https://doi.org/10.63563/jspl.2025.012

Can Korean Calligraphers Write Like Wang Xizhi? Controversy on Collating Characters in the Case of the *Mujangsa Stele*

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Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (ca. 303-ca. 361) became a canonized figure in the history of Chinese calligraphy, particularly after Emperor Taizong of the Tang obsessively collected and reproduced his works. At that time, one main criteria for ideal calligraphy was its resemblance to Wang's style. In this context, stele inscriptions emerged that were composed by collecting, comparing, and imitating individual characters from Wang's extant corpus—a practice known as "Collating Characters" 集字. One notable example in Korea is the *Memorial Stele for Enshrining the Amitābha Buddha Statue at Mujangsa Temple* 鏊藏寺阿彌陀佛造成記碑 (801). Traditionally, it was attributed to the brushwork to Kim Yukchin 金陸珍 (fl. tenth century), a Silla calligrapher, but in 1803, the prominent Qing scholar Weng Fanggang 翁方綱 (1733–1818) suggested a new theory of collating characters. Most of contemporary scholars agree to this view, but exceptionally his son Weng Shukun 翁樹崑 (1786-1815) and his Korean disciple Kim Chŏnghŭi 金正喜 (1786–1856) maintained the traditional view. This case study of the *Mujangsa Stele* examines how the same inscription was interpreted differently by scholars in China and Korea, revealing divergent frameworks of copying, authenticity, and cultural authority. It then turns to ongoing debates among modern scholars, proposing that the two seemingly opposing theories—collation versus Korean inscriber—may in fact be complementary rather than contradictory.

Keywords: Wang Xizhi, *Preface to the Orchid Pavilion, Stele of the Preface to Sage Teachings, Mujangsa Stele,* Weng Fanggang, Weng Shukun, Kim Chŏnghŭi, Kim Yukchin, collating characters

> Among Korean inscriptions praised in China,
> none has been held in higher esteem than this stele.
> 東方文獻之見稱於中國, 無如此碑.
> Kim Chŏnghŭi, 1817

Introduction*

Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (ca. 303–ca. 361) and his calligraphy were introduced to Korea through diplomatic exchanges during the formation of early Silla–Tang relations.[1] In

[1]* I am deeply grateful to Professor Sun Joo Kim, Professor Lee Wai-yee, and Heo Hongbum, Curator of the Chusa Museum, for their valuable comments and generous assistance. An early version of this paper was presented at the Harvard-Yenching Institute on November 25, 2024.

648, during the mission of Kim Ch'unch'u 金春秋 (602–661) to the Tang court—undertaken to secure a military alliance against Koguryŏ (37? BCE–668 CE)—Emperor Taizong (r. 626-649) bestowed upon him two calligraphic works of the *Hot Spring Stele* 溫湯碑 (i.e. 溫泉銘) and the *Jin Shrine Stele* 晉祠碑, both composed and inscribed by the emperor himself in the style of Wang Xizhi. Roughly a century later, Wang Xizhi's style gained a wide currency among Korean calligraphers. Kim Saeng 金生 (b. 711) was particularly celebrated for his mastery of Wang-style calligraphy. One anecdote illustrates the high technical and aesthetic regard in which Kim's work was held and simultaneously, Chinese lack of that recognition.

During the Chongning era (1102–1106), Academician Hong Kwan 洪灌 (d. 1126) traveled to the Song dynasty capital of Bianjing (modern Kaifeng, Henan) as part of a diplomatic mission. While residing at the Guest Hall, he was visited by Hanlin Academicians Yang Qiu 楊球 and Li Ge 李革, who had been dispatched by imperial order. As the two men took up their brushes to compose on a scroll, Hong presented them with hanging scrolls of cursive and semicursive calligraphy by Kim Saeng. Their dialogue began:[2]

> "We did not expect to behold original works by Wang Xizhi today," the two exclaimed in astonishment. "These are not by Wang Xizhi," Hong replied. "They are the work of Kim Saeng, a man of Silla." The two laughed and said, "Apart from the works of Wang Xizhi, how could such marvelous calligraphy exist in this world?" Hong explained it several times, but they did not believe it to the end.
> 二人大駭曰: "不圖今日得見王右軍手書." 洪灌曰: "非是, 此乃新羅人金生所書也." 二人笑曰: "天下除右軍, 焉有妙筆如此哉." 洪灌屢言之, 終不信.

This exchange occurred during the early reign of Emperor Huizong (r. 1100–1125), a period marked by a revivalist zeal for antiquity and imperial enthusiasm for collecting paintings and calligraphy. Like Emperor Taizong of Tang, Huizong avidly sought works attributed to Wang Xizhi and made them copied. At a time when even the most accomplished Chinese calligrapher struggled to emulate Wang's style convincingly, the two Chinese scholars could not accept the possibility that a non-Chinese calligrapher could have produced such work. This anecdote highlights not only the technical brilliance of Kim Saeng's calligraphy, but also the deeply rooted Sinocentric

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Multiple sources attest to this historical event. They include *Stele of Buddhist Monk Nanghye at Sŏngjusa Temple Site* 聖住寺址 朗慧和尙塔碑 (after 909) in Poryŏng, Ch'ongch'ŏng province; Kim Pusik 金富軾 (1075-1151), comp., *Samguk sagi* 三國史記, Chŏngdŏk edition (1512), j.5, Second Year of Queen Chindŏk; Liu Xu 劉昫 (888–947), comp., *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1975), j.199A, Entry Silla. I am grateful for the insights provided by Masha Kobzeva's presentation, "Power of Knowledge as Legitimization Technique: Case of Tang-Silla Exchange Network," as part of the panel "Multiregional Perception of the World in Medieval East Asia" at the Asian Studies Conference Japan (ASCJ) held at Sophia University in Tokyo, Japan on July 7th, 2024.

[2] Kim Pusik 金富軾, *Samguk sagi*, j. 49, Entry 7.

view that artistic excellence was presumed to be coterminous with Chinese cultural identity.

However, it would be an overgeneralization to treat a single anecdote as definitive evidence of Chinese underestimation of Korean calligraphy. In fact, there were also voices of admiration for Kim Saeng. Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254–1322), a master calligrapher of the Yuan dynasty, offers high praise for the Korean master in his "Postface to the *Ch'angnimsa Stele*" 昌林寺碑跋: "[In Kim's calligraphy] the structure and brushwork of the characters are profoundly exemplary. Even renowned Tang inscriptions cannot easily surpass it. As the old saying goes, 'Is there any land that does not produce talent?' Truly, it is so."[3]

Zhao's parallel between Kim's inscription and the masterpieces of Tang China is notable, as it places the Korean work within the highest ranks of the Chinese calligraphic canon. The adage he invokes encapsulates a cosmopolitan vision of artistic excellence—one that transcends national boundaries and challenges the notion of Chinese cultural exclusivity. Zhao's colophon thus functions not only as an aesthetic appraisal but also as a significant acknowledgment of non-Chinese contributions to the broader tradition of East Asian calligraphy. Unfortunately, most of Kim's calligraphy, including the *Ch'angnimsa Stele*, no longer survives, making further in-depth study difficult.

More significant than Kim Saeng's calligraphy in Sino-Korean calligraphic discourse is the *Memorial Stele for Enshrining the Amitābha Buddha Statue at Mujang Temple* 鏊藏寺阿彌陀佛造成記碑 (hereafter *Mujangsa Stele*). Mujangsa Temple was situated north of Amgokch'on 暗谷村, in the northeastern region of Kyŏngju. Its remote location was a deliberate choice, intended to mark a clear boundary between the sacred Buddhist domain and the secular world. In 801, one year after the death of her husband, King Sosŏng (r. 799–800), Queen Kyehwa commissioned a statue of Amitābha Buddha in devotion, to ensure his rebirth in the Pure Land, and erected a commemorative stele to document its construction.[4]

Chosŏn Neo-Confucian scholars turned little attention to the *Mujangsa Stele*. Long forgotten and even broken into pieces, it was rediscovered in 1770 by Hong Yangho 洪良浩 (1724–1802). During his tenure as magistrate of Kyŏngju, he launched a determined search and ultimately recovered a major fragment near the temple site. The stele's reappearance drew significant attention due to its striking resemblance to the calligraphic style of Wang Xizhi, prompting fundamental questions about the reproduction and transmission of calligraphic models across cultural and national boundaries. The inscription had traditionally been attributed to Kim Yukchin 金陸珍

[3] Yi Haeng 李荇 (1478-1534), *Sinjŭng Tongguk yŏji sŭngnam* 新增東國輿地勝覽, Kyujanggak edition, j.21, 31a.

[4] Iryŏn 一然 (1206–1289), *Samguk yusa* 三國遺事, Kyujanggak edition (1512), j.3, 53b-54a. "Hall of Amitābha Buddha, Mujangsa Temple" 鏊藏寺 彌陀殿.

(fl. 10th century),[5] but Weng Fanggang 翁方綱 (1733–1818) offered a new and controversial theory: the stele was a case of *chipcha* (Ch. *jizi* 集字)—that is, the characters were collated directly from Wang Xizhi's works.

The term collating characters refers to a uniquely Sinographic practice found primarily in China and Korea. Rooted in the reverence for proper script forms and refined calligraphic styles, this practice involved modeling one's writing on the works of ancient masters—most notably Wang Xizhi. Practitioners compiled individual characters from Wang's extant corpus and reassembled them to transcribe an entirely new text. In instances where the desired character was missing, they would draw upon morphologically similar components from different characters, sometimes combining elements from various periods of Wang's life—including presumed posthumous forgeries.

Interpreting calligraphic style often involves cultural implications. Previously, the *Mujangsa Stele* had been considered a brushwork of Kim Yukchin or another Silla figure, and this "inscriber theory" (*sŏjasŏl* 書字說) suggests not only the adoption of Wang's style but also its internalization and creative transformation by a Silla calligrapher. Though perhaps not equal to Wang Xizhi—the revered "Sage of Calligraphy" 書聖—this calligrapher demonstrated a level of mastery comparable to Tang dynasty copiers of Wang's script. In contrast, Weng Fanggang's "collating characters" theory may be read as affirming the enduring influence of Chinese cultural authority. Although collated inscriptions still reflect the individuality of the person assembling the characters,[6] the act of collation inevitably entails a higher degree of imitation than original composition. Thus, debates over the script of the *Mujangsa Stele* have become a key issue in the history of Korean calligraphy, closely intertwined with questions of cultural agency and the legacy of Sinocentrism in East Asian exchange.

Against this background, the present study examines how the *Mujangsa Stele*'s calligraphic style was interpreted by Qing and Chosŏn literati, focusing on Weng

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[5] In his *Taedong kŭmsŏksŏ* 大東金石書, Yi U 李俁 (1637–1693) first mentioned him as the calligrapher, and about one hundred years later Hong Yangho affirmed it on the basis of the first passage appearing in the inscription he discovered: "*Nama* Kim Yukchin receives the edict" 奈麻臣金陸珍奉敎 (*Igye chip* 耳溪集, *Han'guk munjip ch'onggan* 韓國文集叢刊 241, 2000), j.16, 291d, "Remarks on the *Stele of Mujang Temple*" 題鏊藏寺碑. He also mentioned that it was written in the style of Wang Xizhi, j.16, 292b, "Colophon to the *Grave Stele of Kim Kakkan*" 題金角干墓碑: 余觀鏊藏碑, 有右軍之風.

[6] De Laurentis, *Protecting the Dharma through Calligraphy in Tang China* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2021), pp. 24–6. The practice of collating characters was not a mechanical act of replication, but also a deliberate and creative process. The goal was to produce a coherent, aesthetically unified calligraphy through the assemblage of fragmented sources with a distinctly literati sensibility. Collators skillfully modified details within individual characters, adjusting the positioning of minor strokes, altering their angles, or subtly transforming their shapes. The result was a newly constituted work of calligraphy that functioned both as homage and innovation—what might be described in modern terms as a *pastiche* or *assemblage*.

Fanggang, Weng Shukun 翁樹崑 (1786-1815), and Kim Chŏnghŭi 金正喜 (1786–1856). While previous research has primarily discussed historical context and issues of cultural centrism,[7] this paper shifts the focus toward the theoretical and practical aspects of collating characters.

One major challenge in this discourse is that traditional scholars often fail to provide clear justifications for their interpretations. An exception is Weng Fanggang, who points to the presence of three dots as evidence for his theory; most others, however, make assertions without offering any substantial reasoning. In its final section, therefore, the paper offers a critical review of modern scholarly debates, centering on Lee Eun-Hyuk and Jung Hyun-sook. They respectively represent the conventional view of the inscriber and the new theory of collating characters. In conclusion, I propose a reconciliatory perspective, suggesting that a synthesis of the two approaches is not only possible, but also productive for understanding the calligraphic complexity and ramifications of the *Mujangsa Stele*.

New Approach: Weng Fanggang and the Character *sung* 崇

Weng Fanggang was an eminent scholar and collector of rare rubbings and stone inscriptions. In 1779, for example, he acquired the inscription from the Sarira Pagoda of Chan Master Yong 邕禪師舍利塔銘, which was written by Li Boyao 李百藥 (565-648) and inscribed by Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557-641) in 631. In celebration of this rubbing, Weng named his studio "the House of Stone and Ink" (*shimo shulou* 石墨書樓).[8] His antiquarian interests extended to Korea, as evidenced by his authorship of three postscripts to early Korean steles.[9] Among these, the *Mujangsa Stele* attracted his greatest attention, owing to its perceived connection with the calligraphic style of Wang Xizhi. As a specialist in the *Preface to the Orchid Pavilion* 蘭亭序, Weng was able to identify traces of Wang Xizhi's influence without difficulty. Furthermore, Weng offered the controversial theory of "collating characters."[10]

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[7] For scholarship in English, see Stephen Little and Virginia Moon, eds., *Beyond Line: The Art of Korean Writing* (California: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2019), p. 317; Shin Jeongsoo, "Kim Chŏnghŭi and His Epigraphic Studies: Two Silla Steles and Their Rubbings," *Journal of Korean Studies* 27.2 (2022): 199-208.

[8] Fujitsuka Chikashi 藤塚鄰, *Shinchō bunka tōden no kenkyū: Kakai Dōkō gakudan to Richō no Kin Gendō* 清朝文化東傳の研究: 嘉慶・道光學壇と李朝の金阮堂 [A Study of the Culture of Qing and its Reception in the East: Schools of Jiaqing and Daoguang Reigns and Kim Wandang of Chosŏn], (Tōkyō: Kokusho kankōkai 国書刊行会, 1975), pp. 85-87.

[9] Weng Fanggang 翁方綱, *Fuchuzhai wen ji* 復初齋文集 (Beijing: Beijing University, 2023), j.24, pp. 449-450. *Postscript to the Stele of Pacifying Paekche* 跋平百濟碑, *Postscript to the Fragment of the Silla Mujangsa Stele* 新羅鏊藏寺碑殘本跋, and *Postscript to the Silla Ssanggyesa Stele* 新羅雙谿寺碑跋.

[10] Weng Fanggang, *Fuchuzhai wen ji* 復初齋文集, j.24, p. 449. "Postface to the Rubbing of the Remaining *Stele of the Mujang Temple* of Silla" 新羅鏊藏寺碑殘本跋.

> The [Mujangsa] stele's semicursive scripts come from a mixture of the *Preface to the Orchid Pavilion* and characters collated by the monks Huairen and Daya. Since the Xianheng (670-674) and Kaiyuan (713-741) reigns of Tang, source materials collated [by Huairen and Daya] had been influential so that people of foreign countries practiced them. The characters they used from the *Preface* all matched the Dingwu edition. Therefore, we know that the edition was truly carved at the time of the Tang and thereafter it spread abroad during the same period.
> 碑行書, 雜用右軍蘭亭及懷仁大雅所集字. 蓋自咸亨開元以來, 唐人集右軍書, 外國皆知服習而所用蘭亭字, 皆與定武本合. 乃知定武本實是唐時所刻, 因流播於當時耳.

By the early Tang, Wang Xizhi's original works were already scattered, prompting Emperor Taizong to obsessively collect and reproduce them. When the emperor composed the *Preface to the Sage Teaching of Tripiṭaka of Great Tang* 大唐三藏聖教序 in celebration of Xuanzang's 玄奘 (602-664) translation of Buddhist Sutras, the monk Huairen (fl. seventh century) collated characters from Wang Xizhi's works to produce the stele inscription at Hongfusi Temple 弘福寺 in 672. Roughly fifty years later, in 721 another monk Daya (fl. eighth century) employed the same method to erect a similar stele at Xingfusi Temple 興福寺.

More importantly, the emperor ordered Ouyang Xun to engrave the inscription of the *Preface to the Orchid Pavillion* on a stele, but it disappeared during the turbulent Tang-Song transitional period. Later, sometime between 1041 and 1048, Li Xuejiu 李學究 found it at Dingwu 定武 (modern Dingzhou 定州, Hebei province)—thus it is called the Dingwu edition, but it was lost again after the fall of the Northern Song. The earliest extant rubbing of the Dingwu stele is a Song edition, now held in the National Palace Museum in Taipei (See Figure 2). While rubbings of the Dingwu stele were initially regarded as authentic, their credibility came under scrutiny due to the proliferation of derivative copies in later periods. As such, Weng Fanggang drew attention to the *Mujangsa Stele* for its stylistic resonance with the Dingwu edition and thus claimed the authenticity of the Dingwu edition through the Silla stele.

In 1803, Weng commented on the character *sung* 崇, noting its stylistic affinity with the character *chong* 崇 in Wang's works: "The three dots below the mountain radical (*shan* 山) in the character *chong* are fully preserved."[11] This statement is difficult to understand without background explanation. It is thus necessary to first examine, through visual comparison, the forms of the character as it appears in the *Mujangsa Stele* and in Wang's works.

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[11] Weng Fanggang, *Su-Mi zhai Lanting kao* 蘇米齋蘭亭考 [Investigation on the Orchid Pavilion at the Studio of Su-Mi], in Wu Chongyao 伍崇曜 et al. *Yueyatang congshu* 粵雅堂叢書 vol. 15. Taipei: Huawen shuju, 1965, j.3, 174a: 高麗所拓唐貞元十六年, 新羅鍫藏寺碑, 兼有懷仁大雅所集右軍字內, 崇字山下三點, 皆全. See also Fujitsuka, *Shinchō bunka tōden no kenkyū*, 194.

The character *sung* appears three times in the *Mujangsa Stele*, and each instance is rendered somewhat differently to avoid monotony, based on the calligraphic principle of "varied forms of the same character" 同字異形. Among the three variants, the one that Weng Fanggang noted for its "three dots" 三點 appears in the second instance. The three dots are visible beneath the *san* 山 radical.

Figure 1. Details of rubbings of the *Mujangsa Stele*. Dimensions unknown. National Research Institute of Cultural Heritage.

Figure 2. Beginning section of the Dingwu edition. Handscroll, dimensions unknown. National Palace Museum in Taipei. Image number: K2D000001N000000000PAC.

Figure 3. Beginning section of the Dingwu edition. Handscroll, Height 24 cm, Width 9.5 cm. Image number: 宋拓定武兰亭序 新 00135367. The Palace Museum, Beijing.

Figure 4. Beginning section of the Yuquan edition. Dimensions: Height 25.2 cm, Width 11.1 cm, Kyoto National Museum, Japan. After *Ō Kishi to Ranteisho* 王羲之と蘭亭序, 27.

In the inscription of the *Preface to the Orchid Pavilion*, the character *chong* is relatively easy to identify; the word *chongshan* 崇山 appears as a later addition inserted into the upper section of the fourth column. Among the numerous extant reproductions of the *Preface*, the character *chong* with three dots is observed in two editions of Dingwu editions and more distinctly in the Yuquan 玉泉 edition (See Figures 2, 3, and 4).[12] They likely informed Weng's recognition of the *Mujangsa Stele*—particularly the character *chong* and its Wang-style.

[12] The Yuquan edition was included in the *Baizhong Lantingxu* 百種蘭亭叙 (Introduction to One Hundred Editions of the Lanting), a compilation owned by You Si 游似, who served as prime minister

Since the original copy of the *Preface to the Orchid Pavilion* already disappeared during the Tang period, it is ultimately impossible to know how Wang Xizhi actually wrote the character *chong*. In his *Su-Mi zhai Lanting kao* 蘇米齋蘭亭考, Weng Fanggang conducted a comprehensive examination of all available editions and documented the various forms of the character *chong* 宗. In the standard cursive script, the character has no dot beneath the mountain radical 山. However, depending on the edition, a single central dot, a short horizontal stroke to the right, or a set of three dots may be added beneath the radical. The character variants are illustrated as follows.

Right to Left
(1) Yu Shinan, First edition (24.8 × 57.7 cm) of the *Lanting ba zhu,* the Palace Museum, Beijing
(2) Chu Suiliang, Second edition of the *Lanting ba zhu,* Personal Collection.
(3) Feng Chengsu, Third edition (24.5 × 69.9 cm) of the *Lanting ba zhu,* the Palace Museum, Beijing
(4) Dingwu edition, The Palace Museum, Beijing

Figure 5. Comparison of the Four Copies of the *Lanting Preface*
https://patricksiu.org/four-imitation-copies-of-lanting-xu-蘭亭序摹本四種

The first three rubbings are copies of works by Yu Shinan 虞世南 (558–638), Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 (597-658), and Feng Chengsu 馮承素 (617–672), respectively, and were collected by Emperor Qianlong as the first, second, and third editions of the *Eight Pillars of the Lanting Preface* (*Lanting bazhu* 蘭亭八柱). The first, known as the Zhang Jinjie edition 張金界奴本, was copied during the Tianli 天曆 era (1328–1329) and features an additional dot beneath the three strokes of the mountain radical. The second, regarded as the standard cursive form, consists of only the three original strokes. The third, the Shenlong edition 神龍本, contains a short horizontal stroke instead. The fourth and final example is the Dingwu edition, which features the distinctive three-dot form. Since our primary concern is with the three-dot variant, I will focus on the Dingwu edition in comparison with the others.

during the Chunyou era 淳祐 (1241–1252) of the Southern Song. You Si had acquired this copy from a monk named Faxian Yuandao 法顯元道 of Yuquansi Temple. This Southern Song edition later entered the collection of Weng Fanggang.

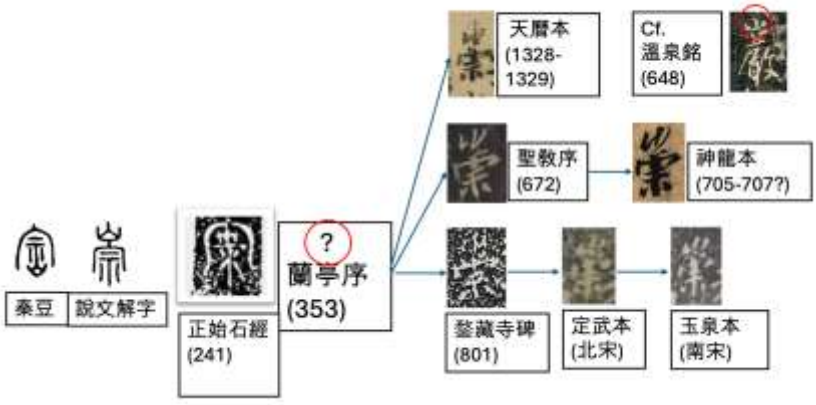

Chart: The Graphical Development and Variants of the Character *Chong*

The one dot in the Tianli edition is understood as the variation of the cursive script of the character. Nishikawa suggests that this is a distinctive trait of Wang Xizhi's style. Influenced by Wang Xizhi, Emperor Taizong added one dot as a part of the mountain radical in the character *yan* 巖 in the *Inscription of Hot Spring*. In the second linage of the Shenlong edition, a short horizontal stroke is not a variation of the upper dot in the character *zong* 宗—which is already present as a prominent central vertical stroke. It is therefore understood as an additional and anomalous stroke of the mountain radical.[13] Nishikawa also explains that the dot is transformed into a small horizontal stroke, placed awkwardly and imbalanced—entirely detached from the three vertical lines, while the three vertical strokes forming the *shan* 山 radical appear unnatural in structure.[14]

In my interpretation, however, the short horizontal stroke is understood as a transformed remnant of the three-dot form. This reading is supported by the character *chong* in the *Preface to Sage Teachings*, where a similar horizontal stroke appears. At the beginning of his postscript to the *Preface*, Lü Haihuan 呂海寰 (1843–1927) remarks: "In this edition of the *Preface*, the character *chong* contains three faint small

[13] Weng Fanggang regards the short horizontal stroke as a mistake of the copier. *Su-Mi Zhai Lanting kao* 蘇米齋蘭亭考, j.3, 14a: 以上所見, 神龍四本, 皆右點微似小橫. 蓋由原本此右一點向左迴帶極犀利而摹者不知以致悞, 似橫畫耳. See also j.8,1b: 按此, 崇字山下三小點, 定武本極分明. 惟褚本左二點不可見, 僅露其右一點而懷仁所集正與之同山字. 中間一小直畫微穿下, 勢亦然. 此眞褚本之確驗也.

[14] Nishikawa Yasushi 西川寧, *Shōwa Rantei kinen ten* 昭和蘭亭記念展 (Tōkyō: Nigensha, 1973), p. 230."[絹本蘭亭敍,神龍半印本]では三縦画が不自然であり,底部の点が小さな横画風になり,また三縦画と全く離れて中途半端な所にあり." See also Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 23.

dots below the mountain radical."[15] Contrary to his comment, the actual character form clearly exhibits a single short horizontal stroke, and it suggests that the three dots might have undergo transformation into other configurations, though at times stylized or obscured. In this vein, the horizontal stroke in the Shenlong edition is also construed as a vestige of the original three-dot form.

Most interesting is the third lineage of three-dot form in the Dingwu edition and the *Mujangsa Stele*. Weng Fanggang believed that the Dingwu edition is more faithful to the original than the Yuquan edition, based on the three dots as a point of reference. If his conjecture is correct, a new question arises: on what basis did Wang Xizhi add the three dots to the character? The chart above may provide a clue for the origin of the three dots.

Arguably, the earliest form of the three dots traces back to the character *chong* on a Qin-dynasty bronze vessel 秦豆, in which a mountain-like form appears in the lower part of the character. In the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, this component was repositioned to the upper part of the character. It seems to have transformed into three dots in the *Stone Classics of the Zhengshi Era* 正始石經 (240-248), also known as the *Three-Script Stone Classics* 三體石經 for its inclusion of ancient script 古文, clerical script 隸書, and small seal script 小篆. The three dots are inscribed inside the roof radical (*mian* 宀) of the ancient script *chong*. This placement differs from later editions in which the dots appear beneath the mountain radical (*shan* 山), but their presence remains discernable. Given that only about a century separates the *Stone Classics* (241) and Wang's *Preface* (353), it is plausible that Wang may have drawn upon the three-dot form found in the *Stone Classics*.

Later, Weng Fanggang's view was underpinned by Liu Xihai 劉喜海 (1794-1852) and Ye Zhixian 葉志詵 (1779-1862). Furthermore, Ye Changchi 葉昌熾 (1849-1916) associated Korean calligraphic practice as a result of Tang militarism.[16] Unsurprisingly, Weng's view was widespread among contemporary Korean scholars, such as Yi Sangchŏk 李尙迪 (1804-1865) and Yi Yuwŏn 李裕元 (1814-1888). It was a somewhat expected situation, given Weng's prominent status in Chosŏn. Exceptionally, Weng Shukun and Kim Chŏnghŭi did not concede to the mainstream view.

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[15] "Postscript to the *Preface to Sage Teachings*" (1907): 此本崇字山下三小點, 微有迹. Source: National Palace Museum in Taipei.

[16] Ye Changchi 葉昌熾, *Yu shi* 語石 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan 臺灣商務印書館, 1968), j.2, p. 69: "After Tang Emperor Taizong's conquest of Koguryŏ, Chinese authority became influential far away. The emperor's love of Wang's calligraphy transformed the domestic culture in the peninsular. The *Mujangsa Stele*, *Master Pohyŏn Stele* [Pogak, i.e., Iyŏn] (1206-1289) in the Ingak Temple and *State Master Honggak Stele* in the Sarim Temple were all written based on the characters of Wang's calligraphy." 自唐太宗伐高麗, 威棱遠慴. 太宗好右軍書, 至移其國俗. 新羅鍫藏寺碑及高麗麟覺寺普賢國師, 沙林寺宏覺國師碑, 皆集右軍書. For discussion, see Shin Jeongsoo, "Kim Chŏnghŭi and His Epigraphic Studies," p. 205.

Can Korean Calligraphers Write Like Wang Xizhi? Controversy on Collating Characters in the Case of the *Mujangsa Stele*

Revisiting the Traditional View: Weng Shukun and Kim Chŏnghŭi

Weng Shukun was the sixth and youngest son of Weng Fanggang. He collected rubbings of Korean steles more extensively than his father through his connections with Korean scholars. Alongside the rubbings, the Korean scholars also provided relevant historical information, such as the author's name and the year of inscription. This kind of information was common knowledge for Korean scholars but was needed for Chinese scholars. In return, Weng imparted epigraphical methodologies to Korean colleagues. For example, rubbings should include *piaek* 碑額 "the heading of the stele" and the *chan'gyŏl* 殘缺 "worn-out parts of the inscribed texts" as well as the legible characters. Weng also emphasized the material form and format of steles, such as the number of characters in each line, the total number of lines of the entire inscription, and the margins around the inscription.[17] Subsequently, Korean scholars began to examine not only content but also materiality of steles. Weng Shukun's Korean colleagues included Hong Hyŏnju 洪顯周 (1793-1865), Sim Sanggyu 沈象奎 (1766-1838), and Sin Wi 申緯 (1769-1845), while Kim Chŏnghŭi remained his favorite friend. Weng and Kim happened to be of the same age. One token of their close friendship is Weng's epithet, Xing-Qiu 星秋 (K: Sŏng-Ch'u); the two characters form a fusion of Weng's courtesy name, Xingyuan 星原, and Kim's style name, Ch'usa 秋史.

In his *Su-Mi zhai Lanting kao*, as previously discussed, Weng Fanggang argued that the *Mujangsa Stele* was a case of collation, but Weng Shukun did not accept this theory. Instead, he upheld the traditional view that Kim Yukchin was both the author and the calligrapher of the stele. He appended a handwritten note to his father's book,[18] as if to correct his father's conclusion.

Weng Shukun expressed his view again in his *Haidong jinshi lingji* 海東金石零記 (Miscellaneous Notes on Korean Epigraphy).[19] The entry on the *Mujangsa Stele* reads (see Figure 6).[20]

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[17] Fujitsuka Chikashi, *Shinchō bunka tōden no kenkyū*, p.175.

[18] See Fujitsuka Chikashi, *Shinchō bunka tōden no kenkyū*, pp. 194–95, "新羅殘碑, 守大南令金陸珍撰並書." Later, this copy of the *Su-Mi zhai Lanting kao* came into Fujitsuka's possession.

[19] This collection of notes was formerly owned by Fujitsuka Chikashi. In 2006, his son, Fujitsuka Akinao 藤塚明直, donated it to the city of Gwacheon, and it is now housed in the Chusa Memorial Museum. The work had traditionally been attributed jointly to Weng Fanggang and Weng Shukun, but Park Hyŏngyu has demonstrated that it was authored by Weng Shukun, with assistance from Kim Chŏnghŭi and other Chosŏn literati. Park reached this conclusion by noting handwriting and similarities between this book and Weng Shukun's another book *Haidong wenxian* 海東文獻, held in the National Library of China. The *Haidong jinshi lingji* was compiled with the intention of assembling a corpus of Korean epigraphy, and entries in it were primarily written between 1814 and 1815. See Park Hyun-Kyu, "*Haidong jinshi lingji* ŭi sŏja wa shilsang," *Taedong hanmunhak* 35 (2011): 385–413.

[20] Gwacheon Cultural Center, *Haidong jinshi lingji* 海東金石零記, 2010, p. 26 (translation), p. 40 (facsimile). See also Lee Eun-Hyuk, "Mujangsa pi wa Wang Hŭiji ch'e ŭi taebi koch'al" 鋟藏寺碑와

The Mujangsa Stele was the brushwork of Kim Yukchin of Silla. This is also located in Kyŏngju, though only a fragmentary edition survives. The stele stands in Kyŏngju, which is none other than ancient Kyerim. Chusa [Kim Chŏnghŭi]
鍫藏寺碑 新羅金陸珍書. 此碑亦在慶州, 只此殘本而已. 碑在慶尙道慶州, 卽鷄林也. 秋史
This style of rubbing technique is excellent. Did they perhaps use Chinese ink to achieve such luster? I request that you make rubbings again, and that send me around three to five copies.
惟種拓法甚好, 此或用中國之墨, 乃得光如是耶? 乞再拓三五紙爲禱.

[Head Commentary] Postscript is in the *Suoji*, a single book.[21]
[頭註] 跋在瑣記之一冊內.

Figure 6. *Haidong jinshi lingji* 海東金石零記, Entry. *Mujangsa Stele*

Weng Shukun, with the assistance of Kim Chŏnghŭi, attributed the *Mujangsa Stele* to the calligraphy of Kim Yukchin. He also appended a note requesting additional copies of the rubbing from Kim Chŏnghŭi for further research. However, by that time, the stele had disappeared, making it impossible to produce a new rubbing.

In addition, Weng Shukun produced a stele illustration (*pido* 碑圖) based on the inscription fragments, and noted before the first line of the text, "It seems there was an additional line here" 此處似尙有一行.[22] Amid this ongoing exchange of views, Weng Shukun suddenly passed away. Upon hearing the news, Kim Chŏnghŭi was deeply grieved and, in memory of his late friend, traveled to Kyŏngju.

The site of Mujangsa Temple was overgrown by bushes when Kim Chŏnghŭi reached on the twenty-ninth day of the fourth month of 1817. Kim searched through the bushes and found the right-side part of the stele, the major fragment that Hong Yangho first found. Kim explored further and discovered another fragment, this time the left-side of the stele, which surprisingly contained the line Weng had hypothesized. Kim's discovery proved Weng's speculation. Kim moved the two fragments to a safe

王羲之體의 對比考察 [A Comparative Study of the Mujangsa Stele and Wang Xizhi's Style], *Hanguk chŏt'ong munhwa yŏn'gu* 12 (2013): 178.

[21] Heo Hongbum identifies the *suoji* 瑣記 with the *Haidong jinshi wenzi ji si juan suoji* 海東金石文字記四卷瑣記. See Yi P'ungmo 李豐楙, "A Study of the Writings of Weng Fanggang" 翁方綱著述考, *Bibliography Quarterly* 書目季刊 vol. 8, no. 3 (1974): 44.

[22] Kim Chŏnghŭi, *Haedong Pigo* 海東碑攷 (manuscript, Sugyŏngsil Collection). Cited in Pak Chulsang, *Na nŭn yetkŏt i choa ttaeron kkaejin pittol ŭl ch'aja tanyŏtta* (Seoul: Nŏmŏ puksŭ, 2015), pp.156 and 330.

place behind the temple. Then he inscribed his own remarks on the lateral side of each stone fragment. The one written on the major one is more detailed and comprehensive.[23]

> This stele was formerly known only by a single fragment. During my exhaustive search, I discovered an additional broken piece amidst the overgrowth. I was overwhelmed with joy and shouted aloud in amazement. I placed the two stones together, like linked pearls, and moved them to the rear corridor of the temple to protect them from the elements. The quality of the calligraphy on this stone surpasses even that of the *Paengwŏl Stele*. The character *sung* with three dots, as in the *Orchid Pavilion*, is fully preserved only on this stone. Master Weng Tanxi [Fanggang] used this stele as evidence [for his theory of collation]. Among Korean inscriptions praised in China, none has been held in higher esteem than this stele. I caressed the broken stele multiple times and regretted that Xingyuan [Shukun] could not view the lower portion [that he mentioned.]
> Inscribed by Kim Chŏnghŭi on the twenty-ninth day of the fourth month in the year of *Chŏngch'uk* (1817)
> 此碑舊只一段而已, 余來此窮搜, 又得斷石一段於荒莽中, 不勝驚喜絶叫也. 仍使兩石, 合壁珠聯, 移置寺之後廊, 俾免風雨. 此石書品, 當在白月碑上. 蘭亭之崇字三點, 唯此石特全. 翁覃溪先生以此碑爲證. 東方文獻之見稱於中國, 無如此碑. 余摩挲三復, 有感於星原之無以見下段也. 丁丑四月卄九日, 金正喜題識.

Kim first explains how he discovered the two broken parts of the stele and proceeds to evaluate their calligraphic merit in comparison with the *Paekwŏlsŏun Pagoda Stele* 白月栖雲塔碑, erected in 954 in memory of the Buddhist master Nanggong 朗空 (832–916). That inscription was engraved based on the calligraphy of Kim Saeng, the renowned Korean calligrapher introduced at the beginning of this article. Yet, in Kim's assessment, the *Mujangsa Stele* still surpasses the *Pagoda Stele* in artistic value—not only because it predates it, but also because it preserves authentic traces of Wang Xizhi's brushwork, such as the distinctive three-dot form of the character *sung* 崇, a feature that had drawn the attention of Weng Fanggang. Notably, though, Kim does not refer to Weng's theory of "collating characters." This is another indirect evidence that Kim did not support his master's view.

After about fifteen-day trip to Kyŏngju, Kim Chŏnghŭi returned to Seoul and engaged more earnestly in epigraphic studies in collaboration with fellow scholars. In the course of this research, he once again expressed his views on the *Mujangsa Stele* in a letter to Kim Kyŏngyŏn 金敬淵 (1778–1820). Although the precise date of the

[23] Rubbing, National Museum of Korea, no. chŭng 6016; Lee Eun-Hyuk, "Mujangsa pi wa Wang Hŭiji ch'e ŭi taebi koch'al," p. 179.

letter is not recorded, it is presumed to have been written around the autumn of 1817, a period when the two men were deeply immersed in the study of epigraphy.[24]

> The *Mujangsa Stele* is indeed written in the calligraphic style of the *Hongboksa Stele*, but it is not a collated inscription like the *Ingaksa Stele*. Kim Yukchin was a figure of the late Silla period. The date of the stele's erection cannot be verified at present.
> 鋟藏碑果是弘福字體, 非集字如麟角碑矣. 金陸珍是新羅末葉之人, 而碑之年代, 今不可考矣.

Kim's remarks are terse and ambiguously phrased, making them difficult to understand with precision. He initially affirms Weng Fanggang's view that the inscription was rendered in the style of the *Hongfusi Stele* that engraved the *Preface to the Sage Teachings* 聖教序. What follows, however, is a problematic passage that lends itself to two possible interpretations. One possibility is that the stele is not a collated work, unlike the *Ingaksa Stele*.[25] Alternatively, the stele is a collated work, akin to the *Hongfusi Stele*, but of a different kind than the Ingaksa Stele. In my view, Kim likely intended the first interpretation, especially given his remarks in the aforementioned book *Miscellaneous Notes* by Weng Shukun. In the next, Kim refers to Kim Yukchin, seemingly suggesting that he was the actual inscriber, though he does not elaborate on this point. It is possible that Kim was reluctant to openly contradict the position of his mentor, Weng Fanggang.

Debates Among Modern Scholars

To this day, scholarly consensus has not been reached regarding the calligraphic style of the *Mujangsa Stele*.[26] Lee Jong-moon is the earliest scholar who suggested a Korean calligrapher.[27] Yi points out that about one-quarter of the characters on the stele are not found in any extant works by Wang Xizhi. Even some characters are too

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[24] Kim Kyŏngyŏn's own inscription in *Tongni udam* 東籬藕談 金敬淵自識: "In the autumn of the year *Chŏngch'uk* (1817), Ch'usa of Hwangsan [Kim Chŏnghŭi] visited me at Tongni Seodang. We discussed several interpretations of the *Book of Changes* and the *Book of Poetry*, read through a thousand volumes of inscriptions on metal and stone, and evaluated the engraved calligraphy preserved in my collection." 丁丑秋日, 黃山秋史訪余東籬書堂, 論易說詩義數則, 讀金石文字一千卷, 復取所蓄諸石題品之; *Collected Works of Wandang* 阮堂集, j.4, 90b–90c, "Letter to Kim Tongni Kyŏngyŏn" 與金東籬 敬淵; Lee Eun-Hyuk, "Mujangsa pi wa Wang Hŭiji ch'e ŭi taebi koch'al," p. 179.

[25] Pak Chulsang (2015, p. 266) interprets that Kim Chŏnghŭi adopted Weng Fanggang's theory of collation, but he does not provide supporting explanation. The *Ingaksa Stele*, located in Gunwi County, North Kyŏngsang province, is the only surviving collated stele from the Koryŏ dynasty. Commissioned by royal decree under King Ch'ungnyŏl, the inscription was composed by Min Chi 閔漬 (1248–1326).

[26] For the previous scholarship on the stele's calligraphy, see Lee Jong-moon, "Mujangsabi rŭl ssŭn sŏyega e taehan chae kŏmt'o," *Taedong Hanmunhak* 41 (2014): 275–79 and 287–89.

[27] Lee Jong-moon, "Mujangsabi rŭl ssŭn sŏyega e kwanhan han koch'al," *Nammyeonghak yŏn'gu* 13 (2002), pp.223-54.

complicated to assemble parts from Wang's corpus. Yet, they still achieve the uniformity in the size and stroke breath of the characters, the lively rhythm and continuity of brush energy, and the overall harmonious composition. Those features attest that the inscription of the stele could not be made through assembling pre-existing characters.

Choi Young-sung supported Yi's position and proposed a new theory that the calligrapher was a monk from Hwangnyongsa Temple. He deciphered the character *sa* 寺 after *Hwangryong* 皇龍 near the lower end of the first column on the stele, and suggested that it would have been followed by the name of the temple monk who wrote the inscription.[28]

Building on the arguments of Lee Jong-moon and Choi Young-sung, Lee Eun-Hyuk further developed the debate by organizing his analysis around three aspects: character size, historical context, and calligraphic style. His main arguments can be summarized as follows. Lee first draws attention to the size of the characters on the *Mujangsa Stele* in comparison to three other steles made through the collation method (see Figure 7).

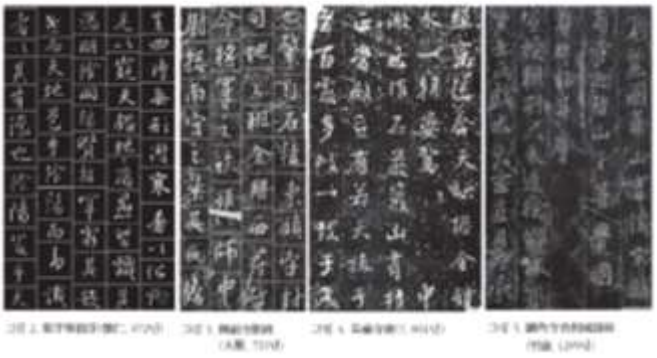

Figure 7. From left to right: (a) Huairen, *Hongfusi Stele* (672), (b) Daya, *Broken Stele of Xingfusi* (721), (c) Kim Yukjin (arguably), *Mujangsa Stele* (801), and (d) Chukhŏ, *Ingaksa Stele* (1295). From Lee Eun-Hyuk, "Mujangsa pi wa Wang Hŭiji ch'e ŭi taebi koch'al," 186.

Lee Eun-Hyuk effectively illustrated the irregular distribution of character sizes in the two Chinese steles by overlaying horizontal and vertical lines on the inscriptions. *The Hongfusi Stele*, or *Stele of the Preface to Sage Teachings*, has slightly narrower spacing between characters than the *Broken Stele of Xingfusi*. Yet in both cases,

[28] See Choi Young-sung, "Silla Mujangsa pi ŭi sŏja yŏngu," *Sillasa hakpo* 20 (2010): 179-218. After Kim Chŏnghŭi found the two parts of the stele, the third fragment was later found near the site of the temple in 1914 by dispatched members of the Japanese General Government, Seoul—Kim Hanmok 金漢睦 and Nakajato Yijuro 中里伊十郎. Thereafter the pieces were carried away to the Museum of the Government and displayed in the Kŭnjŏngjŏn Hall of Kyŏngbok Palace. Currently, the three fragments are held in the Gyeongju National Museum, while the dragon capstone and turtle pedestal, registered as Treasure no. 125, remain on site in Kyŏngju.

variation in character size is clearly noticeable. In contrast, the *Mujangsa Stele* exhibits a high degree of formal consistency. Vertical guidelines were drawn on the stone surface to ensure even spacing between columns, and then characters were inscribed at regular intervals along these lines. The spacing between columns is orderly, and the characters are rendered in a uniform size throughout, intending a deliberate structural cohesion. Based on these observations, Yi concludes that the *Mujangsa Stele* was executed by a single calligrapher.

Yi further states that the *Ingaksa Stele* displays an uneven format, resembling the layout of the two Chinese steles. However, from my own observation, the *Ingaksa Stele* is still relatively consistent in character size and spacing, closely approximating the organization seen in the *Mujangsa Stele*. Thus, it seems reductive to interpret varying sizes solely through the lens of the collation process. A more plausible explanation would be regional stylistic conventions. Whereas Chinese steles have texts in open space, Korean ones employed vertical guidelines. The two different formats suggest disparate underlying aesthetics pertaining to spatial organization.

Meanwhile, one interpretative issue arises regarding character size. Lee Eun-Hyuk initially attributes the irregularity in character size to the inherent limitations of collation process. Because characters are collected from a variety of sources, their sizes naturally vary. Later, however, he interprets the same phenomenon as an embodiment of the so-called *canchaimei* 參差美 (K. *ch'amch'imi*), a key aesthetic principle in Chinese calligraphy that esteems unevenness, asymmetry, and variation.[29] In other words, it remains unclear whether the variation in character size is regarded as a technical limitation resulting from the compilation process or as a deliberate aesthetic choice. If the former is the case, it rightly points to a structural weakness inherent in collated characters. But if it is the latter, it bears no direct relevance to the issue of "collation theory."

The second point of discussion pertains to the historical circumstance regarding the construction of the *Mujangsa Stele*. As evidenced by the fact that *the Stele of the Preface to Sage Teachings* took twenty-five years to complete, the process of collating characters requires extensive source materials and a great deal of time. In the case of the *Mujangsa Stele*, however, it was created as part of a Buddhist ritual intended to pray for the repose of the deceased king's soul. Given the urgency of such a task, the time frame must have been tight—indeed, the stele was completed within a year of the king's passing. Under such time constraints, making new characters based on collation process is highly impractical.

The second argument is overall reasonable, but it still warrants further elaboration. Lee's argument relies solely on the example of the *Preface to Sage Teachings*, making the comparison overly dependent on a single precedent. Incorporating a broader range of examples would strengthen his argument.[30] The *Preface to Sage Teachings* was the

[29] See Lee Eun-Hyuk, "Mujangsa pi wa Wang Hŭiji ch'e ŭi taebi koch'al," p. 185.

[30] It is thus far unknown how long it took to complete the *Xingfusi Stele*, due to the lack of historical documentation.

first successfully executed collated stele, and thus its production likely required an exceptionally long period due to the novelty and complexity of the process. By contrast, when the *Mujangsa Stele* was erected, the *Preface to Sage Teachings* and other Chinese sources were available, potentially streamlining the production process and significantly reducing the time required. Moreover, the *Preface to Sage Teachings* consists of 1,904 characters, considerably more than the estimated 1,400 characters of *the Mujangsa Stele*.

Lastly and most importantly, Lee Eun-Hyuk classified all 431 deciphered characters from the *Mujangsa Stele* into three categories based on their degree of resemblance to Wang Xizhi's calligraphy.[31] The results of his classification are as follows:

(1) Characters identical to those in Wang Xizhi's calligraphy: 156 characters
(2) Characters that appear in Wang's corpus but differ in form: 161 characters
(3) Characters not found in Wang's calligraphy: 114 characters
(4) Others: Characters that are undecipherable or require further clarification

Lee's study is grounded in direct visual comparison with Wang Xizhi's calligraphy, and his systematic analysis provides a solid foundation for addressing the issue of collated characters. Categories (2) and (3)—that is, characters whose forms differ from those in Wang Xizhi's works or are not found in his calligraphy—together comprise approximately 270 characters, nearly twice the number of those matching Wang's calligraphy in Category (1). Although Category Two may vary, depending on the viewer's judgment, the high number of characters either absent from or significantly different in Wang's extant works supports the argument that the *Mujangsa Stele* is not a product of assembling characters from preexisting works. Taken as a whole, Lee Eun-Hyuk's reasoning and progression toward his conclusion are logically sound and convincing although the two minor issues—character size and historical circumstance—need further consideration.

Among scholars in support of a single inscriber, opinions remain divided regarding the identity of the calligrapher. While Choi Young-sung and Lee Eun-Hyuk suggest a Hwangnyongsa monk or a third party, Lee Jong-moon continues to regard Kim Yukchin as the calligrapher, based on textual evidence.[32] Since this study focuses primarily on the broader debate between the single-inscriber and collation theories, internal disagreements within the former camp will not be addressed in detail here.

Now let us turn to the arguments of scholars advocating the collation theory. In this group of scholars,[33] Kim Ŭnghyŏn is the first scholar to advance a scholarly argument

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[31] *Mujangsa Stele* has been transcribed by major scholars of Korea, China, and Japan. See the National Institute of Korean History database. https://db.history.go.kr/ancient/level.do

[32] See Lee Jong-moon, "Mujangsabi rŭl ssŭn sŏyega e taehan chae kŏmt'o," pp. 271–302.

[33] The majority of monographs do not provide for explanations for collating characters. For example, Katsuragi Sueharu 葛城末治, *Chōsen kinsekkō* 朝鮮金石攷 (Keijō: Ōsakaya Gōshoten, 1935), pp. 230–231.

of the collation theory. He explained that even collated inscriptions can reflect the individuality of the person assembling the characters.[34] Building upon his discussion, Jung Hyun-sook developed the theory further.[35] The script style of the *Mujangsa Stele* differs from that of Wang Xizhi in the Chinese sources, but such a level of difference is not significant to assert a single inscriber on the ground of the process of collating characters. The process first involves locating the relevant characters, which are then manually copied one by one; as such, the final form may vary depending on the collator's skill and stylistic choices. In her view, therefore, the scriptural differences between the *Mujangsa Stele* and the works of Wang Xizhi do not necessarily support the theory of a single inscriber.

Moreover, Jung Hyun-sook draws attention to the formal aspects of the inscription. While she accepts Choi Young-sung's claim that the name of a monk was engraved at the bottom of the first line of the stele, she argues that this monk was not the inscriber but rather the monk in charge of collation. As evidence, she pointed to the fact that in both the *Preface to Sage Teachings* and the *Broken Stele of Xingfusi Temple*, the name of the collating monk follows the temple name at the beginning of the inscription.[36]

The format of the *Preface to Sage Teachings* is particularly noteworthy; a large blank space is between the phrase "Composed by Emperor Taizong" 太宗文皇帝製 and "Hongfusi Temple" 弘福寺. This format aligns with that of the *Mujangsa Stele*, where "Taenaema Minister Kim Yukjin, in obedience to the request" 大奈麻臣金陸珍奉敎 is followed by a blank of more than four characters before "Hwangnyongsa" 皇龍寺 is written. Based on such a similar format, Jung infers that the full inscription of the Mujangsa Stele likely reads: "Hwangnyongsa ['a name of monk' collated writings of General Wang Xizhi of Jin]" 皇龍寺 [□□ 集晉右將軍王羲之書].

Jung Hyun-sook further notes that when a monk serves as an inscriber, there is no precedent for his name to appear at the beginning of an inscription. By contrast, in the case of collated works, the collator's name is typically placed at the beginning, as seen in the two aforementioned Chinese steles and in Silla's *Master Honggak Stele* (886). On this basis, Jung concludes that the Hwangnyongsa monk in question should be regarded not as an inscriber, but as a collating monk. On the whole, Jung articulates a well-reasoned argument, grounding her analysis in the concept of collation and formal comparisons with other compiled steles. However, we need to re-consider her claim that the name of the collating monk appears at the beginning of the inscription. One counter example is the *Ingaksa Stele*, whose inscription ends with:

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[34] Kim Ŭnghyŏn, *Sŏ yŏ kigŭi in* 書如其人 (Seoul: Tongbang yŏnsŏhoe, 1995), p. 173.

[35] See Jung Hyun-sook, *T'ongil Silla ŭi sŏye* (Seoul: Daunsaem, 2022), pp. 121–123.

[36] *Preface to Sage Teachings*: "The monk Huairen of Hongfusi Temple collated characters of General Wang Xizhi of Jin" 弘福寺沙門懷仁 集晉右將軍王羲之書; *Broken Stele of Hongfusi Temple*: "This stele, located at Xinfusi Temple, was collated by the resident monk Daya from writings of General Wang Xizhi" 碑在興福寺 陪常住大雅 集右將軍王羲之書.

Disciple-monk Jukhŏ, having received the imperial edict, collated the characters of General Wang Xizhi of Jin. Disciple Ch'ŏngbun, Abbot of Palace Temple and Ingaksa Temple, T'ong'o Chinjŏng Grand Sŏn Master erected the stele.
門人沙門竹虛奉 勅集晉右將軍王羲之書. 門人內願堂兼住持通奧眞靜太禪師淸玢立石.

Figure 8. Rubbing of the *Ingaksa Stele Inscription*, 1295. Accordion-fold Album (12 Folds), 39.2 × 27 cm. Jangseogak no. B14B 29

As shown above, the name of the collating monk appears at the very end of the inscription. It suggests that a more comprehensive investigation is necessary for validating Chŏng's argument.

Concluding Remarks

I have reviewed modern scholarly works with a main focus on Lee Eun-Hyuk and Jung Hyun-sook, followed by my own view. First, Lee and Jung stand at the opposite sides, but they have shared views at times. Both scholars noted that the script of the *Mujangsa Stele* most closely resembles that of the *Hongfusi Stele*, i.e., the *Stele of the Preface to Sage Teachings*. This observation aligns well with the historical context. At the time the *Mujangsa Stele* was erected, the *Preface to the Orchid Gathering* was already an extremely rare text and difficult to obtain, while the *Broken Stele of Xingfusi* had not yet been discovered. Thus, the *Hongfusi Stele* would have been the most accessible and useful source for reproducing the calligraphic style of Wang Xizhi.

As for the script style of the *Mujangsa Stele*, both Lee and Jung exhibit some points of convergence in their analysis, but they differ in interpretation and emphasis. Attention to these differences reveals the core of the debate and may offer insights toward its resolution. Lee remarks that the strokes are uniform and sharp. Similarly, Jung observes that, compared to the two Tang-dynasty steles, the strokes are thinner and exhibit characteristics of regular script, producing a "lean and rigid" (*sugyŏng* 瘦硬) feature. As such, their descriptive accounts largely coincide, but their interpretations diverge. Lee argues that the evenness of the brushwork and the regular spacing between characters point to a single calligrapher's hand. In contrast, Jung maintains that since collation involves a manual process of copying at the end, such a consistent script style happens naturally.

Now I would like to offer my own view. While both Lee and Jung make valid points on their own, each appears to have limitations when it comes to evaluating the script of the *Mujangsa Stele* in its entirety. Lee notes that 156 out of the 431 deciphered characters in the stele match Wang Xizhi's calligraphy. Although this number does

not account for half, it still represents a significant portion. These characters were likely compiled based on extant materials such as the *Preface to Sage Teachings*. Jung Hyun-sook, on the other hand, argues that for characters not found in Wang's corpus, the collating monk would have had no choice but to write them in the style of Wang Xizhi.[37] This statement effectively acknowledges the role of the inscriber to a certain degree. Given that a substantial number of characters in the stele are not attested in Wang's model calligraphy, they cannot be dismissed as negligible.

Considering that both theories have some limitations, it seems most reasonable to adopt a hybrid view: characters traceable to Wang's models were collated, while those absent were written directly by the inscriber. Song Mingxin previously proposed such a view that both collation and freehand copy are evident in the inscription. He concluded that the script of the *Mujangsa Stele* represents a creative adaptation of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy.[38]

The most contentious issue concerns a group of Chinese characters that appear in Wang Xizhi's calligraphy but take different forms in the *Mujangsa Stele*. Lee identifies a total of 161 such characters and, based on this observation, concludes that the inscription reflects one individual's creative handwriting. In contrast, Jung attributes the variations to the collating monk's level of skill and personal style. The two opposite interpretations may involve subjective judgment, and the issue exceeds the present author's capacity for definitive resolution. Thus, rather than pursue the issue further here, I leave it open to future research.

Lastly, let us return to the varied forms of the character *sung* 崇. Thus far, scholarly discussions have focused on the presence of the three dots. However, equal attention should be given to the lower component 宗 (K. *chong*, Ch. *zong*). In the *Mujangsa Stele*, this component appears in its standard form, whereas in the Dingwu editions, the thick central stroke of the character pierces straight through the entire *zong* component, as Weng Fanggang mentioned (see the chart above).[39] In other words, the Korean inscriber adopted the three-dot form but did not replicate the penetrating stroke, which is also characteristic of the Dingwu editions. This divergence highlights the creative agency of the Korean calligrapher, whose approach reflects a selective and interpretive engagement with the model rather than mechanical reproduction.

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[37] See Jung Hyun-sook, "Han'guk sŏyesa esŏ Wang Hiji chipchabi ŭi ch'urhyŏn gwa chŏn'gae," *Sŏyehak yŏn'gu* 44 (2024): 26.

[38] See Song Mingxin 宋明信, "Mujangsa bei de shuxie zhe yu shuti fenxi" "鏊藏寺碑的書寫者與書體分析," *Proceedings of the International Conference on the Mujangsa Stele of Silla* (2010), pp.227-231. I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Shin Jong-won for kindly providing the materials.

[39] *Su-Mi Zhai Lanting kao* 蘇米齋蘭亭考, j.3, 8b: 定武本崇字中直, 諸本皆一直穿冖頭及下二橫畫, 惟細翫.

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