside of these cases, there were few instances where membership in a *kye* was limited. This lack of restrictions to *kye* membership, whether the goals in the establishment of the *kye* were based on religious faith or acts of charity, was similar among all *kye* because the one thing they all had in common was the necessity to insure sufficient membership. The primary stipulation in determining whether a *kye* would be able to flourish was precisely in this openness to participation, making sure anybody was able to take part.

## 2) Organization and duties

Based on the objectives of a *kye*, various activities would unfold accordingly, and each of these duties would require a person be assigned to it. If the objective of the *kye* was religious practice, especially Buddhist recitation, the leader would have to be a monastic specializing in ritual chanting. A *kye* dedicated to temple upkeep would need a supervisor capable of managing various duties, including the gathering and increasing of capital through donations and *singni* (殖利, investments that could garner interest). Just as the forms of *kye* were diverse, so too were the duties that emerged within the internal structure of each organization. When there were religious activities, all practitioners were of equal standing, but this sort of diversified organization was not prevalent. However, in the case of *kye* devoted to temple assistance, the carrying out of activities such as the long-term financial management of funds and purchasing

of agricultural lands, the *kye* would develop a organized system of divided labor and responsibility.

Within the organizational structure of a *sach'algye*, the first duty was that of the *kye* representative. While were many appellations given to describe the role of the representative, including *kyesu* (契首), *chwaju* (座主), *kyejang* (契長), *sudu* (首頭), *chujang* (主長), *susŭng* (首僧) and others, all of them shared the general meaning of “leader.” First to appear was the job classification of *kyesu* in 1681 in a *mitagye* (彌陀契) at Pohyŏn-sa.<sup>5</sup> The *mitagye* was a *pullyanggye* that donated offerings to the Buddha and offered assistance in the restoration of the temple. Beginning in 1681 and lasting until 1847, every six cycles of the *kye* its organization would be reshuffled. In 1691, the total membership reached 750 people. In order to manage a *kye* of such a grand scale, there were special overseers, such as *kongwŏn* (公員), *yusa* (有司), and *sŭngyusa* (僧有司). The *kyesu* was tasked with managing these members and also serving as the representative of the entire *kye*.

Next were the *chwaju* (座主). These appear in the 1722 *sijugye* (施主契) at Pŏmŏ-sa and the 1771 *songgye* (松契) at Suda-sa. The *sijugye* was a type of *pullyanggye*, with 32 monks participating. Of these, there existed a representative called the *chwaju*. The *songgye* at Suda-sa was charged with the nurturing of the mountain forest. Unlike other *kye*, the members of this organization participated directly in supplying their labor to the task of forest management. To take on such an operation, the internal structure of this *kye* required a permanent position devoted to the management of this task. This person was probably the *chwaju* or *kongwŏn*.

The *sach'algye* were largely administered via the consensus and understanding of the entire membership or they were small-scale organizations, meaning that situations requiring a specialized organizational system were rare. However, the one thing every *kye* had in common was the need for a representative to serve as symbolic figurehead. The most widely used appellation to refer to this representative was the *kyejang* (契長). For instance, in *kapgye*, *ch'ŭlsŏnggye*, *pullyanggye*, *ch'ŏngsŏnggye* and others, the chosen representative was called the *kyejang*.

That said, there were other names used for the *kye* representative. The 1881 *pyŏng'o kapgye* at T'ongdo-sa (HMY 1979b, 615–617) and the 1898 *imja kapgye*

(CCNC 2010b) referred to their representatives as *kapjang* (甲長). While the earlier *kyōngja kapgye* at Kirim-sa in 1807 referred to their representative as *kyejang*, the change in usage at T'ongdo-sa was likely meant to better embody the specific character of their own particular *kye*. It is thought that in the case of the *kapgye*, since the organization was made active via the agreement of members who would have all been of a similar age, the role is thought to have been less that of a work manager and much more symbolic in nature.

The *kye* representative was tasked with making decisions about the overall operation of the organization. However, since *kye* were generally small-scale operations, or the chosen activities were determined in a traditional manner, the actual duties of the representative were usually minimal. This is understandable, given that the only information needed to maintain the *kye* system was that pertaining to the few duties and the names of *kye* membership. Given the nature of the organization, the administrative demands on a *sach'algye* representative were minimal, and as a result, the role usually fell to the member with the highest education or the most seniority. In actual practice, the person in charge of the administration of the *kye* was usually somebody else. In the case of the *manilhoe*, *chusōn* (主禪) and *hoeju* (會主) were designations used for the representatives. This is seen to be due to the fact that these names were also used in situations referring to temple leaders in affairs that had nothing to do with *kye*.

The people who carried out the work of general administration within a *kye* were those assigned to the role of *kongwōn* (公員) and *changmu* (掌務). In the eight cases where we know of the existence of people in charge of business affairs, seven of these were *kongwōn* and four were *changmu*, so we can guess that both of these were rather universal titles for the general administrator. These people were charged with the administration of the entire organization, gathering funds and taking care of administration and management work. Given that the work of lending and accumulating the capital of the *kye* was the most central duty for supporting the activities of the organization, almost every *kye* had a single person dedicated to the general management of these tasks. Examining *kye* records we see the following, “*kye* members oversaw the restoration of the temple and the management of *kye* farmlands, *kye* property,

and the *kye* records (契案). In addition, in the case of a *kye* member's death, lay or monastic functionaries (*yusa* and *sūngyusa*, respectively) would supervise the carrying out of ritual mourning services at the temple."<sup>6</sup> From this, we can see that the managers were charged with the specific role of managing the *kye* funds such that in the case of a death, ritual mourning services would be taken care of by the organization.

Another duty within the temple fraternity society was that of secretary. These members kept records and drew up the various documents of the *kye*. They were charged with the composition of articles such as the *kye'an* (契案, *kye* records), *kyech'aek* (契冊, *kye* book), *kyesō* (契序, affairs of the *kye*), as well as keeping records of the *kyewōnjil* (契員秩, *kye* order of members), *panghamnok* (芳啣錄, guest register), and *sijujil* (施主秩, contribution record), so as to keep a careful account of participants and the amount of funds in the *kye*. During member recruitment drives, there were many occasions for the secretary to write about the merits of donations leading to "a life of longevity" or "rebirth in the Pure Land." On these occasions, the names of *kye* members would be recorded by the secretary in the *ch'ukwōnnok* (祝願錄, blessing) that were read during worship services or prayer sessions. All of these various writing tasks were taken care of by the secretary. Finally, at the lowest level of the organization, carrying out the duties of the rank and file, were the *sahwan* (使喚, overseer) and *sisā* (時使, occasional worker). From their titles, we can see the roles played by each.

The various offices managed within a *kye*, and the relative rank of each, differed by each *kye*, depending upon the constitution of the particular *kye*'s membership. Though it is easy to imagine that in most cases, when a *kye* was established within a temple, where the main administrators were monastics, in reality, laypeople were also included among the managing personnel. Though this was the case in the monastic-only *kye* (*kapgye*, *ch'ōnggye*, *mundogyē*, etc.), in those certain organizations described above, formed by those with special skills, every office from the *kyejang* down to the *sahwan* could be staffed by a layperson. Especially in the case of the *pullyanggye*, the specific office related to the organization of donations was exclusively held by a layperson.

### 3) Administration

The sorts of work that a *sach'algye* dealt with in their temple aid activities are so varied that it is impossible to mention them all. The types of activities in which each *kye* would partake were determined by the specific needs of the temple where the *kye* was established. What they held in common were the various means they employed to try and administer the principal in the *kye*'s accounts. The most widespread activities were those that would multiply their accrued capital gained through interest earned via loaning *kye* capital as well as the purchase of wet and dry rice fields. The capital raised in such efforts would be used to repair the buildings on the temple grounds, to purchase agricultural lands or commodities to offer as contributions, or to offer directly as cash donations.

There were two processes through which these temple aid activities would be carried out. In the first, the *kye* principal would be gathered and then invested in profit-seeking enterprises. In the second, the accumulated capital would be used in some way accordant to the purpose of the *kye*. First, let us examine the process of principal accumulation and management.

The common way to accrue *kye* principal was through fixed, determined contributions. However, there are cases where the method was not specifically determined. In 1737, it was said of the *kongbulgye* (供佛禊) at Sungnim-sa (崇林寺) that “nearly 100 people each invested a bit of grain or other valuables” (PMY 1966, 44–45). Another document from the mid-eighteenth century said of a *pullyanggye* at Haein-sa, “the masses were recruited, and the rank and quality of riches donated by the wealthy was not discussed, as all those who contributed cash were included in the register of names” (HPC 10:380b–c). Because this was likely due to the fact that the participants of the *kye* were commoners who were limited to contributing only a small amount, we can surmise that the *kye* organizers, in their desire to encourage the Buddhist faith, wanted to get as many members as possible. In addition, as the *pullyanggye* was a donor organization, rather than one with a fixed sum contribution, the spirit of voluntary participation may also have been constrained.

The most common type of *kye* contribution was cash. Though this could vary given the goals of the organization or the composition of the membership, most of these were small contributions. On one hand, given the nature of a certain *kye*, the form of the contribution could be voluntarily determined. Contributions did not have to be in cash, but could also be in grains, malted rice, cloth, or numerous other sorts of goods and materials. To become a participant in the *p'anch'ōnggye* (判廳稷) at Songgwang-sa in 1798, one needed to contribute white rice and all members donated a years' worth of malted rice. The contribution at a *pullyanggye* at Yōngūn-sa in 1854 was six threaded-loops of coins (繒錢, *minjŏn*) or 60 *tu* of unhulled rice. In 1773, a *kapgye* at Yuga-sa (瑜伽寺) collected leftover materials (長物, *changmul*) and cloth and used them to repair a massive beam in the Buddha hall, and in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the *inkisangp'ogyē* (仁基喪布契) accepted cloth instead of money to meet the goal of preparing for funerary expenses. As the *sach'algye* was an organization based on free and voluntary membership, they had to lessen the financial burden incurred by the *kye* contribution. In most cases, the required contribution was small and sometimes opportunities for participation were widened such that the contribution itself was not stipulated. It is due to situations such as these that money alone was not required and a wide variety of goods and materials were included as possible contributions to the *kye*.

There were generally two ways of managing the *kye* principal. The first involved using the funds accumulated through fixed contributions to the *kye* as direct donations towards the repair or construction of temple buildings. The second involved making loans, either to members or to common people outside the *kye*, and then collecting interest in return. Given that the interest-earning activities carried a big weight in the activities of the *kye*, this second method was nearly universal. However, if the *kye* was formed under circumstances where there was a pressing need to solve an immediate problem, such long-term interest-gaining activities were not needed. For example, when the *ch'ōngsimgye* (淸心契) at Chunghŭng-sa (重興寺) in Pyōngyang was formed for the purpose of constructing a wooden pavilion, or in 1816, when the *ch'amoegyōmbi'gye* at Ŭnhae-sa was formed to construct a stele to commemorate Yōngp'a Sōnggyu, there was no loan-interest process, and instead, the *kye* funds put towards the Buddhist service work all came from direct donations.

The scale of interest-earning through *kye* funds was generally small, but when contributions were few, such investing would take place. *Kye* funds would be lent out to commoners or *kye* members over a fixed period with interest charged. The loan term would depend on the circumstances of the *kye*, but would generally fall between six and nine years. Though there were cases where a greater return was sought and long-term loans would take place, when money was needed to purchase agricultural lands the long-term loans would be called in early and revert to the six to nine year time-frame. In the majority of cases where interest-earning loans were disbursed, the money was used to purchase land for farming, and this tells us that the purpose of interest-earning investment was primarily for the accumulation of farmland.

There is only one document that tells us what the interest rate was in the case of *kye* lending practices. A *hakkye* (學禪) formed by the *pojehoejung* (普濟會中) at Sangwŏn-am in 1898 reported that “for every 10 *nyang* (兩) paid out as principal, each year 5 or 6 *p’un* interest would be taken in and then used to pay for teachings” (HPC 10: 1088c–1089a). Five or six *p’un* translates to about 4 or 5% monthly interest. During the late Chosŏn period, private lenders were seeking 10% monthly rates and public loans were lower, at about 3 to 4.5%. Thus, the loans distributed from Sangwŏn-am were more expensive than the government loans but half the cost of private loans. Because the lending of *kye* funds was, more than anything, entirely dependent upon the full faith and credit of the borrowers, the probability that these were either *kye* members or temple parishoners was very high. As a result, given that these financial relationships were built upon a sense of community solidarity, we can easily understand why the lending rate was so much lower than that charged by private citizen lenders. With lower rates and emotional bonds serving as the context for these loans, the process of both disbursing the loans and having them repaid was carried out quite smoothly.

### **Buddhist Service Work and Activities of the *Sach’algye***

Looking at the 268 documented cases of *sach’algye* during the late Chosŏn period, they can be classified into 25 different types. The type and frequency of the various *kye* can be seen in the table below.



Table 1. *Sach'algye* type and frequency

Type	Category (frequency)							Total
Faith Activities	<i>manilhoe</i> (31)	<i>yömbulgye</i> (8)	<i>ch'ilsönggye</i> (11)	<i>chijanggye</i> (6)				56 (21%)
Temple Assistance	<i>kapgye</i> (75)	<i>tüngch'okgye</i> (29)	<i>mundogye</i> (20)	<i>pullyanggye</i> (49)	<i>sanp'ogye</i> (4)	<i>ch'önggye</i> (14)	<i>kit'agye</i> (21)	212 (79%)

What immediately jumps out from this data is that an important function of the *kye* was to help maintain the temples. As the table indicates, a full 80% of the *sach'algye*, 212 out of 268, were devoted to temple assistance. What is more, though the *manilhoe* (萬日會), *yömbulgye* (念佛契), *ch'ilsönggye* (七星契), and *chijanggye* (地藏契) are classified as faith activities, they also contributed fundamentally to temple assistance as well. Below, we will look at the various aspects of the specific operations within the seven spheres of the Buddhist service work of these 268 *sach'algye*: 1) Donation of supplies, agricultural lands, and cash; 2) Temple restoration; 3) Donation of Buddhist statuary, paintings, bells, and other objects; 4) Sutra publication; 5) Labor activities; 6) Educational activities; and 7) Faith-organization activities.

#### 1) Donation of supplies, agricultural lands, and cash

*Sach'algye* accumulated capital through a fixed schedule of contributions and then appropriated these funds towards the founding purpose. Given that the primary goal in establishing these *kye* was for Buddhist service work, by examining which activities utilized the *kye*, we can understand precisely how the *sach'algye* contributed to this endeavor. Through the donation of needed supplies, farmland, or cash, *kye* provided assistance for every aspect of a temple's operation, and provided essential aid to help these religious communities overcome the extreme financial difficulties they were facing. The activities of the *kapogye* that operated from 1808 to 1824 at Ŭnhae-sa is a great example of this.<sup>7</sup> From the provision of candles, incense and firewood in the Buddha hall, to the lamp oil in the monastic quarters, to the repair of the painting of the

Four Heavenly Guardians (四天王幀畫, *sach'ōnwang t'aenghwa*), to the purchase of farmland, this *kye* contributed to the supply of resources needed for all necessary Buddhist service work at this temple.

Of the many various Buddhist service works, the most widespread was the donation of farmland. The following provides a representative example of an agricultural offering. In 1737, it was said that a *kongbulgye* (供佛禮) at Sungnim-sa (崇林寺) “operated for many years, purchasing a bit of land every full moon day; on the first of the month, a six o'clock service was held and a donation was made as offering to the Buddha” (PMY 1966a). In 1787, the *muokapgye* (戊午甲契) at Ŭnhae-sa purchased land to the northeast of the Buddha hall and donated it to the temple.<sup>8</sup> Their service work had actually begun much earlier than this, with the 1761 restoration of the temple's Gate of the Four Heavenly Guardians (*ch'ōnwangmun*) (Kang 1937, 38). At the onset of the nineteenth century, in 1806, the *im'okapgye* (壬午甲契) at Ŭnhae-sa was operating with 71 members, and donated some 100 *tuji* (斗地) of land and 1,180 *tu* of rice to the temple storehouse.<sup>9</sup> In 1808, the *kyōngjagapgye* (庚子甲契) at T'ongdo-sa donated 15 *tuji* of land to contribute to the preservation of the Hall of the Medicine Buddha (*pogwangjōn*) (HMY 1979b, 455). In 1837, the *muokapgye* at Ŭnhae-sa again contributed land and precious goods and from an inscription left at the time, we can steal a glimpse into the Buddhist world at that time, along with the life of high-ranking parishoners.

Left neglected, passing some 300 years since its last renovations, Ŭnhae-sa has emerged from the brambles owing to the energy of the *kapgye*. With public slaves working harder, and honored guests filling the temple, the monks are pouring in all their energy with none to spare. This *kapgye* is the result of people of good will coming together some time ago, joining their hearts and energies together, and devoting their efforts to serve the temple. Working without rest, with the united power of all 118 members, we offered 100 *tu* [a large unit of land] of land and some 230 *min* [stringed coins].<sup>10</sup>

The desperate financial conditions faced by the temples continued through the nineteenth century. In 1887, a *pullyanggye* at Taesūng-sa in Mun'gyōng

reported that, “according to the joint wishes of the monastics and the lay-people, free from worry about the large amount of money, we gathered our energies to make an offering by purchasing a few *turak* (두락 斗落) of land. Now, as long ago, we are equipped with the financial means to make our charitable offerings to the needy and our ceremonial offerings to the Buddha” (HMY 1979a, 151–168). In much this way, agricultural land could become a fixed source of income to provide for the maintenance of a temple, and as such, became the most widely used means of donation.

The common practice was to convert this land into cash, as represented in the following examples. The *ōsangye* (魚山禪), established before 1809, reported that “a little bit of money was gathered and a fund established, and with rising interest accruing each year, there was enough money to pay for the expenses of food and monastic robes” (HPC 10:328c–329a). In 1894, the *ch’ilsōnggye* at the the Yōndae-am at Okch’ōn-sa was giving a monthly meal with the money from the *kye*,<sup>11</sup> and the *pokjehoejung hakkye* (普濟會中學禪), formed sometime before 1896 at Sangwōn-am (上院庵), raised interest to pay the fees for their lectures (HPC 10:1088c–1089a). Compared to the donation of land, the donation of cash brought about a relatively more immediate result. Of course, these cash donations weren’t coming directly from *kye* principle, but rather from interest-earning investments, and thus required sufficient amount of time. However, in the case of land donation, if revenue needed to be raised, this would require yet another fixed period of time until it was ready. As a result, it is thought that the donation of cash was done only in the case of urgent necessity to aid a temple. Or, as in the case above with the *ōsangye*, if food and clothing needed to be procured directly, cash donations were a helpful means of bringing about a quick result.

## 2) Temple restoration

The majority of traditional temples that remain today possess the characteristics of the palatial style common in the Chosŏn period. All sorts of documents from this period refer to the rebuilding and repair of Buddhist temples. Looking at these records, there are so many cases that one cannot help but doubt as to whether the Chosŏn era really was a period of “anti-Buddhism.” These temple

refurbishing projects were taken on under a variety of circumstances. In the case of the large temples, some were designated as prayer centers or ancestral shrines for royal ancestors and donations from the royal family were given directly or blank warrants of title (空名帖, *kongmyōngch'ōp*) were issued to provide the appropriate financing. Also, they could become the ancestral shrines for powerful families and receive financial support as a result (Han 2006b, 26–29). However, for the majority of smaller temples, when they wished to do any sort of rebuilding or refurbishment they would have to draw up *moyōnmun* and venture out into the secular world in the difficult search for donations. In short, the majority of temples in the Chosŏn period were kept alive via the combined small contributions of the masses of common folk.

When we look at the documents of the *sach'algye* and see the historical evidence regarding temple restoration, we can understand a critical contribution was made to the effort of temple maintainance and preservation during the Chosŏn period. In 1739, the aforementioned *Ch'ōngsimgye* at Chunghŭng-sa in Pyōngyang was a *pullyanggye* formed for the purpose of constructing a wooden pavilion. Kim Sewŏn, a citizen of the Pyōngyang region, thought it lamentable that this temple was without such a structure and thus set out to muster people for the formation of a *kye* to address this lack. They distributed a collection of calligraphy called *Ch'ōngsimgye kakhyu* (清心契各携) and collected valuables. With enough resources raised, they constructed the *Yangsŏngnyu* (養聖樓) (CC 1976a, vol. 2, 1142–1143). This *kye* had 78 members, all lay-people, and held *kye* meetings every year in the spring and autumn.

In 1802 at Kirim-sa (祇林寺), the retired scholar Kim Ch'angyun, together with Hongwŏn (洪遠), Igwan (理寬), Hyeahan (惠閑), Ch'ōnjun (天俊), T'aegwan (泰寬) and others founded a *yōmbulgye* which raised funds and financed the reconstruction of the dilapidated buildings there.<sup>12</sup> A *yōmbulgye* was conventionally organized for the purpose of facilitating spiritual activities. However, the *kye*'s founding statement clearly noted that its purpose was “to accumulate funds for the purpose of temple restoration.”

The Hwajang-am *manilloe* formed in 1846 is a good example of a *kye* that provided critical financial assistance to a temple through its economic activities. The great economic role they played can be seen in the fact that through their donations alone the entire temple was rebuilt. The venerable master Suñ (守恩

上人) managed the capital of the *kye* for some dozens of years and created a veritable godsend of capital in the process. As the hermitage fell into ruin, the master sent notice to the public that, “generally, the expansion of property is very important, and in this case, as it brings solemnity to our temple, is it not an act in service of bringing about our birth in the Pure Land?” (CCNC 2010a). The import of this document is in noting that the temple’s reconstruction was brought about through the proceeds built on the foundation of the *kye* funds of the *manilhoe*. In short, the reconstruction of Hwajang-am was possible because of the existence of the *manilhoe* and the financial role played by a *kye* could, as in cases such as this, be truly enormous.

In 1894, a *ch’ilsōnggye* at the Yōndae-am at Okch’ōn-sa was founded for the purpose of erecting a Seven Stars Shrine (*ch’ilsōnggak*). With many members participating, they are an example of a *kye* that was active in both spiritual and economic activities. The operation of this *ch’ilsōnggye* was such that small groups of 4 or 5 members would each invest their funds and then seek interest to provide enough capital to pay for devotional offerings. After this, in accordance with the purposes of the *kye*, more than 100 members would work toward a similar end, and the amount they then donated was not slight. With the growing prosperity of Yōndae-am’s *ch’ilsōnggye*, the *ch’ilsōnggak* was erected in June, 1902.

A *sugye* (修禊) was operating at Kosan-sa in 1898 (PMY 1964b). It was formed with the oath to remedy the deterioration that had overtaken the temple over a long period of time. The *kye* name, based on the character *su* 修 indicating “cultivation, improvement, polishing,” was a testament to their declaration to be a “*kye* created to restore the temple,” and indeed, through their efforts the temple’s restoration was completed. In total, the *kye* had 42 members, comprised entirely of laypeople, among whom was a county magistrate, which is quite striking.

### 3) Donation of Buddhist statuary, paintings, bells, and other objects

There are not many occasions where the activities of *sach’algye* were geared towards the donation of Buddhist statuary. These days, if one speaks of “Buddhist service work,” together with temple restoration, the construction of

Buddha and bodhisattva statues is the representative type. However, in the Chosŏn period, there are only a few examples of this. It seems that this was due to the dire financial straits faced by temples in late Chosŏn. Because the alleviation of the extreme financial difficulties at this time was the primary work of the *kye*, Buddhist service work aimed at meeting such long-term needs as the construction of Buddhist statuary were uncommon.

There are a few examples of *kye*-funded Buddhist statuary construction. In 1722 at Pŏmŏ-sa, the *sijugye* made donations to refinish the Buddha triad in the Vairocana Hall and reconstruct a gilt-bronze Kwanŭm statue (HMY 1989, 56–57). As their name (*siju*, donation) makes clear, this was a *kye* aimed towards doing Buddhist service work. Around 1855, a *ch'ilsŏnggye* at Oŏ-sa (吾魚寺) was formed for the purpose of enshrining a “Blazing Perfect Light Buddha triad” (*ch'isŏnggwang samjon*).<sup>13</sup> A joint effort that included the efforts of young and old, Confucians and Buddhists alike, the group spent eight or nine years making loans and earning interest through the purchase of 11 *turak* of land and finally succeeded in enshrining the triad.

While there are no cases of Buddhist statues being newly constructed, there are cases of *kye* taking over the responsibility of serving a special Buddha statue. In 1903, the *kwanŭmgye* (觀音禪) at Pŏpchu-sa<sup>14</sup> was formed with the purpose of providing ceremonial offerings to a *kwanŭm* statue located on Sujŏng Peak at Songni-san. The group was founded by 86 monastics and 51 laypeople, including Sunjong's queen. The majority of monks in the area, from Pŏpchu-sa, Pokch'ŏn-am, Sujŏng-am and the surrounding mountains, were included, as were laypeople not only from the area but also a group called “inside Hwangsŏng,” including some dozens of Seoul residents.<sup>15</sup> The object of donations for a *kye* was primarily an entire temple, or perhaps a special building within a temple. While the end result was largely the same, whether the object of donations was a building or statue, the fact that in this case the object was limited only to a statue shows exactly how diverse the target of *kye* donation activity could be.

It is primarily through *hwagi* (書記, painting records) that we can verify examples of Buddhist paintings being created. We only have fragments of evidence about them, as listed in the table below.

Examples of the Promotion of Buddhist Paintings by *Sach'algye*

No.	Year	Name	Activity	Source
1	1709	<i>tŭngch'okgye</i>	<i>Ch'ŏnbuldo</i> [a painting of the Thousand Buddhas]	Hong Yunsik, "Yongmun-sa ch'ŏnbuldo," <i>Han'guk purhwa hwagijip</i> 1, 68–69.
2	1771	<i>songgye</i>	<i>Siwang</i> [a painting of Ksitigarbha]	"Suda-sa siwangdo," <i>ibid.</i> , pp. 170–172.
3	1812	<i>tŭngch'okgye</i>	<i>Yŏngsanhoesangdo</i> [painting of the Sermon on Vulture Peak]	"Yongmun-sa yŏngsanhoesangdo," <i>Han'guk purhwa hwagijip</i> 1, pp. 238–239.
4	1882	<i>ch'ilsŏnggye</i>	<i>Kwanŭm posaldo</i> [painting of Avalokitesvara]	"Pŏmŏ-sa Kwanŭm posaldo," <i>ibid.</i> , 309.
5	1890	<i>ch'ilsŏnggye</i>	<i>Ch'ilsŏngdo</i> [painting of the Seven Stars]	"Panya-sa Taeungjŏn ch'ilsŏngdo," <i>ibid.</i> , 332.
6	1904	<i>chijanggye</i>	<i>Sŏkkamonihubul T'aenghwa</i> [the painting of Sakyamuni]	Sinhŭng-sa, Sŏkkamonihubul T'aenghwa, <i>Han'guk ŭi purhwa</i> 3, Sŏngbomunhwaje yŏnguwŏn, p. 250.
7	1904	<i>manilhoe</i>	<i>Kŭngnak kup'umdo</i> [The Nine Grades of Rebirth painting]	"Pongam-sa yŏnjip'umdo," <i>Han'guk purhwa hwagijip</i> 1, 369–370.
8	1906	<i>manilhoe</i>	<i>Sansindo</i> [painting of the Mountain Spirit]	"Pukjang-sa Sansindo," <i>ibid.</i> , 379–380.

Next, we can examine an example of a paper donation. In 1776, a *chŏgye* (楮契), meaning "paper mulberry kye," was formed at Chikchi-sa (HMY 1980, 95). We only learn of the existence of this organization during the reconstruction period of this temple. However, given its name, it seems to have been a *kye* organized for the purpose of paper production. After the Imjin War and then the Manchu Invasions of 1636, the national paper production system collapsed and regional taxes began being levied on temples. In this situation, the central government paid a dirt cheap price for paper, while the majority of garrisons, provincial governors, or other regional powers demanded paper be supplied for free (Kim Sun'gyu 2000, 272–277). As a result, temples themselves could not help but take on the burden of paper production to supply as a tax to the government. In the process, the number of *chŏgye* increased. The only case that we can verify is the one at Chikchi-sa. The excessive paper tax (*chiyŏk*) was a

direct factor in the collapse of some temples and perhaps this is the reason we can verify only this one case of a *chōgye*. This is likely due to the fact that, unlike *chōgye*, which were founded only for the purpose of dealing with the paper tax, the other *kye* addressed a wide variety of issues in their temple assistance activities.

#### 4) Sutra publication

The activities of the *sach'algye* did not end with the donation of material goods, but extended to a variety of forms, including the publication of Buddhist sutras. While the donation of such things as agricultural land and cash provided critical help to the financial expansion of the temples, the publication of sutras was able to aid the development of Buddhism through the long-term transmission of Buddhism and implementation of educational activities.

Two cases are handed down through the archives. First, in 1882, the *chijanggye* at Haein-sa participated in the printing of the *Tabimun* (茶毘文, *Writings on Buddhist cremation ceremonies*). Published at Haein-sa, the *Tabimun* is a collection of writings detailing the steps necessary in carrying out the funeral ceremonies for the cremation of monks in the mountains. Those who participated in donating to this publication effort were divided into the *sanjungjongsajil* (山中宗師秩) and *t'asanjil* (他山秩). The latter included a *ch'ilsōnggye* comprised of members from some 45 temples in the greater Kyōngsang-do region. The *sanjungjongsajil* included both the *chijanggye* and the *ōhoegye*, and they provide an important example of how such organizations could take part in producing such things as Buddhist funeral texts (Nam 2004, 90–91). In the following year at Pōmō-sa, the *ch'ilsōnggye* there published the *Kyech'osimhak inmun* (誠初心學人文).<sup>16</sup> Though in the case above, there were three organizations joined together in the publishing of the *Tabimun*, in this case, the *ch'ilsōnggye* took on the entire production through a block printing (印出, *inch'ul*) donation.

#### 5) Labor activities

In order to found a *kye*, *kye* funds, and specifically cash, were an absolute necessity. Rice, paddies, or the like could sometimes substitute, but intermittent



cash could not. Whatever means were used, commodifiable wealth was needed. Through wealth, interest-seeking and donation activities were achieved. The function of the *kye* is not to acquire wealth per se. Wealth is the result of *kye* members' labor and production. The activities of the *kye* generally were carried out via the medium of wealth; there were not many occasions where *kye* members directly supplied productive labor. It was only on two occasions, when absolutely unforeseen circumstances arose, that we see examples of this activity, one at a *kapgye* and another at a *pullyanggye*.

In 1715 the *muogapgye* at Yōngbul-sa (安佛寺) had 100 some members who cut and conveyed stone to construct the steps to the Main Buddha Hall (*taeungjōn*). In 1746, the members of a *kabogapgye* channeled their energies and constructed the main gate (曹溪門, *chogyemun*) (CCNC 2010c). Though we cannot know the detailed circumstances from the brief mention in the records, it seems that they left these records because they performed a great amount of meritorious service in activities that demanded much labor power—cutting rock and erecting the main gate. This demonstrates the important fact that the role of the *kye* expanded to the realm of performing labor activities.

Though the previous cases represent temporary instances of labor activity, in the following example, labor activity took on an important, long-term role in implementing the goals of the *kye*. In 1771, the *songgye* (松契) at Sōnsan's Sudo-sa was an organization that planted and cultivated a forest, giving donations through the produced lumber or profits (Hong 1995, 170–172). Through the cultivation of the forest, the *songgye* prevented the temple from ruin and extended the vista of the temple boundaries. They also used their own produced lumber in the restoration of their temple buildings. Because members of the *kye* were themselves responsible for every aspect of forest management, quite unlike in other *kye*, this one took part directly in labor and production activities. Labor aimed at production was an absolutely necessary process for the operation of the *kye*. A particular *kye* format emerged from this process, with the appearance of *chwaju* (座主) and *kongwōn* (公員), offices in full charge of all duties.

Though two types of *songgye*, namely *tonggye* (洞契) and *chokkye* (族契), existed in Chosōn society in a fairly large number, the situation of the *songgye* at Suda-sa was unique. Mention of Sudo-sa's *songmyōngdong kūmgyechōp*

(松明洞禁松契帖) appeared in a text in 1763. Eight years later, in 1771, there is another textual instance of the aforementioned activity of the *songgye*. Given that more than thirty years, at the very minimum, are required in order to make a profit through forest cultivation, we can ascertain that the *kye* must have been founded a few decades previous. Based on extant evidence, we can posit that this is the first *songgye* in Chosŏn.

Another instance is the late-nineteenth century *nuryukgye* that operated at Pŏmŏ-sa producing and selling malted rice (*nuryuk*). (*Han'guk pulgyo ch'oegŭn paengnyŏn* 1969, 49). Given the burden imposed by levies and government demands for labor, a *kye* was formed to provide donations through the sale of malted rice. The particular aspect of this *kye*, operating as a group of skilled professionals, is understood within the nature of forestry and brewing, which demand a large amount of cooperative labor power and professional skill. In this way, the *sach'algye* activity is not limited to donation efforts. Instead, it expands diversely and through active means, to the point of taking part in labor and production.

## 6) Educational activities

Among the diverse activities of the *sach'algye*, there are examples of the development of educational activities such as the training of young monks and instruction of *pŏmp'ae*. Of the five instances of these type of *kye*, three were *hakkye* (學契) and two were *pŏmp'aegye* (梵唄契). *Hakkye* that were set up with the purpose of teaching young students or pursuing scholarly training were called *sŏdanggye* (書堂契) and *kasukkye* (家塾契). *Hakkye* shared similar characteristics with *mundogyae*. *Mundogyae* were established by disciples to provide for and carry on the teachings of a shared master. The aim was for students steeped in their masters' teachings to look after their masters' safety and provide for their cremations after their deaths. In its taking shape along the lines of a master-student relationship propagating the masters' teaching and dharma lineage, the *mundogyae* shares this in common with the *hakkye*.

In Chosŏn society, *kye* of this nature became rather widespread, popular amongst Confucian scholars as *munsaeenggye* (門生契) (Kim Mujin 1983). Just as Confucians inherited the scholarship and academic traditions of their

masters though the *munsaenggye*, monastics used *mundogye* to pass on the teachings of their masters. Though *hakkye* were widespread in mainstream Chosŏn society at this time, the fact that they were rare in the Buddhist world was owing to the fact that if the activities of the *hakkye* were to support educational projects and the succession of a master's academic tradition, such things were made possible through the *kye* of the *mundo* (門徒, disciple).

The first example of a *hakkye* in the Buddhist world was the *ul'amhakkye* (蔚庵學契) that operated at Pŏmŏ-sa in 1812 (HMY 1989, 102). Though there is a short record about their donation to the reconstruction of Poje-ru, we can presume it played a role in Pŏmŏ-sa's student education, led by Ul'am Kyŏngŭi (蔚庵敬儀) until the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup>

The second example is the *pŏmhae hoejung* (梵海會中) *hakkye*. This fact is imparted via Ch'oeui Euisun's (草衣意恂) preface, which states, "I was requested to note a few words in the preface about colleagues who want to create a *kye* for the purpose of spreading the teaching and becoming masters together" (TPC 1998, 229). *Pŏmhae hoejung hakkye* was formed by Pŏmhae's disciples to provide education for his students. Pŏmhae, known as Kagan (覺岸), the compiler of the *Tongsa yŏlchŏn*, formed the *kye* so that his disciples could train the next generation of students. This was the subject of the request in Ch'oeui's preface. An interesting point is raised here, in the fact that the protagonist Pŏmhae had earlier been a student receiving the *sukye* from Ch'oeui. As such, it appears that the members who formed this *kye* were thus also disciples of Ch'oeui. Regardless, because of this relationship Ch'oeui eagerly granted the request to mention that *kye* in that preface. He does so with the implication that his own dharma lineage is being carried on, and we can see in this a proper attitude towards learning and teaching being emphasized.

Third was a *hakkye* established by the *pojehoejung* (普濟會中) sometime before 1896 at Sangwŏn-am (上院庵). This was an organization founded in order to raise the funds to pay for lectures in their *kangwŏn* (monastic academy). Each member contributed 10 *nyang*, and every year the collected funds would collect 5 or 6% interest, enough to cover the expenses of lectures (HPC 10:1088c–1089a). The *hakkye* presents an important example that speaks truth to the fact that Buddhists were administering educational organizations even in the midst of an anti-Buddhist society.

Other *kye* that share the *hakkye*'s purpose of propagating educational activities were the *ōsan'gye* (魚山禪) and the *pōmūmgye* (梵音契). *Ōsan* and *pōmūm* are other names for *pōmp'ae* (梵唄), so they could also be called *pōmp'aegye*. They were founded to teach and propagate this Buddhist musical ritual. The *ōsangye* was formed by Chugong (樞公) and Paekkong (白公), two elder masters of the late 18th century who were steeped in *pōmp'ae*, to teach the ritual to students who had a propensity for the craft. It provided funds to cover the necessary Buddhist food and clothing necessary in teaching *pōmp'ae* (HPC 10:328c–329a). Such an example is also seen in the case of the *ōsanch'ōng* (魚山廳) *pōmūmgye* at Kōnbong-sa in 1904 (HMY 1977, 42). Though the document only offers a simple record of the restoration of the *Sōkkayōlae yōng'at'ap*, it is clear the *kye* existed for the purpose of *pōmp'ae*. Kōnbong-sa was founded at the same time that *pōmp'ae* was being introduced to the region during early Silla. It was founded as an *ōsanch'ōng*, a headquarters for *ōsan*, an alternate name for *pōmp'ae*, referring to the Chinese mountain *Yushan* and the ancient Buddhist music ritual that was developed at the temple there. The education at this *ōsanch'ōng* was supported financially through the activities of the *pōmūmgye*.

Both *pōmūmgye* and *hakkye* shared the characteristic of participation in educational activities. The *hakkye* taught the tenets and thought of Buddhism through readings of the sutras while *pōmūmgye* was in charge of the original function of Buddhism, religious studies and awareness. Through evidence of the *sach'algye* educational activities, we can see that role of the *kye* in late Chosōn was not limited to cultivating a material foundation for the temple. It also contributed to the development of the religious teachings and consciousness of the Buddhist tradition.

## 7) Faith-organization activities

In late Chosōn, the qualifications for membership in the *sach'algye* were not restricted. In special cases, as in *ch'ōnggye*, membership would be restricted to certain people if the *kye* were formed by those working in a similar organization, when efficiency was critical, or the purpose was to build a bond within a particular community. *Ch'ōnggye* and the like were cases where the organiza-

tion was within a temple and membership was comprised only of monastics. But there were other cases where a *kye* was founded not by monastics or laypeople, but entirely by government officials. In late Chosŏn society, when out-of-the ordinary faith organizations did not exist, the fact that coworkers formed a *kye* whose role was similar to that of a faith group deserves special mention.

The first such case is a *pullyanggye* formed in 1854 at Yŏngŭn-sa (靈隱寺), whose members were all officials of the *ujinjangjinbang* (右鎮長鎮房) (PMY 1964, 49). The *ujinjangjinbang* was a military organization within the government offices of Kongju. Formed exclusively by low-ranking officers in the regional government, they made donations to Yŏngŭn-sa. An 1890 Magok-sa *pullyanggye* had numerous duties assigned to its 99 members, including *owijang* (五衛將), *hogun* (護軍), *kasŏn* (嘉善), *sŏndal* (先達), and *ch'ŏmsa* (僉使) (ibid., 31–32). Looking at these duties, it is clear that the participants were all working together at the Kongju *kunyŏng* (軍營, garrison) and they alone had established the *kye*. These two examples are separated by some forty years, but the fact that both were undertaken by the officers of the Kongju government offices is striking. This tradition of the *sach'algye* within the Kongju region, very similar to a faith group in a contemporary Buddhist temple, continued for decades. Another example is of a *pullyanggye* in 1900, formed at Ch'ŏnŭn-sa in Namwŏn by civil servants serving at one of the two offices in the area (Sŏngu 1991, 97–98). The members of the *pullyanggye* at Naju's Tabo-sa (多寶寺) were likewise petty government officials (Sambo Hakhoe 1969, 74).

Though it is not clear when faith groups got their start in Korean Buddhism, from these examples of *sach'algye* we can catch a glimpse of the specialized faith organizations that had emerged by late Chosŏn. In the case of Tabo-sa, it is said that at the time of Buddhist services, the *kye* members would begin purification ceremonies three days before, covering their mouths with towels, and even going so far as to wash and dry their money before bringing it to the Buddha hall. This was no simple donation organization. It seems to have taken on the shape of a religious practice organization, *suhaeng kyŏlsa*, devoted entirely to faith practices. If we look at the activities of these types of *sach'algye* that operated within specific government offices, they offered a guaranteed long-term base for donations, and perhaps more importantly, the authority and

power within that office could be used to the effect of defending against the oppression of the *yangban*.

### The Historical Significance of the *Sach'algye*

In the anti-Buddhist society of the Chosŏn era, the most difficult aspect of Buddhist life was financial hardship. Though traditionally Buddhism's economic support had been completely dependent upon the donations of believers, under the repression of the time, believer support languished, and as a result the temples faced great difficulty in securing the finances to operate. As a self-rescue plan to maintain their temples, monastics sometimes even undertook production activities and financial investing, contrary to the spirit and precepts of Buddhism. Such economic activity was not possible at every temple, however, and those who had trouble meeting their expenses tended to fall into ruin. What appeared in the midst of this context was the *sach'algye*. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, at almost every temple in the country, all sorts of *kye* were flourishing. Donated lands were being received and from that support, temple buildings were restored. *Kye* made it possible for temples to expand the preservation of a temple's spiritual and financial foundation in the late Chosŏn period.

If we return to the example of Pŏmŏ-sa, we can appreciate how large of a role the *kye* played in providing the essential energy for the preservation and development of the temple. For over two hundred years, spanning late Chosŏn to the modern era (roughly 1722 to 1947), more than 63 types of *sach'algye* were in operation: 25 *kapgye*, 12 *mundo'gye*, 5 *ch'ŏnggye*, 3 *manilhoe*, 2 *ch'ilsŏnggye*, 1 *chijanggye*, and 15 others. That one of these 63 types existed at every single temple is a unique aspect of Korean Buddhist history (Han 2000, 492–496). Of these, the role of the *kapgye* became the most prominent, such that it was even said, “a temple exists when there is a *kapgye*” (HMY 1989, 124).

Looking at the program of Buddhist service work in 1812, we can verify the expansion and cohesion of the *sach'algye*. In April of that year, nineteen *kye* participated in Buddhist service work reconstructing the Poje-ru (ibid. 102). At the same time, at Pŏmŏ-sa, though we may not know the exact number of

monks in residence, we can verify roughly 300 members.<sup>18</sup> If each *kye* had about ten members and we know there were 19 *kye*, the number of participating members was over two hundred. Thus, we know that the vast majority of monks at Pömō-sa were *kye* members, and we can say that the administration and preservation of the temple developed into Buddhist service work projects through the special means of the *kye*.

If we examine the activities of the Pömō-sa *sach'algye* over time, we can observe the emergence of a correspondance between *kye* activities and the vicissitudes of the temple's fortunes. During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, reconstruction and preservation activities at the temple was constant (HMY 1989, 3–24), a trend that continued until 1891 with the restoration of the Judgement Hall (*myōngbujōn*). The activities of the *sach'algye* at these times are similarly clear. Later, with the rise of the modern era, the frequency of reconstruction gradually declined, and the activities of the *sach'algye* also declined steeply. That is, when *sach'algye* were flourishing, the Buddhist service work of temple restoration was prevalent, but by the end of the nineteenth century, *kye* activity was slowing and every sort of Buddhist social work likewise decreased.

The activities of the Pömō-sa *sach'algye* were not limited to the accumulation of wealth. They also played a key role in Pömō-sa coming to be known, as it still is, as a *sōnch'al taebonsan* (a major head Sōn temple). From 1899 to 1910, the abbot O Sōnwōl (吳惺月) founded six *sōnhoe* (禪會, Sōn association) and roused a spirit for Sōn practice, and it was the *sach'algye* that supplied the necessary economic foundation for this. Later, from 1900 to 1903, Kyōnghō Sōng'u (鏡虛 惺牛) established a religious society of Sōn monastics there, and here too, the establishment of the Sōn movement was able to take root only through the existence of the Pömō-sa *sach'algye*. Later, Pömō-sa would dedicate their accumulated wealth to the modernization of Korean Buddhism. They made great efforts to energize the movement towards modern education, operating Pusan's Myōngjōng School and Seoul's Posōng High/Normal School, as well as providing the annual funding for sending twenty monks to study in Japan (Chae 1991, 153–160). The *sach'algye* was the driving force that made it possible for Pömō-sa to establish its status and develop into a major temple.

As this all serves to show, *sach'algye* are the key to understanding the various activities of the Buddhist world during the late Chosŏn period. Throughout the country, at temples both big and small, in the various areas where resources were required, *sach'algye* rendered their services. At times, they became the source of Buddhist service work, either as labor or education, or other such intangible work, playing a key role in the Chosŏn Buddhist world. While on the surface the apparent goal of a *kye* was to gather a fixed amount of membership money or resources for donations, through the implementation of *kye* meetings, Buddhist services and other functions were made possible by this financial support, and in this the *kye* strove toward the much loftier goal of inspiring the Buddhist faith. In other words, though the *sach'algye* was indeed a means to remedy the financial difficulties of the Buddhist world, it did not limit itself to this, and in fact became the locus of development for the faith communities of both monastics and lay people who took upon the oversight and development of the temples in an anti-Buddhist society.

In the process of running a *sach'algye*, more than anything, the most important factor was the existence of commoners as participating members. The limits to membership were in the majority of cases very few. Only when monastics formed their own *kye* were there exceptions to this, as with *kapgye*, *mundogyē*, and *ch'ōnggye*. In most cases, *kye* functioned through the active participation of the masses. By either leading in the founding of *kye*, or sometimes as donors, they played a key role in keeping Buddhism alive during the late Chosŏn period. A letter from 1887, written by Pōmhae Kagan on the establishment of a *manilhoe* at Taedun-sa in Haenam, and amidst a search for a *hwaju*, stated: “as a donation request has been drawn up and sent out, every household, acting with filial piety, fraternal love, and loyalty, opened its door to us and greets us with a smile, exulting in the generous bestowal of compassion, and they all came to the temple and emptied their purses with donations” (HPC 10:1093c–1094a). The reason that Chosŏn Buddhism is often called “commoners’ Buddhism” or “faith Buddhism” is because of situations such as this, where the support and faith of nameless commoners served as the fertile ground in which the tradition took root. And central to all of this was the *sach'algye*.

(Translated by Matty Wegehaupt)



## Notes

- 1 See Han Sangkil, *Chosŏn hugi pulgyo wa sach'algye* (2006a). In this text, I analyzed 232 cases of temple fraternities in the late Chosŏn period. Since that time, 36 more have been uncovered. This paper addresses all 268.
- 2 “After King Sŏngjong (r. 1469–1494), monks were prohibited from state certification (*toch’ŏp*), and from this point onward the number of monks inside the capital quickly declined and the monasteries inside the capital all emptied.” Sŏng Hyŏn, *Yongjae ch’onghwa* 8.
- 3 These documents are located in Yŏndam Yuil’s (蓮潭有一) preface and Ch’up’a Hong’yu’s (秋波泓有) *Yŏnwŏn-am manilhoesŏ* (靈源庵萬日會序), *Ch’up’ajip* 2, HPC, 10:72b–c.
- 4 From a transcribed copy in the collection at Okch’ŏn-sa.
- 5 *Mit’agye chwamok* (彌陀契座目). Collection at the Ojukhŏn Municipal Museum, Kangnŭng, Kangwŏn province.
- 6 *Mit’agye chwamok*. Collection at the Ojukhŏn Municipal Museum, Kangnŭng, Kangwŏn province.
- 7 Kapogap yugongbi 甲午甲有功德碑. Collection at Ŭnhae-sa.
- 8 Ŭnhae-sa muogap sugongbi 銀海寺戊午甲樹功德碑. This monument praising Iak Ŭich’ŏm stands to this day at Ŭnhae-sa.
- 9 Imogap yugongbi, collection at Ŭnhae-sa.
- 10 Yumyŏng Chosŏnguk kyŏngsangjwado yŏngch’ŏn’gun Ŭnhae-sa muogap hŏnt’o yugongbi 有明朝鮮國慶尙左道榮川郡銀海寺戊午甲獻土有功德碑. Collection at Ŭnhae-sa.
- 11 Okch’ŏn-sa Yŏndae-am ch’ilsŏnggye sŏngch’aek 玉泉寺蓮臺庵七星契成冊. Okch’ŏn-sa collection.
- 12 Yŏmbulgye taesŏng kongbi 念佛契大成功碑. Collection at Kirim-sa.
- 13 Ch’ilsŏng kyewŏn yugongbi 七星契員有功德碑. Wooden tablet in the collection at Oŏ-sa.
- 14 *Kwanŭmgyesa* 觀音禪史. Pŏpchu-sa collection.
- 15 *Kwanŭmgyesujŏnnok* 觀音禪收錢錄. Pŏpchu-sa collection.
- 16 Imprint of Kyech’osimhak inmun, Palsimsuhaengjang, and Chagyŏngsŏ. From the woodblock copy. Auction site for old texts: (<http://auctionmall.hwabong.com>)
- 17 Though it isn’t detailed in Ul’am’s (蔚庵) biography, as superintendent of Pŏmŏ-sa, there is a record of him donating some 20 volumes to its improvement. What’s more, as he was making many donations as a man of some wealth, together with Masters Paekam, Yŏnch’ong, and Yŏnch’ŏm, they were collectively referred to as the “mountain treasury” (HMY 1989, 126–127).

- 18 The figures are statistics from 1926, when Pōmō-sa was said to have 298 monastics and some 26,523 parishoners. In the 31 headquarter temples, the average number of monks was 232, and parishoner level, 5,010. Compared to this, Pōmō-sa had far more members. In fact, their number of parishoners was the biggest among the 31. See Takahashi Toru, *Yijo Pulgyo* (2002 [1929]), 960–961. Amidst this mix of monks, local commoners and believers, a wide variety of *kye* were established.

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