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Social Stigmas of Buddhist Monastics and the Lack of Lay Buddhist Leadership in Colonial Korea (1910–1945)

Hwansoo KIM

Abstract

One of the key characteristics of Buddhism from the late nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century was the rise of lay leadership. East Asian Buddhism was no exception, but the ways, degree, and timing in which this modern phenomenon manifested itself varied, especially in the case of Korean Buddhism, which saw a delayed arrival of lay leadership. This article addresses the question of why lay Buddhism struggled to emerge as a strong force in colonial Korea. A key factor that has been underestimated in scholarship is that Korean monks were socially stigmatized during the Joseon period (1392–1910). The rhetoric of stigmatism was so ubiquitous in journals and newspapers in colonial Korea that it begs a closer analysis of the correlation between the societal perception of monks and its influence on the development of lay Buddhism. This article first examines three interrelated aspects of Korean monastics: (1) the stigmatization imposed on monastics during the Neo-Confucian Joseon dynasty, (2) the persistence of these stigmas in the minds of Koreans, and (3) their internalization among Korean monastics themselves. The article then draws out the impact of these three aspects on the late and limited emergence of lay leadership.

Keywords: lay Buddhism, Joseon Buddhism, stigmas, modernity, colonial period, clerical marriage

Hwansoo KIM is Assistant Professor in the Department of Religious Studies and the Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, Duke University. E-mail: hwansoo.kim@duke.edu.

Introduction

The expanded role that lay Buddhists (*geosa*)[1] played in the modern period, namely from the late nineteenth to the first half of the twentieth century, is unique in the 2,600-year history of Buddhism. Although lay Buddhists had always been integral to temple life, the modern period saw a significant surge in the level[2] of lay participation, particularly by urban, middle-class Buddhists, in scholarship, meditation, institutional reforms, propagation, and philanthropic programs. This novel development, often called "the monasticization of the laity," emerged in tandem with "the laicization of monasticism,"[3] although each by different degrees. The terminology "monasticization of the laity" connotes the increased participation of the laity in monastic practices, while the terminology "laicization of monasticism" refers to the clergy's efforts to make those practices more accessible to laypeople. To complicate the definitions of "laicization" or "laicizing," they here imply not only, as in Richard Gombrich's more specific example, "tak[ing] a salaried job" (Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988, 175), but also, in Richard Robinson's (1996, 25-26) words, "imparting lay characteristics to the monastic community," or "a [monastic] person taking on more attributes or functions of the laity." The most extreme version

1. Although *geosa* originally refers to both male and female lay Buddhists, in this article, the terms "lay" and *geosa* will be restricted to males, unless otherwise indicated. Although there was an increase in female lay Buddhist leaders in the wake of the modern period, leadership positions in the society were still dominated by males. Related terms such as "laity," "lay Buddhism," and "lay Buddhists" will be used in a similar vein, i.e., to refer to male counterparts.
2. I highlight the word "level" because the laity had always been influential in Buddhism. An increasing number of scholars have found Weber's characterization of the laity as a mere supporter of the monastic community to be problematic (Weber [1916] 2000, 214). See also Schopen (2004) and Samuels (1999, 231-241).
3. I borrow the term "the monasticization of the laity" from Cook (2010, 175) and the term "the laicization of the clergy" from Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988, 229). Jaffe (2001, 232-233) gives the phrase a more nuanced meaning, in that the laicizing of the clergy "has not, however, been a concomitant heightening of the importance of the laity within the established Buddhist denominations, particularly with regard to their assuming sacerdotal functions."

of laicization is monks marrying laywomen, something referred to as clerical marriage (Jaffe 2001). These intertwined processes of monasticization and laicization reconfigured and reinforced the roles of both monastics and lay Buddhists in the modern period, however conciliatory or contentious their roles were.

In East Asia, the dynamic roles played by lay leadership in the modern period were most prominent in Chinese and Japanese Buddhism. There is consensus among scholars that modern Chinese Buddhism began with a group of influential lay Buddhists, which included such figures as Yang Wenhui (1837–1911),[4] Liang Qichao (1873–1929), Ouyang Jian (or Ouyang Jingwu, 1871–1943), Tan Sitong (1865–1898), and Zhang Taiyan (1869–1936), to name a few. In collaboration with and sometimes without the help of monastics, they established numerous Buddhist organizations and schools and published various journals, most of which revitalized and challenged traditional monastic Buddhism, thus transforming Chinese Buddhism into a modern religion (Welch 1968; Pittman 2001; Xiao 2003). Modern Japanese Buddhism also witnessed the rise of a plethora of lay assemblies, publications,[5] and movements, many of which were led by lay leaders such as Tanaka Chigaku (1861–1939), Ouchi Seiran (1845–1918), Inoue Enryo (1858–1919), Takashima Beiho (1875–1949), and Suzuki Daisetsu Teitaro (1870–1966). Even in Korea, the first group of reformers in the late Joseon period was dominated by Yu Dae-chi (1831–1884), Bak Gyu-su (1807–1876), O Gyeong-seok (1831–1879), Bak Yeong-hyo (1861–1939), and Kim Ok-gyun (1851–1894), who were believed to be Buddhists or at least Buddhist sympathizers. Throughout the colonial period, there were also several influential lay Buddhist leaders, such as Yi Neung-hwa (1869–1943), Choe Nam-seon (1890–1957), Jeong In-bo (1893–1950), and Yi Gwang-su (1892–1950). They are all representatives of the monasticization of the laity in the modern period.

4. Holmes Welch (1968, 2) introduced Yang Wenhui as "the father of the revival" of modern Chinese Buddhism.
5. Some influential journals published by lay leaders include *Hanseikai zasshi* (Magazine of the Self-Examination Society), *Shin bukkyo* (New Buddhism), and *Meikyo shinshi* (New Magazine of Bright Teachings).

However, despite the fact that a similar trend took place in modern Korean Buddhism, the level of lay Buddhists' influence and visibility in the Buddhist establishment, not to mention the relative number of lay Buddhist leaders, were significantly fewer than those in other East Asian countries.

I will analyze how the dual development of the monasticization of the laity and the laicization of monasticism played out in colonial Korea from 1910 to 1945, and explain one of the major reasons why the rise of lay Buddhism in the country of the period was slow to materialize compared to the process in other East Asian countries. I will argue that in the case of Korean Buddhism, the monasticization of the laity—that is, the forging of a modern lay Buddhism with the aforementioned characteristics—struggled to grow, while the laicization of monasticism, particularly clerical marriage, went further than what typically occurred in other countries. What differs from the case of Japan is that Japanese Buddhism underwent clerical marriage in earnest in the late nineteenth century with a relatively strong presence by parishioners (*danka* 檀家). Despite a brief period of persecution of Meiji Buddhism, the parishioners continued to support the Buddhist establishment. In the case of Korean Buddhism, laicization took place in the absence of a well-established parishioner system. As such, lay Buddhism struggled to take shape, mainly due to the absence of this critical mass of committed laypeople, while monastics adopted lay habits, such as growing their hair, wearing lay clothes, and taking wives, which inadvertently usurped the roles that lay Buddhists normally would have played in the Buddhist community. In other words, extreme laicization of Korean monks dwarfed the monasticization of the laity. As a result, reform programs were perforce monastic-centered, further smothering the possibility of reforms that would have given rise to a vibrant lay base. In contrast, collaboration and tensions between laypeople and clerics, which are indications of the presence of lay leadership, were much more palpable in China and Japan.

What historical factors, then, were responsible for this situation? Without a doubt, there are many factors, but I would like to single out the institutionalization of social stigmatism that was imposed on monastics for

centuries, the persistence of these stigmas in the consciousness of the populace in the modern period, and the internalization of these stereotypes in monastics themselves. This historical context, I argue, was one of the fundamental factors that made the collaboration between monks and laypeople difficult in Korea, hindering the emergence of modern lay Buddhism.

To better elucidate this context, I will employ Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman's (1922–1982) theory on stigma, which he defines as "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" (Goffman 1963, 3) and that is imputed to an individual who "is thus reduced . . . from a whole and usual person to a tainted discounted one" (1963, 53). Stigmatization is not just the imputation of such an attribute to an individual based on physical and mental disabilities, but also to a group based on race, gender, sexuality, or religion. Goffman (1963, 139) points out that the stigmatization of a religious community can be institutionalized "as a means of formal social control" and also "as a means of removing these minorities from various avenues of competition." His theoretical framework is instrumental in understanding both the stigmatization of Korean monastics as an aspect of social control during the Neo-Confucian Joseon dynasty and the manner in which the monastics internalized it. As for how the stigmatized manage this, Goffman (1963, 94) employs the concept of "concealments of the stigma symbols" in social situation. Accordingly, Korean monastics during the colonial period hid monastic symbols, such as shaved heads and robes. This concealment blurred monks' identity as celibate, thus opening the door for taking wives, which contributed to the excessive laicization process. Thus, those monks who adopted lay habits and lifestyles paradoxically displaced the actual lay Buddhists, which in turn further hindered the development of modern lay Buddhism, i.e., the monasticization of the laity.

Scholars of colonial Korean Buddhism have made the preliminary correlation between the suppression of Buddhism and the resulting lack of lay roles in colonial Korea,[6] but have not provided an in-depth analysis of their

6. Three scholars representative of those who have made this connection are Pori Park (2009), Jongmyeong Kim (2009), and Namlin Hur (2010).

correlation. In this article, I will explain how enduring social stigmas dictated the course of monastic and lay Buddhism in colonial Korea. I will also look at how Japanese lay Buddhists in colonial Korea seized upon the politics of stigma to change Korean lay Buddhism. One caveat needs to be addressed at this point: I do not intend to suggest that social stigmatism was the only reason why lay Buddhism in colonial Korea struggled to emerge. Rather, this study is aimed at offering an interpretative tool that I believe is essential to better contextualize a dimension of modern Korean Buddhism.

Social Stigma and Korean Buddhism

Korean Buddhism underwent a major paradigm shift at the beginning of the Joseon dynasty (1392–1910) when the state replaced Buddhism with Neo-Confucianism as its state ideology. Although Buddhism was not immediately affected by this change, the Neo-Confucian government soon commenced marginalizing Buddhism in the hopes of reinforcing effective social control in its newly established kingdom. Over the centuries, anti-Buddhist policies were sufficiently systematic to leave a nearly indelible image of monasticism in the public sphere itself. During this period, monastics were stigmatized as deviant, parasitic, superstitious, and heretical. Temples and monastics were driven out of the political, economic, and cultural center of the capital city of Seoul and other major cities and into the mountains (Palais 1996, 27). Simultaneously, the government adopted policies that persistently undercut monastic identity and its symbols. Central and local governments made full use of monastics as corvée laborers or as soldiers to abate the tax burdens of the peasants, thus obscuring and blurring their monastic identities. A significant number of temples were used as military bases, and others became the playgrounds of the *yangban* and targets of extortion. Novices of high caliber were prevented from being ordained. As time went on, monastics largely disappeared from the public scene, except for those who roamed villages and cities begging for alms. Deprived of social and political status, they were instead subject to ridicule and harassment. As a result, monas-

tics were often lumped together with outcasts, such as butchers and shamans (Y. Kim 1986, 156). In this milieu, the traditionally assumed relationship between monastics and laypeople could not be sustained (Jeong 1997, 94); monastics clung to one another with a "ghetto mentality" to survive as a quasi-pariah group.[7]

Of course, as many scholars have argued, the state of Joseon Buddhism was not as moribund as one might imagine. For example, Buddhism during Joseon Korea, as Eun-su Cho (2003, 92-93) rightly argues, was more "vigorous" than previously thought and was "supported by the commoners." Boudewijn Walraven (2007; 2012, 5) also echoes Cho's argument in stating that Joseon Buddhism was still important "in the private lives of people," if "not at an official, public level." In addition, lay Buddhists continued to exist and even to be influential in the scholastic development of Korean Buddhism. Many kings, court ladies, and wives of *yangban* continued to turn to monastics for prayers, to financially support temples, and to find ways to exempt monks from corvée labor (Cho 2003; O 2007; D. Han 2007; Lee 2012). In addition, there were Neo-Confucian officials who studied Buddhism as an intellectual pursuit or practiced it for personal solace, establishing amicable relationships with eminent masters. Most notably, in the late nineteenth century, leading members of the first generation of the Enlightenment Party (Gaehwadang 開化黨) were Buddhist, and they envisioned Buddhism as an alternative to Neo-Confucianism for a new Korea (Cho 2003; S. Han 2006, 11-46).

While recent scholarship has brought to light new perspectives on Joseon Buddhism, these revisions must be put into perspective. Those in power at the court did not challenge the Neo-Confucian government to reconsider its anti-Buddhist policies. In addition, most Confucian intellectuals sympathetic to Buddhism were those who lived either in exile or outside their official positions; thus, they did not have sufficient influence to modify the policies, even had they desired to do so. Their sympathy for

7. I borrow the term from James Huntley Grayson's (2006) article on Korean Catholics who, as a result of harsh persecution in the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century in Korea, developed a *ghetto mentality* and remained marginalized until the 1960s. .

monastics involved simply describing their plight, without taking any concrete action to change their circumstances. Even those *yangban* in power who were Buddhist had to maintain their faith "in private" (Walraven 2012, 6), fearing the ramifications in case their secret was revealed. Overall, these Buddhist sympathizers generally held the same disdainful view of monks as their fellow *yangban*; even the Enlightenment Party members in the 1880s and 1890s, some of whom were Buddhist themselves, made no collective effort to change the policies on Buddhism when they had the power to do so. These cases, among many others, attest to the social structure in which the anti-Buddhist policies were embedded and made routine to a point at which everyone, including Buddhists themselves, took for granted the marginalization of the clergy. The traditional lay-monastic structure was deeply tarnished, and the monastic community survived without any strong presence of lay parishioners.

The institutionalized stigmatization of monastics carried over to the early twentieth century during the rapid disintegration of Neo-Confucian society and politics. However, when Japanese Buddhists, who were key players in Korean politics at the time, pressured the Korean government to permit monastics to reenter inside the four gates of Seoul, Korean officials did not relent, and arrested monks caught trespassing inside the gates. For example, a Korean monk, Muje Singwang, was arrested at the gates in 1899, investigated, and denied access (*Dongnip sinmun*, February 17, 18, 1899). The assassination of the Enlightenment Party monk Yi Dong-in (1850?–1881), who frequented the palace to work for the king, provides evidence that Confucian officials were unwilling to recognize monks as rightful members of society (G. Yi 1985, 486). A Japanese Jodoshinshu Buddhist missionary witnessed two *yangban* treating a Korean monk "like a slave" (Okumura 1878). A leading Korean nationalist, Kim Gu (1876–1949), was subject to harassment by *yangban* and commoners when he was a monk (Do 2002, 156-165). After the end of Joseon rule in 1910, the Neo-Confucian social and political worldview was still slow to disappear from the minds of Koreans. The stigmatization of monastics persisted, even though Japanese colonial authorities instituted policies favorable to and protective of Korean Buddhism as a means to effectively rule Korea.

Lay Buddhists and Associations in Colonial Korea

I am not suggesting that during the colonial period there were no noticeable lay leaders and lay organizations, or that monastics made no effort to reach out to people. As in other Asian countries, modern Korean Buddhism witnessed the rise of several lay associations and various reforms to develop modern lay Buddhism. However, the lay associations were short-lived and the monastics' hopes did not materialize. The perception that monks were of a lower class was a crucial factor, and this lingering stigma prevented monks from interacting effectively with the Korean populace. Similarly, lay Buddhists found no benefits in associating with monastics, who they perceived as lacking social and political influence. As a result, the lay Buddhist leaders and assemblies active in the cause of their faith were few and insignificant compared to those in Japanese, Chinese, and Sri Lankan Buddhism.[8] With the exception of a few leaders, such as Yi Neung-hwa, lay Buddhist leaders were passive; other than making scholarly contributions,[9] albeit still a crucial feature for the monasticization of the laity, they did not exhibit any significant leadership in lay organiza-

8. The following are some of the representative works that directly and indirectly deal with the increased roles of lay Buddhism in modern Asia. For modern Japanese lay Buddhism, see Ikeda (1998); for Chinese lay Buddhism, refer to Pittman (2001) and Tarocco (2007).

9. There were a score of lay Buddhists and Buddhist sympathizers who contributed to scholarly aspects of modern Korean Buddhism. The most representative were Yi Neung-hwa, Choe Nam-seon, Jeong In-bo, and Yi Gwang-su, who were also leading intellectuals in colonial Korea (they were friends and collaborated on a number of projects). Their most visible contribution to Korean Buddhism was scholarly work. Yi Neung-hwa wrote a masterpiece entitled *Joseon bulgyo tongsa* (A Comprehensive History of Korean Buddhism) (1918), which was the first scientific study of the subject. In terms of influence on the identity of Korean Buddhism, Choe superseded all other Buddhists, developing the discourse of characterizing Korean Buddhism as a "comprehensive Buddhism," encompassing all different strands of Buddhism, thus presenting it as the figurehead of world Buddhism. As an historian, Jeong taught Korean monks at the central Buddhist seminary. Yi Gwang-su, a relative of a prominent Korean monk, originally a follower of Cheondogyo (Religion of the Heavenly Way), later converted to Christianity, and finally became a Buddhist. He produced poems, novels, and other works on Buddhist themes that reflected his personal belief in Buddhism.

tions or monastic communities, as often seen in China and Japan.

Yi Neung-hwa was an exception. The most prominent lay Buddhist scholar of colonial Korea, he worked closely with monastics and participated in the tumultuous development of Korean Buddhist institutions (Yang 1993, 45-65). He served as chief editor of a journal of Korean Buddhism over several years.[10] He also established three lay associations, starting with the Joseon Bulgyo Jinheunghoe (Joseon Association for the Promotion of Buddhism) in 1914. With the support of the colonial authority, dozens of Korean aristocrats participated in the association, held public events, and managed to establish several local branches with a couple of hundred members. The monk-scholar Kwon Sang-no (1879–1965) hailed the lay members of this association in an article as "truly responsible for the revitalization of Buddhism."[11] This first lay association was unsuccessful, however, due to discord among monks and passivity among lay members (*Maeil Sinbo*, February 23, 1917). It was revamped in 1917 with a new name, Bulgyo Onghohoe (Association for the Support of Buddhism). This time, more lay members, including Japanese lay Buddhists, joined. The renaming was partly a result of the colonial authority's pressure on the Korean Buddhist institutions to create a purely lay Buddhist organization for Korean Buddhism (*Maeil Sinbo*, February 23, 1917; *Dongnip Sinmun*, October 7, 1919). Korean monastic leaders were not enthusiastic, however, and most of the members were not deeply committed to Buddhism; so passivity prevailed again. In 1922, this association was renamed Bulgyo Hyeopseonghoe (Buddhist Cooperative Association), but was soon disbanded after little activity. In the meantime, in 1920, Yi Neung-hwa, with other monastic and lay Buddhists, established the Joseon Bulgyohoe (Society of Korean Buddhism) to promote lay Buddhism. After some initial successes, its activities also decreased. Multiple chapters of the Cheongnyeon Bulgyodo Yeonmaeng (Young Men's Bud-

10. His work for Korean Buddhism goes back to 1906 when he taught at a Buddhist school as its headmaster (J. Yi 2007, 168).

11. "Joseon bulgyo-wa jedae geosa" (Korean Buddhism and All Lay Buddhists), *Joseon bulgyo jinheunghoe wolbo* (Monthly of the Joseon Association for the Promotion of Buddhism) 5 (1915): 18.

dhist Association, hereafter, YMBA) were also established in the 1920s, but their membership was not impressive and their events were trivial and operated ineffectively (Kwon 1926, 5). Yi's involvement in these institutions began to wane in the 1920s; his scholarly work on Buddhism, produced in large quantity during the 1910s, also dwindled as his scholarly attention turned to non-Buddhist topics for the remainder of the colonial era.

The causes of these associations' lack of success are manifold. Limited resources were one factor. The politicization of the associations was another. For example, the colonial authorities supported associations with members who were pro-Japanese[12]—those that played a key role in the annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910. With the shift of the state's policy toward greater conciliation with Buddhism, such people may have considered Buddhism a "privileged religion" and joined the associations for this reason (P. Park 2009, 9). Nevertheless, the political agendas of the colonial authorities and the passivity of the associations' members prevented the groups from energizing.

There was another, more fundamental cause for the lack of success of the lay associations, however. Despite the changed institutional status of Korean Buddhism in colonial Korea, the relationship between monastics and lay members in these associations remained quite tenuous and there was little substantial interaction. The relationship can be characterized as an uncomfortable alliance. Part of the distust may be ascribed to the negative image of monastics in the eyes of laypeople, combined with the monastics' lack of confidence.

Persistent Perception of Monastics as Low Class

That Korean monks had been socially stigmatized during the Joseon dynasty was taken for granted by people in colonial Korea, and this understanding became one of the most powerful hermeneutics for making sense

12. They include Bak Yeong-hyo, Yi Wan-yong (1858–1926), and Kwon Jung-hyeon (1854–1934).

of all the structural problems that modern Korean Buddhism faced.

Like non-Buddhist Koreans, lay Buddhists unanimously agreed that Korean monastics' social status was low as a result of the long-standing suppression of Buddhism during the previous dynasty. Nevertheless, they also criticized monastics for having been unsuccessful in regaining their legitimate status in spite of their stigmatization. This derogatory attitude of Buddhist laypeople toward monastics was compounded by monastics' widespread practices of taking wives, growing their hair, and wearing Western suits. Of course, there were both laypeople and monastics who considered these practices, especially marriage, as necessary to enable monks to move down from the mountains to the cities. But the majority of laypeople, who still considered celibacy as the norm for monastics, did not see this extreme form of laicization as beneficial. They continued to view monastics as socially marginal and ill-equipped to teach laity, which was one of the biggest hindrances to the revitalization of Korean Buddhism.

A plethora of examples of this perception are found in newspapers and Buddhist journals during the colonial period. For example, Yi Neunghwa (1927, 11) admitted, albeit cautiously, that Koreans still "to some extent" harbored anti-Buddhist sentiment toward monastics. Frustrated by the incompetence of Korean monks in modernizing Buddhism, another lay Buddhist was more direct: "They [monastics] are extremely pathetic" and "there is no hope" (B. Kim 1927a, 24).

Even when lay Buddhists denied the low social status of Korean monks, their arguments betray the pervasiveness of the belittling perception of monastics in Korean society. In one article, a lay Buddhist expressed his "tearful sympathy" for the "unwarranted discrimination" that Korean monks had endured during the Joseon dynasty. But he chastised monastics for not having resisted anti-Buddhist policies at the time and for having "just taken it for granted that they were treated as socially low." He also wrote, "They themselves partially asked for it." Hence, he suggested that monks should obtain a social status "like [Martin] Luther did" (M. Kim 1920, 23-27). His comments highlight the discrimination that monks continued to face in colonial Korea. Another lay Buddhist acknowledged the harshness of his own assessment of Korean monks: "If I say it like this,

people will surely point out that I despise Korean monks too much" (B. Kim 1927b, 24).

This rhetoric of monks' low social status was so pervasive among people, whether they were Buddhists or non-Buddhists, or Japanese or Western missionaries, that monks were reminded constantly of their stigmatism. Thus, one of the most pressing issues for Korean monastics during the colonial period was how to get rid of the centuries-old, negative stereotype imposed upon them.

Eradicating Social Stigmatism as a Priority

Korean Buddhist monastic leaders understood how demeaned they were by society. Han Yong-un (1879–1944), for example, in his 1913 "Treatise on Buddhist Reforms" wrote, "Everyone in Korea regards monks on the same level as cows, horses or slaves, without feeling even a grain of pity toward them." And he admitted, "[T]he monks accept this, as if it were their natural status." Thus, he went so far as to say that recovering monks' social status would be equivalent to reclaiming their "natural human rights" (Tikhonov and Miller 2008, 99-102). His reform initiatives, including the education of monastics, the centralization of Korean Buddhism, propagation, and even monastic marriage, were aimed at upending monastics' low social standing.

Unlike Han, who ranked monks on par with slaves, Kwon, in an article he wrote in the 1920s, vehemently rejected the theory that monks were one of the seven outcasts.[13] Yet, the fact that a leading monk-intellectual such as Kwon had to refute this theory shows how deeply ingrained the belief was in colonial Korea. Kwon supported his argument by referring to Joseon legal documents, which did not include monks in this category; however, one could argue that unofficially monks in Joseon society were

13. The seven outcasts are butchers, monks, shamans, puppeteers, coffin carriers, artisans, and *gisaeng* (female entertainers). In his 1924 article, Kwon (1924, 43-47) made a similar argument against a Japanese lay Buddhist's demeaning essay on Korean monks.

treated as if they were part of this category. Just as did the aforementioned lay Buddhists, however, Kwon (1920, 14) undermines his earlier point by suggesting in the same article that it will be impossible to revitalize the social status of monks without education. Even more telling is his acknowledgement in a different article that the unfortunate fate of Korean Buddhism during the Joseon dynasty was "unprecedented in Buddhist history, not to mention in any country of the world."[14] Two Korean monks, Kim Sang-suk and Kim Chang-hae, also agreed that the most urgent matter for Korean Buddhism was to "enhance monks' social status," or, in other words, their natural human rights. Both reasoned that the biggest hindrance to propagation was the centuries-old habit of scorning monks, which was such a norm in people's minds that they treated even prominent monks as inferior (*Maeil Sinbo*, February 22, 1920). Another monk echoed the same social perception of monks, writing, "Korean people have developed a consciousness that has disrespected monks for five hundred years," and then bemoaned the fact that Koreans always "see monks through colored glasses" (Gaya 1926a, 34), i.e., perceptions that belittled them. Kim Chang-hae even suggested that, among many measures to be taken to rectify this problem, working together with the more socially respected Japanese Buddhists would be essential (*Maeil Sinbo*, February 22, 1920).

Yet the very programs aimed at improving the social status of monastics were stifled by the internalization of stigmatism in the consciousness of monastics themselves. This pariah consciousness[15] continued to plague monks' behaviors and thoughts, and compelled them consciously and unconsciously to obfuscate their monastic identity in the public sphere. In other words, much of the reform program ended up enabling the conceal-

14. Kwon Sang-no, "Joseon bulgyosa gaeseol" (An Outline of the History of Korean Buddhism), *Bulgyo Sibo*, July 1, 1938.

15. Max Weber used the sociological concept of "pariah status" to explain how the political, economic, and social rights of Jews in the Christian world and outcasts in India were systematically usurped, and at the same time how they internalized their pariah status by not interacting with outsiders beyond their respective community boundaries (see Weber [1922] 1993, 109).

ment of their monastic identity. This concealment was a stratagem to evade the disapproving gaze of the populace, a tactic that became readily available in colonial Korea.

Double Identity as Both a Monastic and a Layman

Among the reform programs, education, as mentioned earlier, was priority among many monastics, because equipping young monks with modern knowledge and skills would be crucial to implementing all other programs.[16] To promote modern education for young monks, a seminary was established in each major monastery; selected monks were later sent to the central seminary in Seoul for higher education. Studying abroad was another venue through which monastics could gain academic credentials, and a significant number of monks studied in Japan, China, Sri Lanka, and Europe.

Yet these elite monks, especially those who studied abroad, often did not study Buddhism; instead, they tended to study secular disciplines, such as law, philosophy, business, and literature. Although the diversification of their studies to non-Buddhist topics was a sign of Buddhist modernity, many of them deliberately avoided studying Buddhist-related disciplines. In addition, those monks who studied in Japan frequently shed their monastic identity and opted for the lay life, either during their studies, or as soon as they returned to Korea (Gaya 1926b, 31). Those who married, but decided to remain monks, had to find a way to accommodate their conflicting identities of being celibate and married. Juggling these two identities was not an entirely new concept to them because their monastic forbearers had lived a semi-monastic, semi-lay life during the Joseon era as soldiers, corvée laborers, or the like. During the colonial period, this ambiguous identity of monastics, which one Korean monk referred to as a

16. For example, Han in his 1913 treatise wrote, "Why should the sangha be like this, unable to catch up with everyone else? Those who have a mouth reply unanimously that the reason is the lack of education" (Tikhonov and Miller 2008, 78).

"deformed lifestyle" (Mongjeongsaeng 1932, 25), persisted in a different form and context; for example, monks who were students commonly wore student uniforms and grew their hair out. This practice was clearly in keeping with modern trends in colonial Korea, but it also grew out of a lack of self-esteem, a hesitance to present their monastic appearance in public. A period newspaper editorial attests to this point: "Korean monks feel ashamed of their monastic identity and, in order to hide it, wear lay clothes and rush to turn themselves into a complete layperson" (*Maeil Sinbo*, May 18, 1919). As the practice of concealment blurred the line between monastic and lay identity, it made contact with laywomen routine, leading easily to romantic relationships. In this light, monastic marriage was a natural result of the concealment of monastic identity.

Those who decided to remain monks after their secular education in Seoul and abroad had to compete with those who had not received such an education. The latter were dominant, however, because they were in charge of the 31 head temples across the country, and some 1,200 local temples. Threatened by monks armed with modern education, the incumbents of these temples lambasted them and those who had supported their education as betrayers of the temples. They charged that these elite monks used education as an avenue for marriage and personal gain (Namhaesaeng 1926, 21). By contrast, elite monks charged the incumbents with being ignorant, premodern, and self-interested. As some of the educated monks took up salaried administrative positions at temples, the animosity between the two groups intensified. Although the salaries were meager in terms of supporting families, the married monks settled in the temples of cities or villages, and visited their families, who did not live at the temples, in disguise.

Interestingly, the incumbents critical of these young monks took a similar path. Not only did they marry, they also wore Western suits when they went outside of their temple complexes. A case in point was Yi Hoegwang (1862–1933), the Korean Buddhist leader and abbot of Haeinsa, one of the largest temples in Korea. Although unmarried, he donned lay suits and put on a hat to conceal his shaved head when he visited Seoul; he did not stay at a temple but at the house of his lay supporter, a former lady of

the court Cheonilcheong (*Maeil Sinbo*, March 26, 1921). His high administrative rank in the Buddhist institutional hierarchy and extensive network of relationships with the colonial government were not enough to shield him from the derogatory gaze of people unaccustomed to seeing monks in cities. This was also true with many other incumbents of temples. Some monks ignored proper dress codes even inside the temple complex. One newspaper editorial laments, "Witnessing monks in appropriate robes and appearance is more difficult than searching for a star in the daylight" (*Maeil Sinbo*, March 26, 1921). Lay appearance was so common among monks that in 1937 the colonial government intervened and promulgated that all Korean monks, including student monks at the Buddhist seminary in Seoul, should dress in monastic robes both inside and outside of temples (*Bulgyo Sibo*, June 1, 1937).[17]

To some extent, Korean monks' lay appearance in public can be deemed an imitation of Japanese Buddhist priests, who already practiced clerical marriage and often wore Western suits while off-duty. Korean monks were also fond of Japanese priests' elaborate robes and ordered expensive robes from Kyoto.[18] Donning Japanese priestly robes that seemed socially acceptable and even revered was another tactic of destigmatization or, according to Goffman, "concealment" of their social identity. The motivational differences for these practices ran deep, however. Japanese priests did not put on Western suits to conceal their identity or out of fear of harassment; their parishioners were cognizant of the practice and did not consider it a huge problem. Clerical marriage was the norm in Japan at this time, albeit still controversial (Jaffe 2001). In contrast, Korean monks feared that their social relations would often be compromised if they appeared in Buddhist robes. Korean monks married, in part, to create a space in which they could feel included as normal. Thus,

17. One newspaper editorial also stated, "Monks should not wear Western suits like laypersons and should always put on robes, even while travelling" (*Maeil Sinbo*, July 7, 1919).

18. "Hwibo" (Bulletin), *Joseon bulgyo jinheunghoe wolbo* 4 (June 1915): 71. In his discussion with the abbots of the 30 head temples, the governor of Gyeonggi-do province pretended that the purchase of expensive robes was a rumor, but warned explicitly that it should cease.

the Korean monks' case can be seen as a sign of unconscious conformity to and internalization of the long-term stigmatization of monks in Korean society. The monk-scholar Kwon (1944, 17) deplored this phenomenon, explaining that the internalization of a negative identity had become "their second nature," to the extent that they could not see it clearly and that it led to the "paralyzation" of their critical thinking.

I am not denying that clerical marriage was proposed by some monastic and lay Buddhists as part of Buddhist modernity in order to increase the social involvement of monks and to make Buddhism more relevant to the populace. While this was surely one of the driving forces in the case of Korean Buddhism, the unique situation in Korea should be taken into consideration as a crucial factor. Monastic marriage became so prevalent, even among incumbents of the 31 head temples, that in 1926, the incumbents petitioned the colonial government to legalize the practice. They asserted that this lifestyle would not hinder their religious work and would be more desirable in modern society. At the end of the colonial era, it is estimated that there were about 300 celibate monks out of 6,000, hence more than 90 percent of Korean monks were married (G. Kim 2007, 400).

In sum, we see a chain of causes. Monastics carried the burden of their stigma from the Joseon dynasty into the modern period. As they came down from the mountains into the cities, they concealed their identity to become more socially acceptable. They further sought a secular education to elevate their status. Both of these scenarios led to increased contact with laywomen, resulting in marriages. Marriage caused monastics to become paradoxically insulated in their own social groups and less socially involved with laypeople. These practices worked as an additional shackle for them, in addition to the ones they had inherited from the previous dynasty. Their marriages and lay appearances forced them and their families to be more secretive and more passive about their religious identities. They became increasingly diffident about working with laypeople. Frustrated by this chain of events, the leading Japanese Buddhist scholar in colonial Korea, Takahashi Toru (1878–1967), accused the Korean monks of "liv[ing] completely like laypeople," and he demanded that now they

should be driven "from the laity back to home-renouncing monks" and from cities "back to the mountains," reversing his earlier slogan that the Korean monks should move "from the mountains into cities and from home-renouncing monk to laity" (Takahashi 1933, 25). Thus, while the stigmas inflicted upon monks during the Joseon dynasty were forced upon them from the outside, these new stigmas were self-imposed. Their constricted social boundaries effectively undermined their outspoken reform programs.

Monastic-Centered Reforms

The net effect of this condition was that monastic reformers turned their attention from the promotion of lay Buddhism to the resolution of their own institutional issues, which was inevitable. For example, to support a family, a married monk had to find a source of income from temples, as other sources of income were hard to obtain without abjuring the monastic life. Thus, married monks siphoned off money from the already strained temple funds. Fights over limited temple financial resources, most of which were generated from land tenancy and logging income, became fierce. Buddhist reform programs began to revolve around the control of temple properties. From the second half of the colonial period, Buddhist initiatives were predominantly monastic-centered, with little room for lay Buddhists (Hur 2010, 93). Lay Buddhist leaders, including Yi Neung-hwa, were gradually excluded from domestic and international Buddhist conferences, which became increasingly dominated by the monastics, a trend that also occured with young Buddhist and other associations established in the 1920s. In an article entitled "Revitalize the Youth Movement of Korean Buddhism!" Han Yong-un, deploring the lack of young Buddhists in Korean Buddhism, extolled the YMBAs that he established, calling them the pillar and future of Korean Buddhism (Y. Han 1938, 2-5). The Buddhist youths to whom he was referring were overwhelmingly monastics, however; there was no visible emphasis on lay Buddhism in his organizational vision. Kwon (1926, 2-5), after attending

the East-Asian Buddhist Conference in Tokyo in 1925, Buddhist existence of YMBAs in East Asia; he noted that there were many active YMBAs in Japan and China, but he lamented the near non-existence of similar lay associations in Korea. In fact, while more than half of 21 delegates from China and nine from Taiwan were lay leaders, all three from Korea were monastics (*Chugai Nippo*, November 2, 1915).

The monastic-centered YMBAs in Korea were concerned not so much with the propagation of Buddhism as with the renovation of the institution of Korean Buddhism. Their preoccupation was to challenge prerogatives and mismanagement of power by the incumbents of the head temples (*Dong-A Ilbo*, December 15, 1921). Korean Buddhism in the colonial era was dominated by the two monastic factions, both married, that were vying for institutional control: the monks in power and those on the margins, with one side comprising older, conservative monks and the other younger, reform-minded ones. In this environment, there was little ground where lay Buddhists, numerically few to begin with, could play a leading role.

Japanese Lay Buddhism and the Politics of Stigmatization

The efforts to strengthen lay Buddhism came from the Japanese side. In 1920, in collaboration with their Korean counterparts, Japanese lay Buddhists established the most influential, long-lasting lay organization of the colonial period, Chosen Bukkyodan (Association of Korean Buddhism). Although the association promoted the assimilation policy of the colonial government (S. Kim 1995, 125-148), it managed to muster a large number of lay and monastic supporters from both countries and succeeded in establishing a nationwide network, the first of its kind. The association was successful enough to be, at one point, considered a major threat to the Korean Buddhist institutions, as people often mistook it for being representative of all of Korean Buddhism (Jiil 1925, 6). This mistake is understandable in that, first, the association absorbed most Korean lay Buddhists from previous lay associations under its umbrella, thus overshad-

owing those associations and that, second, it acted as the key organizer for mass propagation drives and the annual Buddha's birthday festival, involving both Korean and Japanese Buddhists.

A central objective in establishing this association, as one of the founding lay Buddhist leaders Nakamura Kentaro (1883–?) asserted, was to elevate the social status of Korean monks. In an editorial in the first journal of the association, he wrote that "Korean monks . . . even abbots of the head temples . . . dislike wearing robes" because "monks were considered low-class people" (Nakamura 1924, 2). Although this comment was part of the hackneyed rhetoric employed by Japanese Buddhists to rationalize Korean monks' seeking the support of Japanese Buddhism, it did not deviate much from what Korean Buddhists had said of themselves.

One of the programs that the association launched in collaboration with the Japanese Buddhist sects in imperial Japan was to select prominent Korean monks and send them to Japan to train to be effective missionaries in Korea; however, this program met with a series of difficulties. They soon switched to selecting young lay Koreans instead. The Japanese Buddhist sects that financially supported these students expected them to be ordained as Japanese priests, but the students were unwilling to do so out of fear of being denounced as collaborators by Koreans, and also because they would be discredited in Korea simply by becoming Buddhist monks. These disparities of vision and expectation created tension between the Japanese sects and the association, which had to explain the unique situation of the social status of monks in Korean society to the sects in Japan, adding that the Korean students should remain lay Buddhists because becoming a monk would damage their family reputations (*Chugai Nippo*, February 7, 1927).

Another program that the association implemented was to invite prominent Korean monks and Japanese priests for dharma talks in the presence of socially, economically, and politically influential laypeople. The Korean lay leader of the association, Yi Won-seok, articulated the objective of the program: "If there are faithful lay leaders in Buddhism, I believe it won't be difficult for Buddhism to be as revitalized as it was in

Silla and Goryeo" (*Maeil Sinbo*, November 18, 1921). The program was intended to improve the public image of Korean monks and to inculcate in Korean people respect for, and the habit of showing respect to, monastics. Although this program had limited success, it is clear that the members of the association were willing to become engaged with the issues involving the stigmatism of monks as a means of promoting lay Buddhism.

However, after initial success, the association's leadership was gradually dominated by Japanese lay Buddhists so that, as a joint Korean-Japanese organization, the association largely lost its significance. As a result, many ambitious programs did not materialize. Nevertheless, the fact that there were quite a few Korean lay Buddhists who joined the association in its early stages was evidence of two important points. First, the participation of lay Koreans showed that there were indeed those who wished to take up leadership positions to promote Buddhism; second, lay Koreans felt that they could accomplish more by associating with the socially, politically, and economically influential Japanese than with the disadvantaged monastics of their own country.

Conclusion

A stigma is a social construction of a specific human relation, reality, and historical circumstance; it does not have fixed attributes and symbols, and is subject to change (O'Brien 1997, 307). In Korea, this change was driven partly by the sheer length of time that passed after the end of the Neo-Confucian policy on Buddhism and by the relatively pro-Buddhist policy of the colonial government. Postcolonial Korean Buddhism has developed in a new political, economic, and religious landscape radically different from that of colonial Korea. For example, the anticommunist discourse of postcolonial South Korea necessitated the support of Korean monastics, which reasserted their roles as social leaders. The stigma symbols imposed on Korean monastics have, to a great degree, gradually turned into what Goffman (1963, 43-44) called "prestige symbols," signs of

the recovery that monastics desired. Nevertheless, the monastic-centered development of Korean Buddhism leading to the marginalization of lay Buddhists persisted into postcolonial Korea and, to a certain degree, exists even today.[19] Contemporary Korean monastics are still positioned between lay and monastic status, and want to play the roles of monastic and layman simultaneously, leaving little room for laypeople. As such, the laicization of monastics continues to overshadow the monasticization of laity. There was a movement by a group of Korean monks at Bongamsa temple in 1947 to "de-laicize" and thus "re-traditionalize" Korean monastics. However, it had limited success (Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism 2008, 50). At the time of this writing, a number of lay assemblies are operating in Korea, but their roles in influencing the monastic institution are restricted. It is still too early to say that lay leadership is firmly established in Korea, and the reasons trace to the enduring legacy of Joseon and colonial Buddhism.

Of course, I am not suggesting that lay Buddhism has failed to play a role in modern Korea. Yet, more studies must be done, with specific, convincing cases, and from multifaceted perspectives. Although for the sake of argument, this article used the term "laity" to refer to male Buddhist leaders, lay Buddhist women (and also nuns) were an indispensible force in the development of colonial Korean Buddhism.[20] For example, the Buddhist Women's Association established in 1920 was the first of its kind. However, its role, reflective of the role of women in a patriarchic society, was limited to financially supporting temples, and some parochial involvement in the propagation of Buddhism and Buddhist institutions. The social status of laywomen (and nuns) was as bad as or even worse than that of monks. Women's contributions to modern Korean Buddhism should be recognized and further explored, but it is difficult to find noticeable examples in which female, and particularly lay female, Buddhists had the opportunity to exercise significant leadership in the development of modern Buddhism, espe-

19. By the term "Korean Buddhism," I refer to the Buddhist sects that are the direct offshoots of the Buddhist institution in colonial Korea.

20. For the roles of nuns and laywomen, see G. Kim (1998, 17-49), J. Park (2009), and Cho (2011).

cially during the colonial period (G. Kim 1998, 17-49).

For this reason, the case of lay Buddhism in colonial Korea informs us, first, of how the institutionalized and routine stigmatization of a community can develop into pervasive social knowledge that deeply influences the relationships between members of that community and others in the same society. Second, the scenario of lay Buddhism in colonial Korea provides us with an explanation for why the development of modern lay Buddhism in Asia manifested itself differently by region and country according to variations in local situations. Third, and last, this unique history of lay Buddhism in the context of colonialism demands a more nuanced understanding of the relationships among Korean and Japanese Buddhists, colonial authorities, and the Korean populace during this period.

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