



Special Feature
Korean Buddhism

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Editor's Note

LEE Kang Hahn

In the Special Feature section for the June 2020 issue, we have invited four foreign scholars in the field of Korean religions and philosophy. They all generously contributed important articles dealing with Korean Confucianism and Buddhism. Then, we also decided to host three Korean scholars as contributors for the December issue of the same year, in a special occasion to exclusively deal with Korean Neo-Confucianism in the areas of politics, literature, and philosophy. The experience we had that year was quite fulfilling, as we were able to provide the readers with an opportunity to hear both Korean voices and opinions of scholars around the globe.

Ever since, we felt only driven to charge on with such efforts. So this time around, for the June 2022 issue, as a continuation of prior endeavors the *Review of Korean Studies* (hereafter, *RKS*) decided to arrange a group of Korean scholars and ask them to contribute their own unique takes on no other than Korean Buddhism. We also thought it would be best to present Korean Buddhism in various time periods: the ancient days, the Goryeo and Joseon periods, and the modern era in Korean history. Four outstanding scholars have graciously agreed to contribute their hard works to this special occasion, and thanks to their efforts, we are sure that the readers will get to appreciate the entire history of Korean Buddhism.

Professor Nam Dongsin of the Seoul National University contributed an article entitled “Wonhyo’s View of Human Beings and his Redemption of Mankind.” Professor Nam primarily focuses on how Wonhyo 元曉 (617-686), a prominent East Asian Buddhist thinker, viewed humans and practiced his thoughts. According to the professor, Wonhyo found all human beings equal in the sense of endless death and reincarnation of One Mind, but simultaneously recognized the difference between bodhisattva and all living beings and thus urged the former to edify the latter. And while his life and relationships clearly reveal that he was well aware of his role in the Silla society, he was also devoted

to investigating the universal mind of humans like doctrinal-study monks, rather than focusing on the human body or the natural environment. Professor Nam’s enlightening examination of Wonhyo will help the readers understand the most important aspects of ancient Korean Buddhism.

Doctor Sooyoun Kim of the National Institute of Korean History contributed an article entitled “Dhāraṇī, Maṅḍala, and Talisman: The Rediscovery of Buddhist Faith in the Goryeo Dynasty.” Doctor Kim chose these three objects to explain their significance in Goryeo Buddhism, as according to her they serve as important clues for us to understand the faith of Goryeo’s general population. Doctor Kim also stated that there have not been much studies dedicated to these particular concepts, which does not mean they are not worth exploring, though. On the other hand, it is imperative for us to take a look at them, as they would only deepen our knowledge of Korean Buddhism that blossomed during the Goryeo period. Doctor Kim also informs us that most of the remaining dhāraṇī collections, maṅḍalas, and talismanic seals date to late Goryeo and that most of them were found in the abdominal caches of Buddhist statues, so she tries to determine the historical context of them.

Professor Kim Yongtae at the Dongguk University contributed an article entitled “The Spectrum of Studies on the History of Joseon Buddhism and a New Understanding of the Korean Buddhist Tradition.” He examines what the general image of Joseon Buddhism has been, and how it was studied by modern and contemporary scholars. Professor Kim laments that such image was rather negative, due to certain misconceptions and unfortunate circumstances. He reports that a new perspective was adopted in recent studies and argues that although Joseon promoted Confucianism and suppressed Buddhism, the reality of Joseon Buddhism should be understood exactly as it was. He also emphasizes the necessity to delve into unanswered questions, such as the monks’ social status, economic, legal, and cultural issues that involved the Buddhist community, and Joseon Buddhism’s meaning in a larger Northeast Asian context, so that we could gain deeper understanding of it.

Research Professor Kim Seong Yeon at the Center for the Expansion of Academics on Korea at Dongguk University contributed an article entitled “The Discourse of Reform and the Perception of Tradition in Modern Korean Buddhism.” Doctor Kim examines the Reform discourses that prevailed during the modern period in Korean history, especially during the Japanese occupation period, and also expresses interest in determining how such discourses helped

shape the identity of current day Korean Buddhism. Based on examination of writings from several historical figures, he argues that the discourse concerning Buddhist reforms demanded a break-free from traditions, education and propagation of past Buddhist culture, and the establishment of an organized Buddhist order. He shows us how efforts of the 1910s evolved in the 1920s, and later culminated in the efforts of the latter half of the 1930s, which ultimately resulted in the establishment of the Jogye order in 1941.

Thanks to all these studies, the readers will be able to understand how Buddhism existed throughout the history of Korea, what were some of its many qualities and characteristics, and what it meant to be a Buddhist believer in the past on the Korean peninsula. The *RKS* is immensely grateful for all the contributors' efforts, and could only repay them by continuing to invite important studies in the future to grace the pages of *RKS*.