

Special Feature

# The Discourse of Reform and the Perception of Tradition in Modern Korean Buddhism

KIM Seong Yeon



*The Review of Korean Studies* Volume 25 Number 1 (June 2022): 109-138

doi: 10.25024/review.2022.25.1.109

©2022 by the Academy of Korean Studies. All rights reserved.

www.kci.go.kr

## Introduction

Buddhism, which spread to Korea around the late 4<sup>th</sup> century, has continued to be a distinct thought and religious belief of Koreans up to the present. Buddhism also holds a large presence in traditional Korean culture due to the numerous tangible and intangible cultural heritages that have been inherited and passed on throughout the long history. This perception of Buddhism can be said to be the manifestation of a cultural awareness that has sprouted up in a contemporary society in which traditional culture is being praised anew.

Considering the brilliant golden age of Buddhism, when Buddhism held a high cultural status, from ancient Korea, when it was spread, up to medieval Korea of the Goryeo dynasty, the promotion of Buddhism today is understandable. However, Buddhism in the face of modernity in the 19th century, after having passed through the Confucian society of the Joseon dynasty, almost had no official status neither nationally nor socially, although it may have continued to be worshiped as a folk religion. Furthermore, Buddhism did not have a well-organized religious body that could play a social and religious role amid the waves of modernization. Even the Buddhist monks at that time lamented that Buddhism had severely weakened due to the oppression of Buddhism by the Joseon dynasty. The traditional Buddhism, which was in tatters unlike its splendid glory of the past, met with the Western-style Buddhism, which had newly spread together with modernization and Westernization and had to reestablish its identity as a modern religion. The modern history of Buddhism was thus a process of solving this task, and the high status that Buddhism enjoys today in the traditional culture of Korea is the fruit of such efforts.

However, modern Korean Buddhism was not able to develop so smoothly under colonial rule. Terms such as independent or autonomous may feel awkward to use in association with Korean Buddhism during the colonial period. To organize a religious body and implement social projects required the authorization and permission of the Government-General of Joseon. The

Government-General enacted the Buddhist Temple Ordinance and reorganized all temples into a Head-Branch temple system, thereby seizing control of both the authority to make decisions concerning human resources as well as finances of Buddhism. The Buddhist monks, however, who knew nothing about international political relations and had little national consciousness, were pleased about the organization of a religious body and the official status they gained. They thought that they had finally gained the conditions needed for all the abbots of the head temples to gather in the capital and carry out normal Buddhism projects, when in fact, the appointment of abbots by the Government-General and the authorizations and permissions now required in Buddhist administration was a means of control. Such administrative changes were, at least during the early colonial period, not seen as that negative, perhaps because of the shared sense of victimhood that Buddhism had been oppressed during the Joseon dynasty. Amid this, the Linji Order 臨濟宗 movement that arose against the scheme of Yi Hoe-gwang to unite Won Order 圓宗 of Buddhism of Joseon and the Sōtō School 曹洞宗 of Japanese Buddhism was an independent and autonomous act to preserve the identity of Korean Buddhism. This was a display of pride to protect the tradition of Joseon, but at the same time it showed the limitations of Buddhists who did not properly understand imperialism and colonialism and failed to adequately perceive reality. However, as people overall grew more culturally aware and the cohort of Buddhist youth who had received modern education came of age, more and more Buddhists now harbored national consciousness and started showing efforts to preserve cultural and traditional identity even if they were unable to directly overthrow the colonial reality. In this way, Korean Buddhism continued to form a religious identity as it collided with the reality of being under colonial rule and agonized over the dilemma of externally pursuing modernization while internally establishing autonomy.

Meanwhile, many of the arguments for Buddhism reform that were voiced in the early 1910s were criticisms of the contradictions and limitations of Korean Buddhism itself without considering the political situation of being colonized. Gwon Sang-ro's series of "Treatise on the Reformation of Korean Buddhism" (Joseon bulgyo gaehyeongnon 朝鮮佛教改革論), which was featured over 12 issues in the magazine *Joseon bulgyo wolbo* 朝鮮佛教月報 in 1912, and Han Yong-un's *Treatise on the Restoration of Korean Buddhism* (Joseon bulgyo Yusinnon 朝鮮佛教維新論) are cases in point. These arguments for reform

\* This work was supported by the Fostering a New Wave of K-Academics Program of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the Korean Studies Promotion Service (KSPS) at the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS-2021-KDA-1250007).

propounded the goals that Korean Buddhism should aim for, if it were to survive in the reality of religious competition. In other words, they contained the obligations and social roles that Buddhism as a modern religion should pursue. Considering how they show the pure, apolitical, religious characteristics of Buddhism and its aim, they are the first historical material in which we can catch a glimpse of the kind of modern Buddhism that was imaged out of the contradictions and limitations perceived in traditional Buddhism. In 1922, the series of “Treatise on the Renovation of Korean Buddhism” (Joseon bulgyo hyeoksinnon 朝鮮佛教革新論) featured in *Chosun Ilbo* by Yi Yeongjae strongly argued for measures of reform in order to overcome the political constraints set by colonial rule. He looked straight at the negative effects of the Temple Ordinance and Head-Branch temple system and argued for their abolishment and instead proposed new ways of establishing a religious body. Thus, the arguments for reform after the 1920s began to reflect the political reality of being colonized, and the ultimate goal of establishing an organized religious body of a Buddhist order was proposed. Because the arguments for the reform of Buddhism pursued different goals depending on the time period, reviewing them overall will allow us to properly understand the characteristics of modern Korean Buddhism.

The present article therefore will first provide an overview of what the goals of the discourse of reform in modern Buddhism were. This is because the indicators of reform were the issues the Buddhist monks were critically aware of, and the process of solving these problems was the journey modern Buddhism took. In addition, the article will also look at how the perception of a tradition of Joseon, in opposition to modern reform, changed throughout the colonial circumstances. By looking at how tradition was perceived, we will be able to think about how the identity of Korean Buddhism was established in the reality of Japanese colonial rule.

### Indicators of the Argument for Buddhism Reform and Religious Reflections

Arguments for the modern Buddhism reform were raised in earnest starting from the early 1910s. Han Yong-un’s *Treatise on the Restoration of Korean Buddhism* (hereafter, *Yusinmon*), which was published in 1913 as a book, and

Gwon Sang-ro’s “Treatise on the Reformation of Korean Buddhism” (hereafter, “Gaehyeongnon”), which was a series of writings featured in the Buddhist magazine *Joseon bulgyo wolbo* over 12 issues between 1912 and 1913,<sup>1</sup> were the earliest works that were published. Both these texts comprehensively deal with the overall problems in the Buddhist community and the reformative arguments to improve them. Yi Yeong-jae’s “Treatise on the Renovation of Korean Buddhism” (hereafter, “Hyeoksinnon”), which was serialized over a total of 27 issues in *Chosun Ilbo* from November 24 to December 30, 1922<sup>2</sup> pursues the organization of a modern religious body and an independent governing apparatus for the religious organization. Many other reformative writings that were not published or serialized were featured in Buddhist magazines, and these give us a clue as to what the aims and characteristics of modern Korean Buddhism were. This section will look at the indicators of the reform that the Buddhist community pursued based on the three aforementioned works of Gwon, Han, and Yi.

First, the *Yusinmon* written by Manhae 卍海 Han Yong-un 韓龍雲 (1879-1944) was the first argument for reform published by the Bulgyo seogwan 佛教書館 in 1913 in the form of a monograph. As is well known, Han Yong-un was a Buddhist monk and an activist in the independence movement as well as a literary person who left behind various works of literature. Among all of his numerous writings, *Yusinmon* was the first and thus is an important document that lets us explore his inner thoughts through the Buddhist contemplations and sense of modernity the work contains. Previous studies show the intellectual chain of how Liang Qichao 梁啟超 of China wrote *Collected Writings of Yinbingshi* (*Yinbingshi wenji* 飲冰室文集) after accepting the modern knowledge of Meiji Japan and Inoue Enryō’s 井上圓了 modernization theory. Han Yong-un, in turn, after reading *Collected Writings of Yinbingshi*, accepted the theory of social evolution and Western thought and wrote *Yusinmon* (Kim 1984; Cho 2014). Studies have also pointed out how Han Yong-un, influenced by the body of knowledge based on the theory of civilization of the Meiji era, during which Japan achieved modernization, shows limitations in that he does not consider any historical or cultural context and does not stop at criticizing the

1. “Gaehyeongnon” was printed in Korean Buddhism Monthly a total of twelve times, from issue 3 (April 1912) to issue 18 (July 1913). It was not featured in Issue 9 to Issue 12.

2. The earlier seven entries do not remain until now.

contradictions and absurdities of Korean Buddhism but goes on to criticize how even the legacy of traditional Buddhism is uncivilized (Cho 2014, 334). Perhaps this reflects the influence that the theory of self-strengthening, which emerged in the process of pursuing modernization during the enlightenment period, had on Han Yong-un, who tried to conceive of a way for Buddhism to survive.

“Gaehyeongnon,” which was published around the same period by Toegyeong 退耕 Gwon Sang-ro 權相老 (1879-1965) also diagnoses the problems of the religious body of Buddhism and presents measures of reform from the standpoint of social Darwinism as if emphasizing the necessity of Buddhism reform in the reality of religious competition. Gwon Sang-ro, who was the representative scholar-monk of his time, founded the Buddhist magazine *Joseon bulgyo wolbo* and wrote the first diachronic history of Korean Buddhism, *A Summary of the History of Buddhism of Joseon (Joseon bulgyo yaksa 朝鮮佛教略史)*. He was a Buddhist monk who played a pioneering role in the development of Korean Buddhist studies, including serving as the first president of Dongguk University after liberation. “Gaehyeongnon” is a series of think pieces featured in the *Joseon bulgyo wolbo*, which he himself edited and published in person. The first piece was published in 1912, which makes it officially precede Han Yong-un’s *Yusinnon*.<sup>3</sup> His writings are more conceptual, saying that they should pour more efforts into education and propagation of Buddhism to overcome the weakened reality of the religious body, rather than specifically presenting the religious and social role Buddhism should play. It is possible that he was not able to propose any specific reformative measure in detail, as the *Joseon bulgyo wolbo* was discontinued. Incidentally, however, Han Yong-un’s *Yusinnon* was published around the similar time the magazine was shut down, and some studies have also put forward political interpretations that Gwon Sang-ro stopped writing “Gaehyeongnon” when *Yusinnon* was published (Yang 1993, 164-65). In particular, some have interpreted that the conservatives (*sugupa*) in “Gaehyeongnon” were speaking on behalf of Gwon Sang-ro, who was in charge of the periodical and in the Won Order camp of Yi Hoegwang 李晦光 (1862-1932), who held actual power, and that the reformists (*yusindang*) in “Gaehyeongnon” referred to the Linji Order line, of which Han Yong-un

was part. There is no need, however, to apply the antagonism between the Won Order and the Linji Order during the Linji Order movement of 1910 into the argument to reform Buddhism and overinterpret its contents. Nevertheless, it is an interesting attempt to assess *Yusinnon* as radical and “Gaehyeongnon” as moderate and accordingly read the tendencies of Han Yong-un and Gwon Sang-ro through such comparison.

If Han Yong-un and Gwon Sang-ro were of the older generation, Beomnan 梵鸞 Yi Yeongjae 李英宰 (1900-1927) was of the so-called new Buddhist youth generation that studied abroad in Japan and acquired modern knowledge. After majoring in religion and graduating from Nihon University, he continued to pursue his studies by entering the Tokyo Imperial University and studying Indian philosophy and Sanskrit. He was a promising and talented individual of whom people held high expectations, actively leading youth organizations and also being involved in the publication of *Geumgangjeo* 金剛杵, the gazette of the Korean Buddhist Youth Association in Japan. It was thus unfortunate that he died at an early age in 1927 after contracting an illness in Sri Lanka while studying Sanskrit there with the plans of going to India, the sacred place of Buddhism (Kim 1995, 3-9). The “Hyeoksinnon” he wrote for *Chosun Ilbo* in 1922 is a masterpiece in which he sharply criticizes the negative effects of the Temple Ordinance and the Head-Branch temple system that were enforced after colonization in that they divided the religious body of Buddhism and caused the abbot of the head temple to abuse power. He also argued for a new governance system of the religious body. Because he was the spearhead of the Buddhist Youth Association that argued for the abolition of Temple Ordinance and participated actively in the March First Movement, he was able to clearly perceive the contradictions and limitations of colonial Buddhism that had been formed as a result of the Buddhist policies of the Government-General, which contributed to the writing of “Hyeoksinnon.”

The three arguments for reform I have just briefly introduced can be regarded as the blueprint that laid out the image of a new Buddhism that broke free from its premodern form. Along with other short arguments for reform published in other magazines, the following summarizes the main indicators of the arguments for Buddhism reform during this period:

First, the arguments for reform published during the early 1910s were influenced by the survival of the fittest of social Darwinism and the theory of civilization and strongly argued to break free from tradition. Even the recitation

3. Although Han Yong-un’s *Yusinnon* was published in 1913, it includes a preface Han Yong-un wrote in December of 1910. Some take this as evidence that Han Yong-un wrote *Yusinnon* before Gwon wrote “Gaehyeongnon.”

of Buddha's name, worshiping rituals towards Buddhist statues as well as other Buddhist rites, which could have been regarded as part of tradition that should be passed on, were all regarded as old conventions that needed to be abolished and destroyed. Such arguments were a complete denial of Buddhist tradition and stemmed from the belief that breaking free from tradition would enable the advance to a civilized religion. Early arguments for reform are characterized by this contrast between tradition and civilization, or modernity (Kim 2016, 17).

Even the tradition of Buddhist monks and nuns cutting ties and leaving home was denied. Han Yong-un dealt with the issue of the marriage of Buddhist monks in *Yusinmon* in depth. Listing four harms of cutting ties and leaving home, he agreed that Buddhist monks should be allowed to marry. The four harms he listed were that it was harmful for ethics since cutting ties and leaving home deprived one of any descendants; it was harmful to the civilized country which generally tended to proliferate their population; it was harmful for propagating Buddhism since having no children meant no one would enter the order; and it was harmful for edification and enlightenment since the ban on marriage encouraged debauchery in monks. According to Han, since the ban on marriage was harmful for ethics, the state, propagation of Buddhism, and edification, only when Buddhist monks were allowed to marry could Buddhism exert a good influence on politics, morality, and religious circles.

It cannot be denied that the issue of allowing monks to marry and eat meat was influenced by Japanese Buddhism. Although Han Yong-un was widely criticized when *Yusinmon* was published and even into the mid-1920s, married monks held the main administrative positions in the Buddhist religious body after that until liberation. Ultimately this was less a problem of the identity of Korean Buddhism or the inheritance and passing on of traditional precepts and more an emphasis on the proliferation of the population, propagation, and edification in the aspect of modernity. But after liberation, the key of the so-called Buddhism Purification Movement was to drive out the married monks, who were the remnants of Japanese Buddhism, and to restore the Buddhist tradition of Korea, which was a religious community of practicing Buddhist monks who had cut ties and left home. The marriage of Buddhist monks during modern Korea, therefore, has been both reviewed from the aspect of modernity and from the aspect of being pro-Japanese. At any rate, the core of the early arguments for the reform of Buddhism was to break free from tradition, and this can be seen as a result of the imperative of the times, namely,

that Buddhism must make its mark as a modern, civilized religion to catch up in the era of religious competition.

Second, the arguments for reform emphasized the religious and philosophical nature of Buddhism and argued that it was a universal religion containing the concepts of freedom and equality. This was the result of the introduction of Western Buddhism or religion via Japan and reflected the perception that traditional Buddhism, which was centered on ritual and faith, would now transform into a modern religion. Buddhism, as it was discovered by the Europeans during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century as a pan-Asian tradition, was understood in various ways including as an atheist religion, a religion of reason, a religion of science, a non-religion, and a form of idol worship (Lopez 2005, 1). Above all, it was regarded as one of the religions that could mutually exist with modern science. Thus, Buddhism, as the rational religion, emerged as the alternative to replace the more conservative Christianity, and it was even regarded as a solution to the excessively materialistic and destructive harms of science (McMahan 2008, 74).

But towards the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Christian missionaries relegated all religions of Joseon as "fake religions" in which there was no clear presence of God and carried out their work under the pretext of enlightening "the religion-less Joseon" (Song 2003, 333-34). In the eyes of missionaries, Buddhism of Joseon appeared uncivilized, and the people of Joseon who regarded Christianity as a civilized religion also thought the same. Modernization during the period of late Joseon and the Korean Empire thus meant Westernization. Buddhist monks consequently needed a logic to counter Christianity and thus accepted the Westernized Buddhist concepts from Japan. This transformed into the superiority of Buddhism in the competition with other religions and became the best counter-logic.

For instance, in *Yusinmon*, Han Yong-un first writes of the religious and philosophical aspects of Buddhism as important elements. Quoting Liang Qichao, he writes that "Christianity practices only superstition and has a vulgar philosophical logic,...the doctrines of Buddhism originally have both sides of being religious and philosophical." He goes on, then, to explain how the philosophical theories of Kant, Bacon, and Descartes correspond to the contents in Buddhist texts (Han 2007, 18-27). By comparing Buddhist scriptures not with the doctrine of Christianity but with the theories of Western philosophers, Han seems to have wanted to emphasize how Buddhism was a civilized religion

that was rational, practical, and philosophical, unlike Christianity. In this way, more and more Buddhist monks in the Korean Buddhist community understood Buddhism from a new perspective as the 20<sup>th</sup> century came upon them and argued for reform against the reality of modernization and religious competition.

Third, the arguments for reform emphasized the education and propagation for the popularization of Buddhism as a modern religion. This was possibly the reaction against the sense of victimhood it claimed from not being able to move outside of the mountains because of the oppression Buddhism suffered throughout the Joseon dynasty. Korean Buddhist monks, who watched the propagation of Christianity and Japanese Buddhism within the city walls, were immensely grateful and friendly towards Japanese Buddhism when the ban on monks from entering the city walls was officially lifted by a Japanese monk in 1895. With no experience of carrying out any social projects or propagation in the city, however, Buddhism proceeded to push forward under the banner of popularizing Buddhism amid the fierce competition with other religions. It was perhaps a matter of fact that Buddhism would emphasize its image as the public's religion, given how the spirit of Buddhism was about saving all living beings and how it had been by the side of the people throughout the long history. Education and propagation of Buddhism, then, became the foremost task of popularization.

Han Yong-un and Gwon Sang-ro both emphasized the establishment of a modern school and the education of monks. What they regarded as most important was training instructors, namely, to raise and train excellent propagators of Buddhism. Education was the way to grow talented individuals, and these individuals would be the agents at the frontline leading the popularization and modernization of Buddhism, so education and propagation were the most important projects that the religious body implemented. The premodern Buddhist seminary education that began with the Sramanera course (*samigwa*) and continued on to the Fourfold Collection Course (*sajipgwa*), the Four Teachings Course (*sagyogwa*), and finally the Great Teachings Course (*daegyogwa*) was a method that taught and learned Buddhist scriptures and annotated texts only to Buddhist monks. But new modern schools included both Buddhist monks as well as Buddhist followers, and the curricula included the liberal arts as well as Buddhist studies that had developed in the West. A typical example of these Buddhist schools was Myeongjin School 明進學校,

the former body of the present-day Dongguk University. Myeongjin School went through several names including the Buddhist Instructor School (Bulgyo sabeom hakgyo) (1910), Higher Buddhist Learning Center (Bulgyo godeung gangasuk) (1914), Central Buddhist School (Bulgyo jungang hangnim) (1915), Buddhist Training School (Bulgyo jeonsu hakgyo) (1928), Central Buddhist Professional School (Jungang bulgyo jeonmun hakgo) (1930), and Hye-hwa Professional School (Hye-hwa jeonmun hakgyo) (1940).

In addition, only upon graduating from an elementary school (*botong hakgyo*) established by each head temple in the local area and completing a local Buddhist school or a Buddhist seminary could the learner go on and enter the higher education professional school mentioned above. In this way, Buddhist education settled into place in the form of the coexistence of traditional Buddhist seminary education and modern school education. Many various ways of propagating Buddhism appropriate to the pace of modernization was also conceived of as well. Suggestions such as using media including newspaper and magazines, giving lectures, the translation and publication of Buddhist texts, and establishing societies and organizations were clearly distinct from premodern propagation methods. In short, education and propagation were important themes that were given much space in the argument for Buddhism reform, and a variety of possible measures were proposed.

Fourth, the arguments for reform pursued the organization of a religious body and the establishment of an order. After becoming merged into the two orders of Seon and Gyo Buddhism in Joseon, Buddhism remained without any de facto religious order for a period of time. As it entered the modern period, however, Buddhism started making efforts to establish an order that could control all the Buddhist temples and monks around the country. The Won Order, which had already been established during the Korean Empire, was the result of such efforts. *Yusinmon* and "Gaehyeongnon" both generally mention a controlling body and the establishment of an order, but the specific ways to go about it were presented in Yi Yeongjae's "Hyeoksinnon."

Yi Yeongje argued that a religious constitution should be enacted and that an administrative system for religious affairs defining legislative, judicial, and executive matters should be established. He also proposed specific ideas regarding the composition of the central organization and the roles of the leadership. After the 1930s, a number of articles arguing for reform featured in Buddhist magazines mentioned the construction of a headquarters or an

organized body of a Buddhist order. When the Buddhist Monks' Conference was held in 1929 and the religious council was formed and the religious constitution was enacted for the first time, the time seemed ripe for a way to control the religious body. But when most of the abbots of the head temples for each district did not cooperate, the enthusiasm was channeled towards creating an organized body of a Buddhist order, which was why many arguments for reform began to mention the establishment of an order. At any rate, the argument Yi Yeongjae proposed in his "Hyeoksinnon" largely influenced the creation of a religious order.

In sum, the indicators above show that the arguments for modern Buddhism reform emphasized breaking free from tradition and sought to popularize Buddhism as a modern religion. Additionally, a strong, centralized order that could fulfill these goals and control Buddhist monks and temples was brought into sharp relief. As several examples have shown, the arguments for Buddhism reform were significant in that they were applied in reality and functioned as a motivation to fulfill their objectives.

### Self-awareness as the Agent of Nation and Culture

Starting from the 1920s, the project to popularize Buddhism was revitalized as the central religious organization became a foundation. *Buddhism (Bulgyo)*, the periodical of the organization, was published regularly, to which many Buddhists contributed their writings. Those who had studied abroad in Japan started to return to Korea, and the elevation of the Buddhist Training School to the Central Buddhist Professional School in 1930 resulted in the graduation of talented young individuals every year. Many projects to educate and propagate Buddhism expanded to a level beyond comparison with the earlier period. As the Buddhism popularization project continued to progress stably and more and more monks were better educated overall, the perspective based on the theory of civilization and the breaking away from tradition, which had been evident in the arguments for reform during the early 1910s, started to gradually change.

In particular, the March First Movement of 1919 served as an incident that awakened the Buddhist community to a sense of national consciousness. As Han Young-un and Baek Yongseong participated in the movement as national representatives and many young Buddhists played an active role, they started to

think about the identity of Buddhism of Joseon from the categories of nation and culture amid the colonial reality they found themselves in.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, they made efforts to draw public interest to Buddhism as a traditional religion of the Korean nation and culture. The discovery of the fact that Yi Hoegwang had attempted to annex Buddhism of Joseon to the Linji School of Japanese Buddhism again after 1910 served as another opportunity to reflect upon Buddhist tradition. The newspaper articles criticizing Yi Hoegwang at that time tend to emphasize how Buddhism was what revived the culture of Joseon. In other words, they emphatically argue that Buddhism of Joseon was in no way behind Japanese Buddhism and was a unique religion with a long cultural tradition. Many articles fall along the lines of arguments such as "from early on, Buddhism of Joseon contributed considerably to the culture of Joseon," or "the decline and thriving of Buddhism of Joseon means the ruin and prosperity of the nation of Joseon."<sup>5</sup> This tone was adopted by the Buddhist periodical *Buddhism* a few years later, which particularly emphasized how Buddhism was a part of the culture of Joseon.<sup>6</sup>

This work to reexamine the status of Buddhism in the nation and intellectual culture of Joseon seems to have subsequently clarified the cultural identity of Korean Buddhism.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, Buddhism during Joseon was assessed to be "a cultural inheritance we should be proud of internationally," and that "the significance of the culture of Joseon became certain and clear thanks to Buddhism during Joseon."<sup>8</sup> In short, the perspective based on the theory of civilization that arguments for reform emphasizing the escape from tradition had shifted to the perception of the inheritance of tradition and the awareness

4. The term Buddhism of Joseon means Korean Buddhism. Thus, the sentence essentially means that after the 1920s, there were efforts to establish the identity of Korean Buddhism. The documents at that time, however, use the term "Buddhism of Joseon," which I have therefore used in cases of quotations or for the convenience of narration as well as when a more accurate historical context needed to be conveyed.

5. "Joseon bulgyo undong sang i-dae joryu ui chungdol Gang Daeyeon dae Yi Hoegwang" (The Clash Between the Two Waves of the Buddhism Movement of Joseon, Gang Daeyeon versus Yi Hoegwang), *Chosun Ilbo*, June 24, 1920.

6. "Uri ui jinhaenghal banhyang" (The Direction We Should Proceed in), *Bulgyo* 1, July 1924.

7. Some also argue that after the 1920s, there were trends that no longer saw Buddhism exclusively through the lens of truth attained through enlightenment but as the key element in Korean cultural identity (Kim 2010, 71-81).

8. Kim Taehuep, "Joseon bulgyo chongse ganhaeng e daehaya" (On the Publication of a Series of Buddhism of Joseon), *Bulgyo* 17, November 1925.

of being the agent of culture.

For example, efforts were made to present and draw attention to cultural heritages or figures that deserved pride and respect. The Tripitaka Koreana at Haeinsa were highly praised as being the “spiritual shrine of the people of Joseon” that “carried national significance and value that transcended time,”<sup>9</sup> and Wonhyo became the “manifestation of Gautama Buddha who had appeared in the East,” around which the students studying abroad in Tokyo established the Society to Revere Wonhyo, the Great Enlightened One (Wonhyo daeseong chanang hoe 元曉大聖讚仰會). The “Declaration of the Society to Revere Wonhyo, the Great Enlightened One” proclaimed on December 15, 1925, stated that Wonhyo was the representative figure in all culture and thought including the religion, philosophy, literature, and arts of Joseon and revered him as the noble master who was complete in all aspects of intellect, emotion, and will, as well as truth, goodness, and beauty.<sup>10</sup> The society even designated its own rules. They had thus established a society to revere Wonhyo that aimed to “awaken the religious consciousness of the nation of Joseon and cultivate a character like Wonhyo.”

Therefore, the Buddhist community after the 1920s put their efforts into excavating the identity of Buddhism and setting the status of Buddhism right from a cultural perspective. Such work to discover and attach meaning to cultural tradition appears to have been closely related to the cultural movement of the nationalists in Korea following the March First Movement. If nationalists abroad such as Sin Chaeho had focused on stirring up national consciousness by emphasizing the spirit of Korea and the Korean nation as well as the preservation of the national essence earlier in the 1910s, the nationalists based in Korea propounded the national movement based on a cultural nationalism that emphasized the shared culture of the nation.

*DongA Ilbo*, in particular, carried out a cultural movement to improve the overall national capability and build a new culture. The slogans of the *DongA Ilbo* between the 1920s and the 1930s can be summed up as the following

two: (1) awaken to and unite national consciousness and (2) reformation of old habits and acceptance of new culture (Park 2010, 170-83). One of the most notable characteristics is how worship of Dan’gun 檀君 was emphasized after the March First Movement. The article by Choe Namseon 崔南善 written in 1925, “The Theory of Bulham Culture” (Bulham munhwa ron 不咸文化論) is a case in point. As its subtitle, “The Origins of Eastern Culture Seen through Joseon and a Cultural Part of Humankind that Originated from Dan’gun” suggests, the article propounds Dan’gun nationalism. Choe Namseon was a figure who used the term Joseon Studies 朝鮮學 which aimed to research the culture of Joseon, for the first time in the early 1920s (Ryu 2006, 376). In this article, Choe defines the Korean peninsula as Bulham culture and goes on to say that even the northeastern area of China, Mongolia, and Central Asia were related to this culture, thus elucidating the status of Korean ancient culture in world history. In addition, Dan’gun was highlighted as the founder of the culture of Joseon as well as the symbol of the spirit of Joseon (Park 2010, 181). Thus, after the March First Movement, the society in general proceeded to encourage interest in the culture of Joseon and create Dan’gun as the emblem of the people of Joseon to counter the colonial view of history by the Japanese. The Buddhist community seem to have proceeded in the same vein, thus designating Buddhism as the symbol of traditional culture as well as discovering and promoting venerable monks such as Wonhyo, Uicheon, and Hyujeong.

Choe Namseon also researched Buddhism from the stance of Joseon Studies (Ryu 2006, 376). In 1930, he published an article titled “Joseon Buddhism: Its Status in Eastern Cultural Thought,”<sup>11</sup> which was meant to be featured in a pamphlet for the Pan Pacific Buddhist Youth Conference held in Hawaii in July, 1930. At that time, Do Jinho 都鎮鎬, who had participated as the representative of Buddhism of Joseon, read its contents during his lecture.<sup>12</sup> Choe Namseon had written the article to publicize the distinct characteristics and cultural value of the globally unique Buddhism of Joseon. Accordingly, the status of cultural heritages such as Seokguram Grotto and Tripitaka Koreana, as well as venerable monks of many generations including Wonhyo, were reevaluated. Wonhyo, in particular, was assessed as a figure who had “constructed

9. Choe Namseon, “Daegaksim euro deulagapsida: byeongin sedu e saero hi gamseonghal il” (Let’s Go Back to the Mind of Great Enlightenment: New Realizations to do Early This Year), *Bulgyo* 19, January 1926.

10. “Wonhyo daeseong chananghoe seoneon” (Declaration of the Society to Revere Wonhyo, the Great Enlightened One), *Bulgyo* 19, January 1926.

11. The entire contents of this article are listed in *Bulgyo* 74 of August 1930.

12. See Kim 2002 and Kim 2018b for more on Do Jinho’s participation at the Pan Pacific Buddhist Youth Conference.



the final, conclusive (*gyeollon jeok*) Buddhism of Joseon after the introductory (*seoron jeok*) Buddhism of India and areas west of China, and the particular (*gangnon jeok*) Buddhisms of China.” This conclusion was a nationalistic counterattack to the negative perception of Japanese scholars-bureaucrats that relegated Korean Buddhism to a “transplant of Chinese Buddhism” (Sim 2000, 178). In this sense, the concept of all-encompassing Buddhism (*tongbulgyo*) 通佛敎 that Choe presents in his article aimed to show that the ideal of a unified Buddhism, which Japanese Buddhism, with its various denominations, had aimed to accomplish, had already been present in Korean Buddhism since Wonhyo (Song 2015, 155-56).

Meanwhile, Yi Gwangsu 李光洙 wrote that because Buddhism had permeated and been present in the spirit of the Korean nation for 1,400 years, Buddhist spirit dominated part of the everyday lives of even those opposing Buddhism.<sup>13</sup> Yi argued that even though Confucianism seemed to have dominated the lives of the people during the Joseon dynasty, what had actually dominated the everyday lives of ordinary people was the spirit of Buddhism and the indigeneous spirit of the Korean people that Choe Namseon had propounded. Considering how Yi wrote that this condition continued until Christianity and Western thought was introduced, he seems to have regarded Buddhism as a traditional counterpart of Western religion, and this thought, which was shared among Buddhists during then, likely contributed to elevating the religious status of Joseon. Although Buddhism was a foreign religion, it had been “changed to fit the national characteristics of Joseon after being imported into Joseon,”<sup>14</sup> and as a people’s religion that had laid deep in the everyday lives of the people of Joseon, it now became the most optimal people’s religion that could provide a spiritual haven amid the new modern culture.

The perception that Buddhism, as a traditional religion, represented the cultural identity of the people of Joseon goes along the same lines as the earlier argument that Buddhism was superior from a comparative religious perspective. In other words, Buddhism, being scientific and philosophical, was the true

religion that could save the corrupt and diminished humanity of the society.<sup>15</sup> True religion also personifies the highest philosophical principle, and the most optimal religion was said to be Mahayana Buddhism. That was why the religious views of venerable and virtuous monks such as Wonhyo, Won’gwang, Uicheon, and Cheongheo who understood and accepted Mahayana Buddhism, needed to be revered as well as disseminated for the country and the people. In the tradition of Joseon, Buddhism was highlighted as the religion that could improve one’s character by emulating enlightened beings such as Wonhyo.<sup>16</sup>

To sum up, the Buddhists of the 1920s and 1930s sought to establish the identity of the Buddhism of Joseon within the intellectual cultural landscape of Joseon, which, as a response to the negative view through which Japan saw Joseon as well as to Christianity and Japanese Buddhism, was considerably nationalistic. This image of Buddhism as representing the long history and tradition of Joseon became combined with the scientific, philosophical, and humane characteristics of modern Buddhism and resulted in Buddhism’s taking the status of being the most appropriate religion in a modern, civilized state.

## The Organization of a Buddhist Order and Formation of Korean Buddhist Identity

This section will look at the establishment of an organized body of a Buddhist order, which was one of the important themes of the argument for reform, and how it actually unfolded. If Buddhism during the Joseon dynasty did not largely diverge from each locality led by each sect, Buddhism during the modern period attempted to operate a central religious body that could control the entire body of Korean Buddhism and overcome the limitations of the previous locality-based configuration. Such attempts did have its own limitations and contradictions as Buddhism of a colony, but it was clear that Buddhism had transitioned to a form distinct from the premodern era. This section will thus briefly look at the formation of the Won Order in 1908 to the establishment of the Jogye Order of Buddhism of Joseon in 1941 and examine the traces of the

13. Yi Gwangsu, “Bulgyo wa Joseon munhak” (Buddhism and the Literature of Joseon), *Bulgyo* 7, January 1925.

14. Toegyong, “Joseon gwa Joseon bulgyo wa ui sansajeom” (Similarities between Joseon and Buddhism of Joseon), *Bulgyo* 2, August 1924.

15. “Bulgyo wa hyeondae insim” (Buddhism and Modern Humanity), *Bulgyo* 10, April 1925.

16. Bak Gyuyum, “Gaein euro chogaen e” (As an Individual, towards the Transcended Individual), *Bulgyo* 11, May 1925.

hard thought given to what the identity of Buddhism in Joseon was during the selection of the name of the order.

It is well known that Korean Buddhism was restructured into a Head-Branch temple system following the Temple Ordinance proclaimed by the Government-General of Joseon immediately following colonial rule by the Japanese. Although the Won Order had already been established as the representative Buddhist order in 1908, when the Linji Order was established after it became known that the head of the Won Order, Yi Hoegwang, had made an agreement with the Sōtō School of Japanese Buddhism, the Buddhist community became divided into two. The Government-General of Joseon, however, did not authorize either the Won Order or the Linji Order. It went as far as to abolish both orders in 1912 and instead put into place the Committee of the Abbots of Head Temples of the Two Orders of Seon and Gyo Buddhism of Joseon (Joseon Seon Gyo yangjong gak bonsan jujihoe uiwon). From then on, central administration of the Buddhist community during the colonial period was operated mainly by the general assembly of the abbots of the head temples throughout the country and carried out by central organizations that functioned either as a communication body or a project implementation organ. Although on the surface, the name of the order had been determined during the general meeting of the abbots by adopting the proposal to name it the Two Orders of Seon and Gyo Buddhism, which was the unique name written in the *National Code* (*Gyeongguk daejeon* 經國大典), it was in reality given in advance by the Government-General to unify the laws of the head and branch temples across the country. The name, the Two Orders of Seon and Gyo Buddhism of Joseon was purely nominal; the order was not constituted separately as a religious organization nor were there any regulations.

The central organization that had been in charge of communication between the central body and each head temple had begun as the Committee of the Abbots following Japanese colonial rule, and after that, the 30 Head Temple Association Office was established in 1915; the Agency of Religious Order Affairs in 1921; the Agency of General Affairs and the Agency of Religious Affairs in 1922; and the Foundation of the Central Agency of Religions Affairs of Joseon in 1924 (Kim 2018a). These organizations collected project funds from the head temples across the country, which led to the accumulation of Buddhist assets, and mostly carried out education and propagation projects. However, as it was mainly an organ of communication and project

implementation, it was difficult to enforce solidarity as a religious order or obligate members of the religious order in terms of important issues for the Buddhist religious community itself. As a result, the Buddhist community constantly desired the establishment of a powerful religious organization that could exercise control from the center.

Meanwhile, the Buddhist youth, who had come of age after the March First Movement, formed the Joseon Buddhist Youth Association in June 1920, and began to directly participate in administration of religious affairs in the center. As important staff members of the religious body of Buddhism, the Youth Society took the lead in establishing a controlling agency. Young elite monks who had returned after studying abroad in Europe and Japan including Baek Seong-uk 白性郁, Kim Beop-rin 金法麟, Do Jinho, Jo Hagyu 曹學乳, Kim Taeheup 金泰洽, and Kim Sangho 金尙昊 participated in the national monk rallies during November and December of 1928 to promote the upcoming national Buddhist Monks' Conference and served as members of the preparatory committee, thus lighting the fire of reforming the religious body of Buddhism.

The conference of monks was held in Gakhwangsa 覺皇寺 in Seoul from January 3 to 5 in 1929. The fundamental objective of the conference can be seen in the speech that had been given by Baek Seong-uk during the inaugural rallies. With “the enactment of the constitution of the religious order, the charter of the central agency for religious affairs, and the regulations pertaining to Buddhist monks and nuns as the fundamental goal,” it aimed to pursue the “unified development of the prospects of the religion” and to restore the “social prestige of the religious body.”<sup>17</sup> This clearly shows that specific regulations to control the monks throughout the country had not existed until then. The objectives implied that the limitations of Buddhism had come from the absence of its own controlling regulations and made clear the will to overcome these limitations through the Monks' Conference.

During the conference, the constitution that could now control the Buddhist community under the name of the Two Orders of Seon and Gyo Buddhism of Joseon was enacted, and the separation of the legislative (the religious assembly), the judicial (the regulation committee), and the

17. “Joseon bulgyo seungnyeo daehoe balgihoe hoelok” (Notes of the Inaugural Rally of the Monks Conference of Joseon), *Bulgyo* 54, December 1928.

administrative (the agency of religious affairs) was accomplished. The order now had a modern religions organization, at least in form. The constitution of the religious order, however, was not authorized by the Government-General of Joseon, and the social prestige of the constitution as well as its power to control became virtually nonexistent as the years went by amid the noncooperation of each head temple. It was more a central organization than it was an organization of a religious body (Kim 2018, 89-98).

The discussion of establishing a controlling agency reemerged in the late 1930s. As a controlling agency, Taegosa 太古寺 was established as the central headquarters and authorized in July, 1940. For the newly built headquarters, it was decided that the order should be renamed. The name, it was requested, should contain the history and tradition and also express the identity of the Buddhism of Joseon. This showed how even monks knew that the then name of the order, the Two Orders of Seon and Gyo Buddhism of Joseon, was not satisfactory. A more appropriate name that expressed the identity of Buddhism of Joseon was needed, and it was finally decided that the Jogye Order 曹溪宗 would be that name.<sup>18</sup> The official name of the order was authorized on December 9, 1940 as the Jogye Order of Buddhism of Joseon. With the amendment of the regulations of the Temple Ordinance following the Government-General order no. 125 and the authorization of Taegosa regulations, the Jogye Order of Buddhism of Joseon was officially launched on April 23, 1941.<sup>19</sup>

The name, the Jogye Order, which had been proposed along with the construction of the headquarters temple, had in fact been accepted early on among the monks. Kim Yeongsu 金映遂 argued that calling it Seon Buddhism would not distinguish it from the three schools of Japanese Zen Buddhism, i.e., the Rinzai School, the Sōtō School, and the Ōbaku School, and thus Jogye Order would be the most fitting title of the order that could ensure the identity

of Joseon.<sup>20</sup> Gwon Sang-ro also wrote that Buddhism had been consolidated into the two orders of Seon and Gyo via a law during the Joseon dynasty; according to the lineage of Buddhist patriarch as well as Buddhist dharma, the Jogye Order, which had become independent during Silla, had been passed on until the present.<sup>21</sup> Bang Han-am 方漢岩, who served as the first Head of the Jogye Order, wrote back in 1930 that the lineage of Seon Buddhist dharma of Joseon that had continued unto the present was not the Linji Order but the tradition of Jogye Order.<sup>22</sup> At any rate, the name Jogye Order, which had been proposed as the title early on, was accepted without much opposition even during the construction of the headquarters temple. The issue was more about when the colonial authorities would authorize the renaming to Jogye Order, and there was not much discussion concerning the name itself.<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, the Jogye Order of the Buddhism of Joseon, which was submitted as the decision of the meeting of abbots, was authorized.

As this process has shown, modern Korean Buddhism ultimately pursued a form of an organized religious body as the central controlling body. The fact that it pursued an organized religious body, not merely a central organization or a general form of gathering like such-and-such association or society displayed a clear sense of purpose, and this purpose was the assertion of the identity of Korean Buddhism. It had the same objective as the excavation of various cultural traditions and figures in order to establish Buddhism's status in traditional culture. Above all, it would have been difficult to overlook the symbolism of the name of the order. Not only did it have a historical tradition as an order (S. Kim

18. Kim Yeongsu played a major role in deciding the name as well as the patriarch of the order. He expressed his opinion from an international perspective that the order needed a name in order to counter the schools of Japanese Buddhism that was active in Joseon (Kim Yeongsu, "Joseon bulgyo jongji e chwhihaya" [On the Objective of the Buddhist Order in Korea], *Bulgyo* 7, October 1937; "Jogyejong gwa jeondeungonggyu sam" [The Jogye Order and the Regulations of Transmission of Buddhist Dharma 3] *Bulgyo* 45, February 1943).

19. "Saseol: Joseon bulgyo Jogyejong chongbonsa Taegosa ui sabeop inga" (Editorial: Regulations of Taegosa, the Headquarters of the Jogye Order of Buddhism of Joseon, is Authorized) *Bulgyo sibo* 70, May 1941.

20. Kim Yeongsu, "Joseon bulgyo jongmyeong e daehaya" (On the Name of the Order of Buddhism of Joseon), *Maeil sinbo*, April 1, 1922.

21. Gwon Sang-ro, "Jogyejong: Joseon eseo jariphan jongpa gisa" (The Jogye Order: The Order that Became Independent in Joseon, the Fourth), *Bulgyo* 58, April 1929.

22. Bang Hanam, "Haedong siji e daehaya" (On the Founder of Haedong), *Bulgyo* 70, April 1930.

23. Controversy arose later, after it was authorized as the Jogye Order, surrounding the issue of the patriarch. The argument that Taego 太古 was the patriarch was argued by Kim Yeongsu, the argument that Daoyi 道義 was the patriarch was argued by Gwon Sang-ro and Kim Taeheup, and the argument that Bojo 普照 was the patriarch was argued by Yi Jaeyeol and Bak Bongseok. This debate was finally sorted out in 1962 when it became the Unified Order that the founder (*chojo* 初祖) was Daoyi, the patriarch who clarified the cause of the order (*jungcheonjo* 重闡祖) was Bojo, and the patriarch who had revitalized the order (*jungheungjo* 中興祖) was Taego. In short, it had been concluded in a compromised form that inherited the Seon tradition of seeing Daoyi as the founder, yet it also secured the legitimacy of the Taego Buddhist dharma lineage of the Linji School since Joseon. See Y. Kim 2013 for more on this.

2013), but it contained the identity of a Seon Buddhism attempting to absorb Gyo Buddhism within it even through the consolidation into the two orders of Seon and Gyo during the Joseon dynasty.

In his 1917 book, *A Summary of the History of Buddhism of Joseon*, Gwon Sang-ro wrote about the history of the Buddhist orders and the transmission of Buddhist dharma in “Essentials of Various Buddhist Orders” (*jejong jonggyo* 諸宗宗要) and “Brief Pedigree of Patriarchs of Buddhism” (*bulgyo yakgye* 佛祖略系), and Yi Neunghwa also wrote in his 1918 book *A Comprehensive History of Korean Buddhism (Joseon bulgyo tongsa)* about the origin of orders and the tradition of the Linji Order in “the Root of the Three Treasures” (*sambo wollyu* 三寶源流) (Choe 2013a). From the way the Linji Order, which had emerged as an alternative during the opposition against the coalition between the Won order and Japanese Buddhism, had also put forward a name of the order that could represent the tradition of Buddhism of Joseon shows how the historicity of the orders was perceived as important at that time. Given the characteristics of modern Buddhism that denied the deteriorated Buddhism of Joseon and instead called for reform, and the trend of excavating and illuminating Wonhyo during then, the Buddhist community could have emulated themselves after Japanese Buddhism, which had achieved modernization while still retained the various schools, or orders, of Buddhism. Thus, the fact that the Buddhist community pursued the form of an organized body of a religious order seems to be because this was the form of organization that followed Buddhist tradition while at the same time could achieve modernization of the religious body itself.

At any rate, the ultimate goal the Buddhist community aimed to achieve by establishing an organized body of a religious order as its headquarters was to become a modern religion. As new concepts of religion were disseminated with the introduction of Christianity, the way to survive as a modern religion amid the competition among religions was to form a central point around which the temples and monks around the country could coalesce. As the former section has shown, the monks put forward Buddhism as the representative religion of the Korean people, and an organized body of a Buddhist order was what could express this.

Despite the modernization of the management of the religious organizations and the efforts that were poured in, there were clear limitations in that the series of achievements unfolded within the boundaries of the

authorization of the Government-General. While some tried to be more independent in the establishment of the organization of the Buddhist order, others explicitly revealed pro-Japanese tendencies to maintain their privileges. For example, during the early 1930s, there were abbots that opposed the enforcement of the religious constitution. While the main reason was the conflict between the center and the head temples along with financial difficulties, the pretext they presented was that the constitution had not been authorized by the Government-General. The head temples, which had had to pay donations and various obligatory fees to the center, had finally declared to oppose the enforcement of the constitution amid the reality of financial difficulties (Kim 1996). This meant that the constitution, which had been drawn up during the Monks’ Conference and promised by public opinion to be kept, carried no force at all.

The fundamental reason this happened was that the Buddhist community did not have the power to appoint the abbots of the head temples or the authority to manage the finances of Buddhism. Under the system according to the Temple Ordinance, the authority to appoint personnel and the power to manage finances was in the Government-General. The Buddhist community did not have any means to powerfully control the temples and monks in each region across the nation. This meant that until Korea was liberated, Korean Buddhism would not be able to break free from the large framework of the colonial Buddhist landscape that the Japanese had devised. In other words, Buddhism remained an officially recognized religion in the large framework of Meiji Japan’s religious landscape of State Shintō, religions, and pseudo-religions, and the Government-General had implanted the system of the Temple Ordinance and the Head-Branch temple system to maintain this framework. Since Buddhism already existed in a kind of nation-wide network based on temples, specific regulations could be applied before other religions, and consequently, they were not able to build an independently operating system without the authorization of the Government-General.

It is worth noting how the legislation such as the Temple Ordinance and the Propagation Regulations that the Japanese Empire enacted was done in colonized Joseon first and not in Japan (Choe 2013b). During early in the Meiji era, the Japanese government had advocated to abolish Buddhism and destroy the Buddhist statues (*habutsu kishyaku* 廢佛毀釋) and attempted to make Shintō the national religion of Japan (*Shintō kokkyō ron* 神道國教論), all

of which eventually failed. After the constitution of the Japanese Empire was enacted, the state tried to enforce religious law, only to be met by the opposition by Buddhism. The fact that a failed religious policy could be implemented in Joseon was because of the colonial reality of Joseon, the difficult circumstances the Buddhism of Joseon was in, and the lack of self-awareness among the monks. The Religious Organization Law was passed in Japan in 1939. Joseon was, in other words, Japan's laboratory for religious policies. Therefore, it was impossible, in the colonial reality, for the Buddhist community of Joseon to break free from the boundaries of Japan's religious policies and argue for independence. Independence unification and the establishment of a controlling agency was possible only by overcoming the Temple Ordinance of Japan.

Earlier, I mentioned that the name Jogye Order contained the tradition and identity of Korean Buddhism. The Buddhist community would have also placed a large weight on such historicity and significance as they discussed the name of the Buddhist order. There would have also been efforts to establish Buddhism as the culturally traditional order after the March Third Movement. There was no doubt among Buddhists that Buddhism was the representative religion of the Korean nation. In other words, they regarded themselves to be a national religion. That amounts to the conclusion that the national religion, i.e., Buddhism, established the Jogye Order, which contained history and tradition, after much effort to receive authorization from the Government-General of Joseon, an irony only the unique reality of being a colony can produce. Thus, there are considerable limits in discussing independence or nationalistic features of the establishment and management of an organization of a Buddhist order under colonization. In that sense, it may be controversial to generalize the characteristics of modern Korean Buddhism as nationalistic.

## Conclusion

The argument for Buddhism reform, which was first voiced in the early 1910s, reflected a desperation that Buddhism needed to adapt to the rapidly changing modern society. Han Yong-un's *Yusinmon* and Gwon Sang-ro's "Gaehyeongnon" are both conscious of other religions as they appeal for the rehabilitation of Buddhism. The "Hyeoksinnon" of Yi Yeongjae, who had awakened to the harms of colonial Buddhist policies, argues for the abolishment of the Temple

Ordinance and presents a detailed plan to build an independent organized body of a Buddhist order. As the time passed and the circumstances changed, the direction and goal of the argument for Buddhist reform changed as well. Initially, tradition was seen as uncivilized and as an object to destroy. There was no value judgment as to which Buddhist tradition should be inherited and passed on, nor was there any historical or cultural evaluation. From the viewpoint of social Darwinism and the perspective of the theory of civilization, making oneself stronger was the way to survive in the era of religious competition. Breaking free from tradition was necessary to become a civilized religion.

But as a national consciousness was born after the March First Movement, the task of reviewing the status of Buddhism from the viewpoint of the nation, culture, and thought was undertaken. By proudly exalting cultural heritage and certain figures, Buddhism was perceived as the agent of traditional culture. It was a major shift in perception, from the standpoint of the theory of civilization that sought to escape tradition, to the argument that traditional culture should be excavated, inherited, and passed on. It was along the same lines that Buddhists' gaze turned towards the establishment of an autonomous organized body of a Buddhist order and the formation of an identity of Buddhism itself.

This article looked at the argument to break free from tradition, religious and philosophical characteristics, the emphasis on education and propagation for the popularization of Buddhism, and the establishment of an organized body of a Buddhist order as the indicators of the discourse for the reformation of Buddhism. These indicators do not only contain modern change or the pursuit of novel things as the word reform tends to imply. They all were assessed within and can be understood in the flow of the perception of tradition. Buddhism was so-called discovered by the West in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, but Buddhism in modern Korea was to paint a coat of Western Buddhism on top of the long-standing traditional foundation. McMahan (2008, 6) wrote that "Buddhism did not simply exclude all traditional elements to adapt to the changing world; it recreated them." Korean Buddhism, which had once shouted that "restoration comes from destruction," also recreated a new traditional culture through an awakening to tradition.

## References

- Choe, Byeonghyeon. 2013a. "Geundae Hanguk bulgyo sahak ui jeontong gwa bulgyosa insik" [The Tradition of the Study of the History of Modern Korean Buddhism]. In vol. 1 of *Hanguk bulgyosa yeongu immun* [Introduction to the Research of the History of Korean Buddhism], edited by Byeonghyeon Choe, 19-84. Paju: Jisik saneopsa.
- . 2013b. "Ilje chimnyak gwa singminji bulgyo" [The Invasion of the Japanese Empire and Colonial Buddhism]. In vol. 2 of *Hanguk bulgyosa yeongu immun* [Introduction to the Research of the History of Korean Buddhism], edited by Byeonghyeon Choe, 271-316. Paju: Jisik saneopsa.
- Han, Yong-un. 2007. *Joseon bulgyo yusinnon* [Treatise on the Restoration of Korean Buddhism]. Translated by Wonseop Yi. Seoul: Unjusa.
- Jo, Myeongje. 2014. "Han Yong-un ui Joseon bulgyo yusinnon gwa Ilbon ui geundaeji" [Han Yong-un's *Treatise on the Restoration of Korean Buddhism* and Japanese Modern Knowledge]. *Hanguk sasang sahak* [The Society for Study of Korean History of Thoughts] 46: 313-38.
- Kim, Chunnam. 1984. "Yang Gyeocho reul tonghan Manhae ui seogu sasang suyong: Joseon bulgyo yusinnon eul jungsim euro" [Manhae's Acceptance of Western Thought Seen through Liang Qichao: Focusing on *Treatise on the Restoration of Korean Buddhism*]. MA diss., Dongguk University.
- Kim, Gwangsik. 1995. "Yi Yeongjae ui saengae wa 'Joseon bulgyo hyeoksinnon'" [The Life of Yi Yeongjae and "Treatise on the Renovation of Korean Buddhism"]. *Hanguk dongnip undongsa yeongu* [Journal of Korean Independence Movement Studies] 9: 95-123.
- . 1996. "1930-nyeondae bulgyogye ui jongheon silhaeng munje" [The Issue of the Implementation of the Constitution of the Buddhist Order in the 1930s]. In *Hanguk geundae bulgyosa yeongu* [A Study of the Modern History of Korean Buddhism], edited by Gwangsik Kim, 366-401. Seoul: Minjoksa.
- . 2002. "Choe Namseon ui Joseon bulgyo wa beom Taepyeongyang bulgyo cheongnyeong hoeui" [Choe Namseon's *Buddhism of Joseon* and the Pan Pacific Buddhist Youth Conference]. In *Saebulgyo undong ui jeongae* [The Development of a Movement for New Buddhism], edited by Gwangsik Kim, 232-61. Seoul: Dopiansa.
- Kim, Jong-in. 2010. "Hanguk munhwa roseo ui bulgyo: 20-segi cho Hanguk eseoui bulgyo ui jeongcheseong" [Buddhism as the Cultural Tradition of Korea: The Identity of Buddhism in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Korea]. *Jonggyo yeongu* [Studies in Religion (The Journal of the Korean Association for the History of Religions)] 60: 61-87.
- Kim, Sangyeong. 2013. "Jeongeundae Jogyejong yeoksa ui jeongae yangsang gwa geu teukseong" [The Development of the Premodern History of the Jogye Order and its Characteristics] *Hanguk Seonhak* [Journal of Korean Seon Studies] 36: 454-92.
- Kim, Seong Yeon. 2016. "1910-nyeondae bulgyo geundaehwaron gwa jonggyojeok jipyeong ui hwakdae" [The Modernization of Buddhism and the Expansion of Religious Horizons in the 1910s]. *Bulgyohak yeongu* [Korea Journal of Buddhist Studies] 48: 1-30.
- . 2018a. "Ilje ha bulgyo jongdan ui hyeogseong gwajeong yeongu: jungang gigu ui jojik guseong gwa jaejeong unyeong eul jungsim euro" [A Study on the Formation of Buddhist Orders under Japanese Colonialism: Focusing on Organizational Structure and Financial Management of a Central Organization]. PhD diss., Dongguk University.
- . 2018b. "Joseon bulgyo cheongnyeong chongdongmaeng ui seongnip gwa hwaldong" [The Formation and Activities of the Joseon Buddhist Youth Union]. *Sahak yeongu* [The Review of Korean History] 132: 431-70.
- Kim, Yongtae. 2013. "Jogyejong jongtong ui yeoksajeok ihae: geunhyeondae jongmyeong, jongjo, jongji nonui reul jungsim euro" [Historical Understanding of the Jogye Order: Examination of the Name, Founder, and Aim of the Order]. *Hanguk Seonhak* [Journal of Korean Seon Studies] 35: 144-68.
- Lopez Jr., Donald S. 2005. *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McMahan, David L. 2008. "Buddhism and the Discourses of Modernity." In *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, edited by David L. McMahan, 61-88. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Park, Chanseung. 2010. *Minjok, minjok juui* [Nation and Nationalism]. Seoul: Sohwa.
- Ryu, Sihyeon. 2006. "Ilje ha Choe Namseon ui bulgyo insik gwa 'Joseon bulgyo' ui tamgu" [Choe Namseon's View of Buddhism under Japanese Colonial Rule and the Examination of "Buddhism during Joseon"]. In vol. 2 of *Geundae reul dasi ingneunda* [Reading Modernity Again], edited

- by Haedong Yun et al., 375-404. Goyang: Yeoksa bipyeongsa.
- Sim, Jaeryong. 2003. "Hanguk bulgyo neun hoetong bulgyo inga" [Is Korean Buddhism Transdenominational?]. *Bulgyo pyeongnon* [The Buddhist Review] 3: 176-90.
- Song, Hyeonju. 2003. "Geundae Hanguk bulgyo ui jonggyo jeongcheseong insik: 1910-1930-nyeondae bulgyo japji ruel jungsim euro" [A Study on the Recognition of Religious Identity of Modern Korean Buddhism: Centered on the Articles in the Buddhist Magazines of the 1910s to 1930s Period]. *Bulgyohak yeongu* [Korea Journal of Buddhist Studies] 7: 327-59.
- . 2015. "Geundae Hanguk bulgyo tongbulgyoron ui du yuhyeong: 'cho jongpa juui tongbulgyoron' gwa 'Seon jongpa juui tongbulgyoron'" [Two Types of the Modern Discourses of the Transdenominational Buddhism of Korea: "Trans-sectarian United Buddhism" and "Seon-sectarian United Buddhism"]. *Jonggyo munhwa yeongu* [Journal of Religion and Culture] 24: 149-84.
- Yang, Eunyong. 1993. "Geundae bulgyo gaehyeok undong" [The Modern Movement to Reform Buddhism]. In vol. 6 of *Hanguk sasangsa daegye* [Korean Intellectual History], edited by Hanguk jeongsin munhwa yeonguwon, 139-75. Seongnam: Hanguk jeongsin munhwa yeonguwon.

---

**KIM Seong Yeon** (mildsky78@hanmail.net) is currently a Research Professor at the Center for the Expansion of Academics on Korea at Dongguk University. He received his Ph.D. from the Department of History at Dongguk University in 2018 with the topic "A Study on the Formation of Buddhist Orders under Japanese Colonialism." His interests revolve around the historical development process and modernity of modern Korean Buddhism, and his recent publications include "The Modernization of Buddhism and the Expansion of Religious Horizons in the 1910s" (2016) and "The Formation and Activities of the Joseon Buddhist Youth Union" (2018).

## Abstract

The present article examines the major pursuits of the discourse of reform in modern Korean Buddhism and considers the characteristics and significance of their contribution to the establishment of the tradition and identity of Korean Buddhism. Based on Gwon Sang-ro's "Treatise on the Reformation of Korean Buddhism" which was featured as a series in the Buddhist magazine *Korean Buddhism Monthly* from 1912 to 1913, Han Yong-un's *Treatise on the Restoration of Korean Buddhism*, which was published by the Buddhist Bookstore in 1913, and Yi Yeongjae's "Treatise on the Renovation of Korean Buddhism" which was published as a series in the *Chosun Ilbo* in 1922, the article summarizes the objectives of the argument for reform, which include the following: breaking free from tradition, religious and philosophical features, the emphasis on education and propagation for the popularization of Buddhism, and the establishment of an organized body of the Buddhist order. In the 1910s, Han Yong-un and Gwon Sang-ro were conscious of the competition with other religions as it pleaded for the reform of Buddhism. From the standpoint of social Darwinism and the theory of civilization, they regarded self-strengthening as the only way to survive in the religious competition and proclaimed to escape tradition and eliminate all superstitions elements. Influenced by the March First Movement, however, from the 1920s, the task to review the status of Buddhism from the point of view of the nation, culture, and thought was undertaken. The reverence and worship of the Tripitaka Koreana at Haeinsa and Wonhyo are typical examples. If breaking away from tradition was considered a means to be reborn as a civilized religion in the 1910s, the path that was chosen in the 1920s was to excavate and inherit cultural tradition and become the agent of the nation and culture. Meanwhile, the key point of Yi Yeongjae's argument for reform was to criticize colonial Buddhism policies and argue for an independent administrative system of the Buddhist order. The establishment of a controlling agency or an organized body of the Buddhist order had been discussed in earnest starting from the mid- to late 1930s, and finally, in 1941, the Jogye Order of the Buddhism of Joseon was born. The choice to name the order Jogye Order was the outcome of efforts to declare the tradition and identity of Korean Buddhism. The discourse of reform of modern Korean Buddhism carries significance in the history of Buddhism in that it did not merely pursue modernization but attempted to excavate and recreate tradition, which led to

the efforts to establish an identity as a modern religion.

**Keywords:** argument for Buddhism reform, Han Yong-un, Gwon Sang-ro, Yi Yeongjae, break away from tradition, national religion, agent of culture, Jogye Order