CHAPTER SEVEN
PLURALIST LITERATI IN KORYŎ

The reign periods of Sukchong, Yejong and Injong are usually seen as the height of Koryŏ Daoism. The same period, however, is also considered the apex of Koryŏ Buddhism and the zenith of Koryŏ Confucianism. Nativism as well experienced a period of growth in the late eleventh century and the middle of the twelfth century, culminating in the rebellion of nativist leader Myoch'ŏng 姜清 in 1135. Geomancy, furthermore, was as strong as ever; the idea that the unique landscape
of the Three Han was an essential part of Koryŏ’s well-being was commonly held. Local spirits were worshipped all through the country and were enfeoffed to become part of the officially recognized pantheon of protecting spirits. Despite the dividing lines that modern historiography has drawn between these different belief and thought systems, their respective borders were fluid and easily crossed most of the time and in most of the cases. Not all belief and thought systems were available to everyone in Koryŏ society, but those who did have access to the different worlds of learning and believing, due to their social position and individual talents, in general freely roamed these different realities. Borders were fluid, but they did exist and at times, as will be demonstrated in the chapter on Myoch’ŏng’s rebellion, they could harden to virtually bar any crossing over.

Earlier studies have characterized the intellectual climate of the period during the reigns of Sukchong, Yejong, and Injong in dichotomous terms, drawing on an evolutionary approach that is usually not very clearly articulated. Inconsistencies or inaccuracies within a thought system are explained by referring to the incomplete or immature digestion of foreign cultural elements. Dichotomies are introduced (such as the strong association of Koryŏ Confucianism with political conservatism and of Koryŏ nativism with political progressiveness) that tell more about present-day preoccupations of historians than of the contemporary Koryŏ situation. The discussion of Koryŏ diplomatic relations has demonstrated that the daily reality of Koryŏ with regard to its international contacts was far removed from the idealized picture often presented in the historiography of the subject. Koryŏ’s diplomatic relations were often muddled, ambiguous and inconsistent, but they served clear goals and were generally successful. The daily reality of Koryŏ literati too was muddled, ambiguous and inconsistent, perhaps even more so than Koryŏ’s foreign relations, but like Koryŏ diplomacy, it was geared to provide Koryŏ literati with the best possible ways to deal with their surroundings. Here I shall argue that Koryŏ’s realities were scattered, inconsistent, plural and full of

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5 Hŏ Hŭngshik, “‘Koryŏsa’ chiriji-e shillin myŏngso-wa sanch’ŏn tanmyo-wa-ŭi kwan’gye,” pp. 63–90.
6 Chŏng Kubok, Han’guk chungse sahaksa (Seoul: Chimmundang 显文堂, 2000), p. 189; Ch’oe Yŏngsŏng, Han’guk yuhak sasangsa: kodae, Koryŏ p’yŏn, pp. 278–298. Ch’oe’s study is particularly reductionist with regard to the role he perceives Confucianism to have played in Koryŏ.