

# **The Study of Korean Buddhism in North America: Retrospective and Recent Trends<sup>1</sup>**

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The field of Korean Buddhism in North America has developed greatly since the 1970s, although it is still a fledgling discipline. During the late 1960s and 1970s most studies of Korean Buddhism were confined to assessing literature and materials. From the late 1970s through the 1990s studies of eminent monks, such as Wonhyo and Jinul, dominated the field. Over the last twenty-five years, however, three approaches to the study of Korean Buddhism have emerged: The evaluation of Korean Buddhism in its East Asian context, the examination of Korean Buddhist practice and ritual, and the observation of Korean Buddhism from the standpoint of modernity. Lew Lancaster set the tone for the field through various projects making Korean and Japanese scholarship on Korean Buddhism more accessible to Western audiences. Robert Buswell demonstrated the importance of the Korean contribution to the shared East Asian Buddhist tradition in his writings associated with the Seon/Zen tradition. While much impressive work has been and is being done, the field still lacks basic materials for instruction in the classroom, such as a general historical overview and anthologies of sources.

Keywords: Buddhism—Korea, Zen Buddhism, Buddhist practice, modernity, eminent monks, Won Buddhism

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The study of Korean Buddhism in North America is a very young field, but great strides have been made in the last thirty years. Here, my aim is to highlight the contributions made by scholars who have studied and published in North America, as well as to emphasize recent developments in the field. My approach

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1. The author would like to thank Robert Buswell, Kim Jongmyung, and the anonymous reviewer for comments and insights on how to improve this essay.

will be to discuss the important and relevant books and articles contributing to the field, which have set the general trends of the field. In the past, scholars focused on research on the written sources of Korean Buddhism and studies on the lives and thoughts of eminent Korean monks. In the present there are three discernable approaches to understanding Korean Buddhism in North American scholarship: (1) evaluating Korean Buddhism in its Sinitic context, (2) appraising Buddhist practice in Korea, and (3) observing Korean Buddhism from the Standpoint of postmodernism. I have also included a brief account of the study of Won Buddhism since this new religious tradition shares in Korea's Buddhist history. The conclusion will assess in general some the weak and strong points of North American scholarship and offer some observations and predictions for future studies in the field of Korean Buddhism.

### **Coming to Grips with Korean Buddhist Literature**

The study of Korean Buddhism in North America really began in the late 1960s and 1970s when scholars began to examine the literature on which scholarly conceptions of the history of Korean Buddhism are based. Prior to that time, some North American scholars dabbled in Korean Buddhist themes as offshoots of their studies in early medieval Chinese Buddhist thought, such as Richard A. Gard's pioneering study of Madhyamaka thought in Korea (1959).

One of the first pivotal forays in to field was Peter H. Lee's annotated translation of the *Haedong goseung jeon* (The Lives of Eminent Korean Monks, 1969). Lee had previously provided brief treatments of the eleventh-century text *Gyunyeo jeon* (1961) and the literary lives of the eminent seventh-century Silla monks Wonhyo (617-686) and Uisang (625-702) (1962). Lee's translation of the *Haedong goseung jeon* set a high standard for the nascent field of Korean Buddhism with its flowing translation and detailed annotation. Also, following the example of Yanagida Seizan's research, which demonstrated the importance of the late medieval Chan text *Zutangji* (*Jodangjip* in Kor.) in the scholarly understanding of the origins of Chan/Seon/Zen Buddhism in China and Korea, Seo Kyung-bo's dissertation, "A Study of Korean Zen Buddhism Approached through the 'Chodangjip'" (1969), was the first treatment of this important source (that was preserved only in Korea) and its vision of early Korean Seon Buddhism in Western academia.

The 1970s saw the rise of U.C. Berkeley as an academic center for the study

of Korean Buddhism in North America. Lewis R. Lancaster is primarily responsible for laying the foundations for the growth in the field during the 1970s and 1980s. His early training in Chinese Buddhist sūtra materials, and the fortuitous donation of a photolithric reprint of the *Tripiṭaka Koreana* to U.C. Berkeley, inspired him to emphasize the importance of the Korean Buddhist canon in the history of Buddhist canons. He, with the help of Park Sung Bae, made available *The Korean Buddhist Canon: A Descriptive Catalogue* (1979), which has become an indispensable reference source for scholars throughout the field of Buddhist studies. In several other studies he has continued to flesh out the importance of this Korean accomplishment (Lancaster 1983, 1996, 1998b).

Also, several scholars of Chinese Buddhism residing in Canada, Jan Yün-hua, Iida Shotaro, and Laurence W. Preston, assisted Yang Han-sung in the preparation of a critical edition and translation of the Silla monk Hyecho's (ca. 704-787) *Wang ocheonchukguk jeon*, which was discovered among the hidden manuscripts in Cave 17 at Dunhuang by Paul Pelliot in 1908. *The Hye-Ch'o Diary: Memoir of a Pilgrimage to the Five Regions of India* (Yang and Jan 1984) demonstrates how Korean monks participated in a shared East Asian tradition. Although Hyecho was a recognized disciple of the Tantric master Amoghavajra (Bukong, 705-774) and never returned to Silla, he was always remembered as a Korean monk. His record provides important information on the nature of Buddhism in India during the eighth century.

## Studies on Eminent Monks

From the late 1970s through the late 1990s scholars of Korean Buddhism in North America explored the lives and teachings of seminal Korean Buddhist thinkers. The Ph.D. dissertations of Keel Hee-Sung, "Chinul: The Founder of the Korean Sōn (Zen) Tradition" (1977), Park Sung Bae, "Wonhyo's Commentaries on the Awakening of Faith in Mahayana" (1979a), and Shim Jae Ryong, "The Philosophical Foundation of Korean Zen Buddhism: The Integration of Sōn and Kyo by Chinul (1158-1210)" (1979), began this trend, and the dissertations of Oh Young Bong, "Wonhyo's Theory of Harmonization" (1988), Jang Wang Shik, "Wonhyo's Doctrines of Ultimate Reality and Faith: A Whiteheadian Evaluation" (1992), A. Charles Muller, "Hamhō Kihwa: A Study of His Major Works" (1993), Jung Hee-soo, "Kyonghung's Commentary on the 'Larger Sukhavativyuha Sutra' and the Formation of Buddhism in Silla" (1994), and Lee

Young Ho, “Ch’oui Ŭisun (1786-1866): A Liberal Sŏn Master and an Engaged Artist in Late Chosŏn Korea” (1998) demonstrate how this trend continued.

Keel Hee-Sung’s dissertation was revised and published as *Chinul: The Founder of the Korean Sŏn Tradition* (1984). It is an impressive academic treatment of the life of Jinul and his thought in its historical context, highlighting Jinul’s innovations as well as the influence he received from Zongmi (780-841) in matters associated with his sudden-enlightenment gradual-cultivation approach to Seon and Li Tongxuan (d. 730) in matters associated with his deployment of Hwa-eom (Huayan in Ch.) thought. It concludes with a penetrating essay on Jinul’s legacy which emphasizes the importance of literary works either composed by Jinul or associated with Jinul’s approach to Seon in the Buddhist exam system established in the early Joseon period (1392-1910)—before it was abolished by Yeonsan-gun (r. 1494-1506)—and in the current academic curriculum for Buddhist monks in the modern Jogye school of Korean Buddhism. However, Keel’s work has been more or less overshadowed by the work of Robert Buswell.

Robert E. Buswell, Jr.’s *The Korean Approach to Zen: The Collected Works of Chinul* (1983) was the book that really caused Korean Buddhism to be noticed by scholars working in the much larger and more established fields of Chinese and Japanese Buddhism because it participated in the academic discourse that dominated Buddhist studies at the time: Chan/Zen studies. Buswell’s annotated translations of Jinul’s extant works are lucid and have become an indispensable source for scholars in the West to see how Jinul drew upon his own religious experiences—his respect for the inspiration to be gained by sūtra-study and the popular Zen practices of his day—in crafting his uniquely inclusive approach to Zen. The long introductory essay is an excellent example of the state of the field in Korean Buddhism in the early 1980s. Drawing from Korean scholarship of the time, the first part broadly describes Korean Buddhism before Jinul using the then-dominant discourse of time: Buddhist scholasticism and sectarianism and the rise of Seon Buddhist schools on the peninsula. The second part is a succinct biography of the life of Jinul that demonstrates how Jinul’s enlightenment experiences dictated his conceptions of Zen practice and the origins of his community at Suseonsa, the original name of Songgwangsa, the monastery renowned for Zen practice in Korea. The third part of the introduction is a detailed analysis of Jinul’s Buddhist thought, the most important sections of which deal with Jinul’s views on Chan (Zen) schools of history and his day, the failure of the royal monk Uicheon’s (1055-1101) attempt to force the

unification of the Seon and Gyo (doctrinal) traditions in early Goryeo by establishing a Cheontae (Tiantai in Ch.) school in Korea, and Jinul's successful deployment of the Hwa-eom teachings of Li Tongxuan that caused the rapprochement of Seon and Gyo teachings. In this last section Buswell also describes Jinul's four approaches to meditation and practice: the cultivation of samādhi and prajñā, faith and understanding, investigating the *hwadu*, and no-mind or thoughtlessness, as well as his views on the recollection of the Buddha's name (*yeombul* in Kr., *nenbutsu* in Jpn.). Buswell followed up on this work on Jinul's thought by further demonstrating the relevance and importance of Jinul's (1158-1210) eclectic and inclusive approach to Zen practice in a series of articles in the second half of the 1980s (1986, 1987, 1988, 1989b). *The Collected Works of Chinul* was so important that an abridged version comprised of the introduction and Buswell's translations of Jinul's *Secrets of Cultivating the Mind*, *Straight Talk on the True Mind*, and selections of *Excerpts from the Dharma Collection and Special Practice Record with Personal Notes* was reprinted in the "Classics of East Asian Buddhism" series by the Kuroda Institute under the title *Tracing Back the Radiance: Chinul's Korean Way of Zen* (Buswell 1991).

Although not a scholar of Korean Buddhism by trade, J.C. Cleary added to our knowledge of Korean Seon during the late Goryeo with his *A Buddha From Korea: The Zen Teachings of T'aego* (1988). It is a full translation of the *Taegojip*, the collected works of Taego Bou (1301-1382). Intended for students and a popular audience, it lacks the complex apparatus of annotation found in the works of Robert Buswell or Peter Lee; but I have found it useful in courses on Korean Buddhism for students to see how Taego's straightforward Chinese-style Linji Chan (Imje Seon in Kor.) approach is both similar to and different than Jinul's so-called "Korean" approach to Seon.

### Three Approaches to Understanding the Tradition

Three approaches have emerged since the 1980s in contemporary scholarship on Korean Buddhism in North America: The first approach involves examining Korean Buddhism in its Sinitic or East Asian historical and cultural context and uses comparison with, principally, China and, to a lesser extent, Japan in order to analyze the nature of Korean Buddhism. The second comprises studying Korean Buddhism from the standpoint of practice, as a "lived religion" or "on the ground," such as studies on ritual, material culture, lay organizations and prac-

tice, cults of buddhas and bodhisattvas, and so forth. The third approach consists of studies that interpret Korean Buddhism from the standpoint of modernity, nationalism, and philosophical/postmodern paradigms, such as gender studies.

### 1. Korean Buddhism in Its Sinitic Context

In Korea at the First International Conference on Korean Studies Lew Lancaster gave an address titled, “The Significance of Korean Buddhism in East Asia” (1979). The importance of this essay, in my opinion, cannot be understated. Lancaster suggests that despite the nationalistic rhetoric of the “uniqueness” of Korean Buddhism propounded by many Korean scholars to combat the colonial-period rhetoric that Korean Buddhism offers nothing to the East Asian tradition, the fact remains that Korean Buddhism shares much with that of its East Asian neighbors, particularly China. Using the terminology of the natural sciences he encourages scholars to think not of Korean Buddhism as a different “genus” than the Chinese or Japanese varieties but as occupying a special “niche” or “valence” in a shared East Asian tradition. It must be left to scholars to demonstrate whether it is simply a copy or “address” of Chinese Buddhism. Using as his examples the very figures presented in nationalistic scholarship as embodying “Korean Buddhism” (Wonhyo and Jinul), he briefly shows how each may also be seen as attempting to solve issues faced by the Buddhist church in the greater East Asian arena and as participating in shared Sinitic Buddhist discourse. In other words, the real significance of Korean Buddhism is to be found in the “subtle differences” between the ways Korean Buddhists and their Chinese brethren solve the issues they face. Lancaster hints at what he thinks is a telling point: Traditionally Korean Buddhist thinkers tend to be inclusive and comprehensive in their solutions rather than exclusive and hierarchical like their Chinese cohorts. In later scholarship these characteristics have been described often as the “syncretistic” nature of Korean Buddhism, although I prefer the notion of “synthesis” to “syncretism.”

Buswell’s *The Formation of Ch’an Ideology in China and Korea: The Vajrasamādhi-Sūtra, A Buddhist Apocryphon* (1989a) is one of the first studies that seeks to understand Korean Buddhism in its East Asian context, but more importantly to show how Korean Buddhists were co-participants in the creation of the early Chan philosophy in the *Jingang sanmei jing* (*Geumgang sammae gyeong* in Kor.), which combined the mainstream Mahāyāna doctrines that were outgrowths of the Sinitic Yogācāra tradition, such as the inherence and imma-

nence of enlightenment (*tathāgatagarbha*) and the innate purity of mind (*amalavijñāna*), and early Chan elements, such as the teaching of the two accesses of mind and the practice of “guarding the mind” that drew inspiration from the Daoist meditative practice of “guarding the one.” Buswell deploys the Chinese and Korean hagiographies of the eminent monk Wonhyo to make a strong case that the *Jingang sanmei jing* was actually written in Silla Korea in the second half of the seventh-century, perhaps by the early Seon monk Beomnang (d.u.) and, legitimated by Wonhyo’s expansive commentary, was sent to the Chinese mainland where it was revered. This book is an amplification of his Ph.D. dissertation, “The Korean Origin of the ‘Vajrasamādhi-Sūtra’: A Case Study in Determining the Dating, Provenance, and Authorship of a Buddhist Apocryphal Scripture” (1985), which is also indicative of a trend among Lew Lancaster’s students at U.C. Berkeley in the late 1970s and 1980s to study the importance of indigenous (also called apocryphal) Buddhist scriptures in East Asia. *The Formation of Ch’an Ideology in China and Korea* succeeded in demonstrating that Korean Buddhists must be recognized as active participants in the development of East Asian Buddhism.

Jonathan W. Best has spent a career fleshing out the characteristics of Buddhism in the early Korean state of Baekje (traditional dates 18 B.C.E.-660 C.E.) and its influence on early Japanese Buddhism (Best 1990, 1995, 2003). His dissertation, “Buddhism in Paekche, A Cultural Approach to Early Korean History and Sculpture” (1976), demonstrates how combining the analysis of material culture with the study of textual research provides fruitful information on the early development of Buddhism on the peninsula. He has provided nuance to the simplistic assertion that Baekje Buddhism follows the trends of southern China by demonstrating that during the last century of Baekje’s existence the Buddhist art of the state shared many similarities with Sui (581-618) Chinese regional subtypes from the north (Best 1980, 1987). Furthermore, Best has always sought to situate Baekje Buddhism within the political, economic, and cultural contexts of the time and has challenged assumptions made by depending on suspicious materials (Best 1982, 1991, 2002).

One of the major hindrances to the study of Korean Buddhism is the lack of scholarly materials in English dealing with the early tradition during the Three Kingdoms (ca. 300-668) and Unified Silla (668-935) periods. While many North American scholars of East Asian Buddhism read Japanese, works by Korean scholars were not accessible unless the Koreans published their articles in Japanese. While Robert Buswell’s books did much to highlight the impor-

tance of Korean Buddhism, beginning in the late 1980s Lew Lancaster and Chai-shin Yu produced a few volumes of seminal works by Korean and Japanese scholars translated into English. *Introduction of Buddhism to Korea: New Cultural Patterns* (Lancaster and Yu 1989) contains articles by An Gyeheyon, Inoue Hideo, Kodama Daien, Kamata Shigeo, Lee Ki-baik, and Rhi Ki-yong on themes related to the nature of Buddhism in the Three Kingdoms period. *Assimilation of Buddhism in Korea: Religious Maturity and Innovation in the Silla Dynasty* (Lancaster and Yu 1991) is comprised of works by An Gyeheyon, Bak Jonghong, Oh Hyung-keun, Minamoto Hiroyuki, and Go Ikjin and delves into more complex topics such as Wonhyo's philosophical thought, the Yogācāra studies of Silla monks, Pure Land Buddhism in Silla, and the origins and early lineages of the Seon traditions in the late Silla period. These books hold a special place in my heart because they appeared right when I decided to study Silla Buddhism as an undergraduate student. They provided me with my first exposure to the world of scholarship on early Korean Buddhism before my ability to read academic works in Korean improved to the point that I could make use of them. On top of that, both volumes contain detailed bibliographies of the major Korean and Japanese studies on early Korean Buddhism that have been very useful in my research on this fascinating period.

Later, in the mid-1990s Lew Lancaster and his colleagues returned to their earlier project of making Korean scholarship accessible by producing two more edited volumes of Korean and Japanese scholarship. *Buddhism in Koryō: A Royal Religion* (Lancaster, Suh, and Yu 1996) contains articles by Heo Heungsik, Kamata Shigeo, An Gyeheyon, Go Ikjin, Yi Jaejang, and Lewis Lancaster dealing with Buddhism in the Goryeo state (918-1392) and society, meditative traditions in the mid and late Goryeo periods, and the history of the Buddhist canon. *Buddhism in the Early Chosŏn: Suppression and Transformation* (Lancaster and Yu 1996) is comprised of essays by Han Ugeun, Gwon Gijong, Mok Jeongbae, and Gim Yeongtae on the change in government policy toward the Buddhist church in the late Goryeo and early Joseon (1392-1910) periods and the nature of Buddhist scholarship, thought, and the Seon lineage. These books also contain bibliographies but they are far less extensive than those contained in earlier works, which is indicative of the fact that the earlier periods have been of greater interest to Korean and Japanese scholars.

Buddhism during the Joseon period has recently begun to receive the attention it deserves. John Goulde's dissertation "Anti-Buddhist Polemic in Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century Korea: The Emergence of Confucian



Exclusivism” (1985) not only rightly questions the monolithic view of Buddhism and Confucianism as distinctly separate traditions in Silla and Goryeo times but it also describes how Neo-Confucian polemicists deployed their rhetoric to disrupt and displace the symbiotic relationship between the two traditions following the example of their cohorts in Ming China (1368-1644). More recently, by looking at the *longue durée* Lew Lancaster reappraises Buddhism in the late Joseon period demonstrating that when Buddhism began to revive around 1860 it was based upon ancient patterns shared historically in Northeast Asia (1998a). In addition, Robert Buswell succinctly describes the rhetoric of the unity of the three teachings (Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism), as well as its Chinese origins, that was deployed by defenders of Buddhist tradition in their writings during the first half of the Joseon period (1999a).

Toward the end of the twentieth century Robert Buswell published an article titled “Imaging ‘Korean Buddhism’” in a book about nationalism and the creation of Korean identity (1998). Following some insights gleaned from Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, he demonstrates how the idea of a separate tradition of “Korean Buddhism” among Korean Buddhists is a more-or-less constructed concept developed first from the writings of modern Buddhist thinkers in the 1920s and 1930s of the colonial period. This concept has been reified further not only within Korea to combat biased characterizations of Buddhism in Korea by colonial-period Japanese scholars but in North America as well due to the post-war influence of area studies, which is principally construed along often imaginary national lines. Covering the history of Buddhism in Korea in broad strokes he shows how early on Koreans demonstrated strong connections to both India and China in the representation of the Buddhist tradition in their legends and lore. Only in the Joseon period do we encounter the first imaginings of a Korean tradition, but even then Koreans did not conceive of Buddhism in Korea as separate from the universal Sino-Indian tradition. Hence, it is only with the emergence of Buddhist reform movements in late Joseon, print capitalism, and the deployment of vernacular Korean (*hangeul*) by self-aware Korean Buddhists, which were of themselves stimulated by Japanese encroachment, that the idea of a distinctly Korean Buddhism emerges.

My own research straddles the common ground between observing Korean Buddhism in its Sinitic context and evaluating the nature of Korean Buddhist practice. As an outgrowth of my dissertation research, which includes a study of the cult of dhāraṇī and the widespread existence of spells and thaumaturgy in Sinitic Buddhism (McBride 2001, 2005), which will be discussed briefly in the

following section, I have reassessed the assumption that there was a separate “esoteric” tradition in medieval East Asian Buddhism (ca. 317-907). Exegetical materials of the time in both China and Korea clearly deploy the concept of an “esoteric teaching” (*milgyo*) as a rhetorical device to argue the superiority of the Mahāyāna as presented in such scriptures as the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* (*Huayan jing*) and the *Lotus Sūtra* (McBride 2004a). I have also demonstrated that the Later Goguryeo hegemon Gungye’s (d. 918) claim to be the Buddha Maitreya cannot be understood outside of its East Asian context, since it was primarily a local adaptation of the popular Chinese millenarian Maitreya cult deployed by rebels and usurpers such as the Tang Empress Wu (r. 690-705) and was perhaps intended to make Gungye’s rule palatable not only to the people of Later Baekje and Silla but also to the peoples living beyond his northern borders in the old Goguryeo homelands in Manchuria (McBride 2004b).

The most recent book on Korean Buddhism that has been published is a volume edited by Robert Buswell titled *Currents and Countercurrents: Korean Influences on the East Asian Buddhist Traditions* (2005). It demonstrates that the eastward flow and permeation of Buddhism was not merely one way from India to China through Korea and into Japan but that Korean Buddhists influenced seminal developments, such as the Chan tradition in China and the Japanese Pure Land traditions, in East Asia, strongly suggesting that Korean Buddhism should be recognized in its own right as a country with innovative Buddhist traditions. The origins of this book trace back to a conference held at UCLA in 1995 where scholars from around the field of Buddhist studies demonstrated Korean influences on various Buddhist traditions in East Asia and Tibet. This volume presents essays by Jonathan W. Best on Baekje influences on early Japanese Buddhism, Keel Hee-Sung on the Silla monk Gyeongheung’s (fl. seventh-eighth cen.) influence on Shinran (1173-1262), John Jorgensen on Korea’s role in rhetoric on the revitalization of Buddhism in China, Bernard Faure on the Chan master Musang (or Reverend Kim), Cho Eunsu on Woncheuk’s (613-696) role in Sinitic Buddhism, Chan Chi-wah on the role of Korea in the renewal of Tiantai Buddhism in China, and Huang Chi-chiang on Uicheon’s pilgrimage to China and the Korean monastery in Hangzhou during the Song (960-1279) and Yuan (1279-1368) periods. Earlier versions of many of the essays in this volume were presented during the 1995 conference.

Chuck Muller’s recent essay on the meaning of the Yogācāra concept of the “two hindrances” and the way the concept has been reinterpreted by scholiasts in the East Asian tradition is another important example of how Korean Buddhist

thinkers have participated in the Chinese intellectual tradition (2004). In particular it describes how the term plays an important role in such seminal East Asian Buddhist literature as the *Awakening of Faith* and the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* but more importantly how Wonhyo developed the term using various heuristic devices, which later influenced the views of the Chinese Chan/Huayan patriarch Zongmi.

## 2. Buddhist Practice in Korea

Since the early 1990s there has been an increased focus on ritual and practice in Religious Studies in Western academia. Robert Buswell's *The Zen Monastic Experience* (1992), which is dedicated to his deceased mentor the Venerable Seon Master Gusan (1908-1983), is one of the first monographs to assess contemporary Korean Seon from the standpoint of an inside outsider. The book places contemporary Korean Buddhism in its historical context, including an analysis of changes during the colonial period (1905-1945) and contains a detailed description of what a monk's life would be like in a Korean Seon monastery in 1970s Korea. It is more than just a biographical account of the time Buswell spent as a Buddhist monk at Songgwangsa because the book presents an important corrective to the popular image of Zen monks as antinomian non-conformists as found in the writings of D. T. Suzuki and demythologizes Zen practice by demonstrating the importance of rule-oriented monastic life, educational curriculum, and structured meditation. Furthermore, he demonstrates that there is more to the running of a monastery than just sitting in the meditation hall and how many monks spend their careers in support divisions where they take care of the day-to-day administration and economic concerns of the monastery. The book has become a staple for courses on Korean Buddhism but is also used widely in classes on East Asian religion so students can be exposed to what life is really like for Zen monks.

Chuck Muller's *The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment: Korean Buddhism's Guide to Meditation* (1998) is a translation of the pivotal *Yuanjue jing* (*Won'gakgyeong* in Kor.), the profound meaning of which is explained using interpretive keys found in the commentary of the early Joseon monk Gihwa (1376-1433). This scripture first entered Buddhist intellectual discourse in Korea in the writings of Uicheon during the Goryeo period and increased in importance in the writings of Jinul's dharma heirs as they became more familiar with Chan practices on the Chinese mainland during the period of Mongol domina-

tion. By the early Joseon period it came to enjoy a preeminent place as a guide to advanced meditative absorption leading to enlightenment. Muller emphasizes the importance of this indigenous Buddhist text originally composed in China in both China and Korea and issues associated with doctrine and meditation that it attempts to resolve. More than being a strictly academic exercise, Muller intended his book to engage Buddhist students in the present and to serve as a useful guide to those pursuing Chan/Seon/Zen practice since Gihwa's commentary is packed full of advice on a variety of topics.

Other studies are grounded in historical texts and intellectual exegeses and flesh out issues in the history of Korean Buddhist ritual observances and cultic practices. Kim Jongmyung's "Buddhist Rituals in Medieval Korea (918-1392)" (1994), for instance, presents rich data culled from the *Goryeosa* (History of Goryeo) and *Goryeosa jeolyo* (Essentials of the *Goryeosa*) on all the Buddhist rituals performed by the Goryeo court. Chapters of the dissertation treat rituals performed with high frequency by the Goryeo royal family: the Calamities-Solving Ritual (*Sojae doryang*) and the Humane Kings Assembly (*Inwanghoe*) (ch. 3), the Lantern Festival (*Yeondeunghoe*) (ch. 4), and the Assembly of the Eight Prohibitions (*Palgwanhoe*) (ch. 5). Kim challenges the dominant theory that rituals legitimated the exercise of royal power by demonstrating that the rituals performed most frequently were all primarily intended to insure the longevity of the king and to provide merit for the king's ancestors. The implications of his research cause him to reconsider the utility of the concept of "Buddhism as national protector" (*hoguk bulgyo*) in a study on the important early monk Jajang (d. between 650-655) (Kim J. 1995).

My dissertation, "Buddhist Cults in Silla Korea in their Northeast Asian Context" (McBride 2001), challenges the utility of describing ancient Korean Buddhism, and by extension medieval East Asian Buddhism, in terms of the teleological rhetoric of "schools" by studying "Buddhism on the ground." I suggest that the assimilation of Buddhism in what I call Silla's expansion period (ca. 500-780 C.E.) was less focused around the writings of exegetes than in the domestication of observances and practices found in the cults of dhāraṇī (Buddhist spells and codes), Maitreya, Avalokitesva, and Amitābha, as described in historical literature, Buddhist literature (exegesis and monastery records), hagiography, and epigraphy. However, the important point is that it is the social and religious elites of Silla who are the primary promoters of cultic practices, just as in medieval Chinese Buddhism. Hence, I present a picture of Silla Buddhism as following in the tradition and further expanding upon the charac-

teristics of the aristocratic, practice-oriented Buddhism of the Northern Chinese Dynasties, such as the Northern Wei (386-534). Furthermore, I argue that while there were no “schools” of Buddhism in Silla, the nascent Hwa-eom tradition most closely approaches what scholars want a “school” to be and that Hwa-eom became the dominant form of Buddhism in the eighth century before the rise of the early Seon traditions because of its unique ability to synthesize the practices of all the earlier cults in its comprehensive approach to Buddhist practice. My research also challenges the assertion that early Silla Buddhism is somehow uniquely shamanic by demonstrating that shamanic themes, such as the vision-quest motif, are found in mainstream Buddhist literature and practice in East Asia insomuch that it would be more correct to suggest that Buddhism was already “shamanic”—if indeed that is an appropriate term—before it even arrived in Korea (McBride 2003).

### 3. Postmodernism and Korean Buddhism

One of the newest trajectories in the study of Korean Buddhism is to discuss it in terms of post-modern thought and modern theories of gender. In her dissertation “Deconstructive Framing: Sōn Buddhism and Post-modern Thought,” Jin Y. Park attempts to use Korean Seon as a vehicle for evaluating post-modern philosophy (1998). For instance, she reevaluates Hegel’s view of “Buddhism” and “the East” in deconstructive terms; she compares Jinul’s views on *hwadu* with Søren Kierkegaard’s notion of anxiety, Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s concept of interrogation, and Julia Kristeva’s theory of the semiotic and the symbolic; she analyzes Jinul’s Seon take on Hwa-eom thought in terms of Jean-Francois Lyotard’s account of modernity and the postmodern; and she juxtaposes the Buddhist modernist views of Manhae (Han Yongun, 1879-1944) and Sotaesan. Her most recent essay addresses the lack of published information on the way Korean women in the twentieth century responded to modernity by presenting a transformed version of the message of Seon Buddhism to a feminine audience, through an introductory study of the famous writer and nun Kim Iryeop (1896-1971). She suggests the potential of Kim’s voice in the creation of a feminine Buddhist discourse and hints at the fruits to be gleaned from a deeper study of this interesting and important figure (Park Jin Young 2005).

Pori Park’s dissertation, “The Modern Remaking of Korean Buddhism: The Korean Reform Movement during Japanese Colonial Rule and Han Yongun’s Buddhism (1879-1944)” (1998), reviews the transformation of Korean

Buddhism from the time that Korea became a Japanese protectorate in 1905 to liberation from colonial rule in 1945. She treats changes in the organization of the *saṃgha* (monastic congregations), its educational system, and its proselytizing procedures by which the Korean Buddhist church attempted to cope with the growing threat of Christian missionaries and their message. She appraises how Korean Buddhism, which was considered a tool of the Japanese colonial powers, was Japanized and secularized in the name of modernity and how the Korean Buddhist order was able to reestablish ties to social elites. She uses Han Yongun's Buddhist thought as a prominent example of how Buddhists of the time sought to revitalize the Buddhist message and make it applicable to Koreans and also to resolve the dilemmas that faced the Korean Buddhist order due to colonial pressures. Park synthesizes much of the discussion from the first half of her dissertation in her most recent article on the adoption of modernity by Korean Buddhists during the colonial period (2005).

Sungtaek Cho, who originally trained at U.C. Berkeley as a scholar of Indian Buddhism, demonstrates how in contemporary Korea the Buddhist order has been induced to become more engaged with society, following the example of Korean Christian activists and the demands and needs of modern adherents (2002). He also illustrates how the scholarship of two of the most influential Korean Buddhologists of the post-liberation period, Bak Jonghong and Kim Donghwa, are prime examples of how Koreans countered the Japanese colonial-period rhetoric that distained Korean cultural vitality and how they are typical of native responses to colonial hegemony. He shows how these two scholars are primarily responsible for establishing the parameters of and approaches to the field of Korean Buddhism in Korea (2005).

## Won Buddhism

Although Won Buddhism is certainly one of Korea's New Religions that emerged during the Japanese colonial period, since adherents and some scholars see it as participating in Korea's Buddhist heritage it cannot be ignored. Won Buddhism was founded in 1916 by Bak Jungbin (1891-1943), who is better known by his literary name Sotaesan. Sotaesan was aware of the three traditional religions of East Asia-Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism-yet he felt that his enlightenment experience was independent of any tradition. Nevertheless, upon further inquiry he realized that all of the ancient sages had known that to

which he had awakened and, after reading the *Diamond Sutra*, he declared that the vehicle of Buddhism was the best for elucidating his vision of ultimate truth. Although ostensibly Buddhist, the new religion transforms several Buddhist practices and artistic traditions, such as rejecting the use of images for the Irwonsang (One-Circle Figure). It reinterprets traditional doctrinal categories, such as the three teachings and the four graces, and provides them with new meaning to create a modern Buddhism that jibes with Korea's Confucian heritage. Chung Bongkil (1984) and Mark Cozen (1987) introduced the tradition, which is headquartered in Iri, North Jeolla Province, in South Korea, to Western readers during the 1980s at a time when the religion enjoyed great growth.

During the late 1980s and 1990s, Sotaesan and Won Buddhism became a research focus of several scholars of Korean extraction doing their dissertations primarily at theological seminaries: Kim Bokin's "Responses to Religious Pluralism: Three Case Studies and Comparative Analyses (Buddhism, Wonhyo, Christianity, Won Buddhism)" (1989), Kim Sunggon's "Religious Pluralism and the Question of the One and Many: A Study of Sot'aesan's Perspective" (1991), Park Kwangsoo's "The Won Buddhism (Wonbulgyo) of Sot'aesan: A Twentieth-Century Religious Movement in Korea" (1996), Lee Chung Ok's "Theory and Practice of Gender Equality in Won Buddhism" (1997), and Chandler H. Im's "Korean Christian-Won Buddhist dialogue on Suffering and Liberation" (2001).

Chung Bongkil's *The Scriptures of Won Buddhism* (2003), which is a translation of the *Wonbulgyo gyojeon*, is the first monograph on Won Buddhism in English. It is comprised of a hundred-page introduction, which includes a detailed treatment of the life and mission of Sotaesan and an overview of his thought, and translations of *The Canon*, comprehensive treatments on Won Buddhist doctrine and practice, and *The Scripture of Sotaesan*, shorter expositions on a variety of topics including cause and effect, human nature, Buddha-stages, deliverance, and faith and devotion. Since it is a translation of some of the major works of the Won Buddhist tradition it is an important contribution to the study of Buddhist traditions in contemporary Korea.

## Some Concluding Remarks

The field of Korean Buddhism in North America is still in its infancy. While much progress has been made since the 1970s, there are still major gaps in the study of Buddhism in Korea when compared to the more established fields of Chinese and

Japanese Buddhism. One of the key deficiencies is the absence of essential survey materials for use in the classroom. In particular, there is the lack of a general historical overview of Korean Buddhism designed to meet the needs of a North American audience. Furthermore, there is a need for anthologies of basic sources. Although some recent general anthologies of Korean source materials (Lee 1993, 1996; Lee and de Bary 1996; Ch'oe, Lee, and de Bary 2000) are useful and greatly appreciated, their coverage of Buddhist materials is limited. This weakness will be lessened by the forthcoming *Religions of Korea in Practice* volume (Buswell 2007a), which is predominately a collection of Korean Buddhist sources. There are also few annotated, scholarly translations of primary writings of the major thinkers of Korean Buddhism. This shortcoming will be remedied, in part, when installments of *The Collected Works of Wŏnhyo Project* are published. Sung Bae Park was the instigator of the project, of which five volumes are projected, and he deserves credit for initiating it along with the former president of Dongguk University. The first volume has been accepted and is expected to appear in 2007 (Buswell 2007b), and other volumes are in preparation.

Since academic positions for scholars of Korean Buddhism are extremely limited in North America, it remains to be seen how the field will grow in the United States and Canada. Scholars of Korean Buddhism are and will be forced to cross the porous borders of academic disciplines continually to find niches for themselves and for the fledgling field. Nowhere is this more visible than in the scholarly trend of treating Korean Buddhism within the context of modernity, women's studies, and post-modern philosophy. Studies belonging to this broad category often seem to have less to do with Korean history and civilization than with the discourses of Western modernism and philosophy. While such studies certainly make simulacra of Korean culture more accessible and palatable to some outside readers, it is unclear how such work will be reintegrated back into the historical and textual mainstream tradition. Religion in practice and ritual are some of the most popular trends in the discipline of Religious Studies and impressive work has been done in this area. There is a need for much more research on Korean Buddhist practice and religious observances. Aside from a general survey of Korean Buddhism, monographs on the revival of Korean Buddhism in the late Joseon period and in present-day South Korea also need to be written. My biased opinion is that the scholarly approach that places Korean Buddhism in its East Asian context will be the most fruitful. For both historically-minded and textually-oriented scholars, Korean participation in Chinese Buddhist intellectual discourse, the adoption and adaptation of trends in practice,



and Korean influence in the development of Japanese Buddhism in pre-modern times are topics of which the surface has only been scratched. In the past the field of Korean Buddhism in North America has drawn much inspiration and direction from its elder brother siblings in Korea and Japan and developed in concert with European and Australian branches of the family. Having outgrown the post-colonial rhetoric of the uniqueness of the Korean Buddhist tradition, scholars will truly be able to demonstrate the dynamism of Korean Buddhism and its contributions to East Asian civilization.

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