

On This Topic



The Formation of Late Joseon Buddhism: *Focusing on the Institutional and Socio-cultural Establishment*

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The Importance of the Institutional Aspect of Joseon Buddhism

Korean Buddhism's success into the modern period is due not only to the fact it readily provided for the religious needs of the people, but equally important, if not more, it functioned well and organized the needs of its members and its establishment. It had to reproduce itself and be capable of instilling in its members the knowledge and skill sets needed to perpetuate its traditions and institutions. Much of the Buddhist establishment we witness today was formed in the late Joseon period, largely considered to be a time of Buddhist decline. When Joseon Buddhism is considered from an institutional and socio-cultural point of view, we can discern a *saṃgha* that was emerging and becoming fully established. Yet, Buddhism has not often been discussed in terms of a fully institutionalized establishment that

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continued through the late Joseon period.¹

It is apparent that a large and active Buddhist monastic community has existed, and continues to exist, on the Korean Peninsula going back 1700 years. Indeed, it is upon this body and tradition of Korean monasticism—the physical buildings, organization of its members, and traditions of thought and practice—that the modern Jogye order of Korean Buddhism was established. However, to date examinations of Buddhism have largely viewed it in terms of a degenerated religion,² or as a heterodox ideology vis-à-vis Neo-Confucianism that replaced it as the ruling ideology of the Joseon dynasty. How the Buddhist community existed as a separate organization independent from the state through the Joseon period has rarely been extensively discussed from an institutional point of view, either in English or Korean.

Historical records indicate that there were well-established Buddhist institutions throughout the Joseon period, the importance and significance of which have been largely overlooked as indicators of a thriving tradition. However, if we focus on these institutional aspects of Joseon Buddhism, we will realize that most of the current forms of Buddhism were in fact established at the start of the late Joseon period (1600–1910), namely from the beginning of the 17th century. This is not to belittle the struggles and transformations that have taken place within Buddhism over the past 300-plus years to bring it where it is today. There has been much change, notably

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1. We can extend an inherent acceptance of religious organizations as simply that and nothing more. However, the truth of the matter is that religious organizations do much more than just *religion*. For example, the Catholic Church can be considered a business organization. An *Economist* article reported that in 2010 the Catholic Church invested US\$170 billion in various institutions in the United States run by the church—mostly hospitals and educational institutions. Despite such obvious indicators of business activities, such establishments are not considered businesses and are not even subject to normal accounting regulations (Yglesias 2013).
 2. The notion that Buddhism became nothing more than a religion of cultic practices can be noted even in scholars such as Nam Hee-sook. She maintains that, “...although Chosŏn [Joseon] era Buddhism could not deepen or develop its efforts in the scholarly arena, the rapid expansion of Buddhism on a popular level and its concentration on the common populace, in contrast to its prior focus on the aristocracy, carries great significance” (2012, 10).

during the colonial period and at the beginning of the Republic of Korea, and further, through the modernization process of the Korean society.³ Nevertheless, this does not take away from the fact that the formation of some fundamental institutions of Korean Buddhism can be traced back to the late Joseon period.

Today, Korean Buddhism boasts of being as vibrant and socially relevant as in other well-known Buddhist countries such as Japan, Taiwan, or Tibet. Its vibrancy can be traced back centuries to Silla and through the subsequent Goryeo (918–1392) and Joseon (1392–1910) periods. However, historical records indicate that the late Joseon period, from the early 17th to the early 20th century, was a crucial period in the formation and establishment of the Korean Buddhist traditions of the modern period. It was during that time that the foundational institutions and socio-cultural traditions that we witness today were put into place. The degree of its presence in and impact on Korean society today can be gauged by the fact that almost half of the religious population of modern Korea claim to be Buddhist (Gallup Korea 2021, 3).⁴

For comparison's sake, while Confucian institutions and practices disappeared with the start of the modern period, those of Buddhism managed to continue and flourish. Towards the end of the Joseon period, the examination system for government posts was abolished and the structure of education that supported this tradition also lost a large part of its significance and aim. By contrast, Buddhist traditions continued into the 20th century intact. Its member monastics and the system of monkhood continued, unlike Confucian scholar-officials. Buddhism as an institutionalized tradition was able to sustain its own organizational existence and thus we can trace the modern form of Buddhism to the

3. For the challenges and transformations the Korean saṃgha experienced from the Japanese colonial period to the early days of the modernization period, see Mark Nathan (2018) and Hwansoo Ilmee Kim (2018).

4. This is extrapolated from the 2021 Gallup Korea poll in which 40% of respondents professed to be religious within the surveyed population of 1,500. Within this self-professed religious group, a total of 41% identified as Buddhist, while 43.6% identified as Protestants, and 15.4% as Catholics.

religious tradition, much of which was established in the 17th century and continued through the Joseon and into the modern era.

The Institutional and Socio-cultural Establishment of Late Joseon Buddhism

The saṃgha as an organized body of monks is the elephant in the room that seems to have been noticed but not taken seriously enough. Despite the lofty words of its sutras on the notion of enlightenment or the ideals of monastic precepts of the Vinayas, the saṃgha and its members could not help but contend with *pragmatic* issues. After all, the saṃgha was an organization that, while having to satisfy the basic needs of shelter and sustenance, also pursued a course of action that solidified and improved its situation as an organized body. Simply put, the saṃgha had to look after itself using organizational and institutional means.

There has been research on institutional matters surrounding Korean Buddhism, such as studies, particularly in the 1980s and early 1990s, of the Joseon-period monastery economy.⁵ Some early studies have examined Buddhism not purely in term of its religious aspects or doctrinal notions, but on secular and essential organizational matters that the saṃgha could not avoid. Some studies by current scholars have looked at the state of monastic establishments (Y. Kim 2011; 2012; Son 2019; 2020) or the monastic education system (J. Lee 2012), all in the late Joseon period. These works adopt a similar narrative regarding the establishment of monasteries and their survival through the difficult period of anti-Buddhist state policies.

In a similar vein, other studies have demonstrated the increased activities of monasteries in the 17th century. For instance, there is a sudden increase in the erection of eminent monk steles starting from the early 1600s, indicative of the wealth in resources of the monasteries. From these findings, the re-emergence of Joseon Buddhism and the greater institutional establishment of the saṃgha can be extrapolated, characterized by secure

5. Some of these works include Kim Gabju's *Joseon sidae sawon gyeongje yeongu* (1983) or Yi Jaechang's *Hanguk Bulgyo sawon gyeongje yeongu* (1993), and Han Sanggil's (2006) classic study of Joseon-period temple fraternities.

and stable temple finances and a self-sufficient and well-organized Buddhist community (S. Kim 2019, 225–230).

Corroborating institutional developments also took place in late Joseon monasteries. These contemporaneous developments include the printing of ritual texts,⁶ formation of a new lineage-based identity,⁷ publication of collected works of eminent monks,⁸ and temple renovations,⁹ all in the wake of the Imjin Wars. These coinciding temple activities, the result of an institutionally developed saṃgha, indicate that an emergence was taking place, that of a unique late Joseon Buddhism.

The current collection of articles intends to add to this claim that a new form of Buddhism emerged from the institutional developments that occurred particularly from the start of the late Joseon period. This special issue attempts to shift the narrative from the survival of Joseon-period Buddhism to a focus on the new Buddhist institutional establishments. These include institutions of monastic education, spiritual practices, monastic ordination, and merit-making activities of lay donors. The three articles included as part of this special issue attempt to provide glimpses into how these institutionalized practices took place and their characteristics.

At this point, I make a further claim on the formation of a new Buddhism by focusing on the system of educational training and spiritual practices. These factors are vital and fundamental to the formation of a viable Buddhist establishment since they help maintain the tradition of monkhood and its vitality. Furthermore, these traditions are also evidence of the uniqueness of late Joseon Buddhism, which was established differently from its past forms. In addition, the tradition of ordination will be briefly examined since without such a system to perpetuate new generations of

6. Printing activities of the saṃgha increased dramatically from the 16th century and especially up to end of the 18th century (Nam 2012, 15).

7. See S. Kim (2020).

8. Starting from 1612, collected works of eminent monks of the Joseon period began to be published. In the 17th century a total of 21 collected works were published, 21 works were published in the 18th century, while in the 19th century, 13 works were published (J. Yi 1990, 29–30).

9. See G. Yi (1994, 47–48).

monks and nuns, Buddhism would certainly not have been able to continue.

Lastly, the socio-cultural aspects will be discussed in order to address the questions: How the institutions of Buddhism survive? Who provided financial support to the monasteries and what significance did Buddhism and its monasteries provide to such supporters? Buddhism had to have social and cultural significance to the patrons to justify their support. Without such support, Buddhism simply would not have been able to survive.

System of Monastic Education, Practice, and Ordination

Monastic Curriculum

Unique to Buddhism of the late Joseon period is the formation of a widely accepted system of curriculum for monastics. A monastic curriculum is essential to the samgha for the continuation of its traditions and the organization of the samgha; it is needed to perpetuate the ideology of the institution of the samgha, part of which is to give it legitimation and justification for the operation and existence of the Buddhist organization. It is a system for training its members in the ways and thoughts of the samgha. Its monastic members need to be on the same page regarding Buddhism's teachings and what it preached to the people.

The establishment of a monastic curriculum (*iryek gwajeong* 履歷課程) in the 17th century is a good indicator of the resurgence of the Korean samgha. Up until the early 16th century, a common monastic education is not known to have been used. It appears that individual schools of thought managed their own scheme of training and teaching for their respective monastic members. However, 16th-century printings of monastic curricular literature reveal an effort to establish a common curriculum (J. Lee 2012, 69). By the 17th century there are clear indications that a more unified curriculum was in place. There is, for instance, a description of this curriculum by Yeongwol Cheonghak 詠月淸學 (1570–1654; hereafter Yeongwol), who was active in the early 17th century.

Yeongwol describes the monastic curriculum as consisting of a sequence of three separate stages: 1) the “four-fold texts course” (*sajipkwa* 四集科), 2) “four-fold teachings course” (*sagyogwa* 四教科), and the final 3) “great-teaching course” (*daegyogwa* 大教科), which Yeongwol summarizes in his work “*Sajipsagyo jeondeung yeomsong hwaeom*” 四集四教傳燈拈頌華嚴 (Four-fold Texts, Four-fold Teachings, *Transmission of the Lamp, Analyses and Verses, Huayan*).

Yeongwol explains that the first stage, the four-fold texts course, seeks enlightenment through gradual cultivation and investigating the phrase (*chamgu* 參句), a practice that focuses on understanding the core points of the prescribed scriptures.¹⁰ The second stage, the four-fold teachings course, is for awakening the mind to the principles of the teachings through the study of select scriptures.¹¹ In the final stage, the great-teaching course, Yeongwol explains that students will learn the fundamentals of the Seon of the patriarchs and come to know the correct direction of cultivation by following the curriculum. Again, this stage consists of examining select texts that are considered to be more recondite (HBJ 8, 234b21–235b4).¹²

The three-stage curriculum appears to have gained wide acceptance, but one more stage, “course for neophytes” (*samigwa* 沙彌科), was added to the very beginning of the three-stages, forming a four-stage curriculum, most likely later in the early 17th century. Most of the texts used in the added stage, such as the *Admonitions to Beginning Students*, were already in circulation by the early 17th century.¹³ This newly developed four-stage

10. *Chanyuan zhuquan ji duxu* 禪源諸詮集都序 (Preface to the Collection of Chan Sources), *Dahui shuzhuang* 大慧書狀 (Letters of Dahui), *Chanyao* 禪要 (Essentials of Chan), and *Beopjip byeolhaengnok jeoryo byeongip sagi* 法集別行錄節要并入私記 (Excerpts from the Dharma Collection and Special Practice Record with Personal Notes).

11. The four-fold teachings course focuses on the *Yuanjue jing* 圓覺經 (Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment), the *Diamond Sutra*, the *Śūraṅgama-sūtra*, and the *Lotus Sutra*.

12. The last stage consists of studying the *Avatamsaka-sūtra*, *Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄 (Jingde Era Record of the Transmission of the Lamp), and the *Seonmun yeomsong jip* 禪門拈頌集 (Compilation of Examinations of and Verses on Ancient Precedents).

13. The texts studied in the added course are *Admonitions to Beginning Students* (*Gye chosim hagin mun* 誠初心學人文), *Inspiring Yourself to Practice* (*Balsim suhaeng jang* 發心修行章), *Admonitions to Oneself* (*Jagyeong mun* 自警文), and *Admonitions to the Monastic*

curriculum appears to have been generally accepted as a monastic curriculum by the various Joseon Buddhist schools and later became accepted as the standard monastic curriculum by the modern monastic community in Korea (J. Lee 2012, 68–71; Y. Kim 2018, 160–167; J. Lee 2010).¹⁴

That the same 17th-century monastic curriculum remained intact and is still being used in the modern Korean monastic education system is evidence not only of the enduring monastic educational tradition, but also of the strength and stability of the late Joseon monastic community whose traditions have endured for well over 300 years. It is also a testament to the high level of doctrinal and cultivational traditions that the Buddhist community established in the early 17th century, which continued into the late-Joseon and modern periods.

Establishment of a Widely Shared System of Cultivation

In addition to the establishment of a unified monastic curriculum, another unique aspect that developed, also in the 17th century, was a new system of spiritual cultivation. In some cases, previous practice methods were newly combined and incorporated into the late Joseon methods, or in other cases, previous methods were continued and adopted into the late Joseon period. One example is the continuation of the Seon 禪 practice known as *ganhwa seon* 看話禪, or observing the critical phrase meditation, initially adopted and developed by Jinul 知訥 (1158–1210). Also developed by Jinul is the systematized practice of doctrinal studies followed by meditation that was organized into a schema of initial sudden-awakening followed by gradual-practice (*dono jeomsu* 頓悟漸修) (Buswell 2014), which was a popularly adopted scheme of cultivation into the late Joseon. This notion was further developed by the great late Joseon monk Cheongheo Hyujeong 淸虛休靜

Community (Zimen jingxun 緇門警訓).

14. Furthermore, somewhere in the development of the curriculum from the 17th century the *Lotus Sutra* was replaced with *Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna* (*Dasheng qixin lun* 大乘起信論) in the four-fold teachings course.

(1520–1604, hereafter Hyujeong) into the notion of *sagyo ipseon* 捨教入禪, or leave doctrinal study to enter meditational practice. This scheme will be discussed further in Lee Jong-su's paper, but in brief, the monastics firstly engaged in doctrinal studies and upon its completion moved to meditational practices.

Within this backdrop, a newly systemized form of practice was established, the three gates of cultivation (*sammun suhak* 三門修學),¹⁵ developed coincidentally at about the same time that the standardization of monastic curriculum occurred. This was a system formulated by Hyujeong, which harmonized the three main traditions of monastic practice—meditation (Seon), doctrinal study (Gyo 教), and recitation of the name of Amitābha Buddha (*yeombul* 念佛). The uniqueness of this combination was the adoption of Pure Land chanting practices as integral to the perfection of self-cultivation and as a practice that was considered no less effective than meditation in achieving enlightenment. This new systemization became generally adopted among the Buddhist communities. By accepting the three methods as leading equally to the escape from rebirth, Hyujeong established a unique method that continued into modern times. In this sense, it can be claimed that a characteristically Joseon form of Buddhist cultivation was newly formed.

The development of this new system can be interpreted as a pragmatic answer to the need for an expedient method inclusive of all monastics. This was done while also fully embracing the method of *ganhwa seon*. Hyujeong's exegetical reasoning for the adoption of this method was noted in his composition, *Seonga gwigam* 禪家龜鑑 (Paragon of the Seon House), where he touts the effectiveness of ending the cyclical existence on account of the

15. More specifically, the three paths are the “shortcut path” (*gyeongjeol mun* 徑截門), of meditational practices; “complete and immediate path” (*wondon mun* 圓頓門), which consists of doctrinal studies; and the “path of reciting the name of Amitābha” (*yeombul mun* 念佛門), the foundational practice of Pure Land Buddhism. The path of reciting the name of Amitābha was further categorized into two forms: 1) reliance on the other-power of Amitābha to be re-born in the Pure Land, and 2) reliance on self-power for salvation, called “chanting Seon” (*yeombul seon* 念佛禪). For more on Joseon monastic practices see Lee Jong-su (2010).

powers of Amitābha's vows (HBJ 7, 640). By incorporating the Pure Land method of chanting, Hyujeong, attempted to provide a *one solution for all* that was inclusive of cultivators of both low and high spiritual capacities. Furthermore, Hyujeong's methods imply that the effectiveness of the Pure Land practices was not inferior to meditational practices or doctrinal study when viewed from the framework of the greater Buddhist eschatological scheme (Y. Kim 2020, 278–280).

Systems of Monastic Ordination

It goes without saying that ordination is essential to the maintenance of a monastic community and is no less important than monastic education and practice. Ordination is a method for the monastic organization to regenerate itself, and thus critical to its survival. It is also an important method of maintaining standards of behavior among monastics. To date, research on issues surrounding monastic ordination during the Joseon period has been scarce. One of the main reasons is that historical records specifically on ordination and ordination records are lacking, leaving scholars only a few Joseon-period sources to rely on.

Starting from the neophyte's entry into the monastery, he or she is instructed and trained in the ways of that monastery. The tradition of teaching and training renunciates was a common matter among monastic communities. For instance, in the Korean Buddhist tradition, how a monk should behave within and outside the monastery grounds is laid out in the *Admonitions to Beginning Students* (*Gye chosim hagin mun* 誡初心學人文), composed by Jinul. It is still used today as the standard of conduct in the Korean monastic curriculum.¹⁶ Furthermore, the precepts in the Vinaya literature, or more specifically the *Four-Part Vinaya* (*Sifenlu* 四分律 in Chinese; *Sabunyul* 四分律 in Korean; *Dharmaguptaka-vinaya* in Sanskrit)

16. The *Admonitions to Beginning Students* can be said to be Jinul's adaptation of the Chinese "pure rules" (*qinggui* 清規) to the situation of late 12th-century Korea. The pure rules are a set of rules of conduct and decorum for members of the Chan monastic community in China.

list the rules of behavior for monastics to follow when they receive the precepts and become ordained at an ordination ceremony.¹⁷

State-sponsored ordination ceremonies were carried out during the Goryeo dynasty,¹⁸ and continued into the Joseon period until they ceased when the official recognition of the monastic license (*doseungjo* 度僧條) was rescinded from the *National Code [of Administration]* (*Gyeongguk daejeon* 經國大典) in 1516.¹⁹ However, despite the dissolution of state-sponsored ordination ceremonies, ordination appears to have continued, namely through private ordination ceremonies.

Of the few Joseon-period sources on ordination, an oft-cited one is the *Biographies of Eastern Masters* (*Dongsa yeoljeon* 東師列傳, hereafter *Biographies*), composed by Beomhae Gagan 梵海覺岸 (1820–1896) in 1894, two years before his passing. This source has records of ordinations, such as in the biographical record of Hyujeong. There, it is recorded that the following masters attended Hyujeong's ordination ceremony: Sungin 崇仁 (d.u.), who was the original teacher (*eunsa* 恩師), Gyeongseong Ilseon 慶聖一禪 (1488–1568), who was the preceptor master, and Buyong Yeonggwan 芙蓉靈觀 (1485–1571), who was the dharma transmitting master, which made Hyujeong the lineal descendent of Buyong Yeonggwan. The two masters Seokhui 釋熙 (d.u.) and Yukkong 六空 (d.u.), and the practitioner Gagwon 覺圓 (d.u.) were the three attending witnesses (HBJ 10, 1015c2-5; Gagan 2015, 187). Based on this record, it has been claimed that full traditional ordinations according to the *Four-Part Vinaya* were still performed during Hyujeong's time.²⁰

A similar record can be found in Hyujeong's memorial stele, the

17. According to the *Four-Part Vinaya*, a *bhikṣu* and a *bhikṣuṇī* receive 250 and 348 precepts, respectively.

18. Records indicate that ordination platforms were prepared as early as the 7th century by Jajang 慈藏 (590–658) and continued into the late Goryeo period (K. Han 1998, 353).

19. After the rescinding of the ordinance on licensed monks in 1516, it was permanently abolished in 1566 (Son 2020, 20–21).

20. According to the full ordination of the *Four-Part Vinaya*, three masters and seven witnesses needed to participate in the ceremony. In Hyujeong's case, the three required masters were present, but only three witnesses were in attendance.

Haenam District Daeheungsa Temple Master Cheongheo Stele (Haenam-hyeon daeheungsa cheongheo daesa bimyeong 海南縣 大興寺 清虛大師 碑銘, 1647), which confirms that Hyujeong was ordained in 1540 with Sungin as the original teacher and Gyeongseong Ilseon conferring the precepts as the preceptor master. It was added that the dharma transmission was received from Buyong Yeonggwon (J. Yi 1999, 254–255).

These records indicate there was a good chance that the ordinations according to the *Four-Part Vinaya* did indeed still take place at the beginning of the late Joseon period, likely a continuation from the Goryeo period. Furthermore, it also tells us that the monastic community at the time the *Biographies* was composed, was aware of the tradition of ordination according to the *Four-Part Vinaya*. However, new variations of ordination took place, as noted, starting from the early 19th century.

Most likely due to the nature of private ordinations, these ceremonies would have lacked general oversight and been given to alterations. In fact, records of changes in the methods of ordination appear early in the 19th century. For instance, a prominent early 19th century monk, Daeun Nango 大隱朗昨 (1780–1841, hereafter Daeun), adopted a new tradition of ordination referred to as auspicious sign ordination (*seosang sugye* 瑞祥受戒). This method was established by adopting the tradition described in the *Brahmā's Net Sutra* (*Beommang-gyeong* 梵網經) where the precepts received for the auspicious sign ordination are the bodhisattva precepts—ten grave prohibitions and forty-eight minor precepts.²¹ The uniqueness of the auspicious sign ordination may have been due to a lack of dharma masters for ordinations to take place, or it may have been due to a lack of standardization whereby various ordination traditions came to be adopted. Nevertheless, it allowed for self-ordination in situations wherein there was no dharma master to confer the precepts.²² We are aware that some well-

21. A description of Daeun's establishment of the auspicious sign ordination method in 1826 can be found in the genealogical record of ordination (*hogye cheommun* 護戒牒文) of Haeinsa temple. See J. Yi (2005, 149–154).

22. "If within a distance of a thousand *li* there is no dharma master to bestow the precepts, then the precepts can be received in front of a bodhisattva statue, and an auspicious sign must appear" (T 24, 1006c14–15).

known 19th-century figures such as Choui Uisun 草衣意恂 (1786–1866), the famous disciple of Daeun, and Beomhae Gagan, were ordained using this method (J. Yi 2005, 152).

Another notable 19th-century variation of the ordination method is that of the ten wholesome precepts (*sipseon gye* 十善戒) formulated by Baekpa Geungseon 白坡亘璇 (1767–1852). Baekpa makes a claim for an ordination using the ten wholesome precepts,²³ instead of the traditional 250 precepts for monks, in his *Paragon of Rules for Buddhist Rituals* (*Jakbeop gwigam* 作法龜鑑)²⁴ composed in 1826. Baekpa Geunseon must have also felt the challenges that the monastic community faced in the 19th century, perhaps due to the expanding *saṃgha*, which posed challenges in receiving the precepts. Thus, Baekpa's response was to make the process of ordination simpler and more readily available.

In hindsight, given the success of the lineages in Korean Buddhism, Daeun's method of receiving the bodhisattva precepts became one of the most widespread. Another successful method given the success of the lineages was for the leading monk to travel to China to receive ordination from Chinese masters.²⁵ One of the most popular reasons for going through such trouble was that one could be sure of receiving an orthodox lineage based in the Chinese Buddhist tradition. In fact, today's orthodox Linji lineage was transmitted by the 14th-century monk Taego Bou 太古普愚 (1301–1382), who travelled to China to receive his seal of transmission from the eighth Linji patriarch, Shiwu Qinggong 石屋清珙 (1272–1352). Nonetheless, the rise of traveling to China to receive ordination reveals its popularity within the Korean monastic community in the 19th century, a tradition that was not forgotten. Though needing more research, such a rise likely coincided with fewer restrictions on Joseon subjects from entering China.

23. The ten wholesome precepts are, 1) not to kill, 2) not to steal, 3) not to commit adultery, 4) not to lie, 5) not to speak improperly, 6) not to speak harshly, 7) not to speak divisively, 8) not to be greedy, 9) not to be angry, 10) not to have wrong views (HBJ 10, 573b–580a).

24. *Jakbeop gwigam* 作法龜鑑 (HBJ 10, 552–609).

25. Yi Neunghwa explains how several monks, including Manha 萬下 (d.u.), traveled to China in the late 19th century in order to receive the precepts from a Chinese master (N. Yi 1968, 2:80).

Monastic ordination appears to have been an important and pressing issue in the 19th century given the variations that were adopted by the Joseon *saṃgha*. Creative ways of receiving the precepts were attempted for reasons that will be examined further in Lee Jarang's paper in this issue. Suffice to say that the *saṃgha* may have been expanding, which put demands on the ordination method. This phenomenon of adopting new forms of ordination depicts a monastic community of the late 19th century that was active in perpetuating and adding to its membership while overcoming challenges posed by socio-historic circumstances.

Socio-cultural Foundation: The Support of Buddhism

What meaning did Buddhism have for people such that they participated in and provided support to Buddhist activities? Extant Buddhist sources provide us with good answers to such questions regarding Buddhist ritual practices and the patronage of such activities, a topic that will be discussed in further detail by Lee Seunghye in this issue. Two primary types of extant materials, among others, provide insight into the religious practices that took place at temples during the late Joseon period. First, we have ritual texts that contain the liturgical content or ritual prescriptions used in ritual performances, based on 16th- and 17th-century Buddhist ritual texts. Secondly, we have ritual paintings known as nectar ritual paintings—*gamno taeng* 甘露幀 or *gamnodo* 甘露圖—of large-scale ceremonies sponsored by wealthy patrons and found only in the late Joseon period. These two sources provide a range of information on ritual Buddhism that was common in the late Joseon period.

Nam Hee-sook, a modern scholar, notes the strong presence of ritualism, especially esoteric traditions, within later Joseon Buddhism. She indicates that most of the *dhāraṇī* publications were related to the cult of Avalokitesvara, the attendant bodhisattva of the Pure Land. Nam highlights three attributes of Joseon Buddhism as follows: 1) The latter half of Joseon saw a conspicuous increase in the publication of *dhāraṇī* sutras, mantra collections (*jineon jip* 眞言集), and Buddhist ritual manuals. 2) There was a

cessation of state-sponsored publication of any Buddhist texts starting from the 16th century. 3) Many of the dhāraṇī sutras, mantra collections, and ritual manuscripts were published with *hangeul* annotations (Nam 2012, 10, 14).

One of the most comprehensive modern compilations of extant ritual texts of the Joseon period is the *Hanguk Bulgyo uirye jaryo chongseo* 韓國佛教儀禮資料叢書 (Complete Collection of Korean Buddhist Ritual Material), which was collated and published in 1993. Pak (1993) describes in the introductory chapter the materials contained in this compilation as belonging to three main traditions: Pure Land (*jeongto* 淨土), esoteric (*milgyo* 密教), and meditational (Seon). Pak further explains that these traditions can be subdivided into self-directed rituals (*jahaeng uirye* 自行儀禮), other-directed rituals (*tahaeng uirye* 他行儀禮), and particular rituals (*teuksu uirye* 特殊儀禮) that are neither self- nor other-directed.²⁶

Other-directed rituals include those where the lay patrons, through the assistance of monks and nuns, beseech the power of the buddhas and bodhisattvas in order to avoid sickness, crisis, or misfortune and to send merit from performing Buddhist rituals to the spirits of deceased loved ones. These other-directed rituals make-up the majority of the performed rituals and include rituals such as the water and land assembly rituals (*suryukjae* 水陸齋), often performed at a large scale to appease the dead souls. Another popular other-directed ritual is the ritual of the ten kings (*siwangjae* 十王齋) performed to transfer merit to a recently deceased soul to help it reach the Buddhist paradise. Lastly, particular rituals include rites that are performed for special occasions, such as the eye-doting rituals (*jeoman uirye* 點眼儀禮) for initiating statues of the buddhas or bodhisattvas (Pak 1993, 11–12).

Focusing on Buddhist ritualism provides an opportunity to discover how the needs of the people were addressed by Buddhism and what those commonly shared needs were among diverse social backgrounds. While the

26. Pak characterizes self-directed rituals as rituals for paying homage to and seeking repentance from the Buddha and bodhisattvas (*yecham uirye* 禮懺儀禮), to include cultivational rituals and ordination rituals. This category of rituals also includes daily rituals of paying homage to the Buddha (*ilsang yegyeong uirye* 日常禮敬儀禮) performed at temples.

state suppressed the performance of Buddhist rituals in official spheres, they were a common aspect of Joseon-period Buddhism performed at monasteries and in the private prayer shrines of wealthy donors and the royal family.

Another source of information on the rituals of the late Joseon period are the detailed nectar ritual paintings that illustrate how these grand rituals sponsored by wealthy families would have been performed. There are forty-four extant nectar ritual paintings that were produced during the Joseon period and are limited mostly to the late period.²⁷ Although extensive studies of these paintings are lacking, especially in English literature, they are understood to have been used as a substitute for a full ritual, usually by those who could not afford such grand rituals.²⁸

As such, these ritual paintings hold great value as illustrations of the religious practices in which the people participated and also the cultural context of these events. These paintings are a good indication that filial piety and ancestor worship were important themes and commonly accepted practices among just about all classes of Joseon society, but practiced mostly by the upper class who could afford such rituals. The point to remember is that Buddhism had to cater to Confucian notions that had become widely popular in the late Joseon, namely memorials for the ancestors and performing one's filial duties.²⁹

Distinct scenes in the nectar ritual paintings captured the amalgamation of Buddhism and Confucianism in the ritual performances that enacted

27. Most of these paintings (24) are from the 18th century. However, only 3 paintings are from the 17th century. The second largest number of paintings (11) are from the 19th century. The remaining are from the 16th century (2) and early 20th century (4) (Gang and Kim 1995, 436).

28. The practice of using a substitute ritual painting parallels the use of "painted spirit houses" (*gammo yeojaedo* 感慕如在圖) in the performance of Confucian memorial ceremonies. This was often adopted by commoners or those who could not afford to build an ancestral shrine and the full ritual setup. In the paintings of the ritual table, various sacrificial food, lighted candles, and burning incense were depicted. These paintings have an effect of the actual ceremony being performed (Kang 1993, 90–91).

29. *Zhuzi's Family Rites* 朱子家禮 became widespread in 17th-century Joseon and had a wide impact on that society (S. Yi 2006, 42–46).

filial virtues. One advantage of Buddhist rituals and Buddhist methods of mourning and remembering the dead was that they preceded the creation of Confucian ancestral mortuary rituals (Deuchler 1992, 180–181). It is also likely that the Buddhists were able to successfully respond to the growing popularization of the Confucian memorial rituals detailed in the *Zhuzi jiali* 朱子家禮 (Zhuzi's Family Rites) (S. Kim 2014, 195–196).

This is why the theme of filial piety was also fundamental to Buddhist rituals such as the forty-nine days ritual (*sasipguiljae* 四十九日齋), memorial day rituals (*giljae* 忌日齋), and rituals for sending off souls (*cheondojae* 薦度齋). These various Buddhist ancestral festivals or rituals were the result of adopting the Confucian form of filial piety, which is based on ensuring the wellbeing of the family through the performance of memorial rituals for one's ancestors. This assimilation is aptly illustrated in the *Sutra on Deep Indebtedness to One's Father and Mother* (*Fumu enzhong jing* 父母恩重經), where filial piety is the main theme, which was widely distributed in Joseon Korea (Kang 1993, 84).

Other than the religious significance of Buddhism to the people, an observable implication of these paintings is that monasteries were not only places of sometimes somber religious rites but also centers of social gatherings and cultural events. People gathered at monasteries for reasons other than purely religious—it appears they were also centers of festivities and cultural practices.

Temples as Centers of Religio-cultural Practices

Buddhist paintings, as a portrayal of Buddhist rituals, are also an invaluable source of information on the people who participated in the rituals. These participants included wealthy women, court ladies, and even scholar-officials, who are depicted as regular participants. The donor ledgers of these paintings are a good source of information on these men and women, including the artists and the organizers of the rituals. Such lists were written in the colophon of the paintings. In most cases, the lists are quite extensive and include the entire sponsor list. At times, even the intent of the commissioners for sponsoring the paintings is revealed. There is also a

corresponding parallel between the participants of the rituals as depicted in the paintings and the sponsors listed in the ledgers.

For example, many paintings list senior fifth-ranking court ladies (*sanggung* 尙宮) and gentry women (recognizable by the honorific suffix *ssi* 氏). These groups of women appear often, indicating them to be devout supporters, and in many cases the main donors. Their importance as essential sources of support for monasteries and temples, which enabled these institutions to thrive throughout the Joseon period, cannot be overlooked or under appreciated.³⁰ Also in many cases, gentry men made up a sizeable portion of the donor list. At times the list of gentry men included their official titles (Gang and Kim 1995, 426). It is well known that these donors contributed funds or donated supplies or food to these ritual performances under the assumption that they would, in return, earn merit and good fortune for times of need. They could hope to apply the merit for good fortune or for immediate use by transferring it to the souls of deceased loved ones.³¹

In addition to women and men of gentry background and court ladies, people of all walks of life are also depicted in these paintings, illustrating temples as places of gatherings. These affairs were probably not limited to religious purposes or to times of urgent need; even mortuary rites could serve as occasions for eventful gatherings. At such events, participants and onlookers could enjoy music and dance performances by ritual monks. It does not seem unreasonable to imagine that on special occasions, such as the Lunar New Year or the Buddha's birthday, people of various backgrounds gathered at monasteries to partake in festive events.

30. See for example the donor list of women in Gang and Kim (1995, 248–249, 432). A common tradition recognized to have continued throughout the Joseon period was the commissioning and sponsorship of the printing of sutras and the commissioning of Buddhist statues and bells, in addition to Buddhist paintings, particularly by the women of the royal family—queens, dowager queens, and concubines. This was often done to pray for the souls of deceased members of the royal family or for the royal house's future prosperity (J. Kim 2019, 155–165, 184–186).

31. Donations were made for the fulfillment of wishes such as for a long life or for immediate use, as in towards a wish to gain immediate fortune. The earned merit could also be put towards a wish to be reborn in the Pure Land after death.

Similar to the gentry women who were depicted in the nectar ritual paintings enjoying ritual performances, partaking in the activities at monasteries would have involved enjoyment and leisure. From these descriptions, one can surmise that the reason women were commonly associated with the patronage of monasteries and temples during the Joseon dynasty extended beyond purely religious purposes. The *Sillok* indicate that temples were places of cultural occasions and leisure for women early in the Joseon period. Though more research is needed, similar patterns of behavior likely continued into the late Joseon, especially given the extensive record of women's donations and patronage in the late Joseon period.³²

Gentry men seem to have also appreciated the significance of Buddhist monasteries beyond the religious. Their participation in monastic events can be ascertained, as mentioned earlier, from the donor ledgers of Buddhist ritual paintings and from their images in the paintings themselves. The social significance of their gatherings at monasteries and temples was not necessarily solely religious in nature. Gentry men also frequented monasteries for leisure, literary activities, and even as members of lay societies (S. Kim 2020, 61). For instance, gentry men were members of literary groups that gathered at monasteries to recite poetry, drink wine, and socialize with poet-monks (S. Kim 2014, 68–76; 2018).

Thus far, a case is put forth for examining the history of Joseon Buddhism from the perspective of the institutional and socio-cultural makeup of Buddhism. In this sense, the practices and traditions that were necessary for the survival of the *samgha* were outlined as the start to a larger discussion of this approach. This discussion is continued in the articles that follow, the first by Lee Jong-su, “The Establishment of Buddhist Cultivation Centers in Late Joseon Korea.” Lee traces the historical development of the cultivation centers from the Silla up the late Joseon period.

Lee's article demonstrates that up to the early Joseon period, lecture

32. Another cultural practice that evinces close connections between women and Buddhist temples is the retirement to a nunnery (*biguniwon* 比丘尼院) of widowed queens, at times accompanied by palace ladies, as Buddhist renunciates. Such a practice continued up to 1660 when the nunnery was dismantled (Cho 2010, 306–308, 314–315).

halls and meditation halls were maintained by the monasteries of the doctrinal and meditational schools, respectively. Lee, however, explains that a new formation was established when the *saṃgha* became consolidated into one school, that of Seon (Zen) Buddhism, in the late Joseon period. Further developments came in the 18th century, when Pure Land practices became popular, leading to the formation of assemblies for chanting the name of Amitābha throughout the Korean Peninsula. This trend continued, and later in the 19th century, Buddha recitation halls became common at monasteries. Such developments occurred concurrently with new formations of practice where the practicing monks in late Joseon first entered a lecture hall for doctrinal studies after their ordination. Next, monks entered a meditation hall for Seon practices, which took up a long period of practice, and later in life, monks mainly practiced chanting the name of the Buddha Amitābha.

Lee Jong-su's article is followed by a similar study, "The Role of Laity in Rebuilding Buddhist Devotional and Material Culture in the Late Joseon," by Lee Seunghye. This study probes the questions of why the monastery was patronized by lay devotees of varied social standings and motivations as well as what benefits—religious and secular—they gained as a result. This inquiry is pursued through an analysis of the networks of followers and their patronage of temple works centering on Bogwangsa monastery, such as construction work and the publication of devotional texts. In these temple works it is revealed that middle-class and court ladies found in this monastery a place of their own in a society dominated by elite and gentry men. This study contributes to uncovering the role of lay Buddhists in the revitalization of Buddhism in 19th-century Joseon society, which has thus far rarely been explored.

The final article of this special issue exploring the institutional establishment of late Joseon Buddhism is "Restoration and Legitimacy of the *Bhikṣu* Precept Lineages in the Late Joseon" by Lee Jarang. Lee argues that a significant event in 19th-century Joseon Buddhism was the restoration of the *bhikṣu* precept lineage. An interesting phenomenon of this attempt was that Master Daeun Nango 大隱朗昨 (1780–1841) reinitiated the complete ordination and formed a precept lineage in the early 19th century. Lee

Jarang's paper examines how the Joseon saṃgha's attempts to restore a precept lineage evolved throughout the 19th century, often responding to the historical and religious context. Lee discovers that Dae-eun's distinctive method of restoring the precept lineage served as rationale for the later emergence of new precept lineages.

These papers address diverse aspects of the Buddhist establishment of the late Joseon period, those aspects that not only assisted in maintaining Buddhism's vibrancy and the health of the organization, but the characteristics that determined the uniqueness of Korean Buddhism into the modern era. These papers are only a drop in the bucket in terms of mining the information from the long period that is known as the late Joseon (1600–1910). More work needs to be done on the three centuries of distinct developments in Korean Buddhism from the 17th to 19th centuries. The fact that each of these centuries can provide insights into the complex transformations that took place within the saṃgha has not been forgotten. These discoveries are left for future research by scholars of diverse fields, such as history, sociology, art history, religious studies and more.

Closing Reflections

The Joseon period has been considered a time when Buddhism was suppressed by the state and in effect degenerated. A different picture emerges when the institutional makeup of the Joseon period saṃgha is examined. Rather, the late Joseon period saw the development of the Buddhist institutions that would come to form late Joseon Buddhism. Furthermore, it was a time when Korean Buddhism, as we now know it, was also formed. It is true that anti-Buddhist policies were applied and Buddhism lost official state recognition. Thus, it was forced to come to terms and become fully organized as an institutionalized body enabling it to continue in the new socio-historical circumstances of the late Joseon and into the modern era.

As noted above, while Confucian institutions and practices disappeared with the start of the modern period, those of Buddhism were able to

continue and withstand the challenges of the inroads made by Christianity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Korean Buddhist institutions also managed to weather the Japanese colonial period, when Korean Buddhism faced daunting challenges from encroaching Japanese Buddhist sects. Korean Buddhism was also able to continue through the period of rapid modernization and society-building in the 20th century, and today still claims the allegiance of almost half of the South Korean population who claim to be religious. Despite its many challenges, Korean Buddhism has managed to maintain its religious presence due to the resilience of its religious traditions, but also due to its institutional power that was established from the beginning of the 17th century.

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