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A Strategic Study of Early Buddhism and Buddhism in East Asia
(Documented researches) 9 lectures by Piya Tan

Lecture 5

THE RISE AND GROWTH OF BUDDHISM IN KOREA (1 lecture)

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1. SYLLABUS

MAP of Korea.
(1) Indigenous Korean religion: shamanism.
(2) The Three Kingdoms: introduction of Buddhism.
(3) Silla Buddhism: Syncretism; Hwarang-do; Chajang & Wonhyo.
(4) Sŏn.
(5) Koryŏ.
(6) Korean Buddhist Canons.
(7) Yi: State control & persecutions.
(8) Japanese occupation: innovations.
(9) Modern reforms in the Korean Sangha.
(10) Religions in Korea today: Sŏn Buddhism.

2. FOLK TRADITIONS

When Buddhism came to China, it was an empire (the Han) and Chinese society was very sophisticated with its own indigenous philosophies like Daoism and Confucianism. The situation was very different in the case of Korea. At the advent of Buddhism in Korea, the country was largely tribal (exemplified in tribal worship) and unified with a deep belief in shamanism, a belief system centring on the occult, psychic transformation and healing powers believed to be possessed by a particular religious person called a ***mudang*** *or* shaman.

Migrations into Korea

From the 3rd millennium BCE to historical times, Altaic people of NE Asia moved into the peninsula and became the dominant group.

By the 2nd millennium BCE, a new wave, the southern Tungus (an Altaic-speaking people from northern Asia), migrated into the country. Like other Altaics, their foundation myth asserted that their shaman-king, such as Tangun (prince of the sandalwood tree), was the descendant of Heaven. Tangun, who ruled over the tribes of Dragon, Horse, Deer, Crane, Eagle, and Egret, is regarded as the mythical founder of Korea in 2333 BCE.

Lack of concept of the whole

According to shamanism, curses on hair, nails, or any parts of the body can doom the whole of the victim. Dreams and omens are viewed not only as signs but also as causes of events. The shaman appeased the malice of evil spirits and invoked the protection of benevolent ones. Such beliefs remain strong even among some Koreans in our own time.

In pre-Buddhist Korea, such shamanistic beliefs and practices point to the fact that these folk traditions had not yet developed **a concept of the whole**. The concept of the whole is a philosophical view that enables a systematic structure, e.g. social or religious, to be built. As such, we would see that throughout Korean history, the rulers were (and still is) preoccupied with the hope of unifying their country—and Buddhism played a vital roles in this.

The early Koreans held to a system of appendages, as in parts of the body, that allowed for a **syncretism** that was rich and vital. Thus, shamanism has often intermingled with Buddhism in Korea and has withstood social changes, preserving many of its quaint customs of the folk culture. This gives Korean society and religion its second characteristic: the desire and tendency to syncretize discordant parts into a harmonious whole, as we shall presently see in the development of Buddhism in Korea.

3. HAN AND THE SILK ROAD

From the Warring States period (403-221 BCE) on, refugees from the northern Chinese states of Yen, Ch'i and Chao migrated to the peninsula to escape the ravages of the mainland wars. Since then, Han civilization began to increasingly eclipse the indigenous culture of Korea.

Furthermore, the Silk Road gave China closer ties with the Buddhism of India, Iran and Central Asia. China's overwhelming size, both in land and in people, inevitably led to its domination in the developments in East Asian Buddhism. However, as we shall see, the Koreans themselves exercised their genius in the **indigenization** of Buddhism into their own society.

4. THE THREE KINGDOMS: KOGURYŎ

The established religions of China—Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism—began to penetrate Korea during the period of **the Three Kingdoms** (c.57-668 CE). To the north was the kingdom of Koguryŏ (about 2/3 of northern Korea), the Paekche kingdom in the southwest, and Silla in the southeast. After 668, Silla dominated all of Korea.

The traditional **Korean chronicles** such as *Samguk sagi* (Historical Records of the Three Kingdoms), *Haedong kosŭng chŏn* (Biographies of Eminent Korean Monks) and *Samguk yusa* (Memorabilia and Mirabilia of the Three Kingdoms) all agree that Buddhism came to Korea from China during this period.

Koguryŏ

Buddhism was presumed to have been first introduced into Korea in **372 CE**, when King Fu Chien (r. 357-384) of the Former Ch'in dynasty (351-394) sent a monk-envoy, Shun-tao (Kor. Sundo), to the **Koguryŏ** court with scriptures and images. Earlier in 370, Fu Chien had defeated the Former Yen state, which had laid siege to Koguryŏ—an action that brought closer ties between kings Fu Chien and Sosurim (r. 371-383).

Tradition has it that in 376 king Sosurim built for **Sundo** the Sŏngmun (Hŭnguk) monastery, supposedly the first Buddhist structure on the peninsula. It is also said that **Ado**, a native of Koguryŏ, became a Buddhist monk as 5, and traveled to China at 16 to study Buddhism. He is believed to have returned 3 years later in 383. The king was said to have built the second Buddhist monastery in Korea, the Ibbulan (Hŭngbok), for the first Korean monk. If this were the case, it is likely that Buddhism was known amongst the Koreans even earlier than the traditional date.

There is concrete evidence of an earlier introduction of Buddhism than traditionally believed. A mid-4th century tomb, unearthed near P'yŏngyang, is found to incorporate Buddhist motifs in its ceiling decoration.

Information regarding Buddhism in this period is scarce, but it is likely that it was characterized by magical practices, a symbiotic relationship between the Sangha (ecclesia) and the state, Maitreya worship and Mahayana scriptures.

5. PAEKCHE

In 384, the Serindian (Central Asian) monk, **Maranant'a** (*Mālānanda; *Kumārānandī), was believed to have come via sea to Paekche from the Chinese state of Eastern Chin (317-420). His enthusiastic welcome by the royal court initiated the rapid spread of Buddhism throughout the Paekche kingdom.

Less than a year after his arrival, a monastery had been built on Mt. Han for Maranant'a and the first Korean natives ordained on Korean soil as Buddhist monks. Studies of the Vinaya (monastic discipline) appeared to have flourished in Paekche. In both Koguryŏ and Paekche, there is evidence of the presence of such schools as the Madhyamaka (Samnon), Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma, Nirvana, Satyasiddhi, and Tiantai (Ch'ŏnt'ae).

Paekche's **nautical skill** made it a veritable "Phoenicia of medieval East Asia", and this played a vital role in the dissemination of Buddhism throughout East Asia. In 552 Paekche dispatched Buddhist doctrinal specialists, psalmodists, iconographers and architects to Japan, thus transmitting to the Japanese the rudiments of sinified Buddhist culture and laying the foundation for the rich Buddhist culture of Asuka and Nara periods.

6. SILLA

The Silla nobility, who continued their drive for peninsular unification, found strong incentive to embrace Buddhism in an effort to accommodate the newly conquered Koguryŏ and Paekche aristocracies, who had embraced Buddhism long before.

Silla expansion through southern Korea prompted massive emigration of Koreans to Japan (where they were known as *kikajin*). Many of the cultural and technical achievements of early Japan—such as the development of paddy fields, the construction of palaces and temples, and town planning—were direct results of the expertise introduced by these successive waves of emigrants.

During the reign of king Nulchi (r. 417-458), a monk named **Mukhoja**, was said to have cured the princess of a persistent disease by means of a ceremony involving a mysterious substance recently brought from China: incense.

Silla was the last of the three kingdoms to consolidate its power. It was only in 529, during the reign of king Pŏphŭng (r. 514-540), following the martyrdom of **Ich'adon** (Pak Yŏmch'ŏk), that it officially embraced Buddhism. Political advantages probably motivated Silla to embrace Buddhism. In 540 Pŏphŭng abdicated to become a Buddhist monk residing in a new monastery. The queen is also said to have become a nun and resided in another monastery. This is the first record of a **Buddhist nun** in Korea,

Toward the end of his reign, in 572, Pŏphŭng's successor, king Chinhŭng (r. 540-576) instituted the **P'algwanhoe**, a Buddhist ceremony to bless the departed spirits of soldiers who had died in battle in the expansion of Silla at the cost of Koguryŏ and Paekche. Performance of the P'algwanhoe, as well as another elaborate ceremony, the **Paekchwa kanghoe**, were supposed to bless the king and protect Silla. The construction of pagodas, in particular, was considered to be of direct, supernatural benefit to the king and the country.

7. COUNTERCULTURE

The Buddhism of the Three Kingdoms seemed to have been an ongoing amalgamation of foreign religion and indigenous cults. Local snake and dragon cults, for example, merged with the Mahayana belief in dragons as protectors of the Dharma, forming the uniquely Korean cult of ***hoguk pulgyo*** ("state-protection Buddhism") which thenceforth characterized Korean Buddhism.

One of the earliest examples of this amalgamation was the vow of the Silla king **Munmu** (r. 661-681) to be reborn as a sea dragon after his death in order to guard his country and its new faith from foreign invasion. Buddhism and the state subsequently evolved a symbiotic relationship in which the monks entreated the Buddha and Bodhisattvas to protect the state and the state in turn provided active support for the dissemination of Buddhism throughout the empire. (This tradition would continue in the succeeding Koryŏ kingdom.)

In their efforts to indigenize Buddhism, monks attempted to show correspondences between Korean ancestral heroes and the new religion, thereby accelerating the adoption of the religion among Koreans. Attempts were made, for example, to prove that **Hwanin**, the Celestial Emperor, was identical to Śakra, the king of the devas (Chesŏk-ch'ŏn) of Indian Buddhism, and that **Tan'gun**, the progenitor of the Korean race, was the theophany (divine incarnation) of Śrīmālādevī (Kilsang-ch'ŏn).

Vestiges of the dispensations of previous Buddhas were alleged to have been uncovered in Korea, and the advent of the future Buddha, Maitreya, was prophesied to occur in the south of the peninsula. Even today, visitors to a Korean monastery will notice the shrines to the mountain god or to the seven stars of the Big Dipper on its perimeter—testimonies to the synthesis of common sinified culture to Buddhism..

8. HWARANGDO

One of the most prominent institutions of Buddhism of the Three Kingdoms is the **Hwarang-do**, the Order of Flower Boys. According to the *Samguk sagi*, this chilvaric order was instituted by king Chinhŭng of Silla. The younger members of the nobility, were drilled in ethical virtues and refined culture, centring around mystical experience of the native cult of shamanesses, military skills, and comradeship for national leaders, and fused with the messianic faith in the Bodhisattva Maitreya, the coming Buddha.

This fusion of chilvaric code and messianic faith generated an unexpected zeal to transform Korea into a Buddha land of the world and established the impetus for unification of Korea under Silla. As such, the formation of the Hwarangdo is considered to have been part of the expansionist policies of the Silla court. A later Silla writer related that the Hwarang boys were trained in Confucian filial piety and patriotism, Daoist quietism, and Buddhist morality. As such, it is not a paramilitary organization, as is popularly misunderstood.

To some scholars, the aesthetic celebrations—such as singing and dancing out in the open—that are commonly associated with the Hwarang seemed to be connected to shamanistic rituals of initiation journeys and pilgrimages. However, one thing is certain: their eventual identification with Maitreya clearly showed their intention to spread Buddhism among the Koreans.

9. SILLA BUDDHISM

In 668, Korea was finally unified under Silla (668-935) and with that, Buddhism grew in an unprecedented way. The major "official" schools of scholastic Buddhism that had developed in China were introduced into Korea were:

Ch'ŏnt'ae-chong (Tiantai School).
Hwaŏm-chong (Avatamsaka School).
Yŏlban-chong (Nirvāṇa School)
Tantric Schools (Chin. Zhenyan): **Shinin** & **Chinŏn**.
Wŏnyung-chong, early branch of the Hwaŏm (Avatamsaka) School.
Kyeyul-chong (Vinaya School)
Pŏpsang-chong (Yogācāra) based on the "consciousness-only" (*vijñāpti,mātratā*) teachings.

Worthy of mention, too, is the uniquely Korean school that stressed Buddhist syncretism, founded by the enigmatic Wonhyo:

Pŏpsŏng-chong (Dharmatā School) [11].

Ch'ŏnt'ae-chong (Tiantai School)

Traditionally, the first identifiable school of Buddhism in Korea was the Chinese Tiantai, founded by **Hyŏn'gwang** in Paekche in 565. However, it should be noted that Hyŏn'gwang studied in China, not under Zhiyi (the Tiantai founder), but under Zhiyi's teacher. Nevertheless, the early syncretic school related to Tiantai survived Paekche's absorption into Silla and matured into classical Korean Tiantai, the Ch'ŏnt'ae-chong in the 8th century.

Ch'ŏnt'ae, however, did not gain significance until it won royal patronage under the Koryŏ dynasty in the 10th century. Like Chinese Tiantai, this royal favour towards Ch'ŏnt'ae was part of a political agenda to promote national unity by creating a unified Buddhism as the state ideology.

Hwaŏm-chong (Avatamsaka School)

The second identifiable school of Chinese Buddhism to take root in Korea was Huayan, which centres around the voluminous Avataṃsaka Sūtra. Huayan, or Hwaŏm as it is known in Korean, was introduced into Korea by **Ŭisang** (625-702) [10] in 670, after studying 20 years in China.

Related to Hwaŏm is the Haedong or **Pŏpsŏng** school [10] founded by Ŭisang's friend, Wonhyo. This, however, was an indigenous school since Wŏnhyo did not study under any Chinese teacher, but claimed to have realized enlightenment in Korea itself

Yŏlban-chong (Nirvāṇa School)

The Nirvāṇa school strictly speaking was not a school but a lineage of monks who centred their study and practice around the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra. The Yŏlban (like its early Chinese countepart) is so called because it was inspired by the Sūtra which the Koguryŏ monk **Podŏk** brought back from China into Silla (the new dominant state) in 668.

The Nirvāṇa Sūtra itself influenced the thought of both Ŭisang and Wŏnhyo, but the Yŏlban tradition had little lasting influence.

Tantric Schools (Chin. Zhenyan): Shinin & Chinŏn

The esoteric Zhenyan (Chen Yen; Jap. Shingon) or Tantric school was also influential during the Silla period. In Korea, it was divided into two sub-schools: the Shinin and the Chinŏn. They were associated primarily with the performance of magical rtuals and the curing of diseases, which highlighted their similarity with Korea's indigenous shamanism.

The best known Korean exponent of Tantric Buddhism was the famous traveller **Hyech'o**. His diary of the long years of travel and study in China, Central Asia and India was rediscovered only in the 20th century and is now available in English translation (*The Hye Ch'o Diary*, Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1989).

Oldest extant printed text

Korea is the proud custodian of the world's oldest printed text. The oldest surviving printed work known to date is the **Dhāraṇī scroll** (dated no later than 704)—the Diamond Sutra from Dunhuang is dated 868—found in the foundations of the Pulguk-sa pagoda at Kyongju, South Korea, in 1966.

10. IMPORTANT SILLA MONKS

Pilgrims

During the reign of king Chinp'yŏng (r. 579-632), the monk **Wŏn'gwang** left Korea in 589 for studies in China. Before him, other Korean monks had already traveled to China, even India, for studies. In 554, the monk **Ŭisin** returned from a tour of India, and in 565, **Hyŏn'gwang** returned to Paekche from China, having studied under Huisi (Hui Ssu, 515-77), teacher of Zhiyi (Chih I), who founded the Tiantai school. Of these pilgrims, Wŏn'gwang was the most influential.

Wŏn'gwang

Wŏn'gwang's departure for China in 589 coincided with its reunification under the Sui dynasty. In China, Wŏn'gwang specialized in the study of the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* and the Prajñā,-pāramitā Sūtra, texts central to the Tiantai school that Zhiyi was formulating at that time.

After his return to Silla in 599, he had great influence at court, and in 608 returned to China as an envoy to the Sui dynasty. In 631, when he was dying, king Chinp,yŏng himself attended to him, and the king himself dying in 632.

Wŏn'gwang's fame and his close association with China initiated a flood of Koreans to and from China and India. This development was very remarkable considering the distance involved and that the 7th century was time of endless warfare.

After the death of Wŏn'gwang in 631 and the death of king Chinp,yŏng in 632, Buddhism in Unified Silla was dominated by three monks: Chajang, Wŏnhyo and Ŭisang. They laid the groundwork that would become the hallmark of Korean Buddhist philosophy. Both of them were the vanguards of the Huayan School, as reflected in their influence on Fazang (Fa-tsang) (643-712), the systematizer of the Chinese Huayan school.

Chajang (608-686)

Chajang (608-686) is notable for his determined renunciation of worldly affairs and his dedication to scholastic doctrines and moral discipline. Although born of the royal clan, he reputedly refused, even at royal threat of his execution, to leave his meditation to serve at court. In 636, he left for China, where it was said he had a vision of Mañjuśrī on the sacred mountain Wu Tai Shan.

Tang Emperor Taizong, founder of the Tang dynasty, invited Chajang to reside in one of the capital's grand monasteries, but he chose to live in a simple, secluded hut in the mountains. Still, many students sought him out for instruction, until in 643 queen Sŏndŏk requested the emperor Taizong to send Chajang back to Silla.

Back in Silla, Chajang was made *kuksa* or national preceptor, in effect becoming the head of all the monks in the country. Chajang used his influence to reform Buddhism there by instituting a four-point programme:

(1) Increased scriptural study by monks;
(2) Monastic examinations on doctrine every six months;
(3) Establishment of a single ordination centre at the T'ongdo Monastery to administer entry into and dismissal from the Sangha; and
(4) Creation of a government bureau to oversee and maintain Buddhist temples and their lands and contents.

Because of the third point, Chajang is often associated with the Vinaya school (concerned with monastic discipline), which had earlier developed in China.

Wŏnch'ŭk (613-696)

Wŏnch'ŭk (613-696), a close friend and disciple of Xuanzang (c. 596-664), was a prominent exegete in the Chinese Faxiang (Fa-hsiang) school, whose commentaries on such texts as the Saṃdhi,nirmocana Sūtra exerted profound influence on early Tibetan Buddhism.

Ŭisang (625-702)

Ŭisang is remembered as a master of Hwaŏm (Chin. Huayan) Buddhism and a great builder of monasteries and temples. He failed to reach China in his first attempt (648-9)—which he made with his friend Wonhyo—but made it in 650. Once in China, he stayed for 20 years, studying with the second and third patriarchs of the Huayan school: Zhiyan (Chih Yen) and Fazang (Fa Tsang). Fazang and Ŭisang became good friends, and one famous letter of their correspondence survives.

In 670, when Ŭisang got wind of a Tang plot to attack Silla, he made a dramatic return to Silla and hastened to warn his king. No doubt, partly as a result of this act of courage and patriotism, and partly because of his eminent scholarship, Ŭisang was permitted to construct a total of ten monasteries, making him one of the greatest religious building contractors in history.

11. WŎNHYO (617-687)

Ŭisang's friend and brother monk, **Wŏnhyo** (617-687), is best remembered for his radical efforts to popularize Buddhism among the Silla masses. At 32, in a dramatic experience in a pitch-black cave, after unwittingly drinking sweet water from a partially decomposed crown of a human skull, he had an enlightenment experience.

Wŏnhyo's wayward and exuberant personality is well-known. He then spent his time wandering amongst the populace and teaching Buddhism to all and sundry. In his teaching, he performed songs of his own composition, accompanying himself on a lute or by drumming on a gourd. Wŏnhyo frequented wine-houses and brothels, and in later life had a sexual affair with a princess who bore him a son, Sŏl-ch'ong, one of the greatest Silla intellectuals.

Wŏnhyo himself married and founded the **Pŏpsŏng** (*dharmatā*) school, which taught an syncretic, even ecumenical, form of Buddhism that included all schools and branches. He tried to use music, literature and dance to express the meaning of Buddhism. He removed the barrier between the sacred and the secular, asserting that all beings had inherent and eventual Buddha-hood: their difference, he proclaimed, was a matter of degree in development.

Wŏnhyo's life epitomized his unitarian vision. His spontaneous enlightenment experience had a Zen flavour. His wayward personal behaviour was akin to that of the Tantric masters. He is recognized as a Huayan intellectual, but also remembered as a Pure Land evangelist.

Despite his unconventional lifestyle, Wŏnhyo was a prolific and influential writer of treatises and commentaries on Buddhist scripture. Of the twenty or so extant works attributed to him, the five major works are commentaries on the Lotus Sutra, the Nirvana Sutra, the Diamond Sutra, Aśvaghoṣa's Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana and a handbook of Buddhism for the laity.

In all his works, Wŏnhyo stressed the underlying similarities in the doctrinal divergences he perceived in Buddhism even before sectarian division arose in Korea. Although Wŏnhyo's conciliatory non-sectarian approach was influential and he is remembered one of the shapers of Korean Buddhism, his death in 686 generally marked the beginning of sectarian Buddhism in Korea.

12. SYNCRETISM

It was during the Unified Silla period, too, that one of the characteristic features of mature Korean Buddhism developed. This was **syncretism**, an attempt which began in China. From its inception in East Asia, Buddhism had formed around a number of disparate scriptural and commentarial traditions that had developed in India, Iran and Central Asia in the light of indigenous philosophies of Daoism and Confucianism.

In their attempts to syncretize the various disparate Buddhist traditions and teachings, Chinese Buddhism developed into a number of sectarian groups. In Korea, this approach became more refined and, because of its smaller geographical size, the syncretism was more widespread and homogeneous. Also because of the smaller size of Korea and its monastic population, Buddhism had little hope of being a stable influence on the religious life of the country.

Moreover, there was the constant threat of **foreign invasion**, which called for the need for a unified, centrally organized ecclesiastical institution. The quest for a common denominator or unifying factor to establish an interdenominational approach or Unified Buddhism (*t'ong pulgyo*) produced one of the most ecumenical forms of Buddhism found in Asia.

After becoming a court religion, Buddhism followed a form of **geomancy** (divination and placement by means of harmonious environment) called p'ungsuchirisol (theory of wind, water and earth) from Daoism in order to select temple sites vital for national safety. Pulguk-sa and Sokkuram grotto located on a high ridge near Kyŏngju, with a commanding view of the Eastern Sea, apparently were intended to protect the country from Japanese marauders.

13. SŎN

Pŏmnang

Perhaps the most momentous development in the history of Korean Buddhism during the Unified Silla period was the introduction of Chan Buddhism, called Sŏn in Korean. Sŏn is said to have been introduced into Korea by the monk **Pŏmnang** (fl. 632-646), who is said to have trained with the 4th Patriarch of the Chan school, Tao-shin (580-646), just before the split of Chinese Chan into its northern and southern branches..

Little is known of the life of Pŏmnang, but there are indications that he attempted to combine the teachings of the two distinct Chan lineages—that of Bodhidharma (c. 5th century), Hui-k'o (487-592), and Seng-ts'an (d. 606) and that of Tao-hsin and Hung-jen (688-761)—with the syncretic *tathāgata,garbha* doctrine of the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana (Chin. *Ta-sheng ch'i-hsin lun*).

A patriarch of Pŏmnang's lineage eventually founded the **Hŭiyang-san** school, the oldest of the Sŏn schools. During the 8th and 9th centuries, other Korean adepts returned from the mainland and established eight other mountain Sŏn centres, forming what came to be called the **Nine Mountains School of Sŏn** (Kusan Sŏnmun).

Other Sŏn schools

The next seven lineages were established in rapid succession during the first half of the 9th century. All seven were one or other of the disciples of **Mazu** (Ma Tzu), the second successor of Hui Neng, the founder of the southern Chan school of China.

Korean Sŏn masters also played major roles in the development of Chinese Chan. Perhaps the most prominent of these Koreans was the monk **Musang** (Kim Ho-shang) (694?-762), who was regarded as a patriarch of the Pao-t'ang school of the Szechuan region, and was the first Chan master known to the Tibetans.

The ninth and last Sŏn school, known as Sumisan (Sumi Mountain), was founded in 911 when **Iŏm** returned from China claiming to represent the northern school of Chan, which died out in China soon after.

Despite the regular traffic of Sŏn masters between China and Korea, the entrenched position of the scholastic schools within the Korean ecclesia prevented the growth of the Nine Moutains Sŏn. Continued frustration at their inability to disseminate their teachings led to Sŏn proponents like Toŭi (d. 825) and Muyŏm (799-888) to attack the scholastic schools, leading ultimately to a split in the Korean Sangha into two rival factions.

The Nine Mountains

These Korean Sŏn lineages are known as the "Nine Mountain" schools because of the location of their principal monasteries on nine sacred mountains in Korea. This intentional association with sacred mountains stresses the importance of including elements of indigenous shamanism into Korean forms of Buddhism.

Some have argued that the rapid success of so many schools of Sŏn Buddhism indicates a widespread desire to escape the tumultuous decline of Silla in favour of the contemplative life of a meditating monk. Equally important was the fact that the discipline that meditation entails resembles the self-imposed ordeals of the traditional shaman.

In Korea, moreover, Buddhism is often associated with **national unity**, clearly seen in the association between the founders of Koryŏ and the Sumisan lineage of Sŏn. For these reasons, and perhaps others, Sŏn Buddhism saw a dramatic rise to prominence in the closing years of the Unified Silla period.

14. KORYŎ (935-1392)

In 918, general Wang Kon (of the merchant group) overthrew the state of Later Koguryŏ (established in the north by the monk Kungye). In 935, Wang Kon unified the kingdom, changed its name to Koryŏ, and established his capital at Songak (present-day Kaesong). It was during this period–the Wang dynasty–that Korea began to form its own cultural tradition distinct from the rest of East Asia, and it is from the name Koryō that the Western word **Korea** is derived.

It is interesting to note that in 1036, Buddhist monks under state patronage, succeeded in getting the **death penalty** abolished. This perhaps the earliest example of human rights awareness and social action in recorded history!

The main contribution of Koryō Buddhism to the evolution of the Korean Sangha was the reconciliation between Sŏn and the scholastic schools. It was the monk **Uich'on** (1055-1101) who made the first such attempt by seeking to combine both the Nine Mountains and the scholastic schools into a Ch'ŏnt'ae school (revitalized by Uich'on himself).

Uich'on himself was a scholar, an after 25 years of research, published an outstanding 3-volume bibliography of Buddhist literature.

Chinul

Following Uich'on some three generations later was **Chinul** (1158-1210), a charismatic Sŏn master similarly inspired by a vision of a unified Buddhist ecclesia. Unlike Uich'on's scholastic bent, however, Chinul attempted to merge the various Buddhist schools of his time into a new Sŏn school.

Chinul introduced into Sŏn the practice of the investigation of the ***hwadu*** or "critical phrase" (Chin. *hua-t'ou*), better known by the close synonym of *kongan* (Chin. *kung-an*; Jap. *koan*), as it had been developed in China by Ta-hui Tsung-kao (1089-1163). Chinul sought to incorporate this investigation into the soteriology of sudden-awakening/gradual-cultivation taught by Tsung-mi (780-841), and finally to combine this approach to Sŏn with the interpretation of Hwaŏm thought of Li T'ung-hsüan (635-730).

Chinul's synthesis of Sŏn and the scholastic teachings came to be regarded as a distinctively Korean school of Sŏn, known as **Chogye-chong**, which would remain the predominant school of Korean Buddhism down to the present day. Its 78th patriarch, the current one, Zen Master Seung Sahn, visited Singapore in December 2001.

Decline

During the Koryŏ period, Korean Buddhism reached its zenith, but then began to decline. Many temples were built funded by the national treasury, and monks assumed significant social positions, so much so that in 1197, seven sons of the king became monks.

Towards the end of this period, Buddhism began to suffer internal corruption (gained through royal favours) and external persecution (especially those inspired by the Neo-Confucianist). The government now began to limit the privileges of the monks, and Confucianism replaced Buddhism as the state religion.

15. THE KOREAN BUDDHIST CANON

The Koryŏ period was renowned for its productions of the Chinese Buddhist Canon, made possible by the development of **metal type**, a Korean invention that is arguably the ancestor of the 15th century European development of movable type by Johannes Gutenberg and others.

The Koryŏ Canons were based on the Chinese models of the Shu and the Liao (Khitan) editions. Both have been called the Koryŏ Edition. It is believed that the **first Koryō Edition**, initiated and completed under king Hyeonjong (r. 1009-31), contained 5,048 fascicles of the K'ai-yüan shih-chiao-lu and that it followed the format of the Shu Edition.

The **second Koryŏ Edition**, produced during the reign of king Munjong (r. 1046-82), included translations not incorporated into the K'ai-yüan shih-chiao-lu, in addition to a number of sutras from the Shu and Liao editions. It is believed that together the two Koryŏ editions contained some 1,524 works.

Over a century after its publication, the second Koryŏ Edition was reprinted at Haein-sa, a mountain monastery in southern Korea. It is the Haein-sa printings that are generally called the **Koryŏ Edition**. The wood blocks used to print the Haein Temple Edition, numbering over 8,000, are still maintained at Haein-sa and have been used again in recent times (the late 20th century) to print additional copies of the Koryŏ Edition. One of these copies was presented to Japan and is readily available to scholars.

Mongol invasions

Between 1231 and 1258, Koryŏ suffered six Mongol invasions. These attacks were so devastating that most of the surviving artifacts were those exported to Japan before these invasions and are now housed in Japanese museums. Koryŏ formally surrendered in 1258, and the Wang dynasty remained nominally in power as a puppet government of the Yuan emperor in China.

In between the Mongol invasions and thereafter, a glorious achievement of the Koryŏ was the production of **the Restored Koryŏ Tripiṭaka,** based on the Liao and Northern Song Chinese editions, to replace the earlier canon and supplement destroyed by the Mongols. In the hope of winning Buddha's protection against the invaders, the carving project was restarted in 1236, and took 16 years. This completed Tripiṭaka was moved to Kanghwa Island, but after pillaging from Japanese pirates, it was removed to Chichun Temple in Seoul, and then stored in the Haein-sa in 1398 during the reign of king Taejo.

[SLIDE 15(A).]

The 81,258 blocks of the ***Tripiṭaka Koreana*,** or the Korean Tripiṭaka, as it came to be popularly known, is the most complete and accurate of the several extant block print editions of the Buddhist canons in Chinese characters. In the 1920s, it was chosen by Japanese scholars as the basis of the authoritative **Taishō Shinshu Daizōkyō** (or the Taishō, for short), the Japanese Buddhist Canon, which is in turn the basis of virtually of all modern scholarship on Chinese Buddhism.

In the 1990s, through the assistance of Prof. Lewis Lancaster of the University of California at Berkeley, the **computerization** of the Tripitaka Koreana project was launched centred in the Haein-sa in Korea. The whole canon is now available on CD.

16. YI DYNASTY (1392-1910)

With the advent of the Yi dynasty, the fortunes of Korean Buddhism began to wane. King Yi Sŏng-gye, a renegade general of Koryŏ and founder of the Yi dynasty (1392-1910), adopted **Confucianism** as the state religion and recruited government officers through examinations based on the Confucian Classics.

Despite official policies of Confucian as state religion, many of the Yi kings continued to give generous support to Buddhism. For example, the founder Yi Sŏng-gye, appointed the renowned monk, **Muhak Chajo** (1327-1398), to the official post of preceptor to the royal family (*wangsa*) and the *Yijo sillok* (Veritable Record of the Yi Dynasty) is full of references to his sponsorships of temple building projects, alms offerings to monks and various Buddhist rites.

The Confucianist bureaucrats however continued to pressure the throne for stricter selection procedure for Buddhist monks, limits on the number of temples and hermitages, reduction in the number of officially sanctioned sects, and reorganization of the ecclesiastical system, all in order to effect downsizing and more centralized supervision of the religion. Such policies were adopted by T'aejong (r. 1400-1418), the third Yi king, and carried out on a massive scale by his successor, king Sejong (r. 1418-1450).

17. PERSECUTIONS

The number of monasteries was reduced to only 242. In **Sejong**'s proclamation of 1424, only 36 monasteries were allowed. The Buddhist schools were reduced to seven, and then cut down to only two. The Chogye, Ch'ŏnt'ae (Tiantai) and Kyeyul (Vinaya) schools were amalgamated into a single **Sŏn** school—the Contemplative Order—and the remaining scholastic schools were merged into the **Kyo** school—the Doctrinal Order.

New regulations were adopted for obtaining monk's certificates, making ordination much more difficult, and many ordained monks were defrocked. The official ranks of national preceptor (*kuksa*) and royal preceptor (*wangsa*) were abolished. In the early 15th century, temple paddy land and forest properties were confiscated by the state and the legions of serfs retained by the monasteries were drafted into the army.

Buddhist temples were no longer permitted within the capital or major cities. In 1623, king **Injo** (1623-1649) banned Buddhist monks from entering the capital. [Park 1964: 7]. The children of aristocrats were forbidden to ordain. King **Hyongjong** (1659-1674) banned all ordinations and destroyed monasteries located in the capital or converted them into Confucian halls.

In 1765, king **Yongjo** struck a blow at the Buddhist role of handling death ritual by demanding that all ancestral tablets be removed from the monasteries. King **Chongjong** (1776-1800) again denied the monks admission into Seoul and his proscription lasted until the end of the 19th century. [Yoshikawa 1920: 46]

Small hermitages

Such strictures on Buddhism in Korea caused the monasteries to shrink in number as well as in importance within the cities. Yoshikawa attributes the survival of Buddhism under these hostile rulers to the fact that women of the royal house and the upper classes remained devout believers and gave it support.

Around the city walls there were **small hermitages** housing monks who performed prayers for the women who went there seeking forgiveness for whatever bad karma has caused them to be born as women [Yoshikawa 1920: 47]. While the men gave their full support to the Confucian tradition and its social codes within the family and nation, the women found Buddhism to be more attractive. This meant that many of the Korean families were split with regard to religious allegiance.

Buddhist response

Official disfavour and even persecution brought Buddhism to a low state. In its desperate struggle for survival, it often combined with folk beliefs maintained in Daoism and shamanism, thus losing its distinctive intellectual characteristics.

During this extremely difficult period for Korean Buddhism, **Sŏsan Hyujŏng** (1520-1604) epitomizes the continued Sŏn orientation of the Sangha. Inspired by Chinul's vision of the unity of the Sŏn and the scholastic schools [9], Hyujŏng produced a succinct manual of practice, titled *Sŏn'ga kugam* (Guide to the Sŏn School). His other guides to Confucianism and Daoism were intended to effect a reconciliation between Buddhism and its rival religions that began in mid-Koryŏ times and to show many similarities of purpose.

18. JAPANESE INVASIONS

Despite being eclipsed by Confucianism, Korean Buddhists fought bravely against the invasion of Japanese armies under **Toyotomi Hideyoshi** (1537-98) in 1592 and 1596. In 1592, when Hideyoshi invaded Korea, a Jesuit priest, Gregorio de Cespedes, came with them, but his stay was brief and uneventful.

In the decade before the annexation of Korea by Japan (1910), some efforts were made to unify Korean Buddhism. These efforts, as well as the subsequent efforts of Buddhist "missionaries" from Japan, were largely in vain.

Tonghak and Ch'ŏndogyo

Before the Japanese occupation, there arose an indigenous religious movement that was anti-western and anti-Roman Catholic—the **Tonghak** (Eastern Learning). Founded in 1860 by Ch'oe che-u, who was executed four years later, it emphasized social action and the principle that God and man are one. Tonghak, a syncretism of Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism caused a revolt in 1894 that precipitated the Sino-Japanese War. In 1905, it was renamed **Ch'ŏndogyo**, the religion of the heavenly way.

After the signing of the Korea-Japan treaty of 1876, Japanese Buddhist sects, beginning with the Higashi Honganji sect of Pure Land, began to proselytize among the increasing number of Japanese immigrants living in Korea, an activity which soon spread to the native Koreans as well. Following complaints from the Japanese Nichiren missionaries, the Yi court in 1895 lifted the centuries-old prohibition against the presence of Buddhist monks in the capital of Seoul. During this period, too, the Sŏn master **Kyŏnghŏ** (1857-1912) and his disciples revived Sŏn practice, and his lineage continues to teach to this day.

19. JAPANESE OCCUPATION

When the Japanese finally occupied Korea (1910-15), they used religion as a means to implement their colonial policy. They first united the Gyo and Sŏn sects into one **Cho-ke-jong** in 1911, and forced the various denominations of Christianity into one Reformed Congregation of Churches (1942), then forced them to join in Shintō worship. Nearly 1000 Shintō shrines were erected by the Japanese, but Shintō gained very little support. These Japanese modifications ended as soon as Korea obtained independence in 1945 with the defeat of Japan in World War II.

Korean innovations

During the Occupation, some Korean monks thought that the fortunes of Buddhism were dependent upon arranging a merger with a major Japanese sect. **Yi Hoe-gwang** went so far as to negotiate a combination of the Korean Sangha with the Japanese Sōtō sect. Most Koreans, however, regarded the "gradual" teachings of the Sōtō sect as going against the "sudden" (subitist) orientation of their own tradition, and blocked the move.

In 1913, **Hae Yong-un** (1879-1944), the only Buddhist signatory to the 1919 Korean independence declaration and a major literary figure, shocked his contemporaries by advocating that monks be allowed to marry, a move he felt necessary if Buddhism were to maintain a viable role in modern secular society. Despite objections from the traditional quarters of Korean Buddhists, the Japanese colonial government endorsed the proposal in 1926. Within a decade, virtually all temple abbots were married, thereby bringing a radical change to the traditional moral discipline of the Korean Sangha.

20. NEW SECTS

During the Japanese occupation, various sectarian movements arose, many of them similar to Ch'ŏndogyo [18]. After the war, more than 170 new religious sects emerged. They were syncretic (accommodating various religious ideas and practices), messianic (looking for a saviour in the hope of establishing a spiritual kingdom here and now), and shamanistic.

One of the most prominent new Korean Buddhist sect was **Won** or "Round" Buddhism (more fully, Wonbulgyo), founded in 1916 by Pak Chung-bin (1891-1943). It is a reformed, simplified school that combined Buddhism with a disparate variety of elements drawn from Confucianism, Daoism, Tonghak, and even Christianity.

Its sole focus of worship is a black circle representing the Dharma-body of emptiness. Western influences are apparent in its religious services, which include Sutra-readings, prayers, hymns and a sermon. It seeks to balance inner quiet with selfless social service. Its numerous charitable activities include the building of many schools. By 1973, it had 600,000 followers and 200 temples, mainly in the cities.

21. SCHISM

After independence in 1945, Korean Buddhism was badly split into two irreconcilable sects. The **T'aego-chong**, a liberal sect of married monks, had flourished under Japanese patronage and was based principally in the cities where it ministered to the lay Buddhists. The **Chogye-chong** was a smaller, religiously conservative order of monastics who managed to maintain their celibacy during the long years of Japanese occupation. Their concern was to restore the contemplative, scholastic and disciplinary orientations of traditional Korean Buddhism.

Only after years of intense conflict did the Chogye-chong in 1954 finally win government support for its position. While litigation continued between the two sects, all of the major monasteries have reverted to its control. In recent times, the Chogye-chong, the predominant sect of Korean Buddhism, has been considerably successful in attracting a new generation of monastic postulants and lay followers. The population of celibate monastics (around 23,000) is, however, about the same as that of the married clerics (20,000).

22. RELIGION IN KOREA TODAY

When Korea gained independence from the Japanese in 1945, its region north of the 38th parallel came under Communist domination and freedom of religion was suppressed. In South Korea, however, freedom of religion was guaranteed by the Constitution, and a great revival of religions occurred.

Appealing to the masses with their claims of healing and prophetic powers, these religions demonstrated a potential for social and political power. Among the Confucian, Buddhist, and Christian religions, however, schisms had reduced their effectiveness for social reform. Under the impact of the 1960 student revolution, however, a new wave of social concern became evident in the major religions of Korea. In the 1960s, the religious population of Korea was as follows:

Roman Catholic churches	1,150	790,000 members
Protestant churches	7,500	900,000 members
Confucian *hyanggyo* (schools)	230	170,000 members
Buddhist temples	1,700	940,000 members

North Korea

According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica 1986 Yearbook, in 1985 **North Korea** had a population of 20,082,000. The 1980 figures for religious affiliation are as follows:

Atheist or non-religious:	67.9%	
Traditional beliefs	15.6%	
Ch'ŏndogyo	13.9%	
Buddhist	**1.7%**	**340,000**
Christian	0.9%	

South Korea

In 1985, the population of **South Korea** was 41,215,000. The 1981 figures for religious affiliation are as follows:

Buddhist	**37.4%**	**15,400,000**
Protestant	25.7%	
Confucian	17.5%	
Roman Catholic	4.8%	
Ch'ŏndogyo	3.6%	
Wonbulgyo	3.2%	
Other	7.8%	

In South Korea, there are around 23,000 monks and nuns, and perhaps 20,000 married clerics (Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to* Buddhism, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990: 284).

The new religions of Korea [19] appealled to those of the lower levels of Korean society and claimed the allegiance of millions. The folk religions, imbued with shamanism, continue to dominate the lives of many more millions, including Buddhists.

23. CONCLUSION

Early Korean Buddhism was characterized by a this-worldly attitude. It emphasized the pragmatic, nationalistic and aristocratic aspects of the faith. Nevertheless, an indigenous tradition of shamanism influenced the development of Buddhism throughout its history in Korea. Buddhist monks danced, sang, and performed the rituals of shamans.

Korean Buddhism today, without state patronage in a secular society, is thriving on its own genius. State patronage of religion is a bane when it works the other way, such as, during the Yi dynasty, when Confucianism was the state religion. Understandably, Buddhism would thrive better in a secular state that is tolerant towards religions and where freedom of religion is guaranteed.

While it is true that folk beliefs (like shamanism in the case of Korea) appeal to the less sophisticated masses and the less fortunate, it also provides immediate and effective panacea to the problems of the increasing non-religious sophisticated masses, especially in highly urbanized societies like Korea and Singapore. As such, Buddhism has to address society's mundane problems first before it can open the doors of the deathless to others.

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