Beyond the "Nation-Protecting" Paradigm: Recent Trends in the Historical Studies of Korean Buddhism

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This paper is focused on the recent Western scholarship on the history of Korean Buddhism, and attempts to explain why Western scholars questioned the dominant paradigm of understanding Korean Buddhism as an expression of the "nation-protecting" tradition. This paper's initial part is devoted to the historicization of scholarship on Korean Buddhism. It develops the argument that the "nation-protecting" paradigm evolved in Meiji Japan, and was subsequently imported to Korea by Japanese scholars, engaged in the production of "knowledge" about Korean Buddhism. Japanese Buddhist scholarship emphasized the Sino-centric nature of Korean Buddhism. The Korean scholars of Buddhism in the late colonial and postcolonial eras uncritically inherited the Japanese theoretical model of "nation-protecting" Buddhism, and it was not until the late 1980's, the years marked by the growing momentum of radicalism, that some young Buddhist monks and scholars of Korean Buddhism questioned this paradigm and proposed an alternative "*minjung*" perspective to understand Korean Buddhism. This paper places scholarship on Korean Buddhism within the context of these significant developments, and proceeds to discuss Western intervention in the debate in the 1980s. Western scholars revealed the nationalist passion that underpinned major writings on Korean Buddhism, and more specifically they chose to attack "nation-protecting" projects for their weak conceptual foundation. This paper also takes up a few relevant Western studies to demonstrate in what ways they differed in terms of approach and methodology from the existing "nation-protecting" parameter of understanding the history of Korean Buddhism.

Keywords: Korean Buddhism, nation-protecting tradition, kingship and Buddhism, Japanese colonialism, Western studies on Korean Buddhism

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The systematic academic study of Buddhism in the West can be traced to the beginning of the nineteenth century.[1] Korean Buddhism, however, continued to remain "a well-kept secret"[2] until the twilight years of the twentieth century. Beginning with the late seventies, a glimmer of interest in Korean Buddhism was visible in the United States, and though the research carried out in U.S. universities made a significant contribution to our understanding of Korean Buddhism, it reminded us how woefully little interest the West had evinced in Korea's cultural and religious past. U.S.-based research on Korean Buddhism in the 1980s was focused mostly on the exegesis of Buddhist philosophy and texts although some works were also done during this period on the historical dimensions of Korean Buddhism.[3] One may cite a very well-informed essay by Robert E. Buswell which forms the introductory chapter of his *Complete Works of Chinul*, the research of anthropologist James Grayson, studies on Baekje Buddhism by Jonathan Best, and a meticulous doctoral work on monk-soldiers during the Hideyoshi invasion by Kim Samuel Dukhae (Grayson 1985; Buswell 1983; Kim Samuel Dukhae 1978; Best 1982). Australasia or Europe-based scholars were hardly visible on the intellectual landscape of Korean Buddhism until the late 1980s.

The late 1980s is also characterized by the spirit of restlessness and intense retrospection. During this period the powerful *minjung* movement questioned the Orientalist legacies of Korean Buddhism and explored new paradigms of understanding. The emergence of scholars from Europe and Australia on the map of Korean Buddhism doubtless added range and richness to the field. It is also interesting that the younger scholars of Korean Buddhism in Korea and overseas shared a common agenda of rescuing Korean Buddhism from the nationalist intellectual tradition known as the "nation-protecting" paradigm. This paper attempts to take up some of the recent European and Australasian studies on Korean Buddhism as examples to demonstrate how their basic parameter of understanding reflected a new mood. However, in order to understand and

1. J. W. de Jong has critically examined the entire gamut of scholarship on Buddhism in his short work of 1987. This paper is limited in its scope, as it is confined only to the works that address socio-political aspects of Korean Buddhism. The relevant works by US-based scholars have been omitted because this special volume of the journal exclusively discusses the achievements of American scholars.
2. I have borrowed this expression from Professor Robert Buswell, Jr.'s Fall 1989 paper (p. 14).
3. Notable contributions to the field of Korean Buddhism during this period were made by Lewis R. Lancaster, Sung-bae Park, Robert E. Buswell, Jr., and Keel Hee-sung and Shim Chae-ryong.

appreciate their criticism of the legacy of "nation-protecting" intellectual framework, it is important to look carefully at the historical forces that shaped and nurtured it for about a century. After all, this "received wisdom" constituted the major challenge to the scholars of the history of Korean Buddhism.

The Legacy of the "Nation-Protecting" Paradigm of Korean Buddhism

The modern study of Korean Buddhism is inextricably related with the specific realities of the political history of modern Korea. Persecuted by the rulers of the Joseon dynasty for about five centuries, Korean Buddhism found in the leaders of Meiji Japan the hope of salvation and the source of regeneration. It is worthy of note that soon after the conclusion of the Ganghwa Treaty in 1876, several Japanese Buddhist sects were transplanted on the Korean soil, and it was due to the intervention of Japan that restrictions on Buddhist monks to enter the walled city of Seoul was rescinded by the court of Joseon. And it is also remarkable that Japanese Buddhism, the role-model of Korean Buddhism during the Meiji era, was engaged at the time in a fierce struggle to redefine its identity in a changed Shinto-centered universe. Buddhism had to respond to a vicious campaign of "*haibutsu kishaku*" (reject Buddhism and expel the monks), whose strength was derived from the belief that Buddhism was incompatible with the Japanese national character because of its alien origin.

Subsequently, during the era of colonial occupation, such Japanese scholars as Takahashi Toru and Nukariya Kaiten who took up systematic research on Korean Buddhism sought to use knowledge about Korea's cultural past to meet the political imperatives of Japan. And although the construction of Korea's cultural past was mostly attempted during this period by Japanese scholars, a handful of Korean scholars who wrote on Buddhism were inspired more by evangelical zeal to rejuvenate Buddhism as a vibrant faith of the people than by the need to apply academic rigor to the history of Korean Buddhism. For instance, Yi Neung-hwa, a pioneer scholar whose voluminous work *Joseon bulgyosa* (History of Korean Buddhism) represented the first systematic history of Korean Buddhism confessed in his preface: "Though this work has been written in the form of a history, this is combined with the purpose of religious evangelism" (Yi Neung-hwa 1918: 1; Kim Yong-ho 1994). Indeed the major task faced by Korean Buddhist intellectuals during the colonial era was to inject strength into

Buddhism's moribund body and preserve it from the Japanese attempt at assimilation. Yi Neung-hwa echoes this objective in his work:

> Thus the dharma of *wu-wei* enunciated in the Western regions reached the destined land in the East. The Diamond Mountain became the abode of Bodhisattvas and the *Tripitakas* of Haein (temple) became the dharma-treasure of the World. There were numerous meditation masters and dharma monks who achieved enlightenment and innumerable kings and ministers who protected the dharma. (Yi Neung-hwa 1918)

It is obvious that the framework of "nation-protecting" tradition to analyze the history of Buddhism was systematized in Japan within a specific historical context. Facing ceaseless challenges from Shinto-based nationalists, the Buddhist scholars of the Meiji era published such long polemical treatises as *Bukkyo katsuron joron* (Prefatory Remarks on the Revitalization of Buddhism by Inoue Enryo, 1887) and *Bukkyo ikkan ron* (Essay on the Consistency of Buddhism by Murakami Sensho) which emphasized the *gokoku* (nation-protecting) spirit of the Japanese Buddhist tradition and sought to appropriate and establish nationalism as an essential component in the history of Buddhism in Japan (Staggs 1979).[4] The new Buddhism of Japan which was conceived and cradled in such a jingoistic milieu could not but form two major characteristics--the significance of Buddhism as a spiritual prop of the state and a myopic Japan-centered view of the Buddhist world.

The significance of Buddhism as a conduit of the interests of the state is evident in the close collaboration between Japanese Buddhist sects and the expansionist and imperialist forces of Meiji Japan. Soon after Japan imposed the Ganghwa Treaty of 1876 on the Joseon dynasty, the Otani sect became active in Korea as an ideological underpinning of Japan's imperialist penetration into Korea (Choe Byeong-heon 1993: 452-53).[5] By the 1890s, when the Sino-

4. Kathleen M. Staggs in her 1979 Ph.D. dissertation has provided a detailed introduction and complete translation of these two texts. Also see her 1983 work. Other important studies on Meiji Buddhism are by James Edward Ketelaar (1990) and Ienaga Saburo et al. (1967: 251-392), of which the section on Modern Buddhism is particularly relevant.

5. Choe Byeong-heon has discussed some aspects of the challenges posed by the agreement to assimilate the Korean Won sect within the Soto Zen sect and the opposition movement launched by Han Yong-un. See his 1993 work.

Japanese War broke out, Buddhist sects armed themselves with militant ideological ammunition in order to overcome the increasingly aggressive attacks launched by Shintoists. Tanaka Chigaku, for instance, invoked the memory of the 13th century militant monk Nichiren and raised such slogans as "Let's carry out only actions of aggressive thought" and "Let's rather say that the Lotus Sutra is the sword" (Staggs 1979: 343). Other Buddhist leaders raised equally spirited slogans relating to the revival of the time-honored practice of *saisei itchi* (unity of rites and rule), unity of Buddha dharma and the Imperial law, and of the nation-protecting spirit of the Buddhist tradition. Such Buddhist sects as Pure Land and Soto Zen engaged in vigorous ideological campaigns in Korea in order to make the Buddhist population amenable to the imperialist designs of Japan. The activities of Takeda Hanshi of the Soto Zen sect eloquently illustrate this point. He was involved in the assassination of Queen Min, the promotion of the government policy of annexing Korea, and a plan to absorb the Won sect of Korean Buddhism within the fold of Soto (Han Cheol-hui 1988: 59-66; Kim Gwang-sik 1996: 55-71; Kikizan 1998). Takeda's legacy of using Buddhism to serve the imperialist needs of Japan was energetically carried forward by the Soto sect in colonial Korea. The establishment of *Bukkyo Gokokudan* (The Buddhist Corps for Protection of the Nation) in the early years of the colonial era to foster and promote Korean loyalty for the Japanese Emperor and the construction of a temple in the name of Ito Hirobumi in Korea in the early 1930s are its ideal illustrations (Hur Nam-lin 1999).[6]

The narrow Japan-centered outlook is evident in the perspective of Shimaji Mokurai, one of the most representative scholars of Buddhism in Meiji Japan who wrote in his *Bukkyo kakushu koyo* (Lectures on Various Schools of Buddhism, d. 1896) that as "China and Korea are nothing more than a great wave sweeping up to the shore of the teachings of Eastern Buddhism, there is no need to discuss them at length" (Jorgensen 1997: 230).

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6. Ötake Myogen, administrative head of the Soto Zen sect, issued the following apology to the Korean people in 1993: "Especially in Korea and the Korean peninsula, Japan first committed the outrage of assassinating the Korean queen [in 1895], then forced the Korea of the Lee Dynasty into dependency status [in 1904-5], and finally through the annexation of Korea [in 1910], obliterated a people and a nation. Our sect acted as an advance guard in this, contriving to assimilate the Korean people into this country, and promoting the policy of turning Koreans into loyal imperial subjects." January 1993 issue of *Soto Shuho*, pp. 28-31 quoted in Brian Victoria, *Zen at War*. New York: Weatherhill, 1997, p. 156.

The world of Korean Buddhism in the late Meiji era and the subsequent period of colonial rule sought to define its identity based on the hegemonic Japanese prototype. Like the Japanese antecedents, the uniqueness of Korean Buddhism was also understood and interpreted by both Japanese and Korean scholars in terms of its emphasis on "nation-protecting" spirit (*hoguk bulgyo*).

The recent two-volume work *Chinil bulgyo* has documented how Buddhist scholars of Korea lent support to Japan's imperialist agenda by injecting into Korean Buddhism Japan's "nation-protecting" theory. Kwon Sang-no's appeal to the Korean *sangha*, which was carried by *Bulgyo sibo* on January 1, 1941, is a classic example of the success of the Japanese attempt to mould Korea's Buddhist past in its own image:

> There were more than sixty thousand volunteers who joined the Imperial Army and there were many monks amongst them. ....Some may erroneously assume that the participation of Buddhist monks in war violates the norms of Buddhism. Indeed it is in conformity with the basic tenets of Buddhism.
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> .....The monk Dochim of Baekje was indignant at the fall of his country and initiated a restoration campaign by mobilizing the righteous army. The Dharma brothers of the monk Seosan and his disciple monk Samyeong rose up in arms (in defense of their country) during the Joseon dynasty, and when the Manchus invaded our country in 1636 the monk Pyogeom organized a resistance force. Additionally, it seems as if it were only yesterday that there were camps on our land where soldier-monks were trained. Since we are faced today with a situation of crisis, brave and courageous young monks are rising up to march to the battlefield. Indeed they are the ones who are mindful of the true spirit of Buddhism and carry forward the unique tradition of Korean Buddhism. (Im Hyebong 1993: 513-14)

Obviously the spirited Japanese propagation of the "nation-protecting" spirit of Korean Buddhism during the war years and their acceptance by some influential Korean monks supported the colonial interpretation of Korean Buddhism.

During the post-colonial era this perspective became further energized and embedded in the national self-identity of Korean Buddhism. Especially during the Park Chung-hee regime, when the nation had overcome the trauma of division and war and was engaged in a campaign of national reconstruction, the the-

ory of "nation-protecting" Buddhism was employed by the establishment in a bid to blunt the edge of dissidence and to translate religious sensibility into an ideology of narcissistic nationalism. Park often emphasized the significance of national self-examination which, he argued, was crucial to the task of social reconstruction and the accomplishment of a human revolution (Park Chung-hee 1970). And it needs to be noted in this context that Park's idea of national self-examination was predicated on the ideology of Meiji Japan, evident even in his adoption of the term *yusin* to designate his rule in the seventies. A speech delivered by Dr. Yoo Ki Chun (Yu Gijun), Park's Minister of Education, at the World Conference of Buddhism organized by Dongguk University in 1976 is one of the many pieces of evidence which suggest how the colonial interpretation of Buddhism was inherited by the Park regime to serve its myopic goal and legitimize its authoritarian rule. The Minister of Education maintained in his congratulatory address that The Five Secular Commandments of Hwarang, the carving of the *Tripitaka Koreana*, and the great services of Seosan and Samyeong during the Hideyoshi invasion (1592-1598) formed the core of Korea's Buddhist tradition. He further noted:

> The true teachings of the great Buddha, intentionally or not, are to be believed in order to revive this land--the southern part of the Korean peninsula. This land will then be blessed as a new sanctuary of Buddhism. ...Under such sufferings, the mission of the Buddhists should not be aloofness in a mountain monastery, but to fight against the immoral and inhumane enemy called communism which is decorated with something called historic materialism. (Chun Yoo Kee 1976)

Park's regime adopted a number of measures to bend academic integrity to the interests of his regime, and as Kim Jongmyung has noted in his doctoral dissertation, Park's Yusin Constitution prescribed national ethics and Korean history as compulsory subjects and Korean cultural history as an elective subject at the college level. And besides, numerous works of research on the nation-protecting tradition of Korean Buddhism published in the 1970s were financed by Korea's Ministry of Education (Kim Jongmyung 1994: 271; Nam Dong-sin 1993: 204-16).[7] Studies on nation-protecting Buddhism carried out in Korea during the

7. Also see Nam Dong-sin's 1993 essay, which takes a critical look at the social and political role

repressive Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan eras are too numerous and of too limited scholarly value to be reviewed.[8]

New Approaches: 1980-1999

As noted earlier, in the eighties a new historiographical trend, named *minjung*, emerged in Korea to challenge the assumptions and formulations of mainstream historical discourse, or what it called "official" and "elitist" history, concerned as it was with the elites rather than the suffering masses. Unlike "elitist history" which interprets relations of power from the perspective of the dominant class or state, *minjung* historical narratives give primacy to class interests, the worldview and consciousness of the *minjung* group formed by peasants and workers. *Minjung* historians were forged in the crucible of harsh struggle against the political establishment that they waged in solidarity with peasants and workers. *Minjung* historiography is, therefore, a political confrontation against the ruling elite and mainstream historians whom it accuses of serving the ruling elite by turning the lens away from peasants and workers. It was more or less at the same juncture of history that such Western scholars of Korean Buddhism as Robert E. Buswell, Jr. in the United States (Buswell 1998),[9] John Jorgensen in Australia and Henrik Sorensen in Denmark or such U.S-trained Korean scholars as Keel Hee-Sung and Shim Chae-ryong raised their voices of criticism against the traditional framework to understand Korean Buddhism. It must be noted, however, that *minjung* historians and Western/West-trained scholars used different interpretive frameworks to attack the inherited perspective of Korean Buddhism.

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of Korean Buddhism in the post colonial period and provides a balanced perspective on the political role of Korean Buddhism through history.

8. They were written in a repressive political climate, incompatible with the integrity of knowledge or with the ability to pursue an argument where it leads. It should be pointed out, however, that some scholars took a principled stand. Seo Gyeong-su, for instance, refused to subscribe to the established interpretation and criticised the "nation-protecting" tradition as anti-doctrinal. See his 1990 work (p. 195).
9. Robert Buswell, Jr. wrote an influential essay in the late 1990s in which he questioned the validity of the trend of post-war scholarship on Korean Buddhism which aims to delineate it as uniquely Korean. He emphasized the universal or pan-Asiatic character of Korean Buddhism and demonstrated that the imagination of distinct "Koreanness" in Korea's Buddhist tradition was a modern construct.

John Jorgensen received his initial training in Buddhism at Australian National University (ANU), Canberra under the guidance of Professor J. W. de Jong, one of the strongest pillars of Buddhology in the latter half of the twentieth century. A scholar of extraordinary understanding of classical Indology and Buddhism in all their branches, a rare linguist with consummate command over all the major classical languages of Buddhism—Pali, Sanskrit, Prakrit, Chinese, Tibetan, and Mongolian—and an array of modern languages including Dutch, English, French, German, Russian, Italian, Danish, and Japanese, he set a very high scholastic standard for his doctoral students. ANU also had Ken Gardiner on its faculty who embraced Buddhism as his personal faith. Ken Gardiner's research interest covered the entire spectrum of ancient and early medieval northeast Asia, but he usually focused his studies on Korea to show the rather "different shape that northeast Asia assumes when it is no longer viewed from the traditional centers of attention, China and Japan" (Mohan 2005). Under the initial influence of these two scholars and subsequently at Kyoto University in Japan and Dongguk University in Korea, Jorgensen formed an integrated perspective of the history of Mahayanic Buddhism, and was able to see the development of Korean Buddhism within its broad East Asian context.[10]

His approach is characterized by the acute consciousness of the contextual bias of such sources as the *Samguk yusa* and a hypothesis that Northeast Asia constituted a much more coherent cultural space than is often imagined. This methodology enables him to make enlightening comparisons across space in the world of Buddhism, and also to identify the aspects of universality and some of the fundamental differences between China and other parts of East Asia. His influential essay "Korean Buddhist historiography" (Jorgensen 1997) amply reflects his rigorous training in Buddhology and his comprehensive perspective of the East Asian Buddhist tradition. In this essay he traced the colonial origin of the "nation-protecting" framework to understand Korean Buddhism and emphasized its limitations. He argued that Korean Buddhist historiography was tainted with the "patriotic claims of superiority to China" aimed at asserting an "independent Korean identity." Modern Korean scholars of Buddhism in the early twentieth century used their studies of Korean Buddhism either as a counter-dis-

10. Subsequent to his 1990 Ph.D. dissertation entitled "Sensibility of the Insensible: The Genealogy of a Ch'an Aesthetic and the Passionate Dream of Poetic Creation," he authored several seminal works of cross-cultural significance. His major monograph is *Inventing Huihneng: Hagiography and Biography in Early Ch'an (forthcoming).*

course of Japanese thesis on Korean Buddhism or as merely an "extension of Chinese Buddhism." They also used it as a conduit of nationalist passion. In the fifth section, entitled "Lessons for the Future of Korean Buddhist Historiography" of this essay, Jorgensen correctly notes that future historians of Korean Buddhism need to make a clear distinction between Buddhism and the machinery of the state and uphold dispassionate objectivity. He further warned against the danger of writing under the shadow of the "legacy of Japanese colonialist influence" or "*hoguk bulgyo*" (nation-protecting Buddhism) or "*Tong bulgyo*" (culmination of Buddhist history) discourse. Finally, he pointed out that future scholars of Korean Buddhism needed to "broaden the scope of Buddhism from the monastic elites and tradition of the established order and include the common people" (Jorgensen 1997: 254).

Henrik Sorensen wrote his master's thesis at the University of Copenhagen on Buddhist art in China. Subsequently, when he spent a couple of years at Songgwang Temple and came under the radiating influence of Gusan Seunim (Kusan Sunim), he became interested in the Buddhist tradition of Korea, particularly the Son tradition. Sorensen equipped himself with required linguistic resources, including Classical and modern Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and numerous European languages. He also thought out for himself a convincing methodology and theoretical model to undertake his research on Korean Buddhism with patience and perseverance. Subsequent to his Ph.D. dissertation on the Seon sects in late Silla he submitted at the University of Copenhagen, he wrote several papers of incisive analysis on all the periods of Buddhist history in Korea, along with a book in Danish on Buddhist texts in Japan and Korea (Sorensen 1999).[11] Recently he published an article to attack some Korean scholars who sought to idealize and mythologize Korean Buddhism on the sole evidence of the *Samguk yusa* (Sorensen 2000: 269-86). He noted, for instance that an article entitled "Brief Remarks on the Buddha Land Ideology in Silla during the Seventh and Eighth Centuries," a foremost Korean scholar of Buddhist studies, Rhi Ki-yong discussed in length the existence of "Pure Land Ideology" on the basis of the relevant accounts in the *Samguk yusa*. Sorensen criticized Prof. Rhi for not questioning the contextual bias of his source, and more importantly,

11. Also see his short book of 1999 in Danish, which incorporates Danish translations of some of the representative writings of Wonhyo, Jinul, and Hyujeong , along with the writer's introductory notes.

for not corroborating the accounts of *Samguk yusa* with such more trustworthy contemporary sources as the "thematic essentials (*jongyo*)" and other exegetical writings on the sutras of the Pure Land tradition. Sorensen compellingly argues that the task of writing a history of Korean Buddhism required that the true nature of the *Samguk yusa* be understood. To quote: "The *yusa* has long been considered a symbol of dynastic authority bestowed upon the Korean nation by divine and Buddhist powers, and therefore has been granted the same importance by the Koreans as the *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Affairs) was by the Japanese" (Sorensen 2000: 283). In fact, most Korean scholars do not equate the *yusa* with the *Kojiki*, and do not believe in its "divinity" in the way Shintoists and the scholars of the Japanese *Kokugaku* (National Learning) school did in relation to the *Kojiki*. Nonetheless, Sorensen's stress on the need to be conscious of the "myth-historical" accretions of the *yusa* is valid.

In the 1980s when these two prominent scholars, Henrik Sorensen and John Jorgensen, were undergoing rigorous training in Buddhist studies and preparing themselves for a challenging intellectual career ahead, a Russian scholar by the name of Sergei V. Volkov was working in relative isolation at the University of Moscow. His doctoral dissertation was published in 1985 as *Panniaia istoriia buddizma v Koree* (The Early History of Buddhism in Korea), which describes major trends in Korean Buddhism from the fourth-ninth centuries. The book in its Korean translation consists of a short twelve-page introduction, slightly over two pages of conclusions, and three chapters: socio-economic and political developments during the Three Kingdoms and the Unified Silla periods; the acceptance and development of Buddhism during the Three Kingdoms and the Unified Silla periods; and the political and social roles of the *sangha* during the Three Kingdoms and Unified Silla periods. Due primarily to his overly ambitious plan to compress the political and social history of Korean Buddhism of five and a half centuries of the Three Kingdoms and Unified Silla periods into a small book of one hundred and fifty pages, the author has not been successful in providing an empirically detailed and rigorously analyzed narrative. For instance, in the third chapter Volkov takes up a great number of issues for discussion, including (but not exclusively) the construction of monasteries and Buddhist artifacts, activities of Buddhist monks in the Three Kingdoms and Unified Silla Periods, and various Buddhist sects of Korean Buddhism—however, he is mostly preoccupied with long statistical charts. His discussion covers only a few paragraphs. His reliance on mostly Russian language, North Korean and dated Japanese and English language works, and his inability to take up

major philosophical issues of Korean Buddhism for examination have further limited the quality of the work.

In his understanding of the Buddhist institutions of Silla the author tried to adopt a comparative interpretive framework by looking at related ideological developments and institutional formations in other East Asian and South Asian countries. However, as he did not use any recent work in English, Japanese, or Chinese (written in the late seventies or eighties) on East Asian, South Asian, and Southeast Asian Buddhism, and lacked familiarity with the recent writings in the field, his study hardly yielded any insightful analysis. Another major drawback of the book is Volkov's approach—religion as a superstructure—and the failure to appreciate the autonomy of ideology and culture. Invoking the authority of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* which says that "all the secular relations, including social relations, are considered as 'evil' in Buddhism, and as a result of such an emphasis on other-worldliness the religion became rigidly unsocial in character," Volkov argues that though Buddhism could not have directly contributed towards the protection of the nation, it could be conceded that the Buddhist faith and certain Buddhist notions were employed by the state for the maintenance of social stability and the hegemonic privileges of the social elite (Volkov 1985: 138). Such analysis demonstrates an ideologically predetermined understanding of the dynamics of social and religious formations. In the context of early Korean history the ruling elite may have employed Buddhist concepts and rituals to maintain social stability and validate their privileged positions, but numerous instances may be cited to demonstrate the fact that Buddhist ideas were employed by the common people to attack the authority of the state by igniting millenarian uprisings and peasant rebellions. Indeed, it is now widely recognized, thanks to research by Romila Thapar (1978, 1984) and Uma Chakravarti, (1987), that even during its beginnings in early India, Buddhism stood sharply in opposition to the ritual power and privileges of Brahmans and lent its support to the newly-risen urban elites, the *grhapati* and *sresthi* from the *vaisya* community and even the marginalized community.

A new book entitled *Buddhist Ideas and Rituals in Early India and Korea* by Lee Kwangsu also raises some significant issues in relation to the political aspects of early Korean Buddhism (Lee Kwangsu 1998). In his discussion of Buddhist kingship, Lee points out that King Jinheung's tour to newly conquered territories was definitely inspired by the Asokan example, and he even reads Asoka's influence in King Jinheung's edicts. He says that "the ideas of righteous rule, royal tour, the Emperor of the Four Quarters, protection of land and people,

and diplomatic friendship with neighbors are clearly derived from Pali sources" (Lee Kwangsu 1998). Royal peregrination as an instrument by which the mystique of monarchical institution is sustained and advanced, and by which rulers "take symbolic possession of their realms" (Geertz 1977: 153) is not unique to early Indian statecraft. Even before Buddhism was introduced to China the First Emperor of Qin undertook tours to mountains and rivers in his territory. In undertaking tours, King Jinheung was following the principle of centralized polity on the Chinese model, and, all his pious pronouncements are based on prescriptions and precepts enunciated in the Confucian classics (Mohan 1996, 2003). King Jinheung's originality lay in mobilizing Buddhist monks to accompany him. And it is here that one is reminded of the Asokan prototype—Asoka's tour to the sacred Buddhist sites in the company of *dhamma mahamatya* (commissioners of dharma).

Chinese scholarship on Korean Buddhism has mostly been confined to some aspects of Buddhist linkages between China and Korea.[12] *Hanguo fojiao shi* Vol. 1 (He Jingsong 1997), a recent work by a young scholar, is a sole exception. It deals with Buddhism in early Korea during the Three Kingdoms and the Unified Silla periods. However, because of its complete reliance on well-known primary data and its lack of access to secondary sources in Korean or Japanese (which have defined many new frontiers of inquiry in the field), the book does not represent innovative and insightful research.

Writings on the History of Korean Buddhism in the New Millenium

During the new millennium a scholar each in Australia and Europe emerged, and sought to rescue the history of Silla and Goryeo Buddhism respectively from the "nation-protective" interpretive angle. My thesis entitled "Buddhism and State in Early Silla" was accepted for a Ph.D. degree by Australian National University in 2000, and the following year Sem Vermeersch received his Ph.D. degree from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.[13]

12. Some representative examples of Chinese scholarship on the Buddhist dimension of Sino-Korean relationship are: Yuan Jiayao (1993-1994), Huang Youfu and Chen Jingfu (1993), and Liu Suojin (1995).

My thesis aims at providing a systematic understanding of the political aspects of Buddhism in early Silla. It demonstrates that though Buddhism in Silla developed under the patronage of royalty and underpinned Silla's development into a centralized monarchical state, early Silla rulers understood the significance of Buddhism primarily as a component of the Chinese cultural ensemble. Chinese ideas and institutions were crucial to the process of the evolution of the centralized government on the Chinese model and the detribalization of the consciousness of the people of Silla. Buddhism of the Northern Wei tradition, which equated the ruling emperors with the Maitreya and legitimized the political establishment, held particular appeal for the Silla rulers.

The thesis demonstrates that King Bobheung's recognition of Buddhism was relevant to the centralizing tendencies of Silla in the early sixth century, and King Jinheung's invocation of the concept of *cakravartin* and the development of a framework of *sangha*-state relations were intimately interwoven into his agenda of aggressive monarchy. His reorganization of the order of Hwarang on the foundation of Buddhism was also related to his political strategy of further reinforcing the monarchical authority. Recognition of the Hwarang youth as incarnations of the Maitreya divested the Maitreya cult of its apocalyptic and subversive potential and made the young members of the Silla aristocracy amenable to the political requirements of the state.

King Jinpyeong, Queen Seondeok, and Queen Jindeok inherited and carried forward King Jinheung's interpretation of the Buddhist concepts to conform to their aggressive monarchical agendas. The thesis argues that the exclusive Seonggol lineage of the Silla royalty was fabricated during the reign of King Jinpyeong and was inspired and sustained by Buddhist myths and motifs. The Buddhist beliefs and practices were apparently assimilated into the existing political matrix of the shaman-king and the *golpum*-based social structure.

By suggesting that the early Silla rulers drew on a diverse source of legitimatory symbolism and demonstrating the political significance of their Buddhist policies, the thesis attempts to interrogate the established paradigm of under-

13. There are other excellent scholars in Europe whose works have not been dealt in this paper because their research does not directly address the issue of "nation-protecting" Buddhism. These scholars are: Dr. Tonino Puggioni from Ialy, Yannick Bruneton from France, and Joerg Plassen from Germany. Dr. Puggioni's studies come closer to the theme as in many of his recent papers he has shed fresh light on the issue of Buddhist patronage of the marginalized population in Goryeo, such as palace women and eunuchs.

standing the early Silla rulers as devout Buddhists, and the entire trajectory of Korean Buddhism as an expression of the "nation-protecting" spirit.

Sem Vermeersch's doctoral dissertation entitled "The Power of Buddha: The Ideological and Institutional Role of Buddhism in the Koryo Dynasty" (Vermeersch 2001) represents the only detailed work in any Western language that provides a critical perspective of Buddhism as an ideological underpinning of the centralized monarchy during the Goryo period. Vermeersch conceived his study on a broad canvas, looking at a spectrum of significant issues, including Buddhist sects and their base of patronage, rituals, monastic institutions, and the repertoire of Buddhist symbolism and its relevance to the legitimization of monarchical authority. Through a balanced interpretation of such difficult data as historical texts, temple records, Buddhist sutras, and epigraphic material he introduced new aspects of mutual symbiosis between Buddhism and monarchy during the Goryeo period. The main objective of the dissertation, as set forth in the introductory chapter, is to understand the ideological significance of Buddhism to the Goryeo state and to analyse the processes through which monarchical interests were articulated through Buddhist institutions. Indeed Vermeersch's research constitutes a convincing critique of the nationalist historiography which places an exaggerated emphasis on the concept of "*hoguk bulgyo*," and complements the research of Kim Jongmyung's thesis on Goryeo rituals.[14]

Conclusion

It is obvious from the above discussion that commencing from the late 1990s there emerged a movement both in Korea and overseas to shift beyond the parameters of "nation-protecting Buddhism" and recognize Korea's Buddhist tradition as an autonomous entity. The early phase of Korean Buddhism doubtless developed under the patronage of royalty, and Buddhism and kingship forged a mutually empowering relationship. However, the values implicit in the term "nation-protecting Buddhism" are incompatible with the significance of religious ideology and rituals as an autonomous force of history. The concept of the "nation-protecting" Buddhist tradition is generally interpreted to mean that

14. Kim Jongmyung's doctoral thesis, submitted at the University of California, Los Angeles (1994), contains an appendix on the "nation-protecting" tradition of Korean Buddhism.

Buddhism in Korea did not have its ideological and institutional authority independent of the will of the ruler. Such a conceptual construct degrades moral authority of the faith that shaped the pattern of thought and provided norms of ethics to the Korean people through the centuries. Scholars who have interpreted the history of Korean Buddhism within the framework of the "nation-protecting" tradition have also ignored the asymmetry and tension that is invariably generated at the intersection of the two autonomous forces, kingship and Buddhism.

The critique of the idealized construct of Korea's "nation-protecting" Buddhist tradition was derived from the meticulous scrutiny of sources, as also from the realization of the process of the mutually generative function of knowledge and power, as enunciated by Michel Foucault (Sheridan 1980: 138.). The formation of the dominant paradigms that defined the history of early Korean Buddhism within the context of the "nation-protecting spirit" was apparently governed by contemporary power-relations. Japan's conceptual construct of Korean Buddhism is an apt illustration of Foucault's theoretical formulation of the involvement of forms of knowledge in power relations. During the colonial period and subsequently during authoritarian rule, this paradigmatic theory, with colonial roots, was reinforced as it served the interests of the state.

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