

# Becoming a Buddhist Nun in Korea: Monastic Education and Ordination for Women

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## I. Introduction

This article examines the education and ordination that a laywoman undergoes in order to join the Buddhist monastic life in Korea. To understand the objectives and contents of these processes, it is important to place them in historical and institutional perspectives. Therefore, this article first presents a brief survey of the historical emergence of a Korean *bhikṣuṇī saṃgha*. This is followed by a discussion of the ways in which the monastic educational system has evolved in Korea. The educational objectives and specific curriculum are addressed in this section. Finally, the article analyzes the significance of the nun's training and ordination in relation to her practice as a member of the *saṃgha*. The scope of my investigation is limited to the education and ordination administered by the Chogye Order in contemporary Korea. As for the historical background, the focus is largely on the Chosŏn dynasty during which the foundation of the present system was laid down.

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## II. The Appearance of Korean Nuns in History

Buddhism was introduced to the Three Kingdoms in the fourth century through China, but there is no clear indication of the existence of a bhikṣuṇī saṃgha in Korean historical sources. We can only speculate its existence on the basis of Japanese materials. The *Chronicle of Japan* (*Nihon shoki*) mentions that Paekche, one of the Three Kingdoms, sent sutras and *Vinaya* experts, including one bhikṣuṇī to Japan in the twenty-fourth year of King Widök's reign (577). (Kim, young-tae, 1985:539) The book also shows that ten years after this, Zenshin and other women came to Paekche from Japan and received *sikṣamaṇā* and bhikṣuṇī ordinations from Paekche bhikṣuṇīs. Another historical mention of a Korean nun concerns Pöpmöng, a Paekche bhikṣuṇī, who went to Japan during King Mu's reign and cured a Japanese minister's disease by chanting the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra*.

With regard to Silla, Sasi, a younger sister of Morok of Ilyön-kun, is said to be the first woman in the kingdom, who under the influence of the Koguryō monk Ado, became a nun. (Ilyön, 1979) However, given that Buddhist teaching was not yet legalized in Silla at this time and thus, no officially designated bhikṣu could have presided over her ordination, it is most likely that Sasi was a *sramaṇerikā* rather than a bhikṣuṇī. (Kim, young-tae, 2000:38) It seems that the first bhikṣuṇī in Silla, and for that matter in Korean history, is Myoböp. She became a nun after Buddhism was officially approved by the Silla court (527). Myoböp was King Pöphüng's queen consort. With royal support, bhikṣuṇī ordination would have been possible in Silla along with dharma talks at every full moon, contributing greatly to a steady increase of bhikṣuṇīs. Indeed, Silla had *toyunarang*, a government position held by a bhikṣuṇī to oversee nuns in the kingdom.

Considering that Buddhism was introduced to Paekche earlier than Silla (384 and 527, respectively) and that Paekche bhikṣuṇīs were very active in Japan, it is not difficult to speculate that the number of bhikṣuṇīs in Paekche was not small and that it had an office similar to Silla's *toyunarang* as well. (Kim, young-tae, 2000:42) However, no

historical records are available about when and from whom Paekche nuns received bhikṣuṇī ordination. In view of the general transmission routes of Buddhism to Korea, we can consider two possibilities: either bhikṣus came from China and ordained them or Paekche *śrāmaṇerikās* went to China to receive bhikṣuṇī ordination.<sup>1</sup>

According to historical sources, there already were bhikṣuṇīs in China at the end of the Han dynasty and the beginning of the Wei dynasty. They received bhikṣuṇī ordination from the bhikṣuṇīs who came from Sri Lanka.(Hung-tsan, 1976-77:186a-186b) The records also describe that Ching-chien, the first Chinese nun, received bhikṣuṇī ordination from bhikṣus only, not from both the bhikṣu and bhikṣuṇī saṃghas as required by the *Vinaya*.(T.50:934c) This is because there were no bhikṣuṇīs in China then. Despite this difficulty at its birth, a bhikṣuṇī saṃgha was established in China around this time. As Buddhism was transmitted to Paekche via China, the dual ordination for the bhikṣuṇī would also have been introduced, paving the road for the appearance of bhikṣuṇīs in Paekche who could receive full ordination appropriately in accordance with *Vinaya* procedures. It might be reasonable to conjecture a similar course of events concerning the beginning of Silla's bhikṣuṇī saṃghas, too.

However, it should be noted that the bhikṣuṇī ordination procedure in Paekche might not have been exactly the same as in China. This argument is based on the fact that in translating the *Five-parts Vinaya Book* (Skt. *Mahisasaka-vinaya*; Kor. *Obu-yulmun*) from Sanskrit, the Paekche monk Kyōmik organized it into seventy-two fascicles unlike in China where the five divisions of the original Sanskrit version were kept.(Yi, Nūng-hwa, 1968:33) This difference suggests the possibility that Paekche had adopted its own ordination procedure.(Kim, young-tae, 1985:538)

In Koryō, King T'aejo declared Buddhism as the state religion, providing a momentum for its spread. According to the *History of Koryō* (*Koryōsa*), however, it seems that the position of nuns during this period

<sup>1</sup> These possibilities are based on the comments by Kim Yōngt'ae, Professor Emeritus at Dongguk University.

was not any higher than in the Three Kingdoms and United Silla eras. Becoming a bhikṣu served as a means for social rise in Koryŏ, but becoming a bhikṣuṇī appears to have been a solution to overcome personal misfortunes in life more or less.(Lee, yŏng-ja, 2001:215)

The Chosŏn dynasty, which succeeded Koryŏ, adopted an anti-Buddhist policy during its early stages. However, its enforcement was not consistent as is seen during the reign of King T'aejong (1401-1418) and also during the later years of King Sejong's (1419-1450) rule. The Chosŏn court legally forbade womens' *pravrajyā* (leaving home). Although King Sejo reversed the anti-Buddhist policy and permitted women to become nuns as a way of promoting Buddhism, the court resumed the oppression of the Buddhist community from the mid-Chosŏn period while reinforcing its support for Confucianism. The Chogye Order was established at the end of the Japanese occupation period, and with this, a bhikṣuṇī saṃghas was revived in Korea. Thus, it is after 1900 that the full-scale training and ordination of bhikṣuṇīs in the modern era began.

### III. The Nun's Ordination

Article III in the Chogye Order's law defines a bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī as "a person who has renounced the world, has remained celibate, has received full ordination as well as the bodhisattva precepts, and dedicates himself/herself to practice and missionary work." In keeping with this, a woman who wants to become a bhikṣuṇī in the Chogye Order should successfully finish its designated educational program. The contents of this program are described below.

Women's monastic education in the Chogye Order aims to produce bhikṣuṇīs who can be "model teachers for humanity, with their wisdom and vow fully manifested."(Chongdae, 2001:20) A laywoman who wants to join the monastic life learns basic manners, customs, and rituals for six months in a temple to which she initially entrusts herself. This process is designed for her to adapt to new life as a member of the monastic community. This phase is followed by four weeks of training

at a basic educational institution (*kich'o kyoyugwŏn*) run by the order. Once she completes the training at this institution, she is eligible to take the fifth-degree examination administered by the Chogye Order.<sup>2</sup> If she passes this examination, she receives *śrāmaṇerikā* ordination from ten *bhikṣuṇīs*, three teachers and seven witnesses. Afterwards, she enters a monastic seminary (*kangwŏn*) and stays there for four years. Once she successfully completes her seminary education and passes the fourth-degree examination, she can be ordained as a *bhikṣuṇī*. Two years before receiving *bhikṣuṇī* ordination, however, she receives *sikṣamāṇā* ordination from senior *bhikṣuṇīs* (three teachers and seven witnesses). The *sikṣamāṇā* receives *bhikṣuṇī* ordination from senior *bhikṣuṇīs* (three teachers and seven witnesses) and then on the same day goes to senior *bhikṣus* (three teachers and seven witnesses) for their sanction. The following section offers an explanation of the specifics of the *śrāmaṇerikā*, *sikṣamāṇā*, and *bhikṣuṇī* ordination procedures.

### 1. *Śrāmaṇerikā* ordination

A woman who has renounced the world to enter a *saṃghas* is called *haengja* (postulant). A postulant should learn the basics of Buddhist doctrine, monastic rules, and religious rituals. The youngest and the oldest ages that the Chogye Order stipulates for becoming a postulant are fifteen and forty. Other regulations exist on the eligibility for a layperson to become a postulant. They include those who fail to sever relationships formed in the secular world, the handicapped, those who have incurable diseases, and those who would do harm to the respectability of the *saṃghas*. These conditions imply that persons with

2 The Chogye Order administers public qualification examinations for monks and nuns, and these examinations are divided into five different levels. The fifth- and fourth-degree examinations are for candidates for the *śrāmaṇera/śrāmaṇerikā* and *bhikṣus/bhikṣuṇī*, respectively. *Bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs* who have been in the *saṃghas* for at least ten years and have participated in a minimum of four retreats can take the third-degree examination. The second- and first-degree examinations are given to those who have been in the *saṃghas* for at least twenty and twenty-five years, respectively. For detail, see the *Samini yurūi (Śrāmaṇerikā Rules and Decorum)*, trans. and ed. Sök Ch'oru (Seoul: Chogye Order Press, 2000).

a healthy mind and a healthy body are able to practice according to dharma.

The Korean terms *sami* (male) and *samini* (female) are originally from *śrāmaṇera* and *śrāmaṇerikā*, respectively. The meaning of these Sanskrit words comprises both "cultivating the mind diligently" and "taking refuge from evil." The *śrāmaṇerikā* precepts cover common virtues laypeople are advised to observe in society, in addition to only a few other moral principles.(Mok, chöngbae, 1998:110) There is a book published by the Chogye Order entitled *śrāmaṇerikā Rules and Decorum* (*Samini yurūi*). Postulants study this book in their preparation for their *śrāmaṇera/śrāmaṇerikā* ordination. The ten precepts and manners *śrāmaṇerikās* should observe are as follows(T.22:810b):

- (1) Do not take life.
- (2) Do not steal from others.
- (3) Do not engage in lewd conduct.
- (4) Do not speak falsehood.
- (5) Do not drink.
- (6) Do not use flowers nor apply perfume.
- (7) Do not sing or dance; and refrain from entertainment.
- (8) Do not sit on or use a high and big wooden bed.
- (9) Do not eat unless it is mealtime.
- (10) Do not keep gold or silver.

The above rules were mainly for adolescent monks or nuns of about fifteen years of age. Nowadays, the average age of women postulants is about thirty, and this average age is going up. Their education level is also rising; most of them have finished high school or college. Therefore, the above precepts may be too basic for today's postulants. However, they are still effective in that they can nurture the ideals of compassion, humility, and non-possession and thereby help postulants to control their mind and especially their basic instincts. This is seen in the earnestness and the seriousness with which they study the *Śrāmaṇerikā Rules and Decorum* in their training temples.

## 2. Śikṣamāṇā ordination

As mentioned earlier, the *samini* receives śikṣamāṇā ordination two years before being ordained as a bhikṣuṇī, according to the Chogye Order's regulations. For the two intermediary years, the śikṣamāṇā should keep six precepts. The stipulation of the two-year period is intended to examine both her physical and psychological qualifications fully. The Eight Rules (*Gurudharmas*) say, "To receive bhikṣuṇī ordination, one should observe the six precepts for two years. She then can receive bhikṣuṇī ordination from the bhikṣu and bhikṣuṇī saṃghas." The six precepts are(T.22:756c):

- (1) Do not meet with a man of infected mind.
- (2) Do not steal money.
- (3) Do not take life.
- (4) Do not speak falsehood.
- (5) Do not take food unless it is mealtime.
- (6) Do not drink.

If a śrāmaṇerikā violates any of these precepts, the time she has spent in a training temple up to that point is nullified, and she has to start her two-year education over, beginning from that day. The six precepts are not so different from those for the śrāmaṇerikā in their contents; however, the first precept is particularly stressed as the most important one to observe.(Sato, Mitsuo, 1994:36)

## 3. Bhikṣuṇī ordination

Qualifications for becoming a bhikṣuṇī are as follows. She should be at least twenty years old. As for her training background, a candidate must have undergone one of the two following tracks. She should have received four years of education at a seminary. Or, after receiving śrāmaṇerikā ordination, she should have completed eight retreat periods (four summers and four winters) in addition to study at a meditation hall (*sōnwōn*). Finally, she should have passed the

fourth-degree examination.

The bhikṣuṇī ordination ceremony lasts for seven days during which the candidate should keep silent and should not take any food in the afternoon. She must also participate in the rituals, penitence sessions, formal meals, dharma talks, and group work. During this period, all personal, free activities are prohibited.

The text used in the Chogye Order's bhikṣuṇī ordination is the *Dharmaguptaka-vinaya*, which consists of 348 rules. This is far more than the 250 rules for bhikṣu ordination. Below is a comparative chart of the monastic rules for the bhikṣu and the bhikṣuṇī as laid out in the *Dharmaguptaka-vinaya*.

	Bhikṣu	Bhikṣuṇī
Pārājikā dharmas	4	8
Samghāvaśeṣā dharmas	13	17
Aniyatas dharmas	2	
Nihsargika-pāyantika dharmas	30	30
Pāyantika dharmas	90	178
Pratideśanīyā dharmas	4	8
Śaikṣa dharmas	100	100
Adhikaraṇa-śamatha dharmas	7	7
Total	250	348

The number of rules for the bhikṣuṇī differs from that for the bhikṣu in the *pārājika*, *saṃghāvaśeṣa*, *nihsargika-pāyantika*, *pāyantika*, and *pratideśanīya* categories. This difference seems to exist because the rules were established in view of matters and situations that were more directly relevant to women than men. An analysis of these rules, therefore, enables us to better understand the importance of practice specifically for women.

#### A. Pārājikā dharmas

The pārājika precepts are likened to a guillotine. Those who



violate them are expelled from the saṃghas; they cannot become a nun a second time and cannot be forgiven through penitence. Among the eight pārājikas, first four--lewd conduct, stealing, taking life, and speaking falsehood--are the same as the ones for the bhikṣu. The other four precepts apply only to the bhikṣuṇī: for example, do not meet with a man, and do not cover up or cooperate with a bhikṣuṇī who commits the pārājika offenses. The strict rules on sexual behaviors seem aimed at protecting the bhikṣuṇī. The pārājikas constitute the backbone of all the monastic rules; in addition to protecting bhikṣuṇīs, these precepts are also meant to prevent the saṃghas from falling into disarray. They emphasize the importance of the nun's renunciation of her secular views and ways of conduct as a woman.

#### B. Saṃghāvaśeṣā dharmas

Saṃghāvaśeṣā rules concern behaviors that can cause the dissolution of a saṃgha. It says, "Although a person violates these rules, his/her qualifications as a monk or nun still remain effective if he/she performs penitence in the dharma hall and receives approval from the saṃghas; therefore, one can restore his/her status as a monk/nun.(T.22:756c) This is why the Saṃghāvaśeṣās are referred to as the rules of "remaining in the saṃghas."

The rules in this category that apply to bhikṣuṇīs but not to bhikṣus are about ten in number. They are largely related to prohibiting a bhikṣuṇī saṃgha to be independent of a bhikṣu saṃgha. They are also intended to prevent circumstances in which nuns face sexual temptation and are drawn into lewd conduct. Furthermore, these rules are for keeping nuns from criticizing decisions made by the saṃghas.

#### C. Nihsargika-pāyantika dharmas

The Nihsargika-pāyantika rules are about inappropriately obtained items. They concern one's material desire, encouraging communal possession and equal distribution of goods among saṃgha members. The eighteen of these rules commonly apply to bhikṣu and bhikṣuṇīs, and bhikṣuṇīs must observe twelve additional ones. These twelve rules

prohibit forcing a benefactor to give alms, misusing donated money or goods, and using luxurious robes and bowls. The Nihsargika-pāyantikas stress frugality and prevent bhikṣus and bhikṣuṇīs from becoming a burden on the laity.

#### D. Pāyantika dharmas

The pāyantika offenses can be expiated by penitence in front of the saṃghas. While the Nihsargika-pāyantikas stipulate that a monk or nun surrender certain material things to the saṃghas, the pāyantika rules require only penitence of minor offenses in front of the saṃghas. These rules are mainly about speaking falsehood or unintentional misconduct. Among these rules, 109 items address a bhikṣuṇī saṃghas's reliance on a bhikṣu saṃghas for protection, regulations on misconduct, the prevention of harmful acts to laypeople, and the maintenance of order in the saṃghas, among others.

#### E. Pratideśanīya dharmas

The word "pratideśanīya" indicates a "regret of misdeed" by a confession and penitence. Bhikṣus should observe four pratideśanīya rules, bhikṣuṇīs eight. One who transgresses these rules can repent to other bhikṣus or bhikṣuṇīs. The pratideśanīya rules refer to light offenses committed not by intention but by mistake; therefore, one can be forgiven by penitence. These rules mainly regulate a desire for food.

From the above, it can be said that in handling monastic rules, the saṃghas's intention is to give violators, except for those who commit the pārājika offenses, a chance to repent and thereby remain in the saṃghas. The monastic rules help one to reflect on his/her deeds as a member of the saṃghas and encourage him/her to keep the right mind and to stay on the right track through self-discipline.

### **IV. The Monastic Educational System for Nuns**

The object of the monastic education in the Chogyé Order is "to

succeed the noble order of the Buddha, disseminate his teaching, and save all sentient beings."(Chöngdae, 2001:221) The educational system established by the order, therefore, is intended to produce monks and nuns who will attain enlightenment and practice bodhisattvahood as a way of building a Buddha-land.

### 1. The development of the monastic educational system

Today's Buddhist monastic education in Korea is a continuation of the tradition established in the late Chosŏn dynasty. During the early years of Chosŏn, the government reorganized the existing twelve Buddhist sects into Sŏn and Kyo schools. By mid-Chosŏn, the two schools developed their distinct characteristics. However, under the strong leadership of Sŏn monks such as Hyujöng and Samyöng, various sects within the scholastic school began to disappear, and the Chönghŏ branch came to dominate the Sŏn school. In this way, the Sŏn school prevailed during the rest of the Chosŏn period. This led Sŏn monks to teach even sutras, establishing the tradition of synthesizing Sŏn practice and doctrinal study. Along with this development, an ecumenical center (*ch'ongnim*) was founded, and all of the traditional Buddhist educational organizations were placed together there, including a seminary, a meditation hall, a *Vinaya* institute (*yurwŏn*), and a chanting hall (*yömburwŏn*).

### 2. The establishment of the educational curriculum

The current curriculum at seminary within the traditional Korean Buddhist monastic educational system was developed in mid-Chosŏn when Sŏn and Kyo (doctrinal study) began to be integrated. The system came to be solidified between King Injo's (1623-1649) and King Sukchong's (1675-1720) reigns.

After its introduction to Korea between the end of Silla and the beginning of Koryŏ, the Sŏn school relied on the *Diamond Sutra* (*Chin-kang ching*) and the *Book of the Heroic March Samadhi* (*Sāraṅgama*

*Sūtra*) as its central texts. When Buddhism began to decline in mid-Koryŏ, Pojo Chinul (1158-1210) revived it by establishing the Samādhi and Prajñā Community (*chŏnghye kyŏlsa*) and adopting "sudden awakening and gradual cultivation" (*tono chŏmsu*) as the foremost idea for practice. His teaching focused on the *Diamond Sūtra*, the *Platform Sūtra* (*Liu-tsu t'an ching*), the *Flower Ornament Sūtra* (*Avatamsaka Sūtra*), and Ta-hui Tsung-kao's *Letters* (Kor. *Taehye sŏjang*), among others. He also wrote the *Admonition to Beginning Students* (*Kye ch'osim haginmun*), the *Excerpts from the Dharma Collection and Special Practice Record with Personal Comments* (*Pŏpchip pyŏrhaengnok chŏryo*), the *Complete and Sudden Attainment of Buddhahood* (*Wŏndon sŏngbullon*), and the *Resolving Doubts about Observing the Hwadu* (*Kanhwa kyŏrŭiron*). Pojo's dharma-descendant Chin'gak Hyesim (1178-1234) compiled the *Collection of the Sŏn School's Enlightened Verses* (*Sŏnmun yŏmsong*) by assembling the traditional *kong'an* (Ch. *kung-an*) phrases. At the end of Koryŏ, Yaun wrote the *Self-Admonition* (*Chagyŏngmun*). All these sutras and texts were requirements in Sŏn studies until the early part of the Chosŏn dynasty. (Chae, Inhwan, 1975:258-9) As the Sŏn school flourished from mid-Chosŏn, Sŏn monks began to teach not only texts on Sŏn but also the *Flower Ornament Sūtra*, the *Lotus Sūtra* (*Miao-fa lien-hua ching*), the *Book of Consummate Enlightenment* (*Yüan-chüeh ching*), and the *Awakening of Faith* (*Ta-sheng ch'i-hsin lun*). These texts became incorporated into the curriculum of the Buddhist monastic education, and their sequence of study came to be established as well.

### 3. The present curriculum

The current seminary curriculum has been in place since 1962. It consists of the Śrāmaṇera/Śrāmaṇerikā Course (Sami-kwa) in the first year, the Fourfold Collection Course (Sajip-kwa) in the second, the Fourfold Teachings Course (Sagyŏ-kwa) in the third, and the Great Teachings Course (Taegyŏ-kwa) in the last year. The texts used in each class are: the *Admonitions to the Gray-Robed Monks* (*Ch'imun kyŏnghun*) in the Śrāmaṇera/Śrāmaṇerikā Course; Kuei-feng Tsung-mi's *Ch'an Preface*

(*Ch'an-yüan chu-ch'üan chi tou-hsü*), Ta-hui's *Letters*, Chinul's *Excerpts from the Dharma Collection and Special Practice Record with Personal Notes*, and Kao-feng Yüan-miao's *Essentials of Ch'an (Ch'an-yao)* in the Fourfold Collection Course; Mahayana sutras such as the *Book of the Heroic March Samadhi*, the *Awakening of Faith*, the *Diamond Sūtra*, the *Book of Consummate Enlightenment* in the Fourfold Teachings Course; and the *Flower Ornament Sūtra*, the *Collection of the Sōn School's Enlightened Verses*, and the *Ching-te Record of the Transmission of the Lamp (Ching-te ch'uan-teng lu)* in the Great Teachings Course.<sup>3</sup> All of these subjects are directly pertinent to Sōn practice, which focuses on discarding the deluded consciousness of self, concentrating on Buddhahood, comprehending the emptiness of all phenomena, and realizing the Buddha-nature in all sentient beings.

#### 4. Seminary life

The monk or nun who participates in the educational program at a seminary is called *hagin* (student). As of February 2002, there are thirteen seminaries for bhikṣus and five for bhikṣuṇīs in which about 350 bhikṣus and 631 bhikṣuṇīs study, respectively. Teaching and learning methods differ among the four classes. The Śramaṇera and the Fourfold Collection classes require students to memorize what they have learned and to be able to recite it. In the Fourfold Teachings and the Great Teachings classes, students study and discuss texts by themselves in small groups and have question-and-answer sessions later with their teachers. This is called the "discussion and lecture" (*nongang*) method. It is designed in such a way that students can develop their own interpretive perspectives on Buddhist teaching by interacting with their peers and clarifying issues that are beyond their own ability through the guidance of their professors. In the afternoon, students meditate, read sutras, and participate in group work. After supper, they attend the evening ritual, chant, meditate, and then go to bed at nine at night,

<sup>3</sup> Some of these texts are optional. For example, not all seminaries adopt the *Collection of the Sōn School's Enlightened Verses* in their fourth-year course.

getting up at three the next morning. Their routine thus centers on doctrinal study, meditation, and chanting with a view to *śīla*, *samādhi*, and *prajñā*. (Yi Nūnghwa, 1968:989) The educational methods used at seminary are intended for understanding man's true nature, developing self-motivation and discipline in study and practice, and combining meditation and sutra reading. This program applies equally to monks and nuns. In both education and practice, the Chogye Order does not allow gender discrimination. When student monks and nuns finish their training at seminary, they can enter special educational institutions, such as an academic center (*hangnim*) (two for bhikṣus), *Vinaya* institutes (three for bhikṣus and one for bhikṣuṇī), and graduate schools of the saṃghas (one for bhikṣus and one for bhikṣuṇīs). However, the majority of them turn to practice at a Sōn monastery.

## V. The Nun's Sōn Practice

### 1. The origin of Sōn practice in Korean Buddhism

The Korean Sōn school began with Wōnjōk Toūi who inherited the dharma teaching from Hsi-t'ang Chih-tsang (735-814), who had in turn succeeded the lineage of Ma-tsu Tao-i (709-788), the ninth heir of the Ch'an patriarch in China, Bodhidharma. The Kaji Mountain school (Kajisanmun) and the Nine Mountains school of Sōn (Kusan Sōnmun), which were opened in Korea, followed the tradition of the Southern school of Ch'an in China. Pōpnang (fl. 632-646) and his disciple Sinhaeng (704-779), who were both returnees from China, propagated the Northern school of Ch'an before the Southern tradition was introduced, but it did not last long. Pōpnang was a successor of Chigong, who was in turn a disciple of P'u-chi (651-739) of the Northern school.

Soon after the Koryō dynasty was founded, *mukcho* Sōn (Ch. *mo-chao* Ch'an; lit. silent illumination) dominated in Korea. However, with the reform politics in the Koryō court, it was overridden by the rising Hwaōm (Ch. Hua-yen) thought. After the military elites took

power in the twelfth century, Chinul and his dharma heirs were elevated to the position of National Master. Influenced by Ta-hui Tsung-kaio (1089-1163), Chinul launched full-fledged *kanhwa* Sŏn (Ch. *kan-hua* Ch'an; lit. observing the critical-phrase) teaching. T'aego Pou (1301-1382), one of the representative Sŏn masters in Koryŏ, communicated regularly with the monks of the Lin-chi school in China and promoted the Kanhwa meditative technique further. In this way, the kanhwa Sŏn tradition began with the patriarch Toŭi and flourished till the age of Pou, whose teachings spread through his one thousand disciples.

In the latter half of the Chosŏn dynasty, Sŏn teaching prospered once again under Chŏnghŏ Hyujŏng (1520-1604), the sixth descendant of Pou. The dharma teaching of Pou's tenth successor, Hwansŏng Chian (1664-1729), gave rise to the Hoam branch, which produced renowned Sŏn masters in the modern period, including Kyŏnghŏ Sŏng'u and Man'gong Wŏlmyŏn. From the point of view of nuns' practice in Korea, Man'gong deserves special attention because he taught bhikṣuṇīs and gave some of them songs of dharma transmission (*chŏnbŏpke*). (Kim, Insu, 2000:77-96)

## 2. The founding of Sŏn monasteries and monastic regulations

The first Sŏn monastery in Korea was founded by the monks who had returned from T'ang China in the latter half of the Silla dynasty. In the thirteenth year of King Hŏndŏk (821), Toŭi introduced the teaching of Hsi-tang Chih-tsang. After returning from China, he built a Sŏn monastery, anticipating a shift in Korean Buddhism from the scholastic tradition to Sŏn practice. (Sŏngbon, 2000:54)

The Sŏn monasteries in Silla were different from those in T'ang China whose dharma hall had no Buddha shrine. In Silla, an altar was constructed for a Buddha statue in every monastery. Nearly all of the statues enshrined in the monasteries at that time were those of Vairocana Buddha. This suggests that the core of Silla's advanced doctrinal study lay in the *Flower Ornament Sutra*. Silla Buddhism's strong

scholastic tradition thus provided a solid basis for the newly introduced Sŏn sect.

In the Koryŏ dynasty, the establishment of the Nine Mountains Sŏn sect heralded the vogue of Sŏn monastery constructions. The opening of a meditation hall in Susŏn-sa by Chinul in particular, led to the establishment of a code of conduct at a meditation hall and of *kanhwa* Sŏn practice as a regular activity and thereby laying down the foundation of the rules and decorum observed in today's Sŏn compounds. The *Admonitions to the Beginning Students*, which is used in seminary today, contains the basic rules which Chinul presented as a guideline for novice Sŏn practitioners. Chinul wrote it on the basis of the *Pure Rules of Ch'an Monasteries* (Ch. *Ch'an-yüan ch'ing-kuei*; Kor. *Sŏnwŏn ch'ŏnggyu*) composed by Ch'ang-lu Tsung-tse of Sung China. The *Platform Sutra* and the *Records of Tai-hui* (*Ta-hui yü-lu*), which played a critical role in Chinul's enlightenment are still adopted as required texts in seminary in the spirit of inheriting his promotion of Sŏn Buddhism at Susŏn-sa.(Sŏngbon, 2000:61)

Under the anti-Buddhist policy of the Chosŏn dynasty, temples moved to mountains.(Chongbŏm, 2000:73) Despite this change, new monasteries continued to be built, and old ones were also continuously repaired. The new constructions never failed to include meditation halls. Unlike in Silla and Koryŏ when Sŏn monasteries were designated separately, each ecumenical center in Chosŏn included both a seminary and a meditation hall side by side in its compound. In the meantime, the Chosŏn period witnessed the construction of a number of meditation halls in the mountains, contributing to dharma transmission in the midst of the government's official persecution of Buddhism. In many respects, Sŏn monasteries in contemporary Korea, including those for *bhikṣuṇīs*, continue the same role that they played during the Chosŏn dynasty.

As discussed earlier, the subjects taught in today's seminary reflect the importance of Sŏn practice in Korean Buddhism. The *Essentials of Sŏn*, for example, addresses the *Kanhwa* Sŏn method established by the Chinese Lin-chi school. When a student completes the courses on



doctrinal studies at a seminary, the next step which he/she usually takes is meditation practice; from this came the phrase *sagyo ipsŏn*, which means that after completing doctrinal studies, one is to undertake Sŏn practice in a meditation hall. The *Speculum on the Sŏn school* (*Sŏn'ga kwigam*), authored by the Sŏn master Sŏsan Hyujŏng, details a guideline for meditation practice. This text was used not only in the Chosŏn period but is also currently in use; it is recited every morning and evening to exalt the practitioner's spirit of Sŏn. This is the way in which the Korean Buddhist monastic education leads monks and nuns to their ultimate goal: spiritual enlightenment.

### 3. The organization of Sŏn monasteries

Currently, the Chogye Order runs fifty-eight Sŏn compounds for bhikṣus, including five ecumenical centers whereas it has only thirty-three bhikṣuṇī Sŏn compounds. As of February 2002, there are 1,042 bhikṣus and 757 bhikṣuṇīs registered in the order. This boom in Sŏn began one hundred years ago when the Sŏn master Kyŏnghŏ Sŏng'u opened a meditation hall in Haein-sa and was appointed its spiritual director (*pangjang*). (Wŏnmyŏng, SC:98) In 1946, the Kaya ch'ongnim was opened but soon destroyed during the Korean War. It was reestablished in 1967 and along with another ecumenical center founded in Pong'am-sa in Mungyŏng. This secured more sites for Sŏn practice.

As for the organization of Sŏn monasteries, the head of an ecumenical center is called pangjang. Other than ordinary meditation halls and those belonging to ecumenical centers, there are basic, international, and overseas Sŏn monasteries, which are classified as special Sŏn monasteries.

Activities in the Sŏn monastery during a retreat period consist of meditation, sermons, recitations of monastic rules (*poṣadha* observance), Sŏn dialogues, disciplinary action, group work, mountain hiking, hair shaving, bathing, self-reflection and repentance, final formal dharma talk, etc. Meditation in the Sŏn monastery is divided into *ilban chŏngjin*

(regular effort), *kahaeng chŏngjin* (intense effort), and *yongmaeng chŏngjin* (ferocious effort). The "regular effort" covers eight to ten hours (two hours each time and four times a day); the "intense effort" lasts for twelve to fourteen hours (three hours each time and four times); the "ferocious effort" continues eighteen hours a day for one week, allowing only two or three hours of sleep per day.<sup>4</sup> Monastic rules are recited every fifteen days, and lectures delivered during these sessions deal mainly with the *Book of Brahma's Net (Brahmajāla Sūtra)*. Hair shaving and bathing are done once every fifteen days. Self-examination is held on the eve of the final day of the retreat. Monks/nuns gather together, confess their wrong doings, and repent their mistakes. At the end of the retreat season, they all listen to the pangjang's formal dharma talk. This schedule at a Sŏn monastery is observed by bhikṣus and bhikṣuṇīs alike without exception. As bhikṣuṇī Sŏn monasteries are usually located near the main temple for bhikṣus, bhikṣuṇīs should attend dharma talks and the reconfirmations of monastic rules that are held there every fifteen days. The location of bhikṣuṇī monasteries or hermitages in the vicinity of those of bhikṣus is in keeping with the *Gurudharmas*.

#### 4. The bhikṣuṇī's meditation practice

The first bhikṣuṇī Sŏn compound in Korea opened in 1913 at Kyŏnsŏng-am in Sudŏk-sa. Thereafter, a number of Sŏn monasteries came into existence to house bhikṣuṇī practitioners. The modern bhikṣuṇī saṃghas in Korea was started by the bhikṣuṇī disciples of the Sŏn master Man'gong. The first bhikṣuṇī whose awakening was authorized by Man'gong was Myori Pŏphŭi (1887-1975), who opened a new page in the lineage of Korean bhikṣuṇīs. She learned sutras and other classics of the great masters in a seminary and studied under Man'gong at Kyŏnsŏng-am. At the age of thirty, her mind's eyes opened, to which Man'gong gave sanction. A Sŏn dialogue between Man'gong and Pŏphŭi illustrates her attainment. Man'gong asked the

4 For an ethnographic description of the "ferocious effort," see Robert Buswell (1992:187-9)

congregation: "When a peach flower's petals are flying in the white snow, where do you find them?" Pöphüi answered: "As the white snow melts, a piece of soil surfaces." Man'gong praised her by saying, "You achieved a piece of soil." Pöphüi's answer means that as thousands of images disappear, true nature can be seen. Man'gong confirmed that she had seen her true nature.

Bhikṣuṇī Ŭngmin (1923-1984) also studied under Man'gong at Kyönsöng-am, and her enlightenment was authorized by him. One day Man'gong asked the assembly, "The moon of the mind is round and alone, and its light swallows all the images, so neither light nor objects are left. What is that thing again?" Ŭngmin stood up from the congregation and answered: "If light does not shine, there are no objects. As if a mirror shines on another mirror, Buddha cannot be seen in the images." Man'gong recognizing Ŭngmin's advancement in practice, praised her as a superior student of Sön.<sup>5</sup>

These are two of many well-known anecdotes about the wisdom of Korean bhikṣuṇīs. While the traditional image of a bhikṣuṇī is often associated with a tender mother, the bhikṣuṇī's determination and perseverance as a Sön practitioner transcends her feminine import. In Korean Buddhism, the bhikṣuṇī's practice is checked and sanctioned by a senior bhikṣu. Korean monastic life allows no difference between monks and nuns on their road to spiritual enlightenment. Nuns have shown devotion to practice, and their intensity is as strong as that of monks, if not stronger.

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5 For these two and other anecdotes on Korean nuns' enlightenment, see SC. A similar anecdote on a bhikṣuṇīs enlightenment involves Tamyön Sön'gyöng (1904-1994) who was approved by the Sön master Hanam in 1942 at the age of thirty-five. Before he passed away, bhikṣu Hyangkok made a brief visit to Naewön-sa one day and presented to the congregation the following statement: "Here is a fake Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, so look for a real one." Sön'gyöng went to the pangjang room where Hyangkok stayed, and told him: "A fake Mañjuśrī, a real Mañjuśrī, all the Buddhas in the past, present, and future, all the great masters in history, everything came out of my nostril." Hyangkok asked again, "Where is your nostril?" "I have no nostril from the beginning, so I can't say where." Hyangkok complimented her by remarking, "You have made great progress in your practice. From now on, you may teach young practitioners."

## VI. Conclusion

This paper examines the ways in which the Chogye Order, the largest Buddhist order in Korea, has established and maintained its monastic educational system for women, from the stage of a postulant to that of a bhikṣuṇī. The roots of the system go back to the Chosŏn dynasty. The lack of historical records on the emergence and development of a bhikṣuṇī saṃghas in ancient Korea presents an enormous obstacle in tracing and reconstructing the tradition of women's monastic life and education. Limited as it is, the information available on Paekche and Silla nuns, however, suggests the existence of a sizable bhikṣuṇī saṃghas in the Three Kingdoms period. The situation is no better concerning the data on Koryŏ and Chosŏn nuns. Many of the crucial issues on the training and ordination of Buddhist nuns in pre-modern Korea remain to be investigated.

The main body of this article treats the evolution and operation of the current training program and ordination procedures for women who join the Chogye Order. It is clear that in transforming a laywoman into a fully ordained bhikṣuṇī, the basic educational institution, seminary, and meditation hall play vital roles. The organization of the various branches of the Chogye Order's educational system is based on the idea that sutra study and Sŏn practice complement each other and that their integration helps nuns to expedite their progress toward enlightenment. As is indicated by the textbooks used in seminary, women's monastic education is same as men's in that their curriculum commonly follows the traditional emphasis on Mahayana sutras and the kanhwa Sŏn practice in Korean Buddhism. In other words, no gender-based discriminations are found in their curricular orientation or educational objectives. No fundamental prejudice exists against women's capacity to attain Buddhahood. This is evidenced by the fact that those bhikṣuṇīs whose enlightenment was authorized by Sŏn masters such as Man'gong and Hanam received a song of dharma transmission and thereby succeeded the Sŏn lineage.

While it is true that an increasing number of nuns these days engage in social work and environmental issues instead of dedicating

themselves entirely to meditation, many of the newly ordained bhikṣuṇīs still tend to favor Sōn monasteries in pursuit of spiritual enlightenment after they graduate from a seminary. Moreover, their practice is guided by the doctrine of emptiness, which urges them to go beyond the goal of attaining Arhatship or Buddhahood. On a more practical level, their serenity of mind, wisdom, and compassion reveal the lofty spirit of female monastics, generating an enabling and ennobling image of women in contemporary Korean society, which is faced with the deterioration of its spiritual well-being amid rapid industrialization and modernization. It is in this context that Korean nuns can define the profound meanings of their practice and of their role as disseminators of the Buddhas teaching.

## Glossary of Chinese Terms

(S=Sanskrit K=Korean)

- adhikaraṇa-samatha dharma (S) 滅諍法  
 aniyata dharma (S) 不定法  
 bhikṣu (S) 比丘  
 bhikṣuṇī (S) 比丘尼  
 Chagyōngmun (K) 自警文  
 Ch'an-yao 禪要  
 Chigong (K) 志空  
 Ch'imun kyōnghun (K) 緇門警訓  
 Chin'gak Hyesim (K) 眞覺慧謹  
 Ching-chien 淨檢  
 Chōnghye kyōlsa (K) 定慧結社  
 ch'ongnim (K) 叢林  
 Ch'ang-lu Tsung-tse 長蘆宗墮  
 chōnbōpke (K) 傳法偈  
 Chōnghō Hyujōng (K) 清虛休靜  
 Dharmaguptaka-vinaya (S), Sabun-yul (K) 四分律  
 Gurudharmas (S) 八敬戒  
 haengja (K) 行者

- Hanam (K) 漢巖  
 hangnim (K) 學林  
 Hsi-t'ang Chih-tsang 西堂智藏  
 Hwaö̃m (K) 華嚴  
 Hwansö̃ng Chian (K) 喚醒志安  
 Hyanggok (K) 香谷  
 kangwö̃n (K) 講院  
*Kanhwa kyö̃rüiron* (K) 看話決疑論  
 Kao-feng Yüan-miao 高原圓妙  
 Kuei-feng Tsung-mi 圭峯宗密  
*Kye ch'osim haginmun* (K) 誠初心學人文  
 Kyö̃mik (K) 謙益  
 Kyö̃nghö̃ Sö̃ng'u (K) 鏡虛惺牛  
 Ma-tsu Tao-i 馬祖道一  
*Mahisaka-vinaya* (S), *Obu-yulmun* (K) 五部律文  
 Man'gong Wö̃lmyö̃n (K) 滿空月面  
 Myobö̃p (K) 妙法  
 Myori Pö̃phüi (K) 妙理法喜  
 nihsargika-päyantika dharma (S) 捨墮法  
 pangjang (K) 方丈  
 pä̃räjikä dharma (S) 波羅夷法  
 päyantika dharma (S) 單墮法  
*Pö̃pchip pyö̃rhaengnok chö̃ryo* (K) 法集別行錄節要  
 Pö̃pmyö̃ng (K) 法明  
 Pö̃pnang (K) 法朗  
 pošadha (S) 布薩  
 pratideśāniyā dharma (S) 悔過法  
 pravrajyā (S) 出家  
 sagyo ipsön (K) 捨教入禪  
 śaikṣa dharma (S) 衆學法  
 saṃgha (S) 僧家  
 saṃghāvaśeṣā dharma (S) 僧錢法  
*Samini yurüi* (K) 沙彌尼律儀  
 Samyö̃ng (K) 四溟

Sasi (K) 史侍(氏)  
 sikṣamaṇā (S) 式叉摩那  
 Sinhaeng (K) 神行  
 Sŏn'ga kwigam (K) 禪家龜鑑  
 Sŏnmun yŏmsong (K) 禪門拈頌  
 sŏnwŏn (K) 禪院  
 Sŏnwŏn ch'ŏnggyu (K) 禪苑清規  
 śrāmaṇera (S); sami (K) 沙彌  
 śrāmaṇerikā (S); samini (K) 沙彌尼  
 T'aego Pou (K) 太古普愚  
 Ta-hui Tsung-kae 大慧宗杲  
 Ta-hui yü-lu 大慧語錄  
 Tamyŏn Sŏn'gyŏng (K) 湛然禪敬  
 tono chŏmsu (K) 頓悟漸修  
 toyunarang (K) 都唯那娘  
 Ŭngmin (K) 應敏  
 Uimalakirtinirdeśa sūtra (S) 維摩法經  
 Wŏndon sŏngbullon (K) 圓頓成佛論  
 Wŏnjŏk Toui (K) 元寂道義  
 Yaun (K) 野雲  
 yŏmburwŏn (K) 念佛院  
 yurwŏn (K) 律院

## Abbreviations

- \* For Chinese Buddhist Tripitaka citations, *T* refers to the *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*.
- \* *SC* refers to the *Sŏnwŏn ch'ongram (The Collected Works on Zen Monasteries)*. Ed. Department of Education of the Chogyŏ Order. Seoul: Pulgyosidaesa, 2000.

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