
The Buddhist Reform Movement in Modern Times

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Buddhism was suppressed throughout the Choson dynasty. The conservative faction of the society intensified its efforts to destroy Buddhism. Yet, Buddhism managed to preserve itself in spite of the official policy of suppression. Korean Buddhism's strong resilience is an indication of its deep roots within the consciousness of the Korean people. This was the situation of Korea as it faced reform.

Beginning in the late Choson dynasty, the culture and institutions of more advanced nations were suddenly introduced to Korea, leading to change in the official policy concerning religion. After a long period of persecution, Catholics were allowed to propagate their faith which led to an enormous influx of foreign missionaries. At the same time, many monks from the various Japanese Buddhist sects came to Korea. The foreign clergy of these different religions eagerly strove to popularize their faith. However, the government was bent on preserving itself through reliance on foreign powers and as Buddhism continued to represent the basic sentiments of the people, the government maintained its policy of oppression of Buddhism only.

The Korean law-forbidding monks from entering the capital was rescinded through the auspices of the Japanese monk, Sano Zenrei, seeking to convert Korean Buddhists to the Nichiren faith, by asking Kim Hong-jip's administration to allow Korean monks to enter the capital. The government granted his request in 1895. Korean Buddhists were thus free to engage in propagation activities, which immediately provided Japanese Buddhism with an opportunity to get a foothold in Korea. Hence the flip side of the repeal of the law-forbidding monks from entering the capital was that it opened up the possibility of Japanese monks becoming more active in Korea. The Korean government was finally spurred into action and repealed the

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policy of suppression towards Buddhism at the same time as trying to gain control of the administration of the Buddhist temples. And the Korean Buddhist community started to work for collaboration between the nation's temples.

In 1899, Korean Buddhism established its plan for the unification of all Korean temples. Wonhungsa was built outside of Tongdaemun gate. It was to be the head office of Korean Buddhism. In addition, one head temple was established for each province, 13 all together. In this way, the administration of all Korean temples was unified. Moreover, the post of Ministerial Head was created as a representative of all the monks in the country; and the post of Minister of the Interior was created and made responsible for the temples in the Seoul area. A chief administrator was also appointed for each head temple in the provinces. These Buddhist activities stimulated the government to establish national administration of the temples. The government thereby established posts for temple affairs within the temples in 1902. The posts belonged to the Ministry of the Interior. The government also proclaimed the Comprehensive Rules for Temple Management and Affairs. Consisting of 36 articles, this document applied to all the nation's temples. With this the *tae popsan* and *chung popsan* systems came into effect.

The *tae popsan* system took Wonhungsa as the head temple for all the temples in the country, whereas the *chung popsan* stipulated that there were to be 16 administrative temples in the provinces. In this way the temples and monks, which had been neglected for so long, finally received protection from the national administration. However, the post of Temple Affairs and the *tae popsan* system were abolished in the 1st month, 1904. After the Protectorate Treaty of 1905, the Japanese Resident General was able to meddle in Korean Buddhist affairs. With the 1910 Annexation Treaty, the Department for Overseeing Korean Affairs was established. Korean Buddhism was then oppressed as part of Japan's colonial policy.

The Invasion of Japanese Buddhism

The Japanese government, trying to seize the opportunity to force a commercial treaty on Korea that would further Japan's aggressive designs, deliberately brought about a confrontation with Korea. This was called the Unyo incident. In 1875, a Japanese navy vessel, the Unyo, appeared in Korean waters off the coast of Kanghwado and was promptly attacked and

fired upon by Korean patriots. After this incident, in 1876, the Treaty of Friendship (or Treaty of Kanghwa) was signed. The Japanese then sought to invade Korea with Japanese through Buddhism. Thus, in 1876, the Shin, Nichiren, Pure Land, Shingon, Soto and Rinzai sects were introduced to Korea.

The first Japanese Buddhism to come to Korea was a faction of the Shin Sect from Hongenji temple. Then in 1878, Okumura Ensin came to Pusan and established a center. He was followed by Nagaya Tokusei who established the Wonsan Center in 1880; Sigena Genryu who established the Inch'on Center in 1884; Ikumi Sansyo who established the Kyongsong Center in 1890. In addition a center in Mokp'o was established in 1897. After this, centers for propagation were established in Kunsan, Chinnamp'o, Kaesong, Shinuiju, and so on. Japanese were recharged with educating the young Japanese residents, and educational facilities were made available to the poor. Lectures were also held for women in Pusan. In 1910, a vast missionary effort was put into action in order to assimilate Korea into Japan.

The Nichiren Sect was very active in Korea. In 1881, Watanabe Nichiun established a Nichiren center in Pusan. In 1882, Asahi Hinae founded Chonggaksa in Wonsan and Myogaksa in Inch'on. In addition, Hogueksa and Kyongwangsa were built in Seoul; Ch'oesungsa was built in Chinnamp'o; An'guksa was built in Kunsan; and Iryonsa was built in Hamhung. Then Sano Zenrei from the Nichiren Sect, carried out a campaign to repeal the restriction against Korean monks entering the capital in 1894. In this way, they sought to convert Korean Buddhists to the Nichiren Sect.

Hongenji — the main faction of the Shin Sect was active in Korea even before the opening of the country's ports to foreigners. In 1877, the sect became very active in Korea after Okubo Tosimichi of the Japanese Internal Affairs Department and Teratori Munegawa of the Foreign Affairs Department established an opening for religious policy after advising the head of Hongenji Temple. In 1905, Otani Sonpo appointed as head, along with Ouchi Keimei, Iko Syusyo and Onuma Zenryu, came to Korea and established a Buddhist Institute in Seoul and organized youth groups in Seoul, Ch'ungmu, and P'yongyang.

As for the Shingon Sect, Kanetake Syundo established Kwangunsa in Seoul and for the Pure Land Sect, Nogami Unkai and Betkai Kyosi established an administrative office in Seoul in 1893 and engaged in propagation activities.

In 1910, the Shinji Faction of the Japanese Rinzai Sect, established a propagation center at Imjesa in Seoul, and a teaching center at Pohyonsa was

established for the education of monks. They also built an education center at Yongmyongsa in P'yongyang. By 1911, after the Japanese annexation of Korea, Hongenji operated 20 centers for propagation, as well as branches that managed another ten educational institutions and youth groups. The Soto Sect had five temples and three centers for propagation. The Shingon Sect had one temple and two centers for propagation these centers were especially devoted to Koreans. In this way, Japanese Buddhism expanded thought out the length and breadth of Korea.

This sudden invasion of Japanese Buddhism came as a great shock to the Korean Buddhist world. In this light, the following three points should be noted. Firstly, Japanese propagation was not aimed solely at Japanese residents of Korea, it also targeted Koreans. In actual fact, the Japanese used every method available in order to convert Koreans. Secondly, Korean temples and temple property were often confiscated. Thirdly, Japanese Buddhist sects maintained, as a doctrinal tenet, that Korean Buddhism should be combined with the Buddhism of Japan. The Japanese efforts to combine the two intensified after the Protectorate Treaty of 1905. According to the fourth article of the Resident General's Regulation, "Each Japanese sect's administrator, (Buddhist) preacher, and other Japanese nationals must procure the necessary documents with authorization when subscribing to Korean Temple management commissions." This was actually just a ploy by the Resident General designed to encourage the Japanese to take over Korean temples. Among the various Japanese sects, the Pure Land, the Shin Sects and the Nichiren Sects used underhand schemes in trying to procure Korean temples. Their secret plot failed, however, because of the rebellion of Korean Buddhists.

The Buddhist Reform Movement

Under the patronage of the Resident General, there was rapid expansion in Japanese Buddhist congregations, and Japanese Shinto was also forced on the Korean people. Catholicism and Protestantism were restricted, but they obtained a foothold in Korea by the setting up of modern schools, hospitals, kindergartens and orphanages. The Korean people, overwhelmed by the sudden influx of foreign religions and the invasion of Japanese Buddhism, eventually started a campaign calling for the reformation of Buddhism.

The Buddhist Research Society(B.R.S.)'s Reform Movement

After the Kwalliso posts for temple affairs, which had been established by the government in 1903, were abolished in 1904, Master Podam from Pongwonsa and Master Wolch'o from Hwagyesa formed the nucleus of a movement for Buddhist reform. They felt that the only way to revive Korean Buddhism was to modernize Buddhist education and propagation. To this end, they established the Buddhist Research Society at Wonhungsa. In 1906, they submitted a request to the Interior Ministry stating their intention "to establish a school focusing on research into modern scholarship." After receiving permission, they established branches in rural areas and set up the Myongjin Institute at Wonhungsa in order to educate monks, teaching them how to adapt to the modern age. They used propagation organizations of Japanese Buddhism as models for their own efforts to modernize Korean Buddhism. Receiving advice from Inoue Gensin, a missionary from the Japanese Pure Land Sect who was then in Korea, they adopted the Pure Land as the basic doctrine for the Buddhist Research Society. This research society was therefore strongly under the influence of Japanese Buddhist sects. In particular, the Japanese Pure Land Sect continued to strengthen its ties with the B.R.S. But Inoue Gensin, promoted a plan calling for the merger of Korean Buddhism with the Pure Land Sect, causing voices of opposition to be heard throughout Korea and the B.R.S.'s reputation was thereby irreparably weakened, bringing their efforts to nothing.

The Wonjong Reform Movement

On March 6, 1908, 52 monks, representing all monks, convened at Wonhungsa and held a general meeting. At this meeting, they decided to call their order Wonjong, the Won order and they inaugurated their headquarters. The Won order, seeing that the B.R.S. had failed to break its association with the Japanese Pure Land Sect, hoped to reform a pan-national organization. During the Choson period, Buddhist sects dwindled to just seven schools, which were then consolidated into the two schools of Sonjong and Kyojong. During the reigns of kings Yonsan'gun, Chungjong and Myongjong, even the names of the previous schools were unknown. Due to the sectarian proselytizing of the Japanese and the realization that a new age had dawned, Korean Buddhists felt the need to clarify the name of their organization. They chose the name Wonjong. This name, derived from

the phrase "perfect penetration, unimpeded", was generally understood to encompass the complete practices of Kyo and Son. Master Hoegwang was selected as the Grand Patriarch, a managerial staff divided into eight sections was formed and the Wonjong became an organ for the unification of Korean Buddhism.

The organization of Wonjong was a result of the new movement of Buddhism, which kept in step with the big changes in and reformation of Korean society. These changes included new systems of administration and civilization established from the time of Kabo kyongjang, the Reform of 1894. In 1910, the Chongmuwon, the office of the Wonjong received donations from temples throughout the country in order to build Kakhwangsa in Susong-dong, Seoul. This temple became the central conference hall for Korean Buddhism as well as the center for proselytizing work. It also published the periodical Won'gwang and reorganized the Myongjin School, making it a normal school for promoting Buddhism. When Japan forcibly annexed Korea in August 1910, the after effect influenced the Korean Buddhist community. The Japanese Buddhist annexation of Korean Buddhism was actually the plot of the Japanese monk Takeda Noriyuki and Master Hoegwang, the patriarch of Wonjong. In October, 1910, Hoegwang went to Tokyo to discuss the annexation of Korean Buddhism by the Japanese Soto Sect without any consultation with the Korean Buddhist community beforehand. Master Hoegwang and Isikawa Sudo, who was the head of the Soto Sect, agreed to the union and Hoegwang then formed a treaty of seven articles with Hirotsu Setsuzo, the representative of the Soto Sect. The contents of the seven articles were all about subordination of Korean Buddhism to the Japanese Soto Sect. Master Hoegwang, after returning to Korea, then tried to ingratiate the office of the Wonjong with the Japanese government on the one hand, and to unify all the Korean temples under the Wonjong to support the annexation on the other.

Knowing the dangers of the aim and result of the annexation, however, Korean Buddhists formed a movement to oppose the annexation. Thus the effort of the Buddhist reform movement by the Wonjong was weakened and came to nothing.