

Understanding Modern Korean Buddhism via Collective-Consciousness, Multiculturalism and the Temple Stay Programme (TSP)

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Abstract

Korean Buddhism is invariably described as *T'ongbulgyo* (通佛敎) or 'Syncretic Buddhism', a trait it acquired during the Unified Silla Period (統一新羅, 676-935). Buddhism was also considered to provide the state with a sort of 'spiritual' protection, and was often referred to as 'State-Protecting Buddhism', or *Hogukpulgyo* (護國佛敎). Korean Buddhism is consistently described thus, with the epithet 'Korean' even in Korea by Korean Buddhists. This paper will examine why the mainstream of Korean Buddhism feels the need to reaffirm its identity by examining the recent innovation of the Temple Stay Programme (TSP) aimed at non-nationals in light of current government rhetoric about multiculturalism. The paper will suggest tendencies within the largest Buddhist order, the Chogye Order, towards self-preservation in a contentious cultural and religious climate. This paper will then question if they are not at odds with the national brand of "syncretic" Buddhism and question if Buddhism in Korea operates outside of, or in collaboration with the nationalist *Uri* (우리, 'We'/'Us') collective-consciousness. I will also take note of developments within contemporary Korean Buddhist culture independent of the established monastic orders and ask if Buddhism in Korea can be effective without engaging society objectively.

Keywords: Buddhism, Syncretic, State-Protecting, Chogye Order, Temple Stay Programme, *Uri*

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Introduction

It was during the Unified Silla Period (676–935 CE) that the new integrative atmosphere afforded Buddhist scholars a period of stability necessary for the flourishing of a ‘Syncretic-Buddhism’. Korean Buddhism is still known for its syncretic tradition. After it arrived in Korea during the fourth century, Buddhism soon widely took over from the pre-existing and indigenous Shamanistic traditions, the role of invoking the divine on behalf of the nation and protecting the state—*Hogukpulgyo*. I argue that there is still even today, an impetus towards ‘State-Protectionism’ on the part of the established Buddhist Church in South Korea albeit in a somewhat altered form. *Hogukpulgyo* was a liturgical court Buddhism endorsed by monarchs of the Koryŏ Dynasty (高麗, 918-1392) to add legitimacy to the throne. That is not to say that there was a strictly servile relationship between Church and State in Koryŏ. According to Sem Vermeersch, such legitimization on the part of Buddhism “circumscribed the role of Koryŏ kings” such that “they could never escape its influence”.¹ Revered monks, and not the King, were considered the spiritual leaders of the country and so they were “locked in a relation of mutual interdependency”, far from being subservient.² Mohan Pankaj calls it a paradigm, the tendency of Western scholarship to view Korean Buddhism as ‘Nation-Protecting’, though this may be somewhat of an exaggeration.³ It was never a mainstream doctrinal feature of Korean Buddhism to the extent of syncretic doctrinal tendencies, but it was a feature nonetheless. As Cho Sungtaek frames it, while “not a particularly sophisticated phenomenon on a philosophical level, this feature had a lasting influence on all aspects of Buddhist thought in Korea”.⁴

It is in this sense, as a sub-plot to the overarching narrative of Korean Buddhism that I will investigate any lingering tendencies and motivations to actively seek out a relationship with the State on the part of the ‘Chogyŏ Order of Korean Buddhism’ (大韓佛教 曹溪宗, *T’aehanbulgyo chogyejong*), the largest Buddhist Order in the country. Not just the established Buddhist Church, but South Korean society at large lives in a state of ‘national-defense’; practically speaking, in terms of maintaining a mandatory combat readiness, but also psychologically in terms of a nationalist collective-consciousness which they themselves designate as ‘*Uri*’. The purpose of this enquiry is to elucidate to what extent the established Buddhist Church is subject to the *Uri* paradigm, and to what extent it is complicit in promoting the culture of Korean nationalism, or *han’gungminjokchuŭi* (한국민족주의). An increased Christian influence has set limitations to the space the Chogyŏ Order occupies in the popular mind—a popular mind which continues to react to Japanese Colonialism.⁵ This shapes any and all actions undertaken by mainstream Buddhism in the public sphere, especially how the Chogyŏ Order attempts to simulate integration by cooperating with the government Ministry for

¹ Sem Vermeersch, “Representation of the Ruler in Buddhist Inscriptions of Early Koryŏ”. *Korean Studies* 26:2 (2002), 240.

² Ibid.

³ Mohan Pankaj, “Beyond the “Nation-Protecting” Paradigm: Recent Trends in the Historical Studies of Korean Buddhism”. *The Review of Korean Studies* 9:1 (2006), 49.

⁴ Cho Sungtaek, “Buddhist philosophy, Korean”. In *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward Craig. Vol. 2. London: Routledge. 1998.

⁵ Robert E. Buswell, “Imagining Korean Buddhism: The Invention of a National Religious Tradition”, in *Nationalism and the Construction of Korean Identity*, edited by Hyung Il Pai and Timothy R. Tangherlini (Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1998), 73-107. Vladimir Tikhonov “One Religion, Different Readings:(Mis)interpretations of Korean Buddhism in Colonial Korea, Late 1920s-Early 1930s”. *The Journal of Korean Religions* 1:1 (2010).

Tourism & Culture, inviting foreign nationals to its places of spiritual practice. By focusing on the recent innovation of a Temple Stay Programme (TSP hereafter) while there is simultaneously a strained relationship with non-Koreans, I will explore the relationship between the established Buddhist Church, the ‘homogeneous’ State identity and the collective Korean consciousness. I will lastly turn my attention to some movements in lay Korean Buddhism in order to frame contemporary Korean Buddhism outside of Church-State relations.

Korean Buddhist Nationalism

Bernard Faure observes “nationalist elements that characterize modern Korean Buddhism tend to creep surreptitiously into the analysis”⁶ and in relation to Korean Buddhist Studies from the Colonial Period onwards Henrik Sørensen adds, “the problem with much of this material is that it abounds in strong nationalistic views and biases which tend to obscure the historical facts rather than disclose them”.⁷

In response to Japanese colonial debasement of the Korean Buddhist tradition, Korean scholars such as Ch’oe Namsŏn (1890–1957) overcompensated “by painting a picture of East Asia’s ancient Buddhist tradition with Korea in its center (which) eventually laid the fundament for the nationalist view of Korean Buddhist history in post-1945 South Korea”.⁸ Through the latter half of the twentieth century and until quite recently, divisions not just within Korean Buddhism but within Korean society generally, hinged along the categorization of people into one of two positions; collaborators with the Japanese, *ch’inil* (친일), and those who resisted Japanese influence, *panil* (반일). While being debunked by scholarship, those binary positions are still current in the mainstream Korean society which makes claims to being multicultural. In other words, the immediate concern of the Korean Buddhist establishment through most of the twentieth-century has been the preservation of its nationalist credentials, which were lost to “Japanese influences” and then Christianity during the Independence Movement.⁹

Uri Multiculturalism: “Our” Multiculturalism

Koreans designate their collectivity with the term *Uri* (우리), which literally means “Us” or “Our”. Censorship and anti-defamation laws are merely a manifestation of this *Uri* collective-consciousness, which beyond the government is the ultimate censoring authority in Korean society. “It is such that an individual South Korean can become South Korea the nation, and vice versa”.¹⁰ Korea and the Korean language, more often than not, are referred to as *Uri nara* (Our country) and *Uri-nara-mal* (Our [country’s] language) respectively. In a land where “we” is the default setting, it is no coincidence that there is a

⁶ Robert E. Buswell, *Currents and Countercurrents: Korean Influences on the East Asian Buddhist Traditions* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005), 153.

⁷ Henrik Sørensen, “Korean Buddhist Journals during Early Japanese Colonial Rule”. In *Korea Journal* 30:1 (1990), 17.

⁸ Vladimir Tikhonov, “One Religion, Different Readings:(Mis)interpretations of Korean Buddhism in Colonial Korea, Late 1920s-Early 1930s”. *Journal of Korean Religions* 1:1 (2010), 163-188.

⁹ Vladimir Tikhonov, “Japanese Missionaries and their Influence on Korean Buddhist Developments (1876-1910)”. In *Makers of Modern Korean Buddhism*, edited by Jin Y. Park (New York: SUNY Press, 2012), 245.

¹⁰ Koo, Se-Woong & Mari Lias, “South Korea’s Real Culture of Shame”. *The Korean Observer* (February 23, 2015).

culture of hyper-nationalism, sectarianism and a censoring of even constructive criticism of the state. The life of non-nationals in Korea is at odds with the branding of South Korea as 'multicultural'.

Mutuma Ruteere, UN Special Rapporteur on Racism visited Korea on the 29th of September 2014. Mr. Ruteere "addressed the discriminatory use of the term 'multicultural families' among South Koreans. The concept of such families, he said, was often used in the Korean media to convey negative connotations of foreign workers and migrant wives".¹¹ The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family reports that 41.3 percent of 'multicultural families' in Korea said that they had experienced discrimination in 2012. According to the National Human Rights Commission of Korea, 42% of students from 'multicultural families', were taunted by classmates in a 2010 survey.¹² Out of a population of some 50 million, 2.3% are long-term residents of non-Korean extraction. That is not a high figure by any means yet 82.9 percent of Korean respondents answered that they thought Korea had become a multicultural society to a recent survey conducted by the Sögang Institute of Political Studies in Seoul (to many Koreans, *multiculturalism* merely means "the presence of non-Koreans). There are no anti-discrimination laws to protect non-Koreans in this 'multicultural' society where the plans for segregating races into zones on Busan's Haeundae beach this summer were only recently scrapped by the local government under pressure from non-Korean reporters.¹³

Multiculturalism and the Temple Stay Programme (TSP) as a Symptom of Interfusion (Wönyung, 圓融)

It is impossible not to consider the newest development in Korean Buddhism (the Chogye Order's TSP) against the backdrop of such a hotly contested issue in Korean society as "Multiculturalism" since the TSP invites foreigners into Korea, a process that is tightly controlled. The TSP was initiated in advance of the 2002 Soccer World Cup. A perceived lack of affordable accommodation on the part of the Korean Ministry for Culture & Tourism caused great concern.¹⁴ An average of 1.2 million international soccer fans were expected to stay in Korea each night over the month long World Cup.

The Chogye Order of Korean Buddhism is the largest of 25 orders in Korea today and was officially established in 1962. Of the 870 traditional temples in Korea, which receive funding from the government, 840 are affiliated with the Chogye Order. An infrastructure was already in place perfectly situated to cater for a nomadic fan base who couldn't be sure if their national team would make it to the knock-out stages and therefore when and where their next game was likely to be.

The Ministry for Culture & Tourism saw an opportunity to cater for a huge influx of visitors while showcasing traditional Korean culture. The Chogye Order, after initial reservations about boisterous soccer fans, began to see an opportunity to spread the Buddhist teachings and while securing some much needed funding, raise the profile of

¹¹ Claire Lee, "U.N. calls for Korean Anti-Discrimination Act". *The Korean Herald* (October 6th 2014). Mr. Ruteere met with governmental officials but was not allowed contact with any government ministers during his time in Korea.

¹² Francis Brannen and Debra MacLellan "A Perspective of Cultural Change in Korea and Its Effect on Multicultural Children". *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science* 19:6 (2014), 20.

¹³ James Hyams, "Haeundae Beach Racial Segregation Plan Misunderstood". *The Korea Observer* (May 12, 2015).

¹⁴ The possibility of the urban landscape becoming saturated with cheap empty motels after the event if their construction were to be funded especially for the World Cup was a genuine worry.

Buddhism in the process. 991 international visitors availed of the TSP during the World Cup. A few short months later from September 29th to October the 14th of the same year, 1,567 visitors availed of the TSP during the Asian Games being held in Busan. 36,902 visitors domestic and from abroad participated in the TSP in 2004. By 2006, that number increased to 70, 914 but dropped to 11,044 the following year. Interestingly, foreign participants of the TSP have been mostly Catholic at 23.3% with only 6.1% of participants claiming to be Buddhist.¹⁵ Tourists account for a minority of foreign participants (who are largely made up of English teachers residing within Korea along with a smattering of international students as this is the rather limited demographic of foreigners allowed to reside in Korea).¹⁶

This author attended an orientation for TSP employees in December 2014 in *Hwaunsa* temple (a Chogye Order temple), on the outskirts of Seoul¹⁷ wherein the Italian and Irish volunteers were referred to consistently as “*miguk saram*” (미국 사람), meaning “American”¹⁸ and told “you don’t have *this* [tea ceremony] in your country”. When made aware of the nationality of the volunteers, a concession was made and they were then simply referred to as the “*oegugin*” (외국인), which means “foreigners/outsiders” for the rest of the day’s orientation.

It would defeat the purpose of the TSP, which aims to promote Buddhism, if visitors’ time for experiencing simulations of traditional Korean culture were taken up talking about their respective countries or religions, but at least their country of origin should matter in order for it not to be one-sided and hierarchical. “True multiculturalism means learning from both sides”, concluded UN Special Rapporteur on Racism, Mutuma Ruteere on the same date above.¹⁹ All religions are culturally bound.²⁰ The very question that the TSP raises is, how culturally bound Korean-Buddhism is and is it immune to such attitudes which prevail in mainstream Korean society? “The current Korean situation is not fully aware of the possible tensions and conflicts that *controversial Multicultural principles* would bring about” according to Kim Nam-Kook, professor of Political Science at Korea University.²¹ The TSP holds a mirror up to Korean Buddhism and raises questions over the amount of awareness being promoted by the national brand of a religious and philosophical system which is founded on awareness, prides itself on being syncretic, yet, seems to be having trouble emerging from a modern, nationalist version of *Hogukpulgyo*.

A reception organized by Seoul Peace Museum for survivors of massacres by South Korean troops during the Vietnam War was scheduled to be held at the Chogye Order of

¹⁵ For statistics concerning the TSP, see Uri Kaplan, *Simulations of Monasticism* (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 2007).

¹⁶ Foreign teachers have to conform to a controversial HIV test to be issued a visa in Korea (an issue which has gone to the UN Commission for Human Rights). Of the OECD countries, South Korea admits the lowest number of asylum seekers; the country has a 12.4% recognition rate of refugees though admittedly a short history of doing so. The global average is just over 30% according to UNHCR. Including refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons, the ‘Total Population of Concern’ in South Korea is 3,635. See: <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e489036.html> [accessed on 05.06.2015]

¹⁷ The event was entitled ‘Practicing Temple Stay together with Foreigners’ (외국인과 함께 템플스테이실습, *oegugin’gwa hamkke t’emp’ŭlsŭt’eisilsŭp*).

¹⁸ In Korea, ‘American’ is still somewhat synonymous with ‘Foreigner’, especially if one is caucasian.

¹⁹ Claire Lee, “U.N. calls for Korean Anti-Discrimination Act”. *The Korean Herald* (Oct. 6, 2014).

²⁰ Choi, Chong-Ko, *East Asian Jurisprudence* (Seoul National University Press, 2009), 410. The author elaborates on Paul Tillich, “Religion is the essence of culture and culture is a form of religion”.

²¹ Kim Nam-Kook, *Multicultural Challenges and Redefining Identity in East Asia* (Farnham: Ashgate 2014), 65. Emphasis added.

Korean Buddhism's History and Culture Memorial Hall in Seoul entitled "One War, Two Memories", at 7 pm on the 7th of April, 2015. "The Chogye Order's treasury department abruptly notified the Peace Museum on Apr. 3 that it was canceling the agreement [...] because of issues of ideological conflict and safety", according to The Hankyoreh Newspaper²². Planning a demonstration outside the Temple, the Vietnam Veterans Association of Korea (VVAK) commented "Certain leftist, anti-state forces are attempting to perpetrate a baseless, evidenceless theater of 'testimony by civilian massacre survivors'. Giving into the fear of being branded "anti-state" the Chogye Order went through with their cancellation just four days before the event (meanwhile, a delegation of Vietnamese survivors were already in country to attend).²³ Concerns over VVAK threats of violent protest outside Chogye Temple should have been incidental to monks who "staged pitched battles" outside the temple in October 1999 when "for 30 minutes, grey-robed monks, armed with makeshift weapons and hurling stones, bottles and furniture attacked each other at the temple" with regard to the rights of succession to leadership of the order.²⁴

The TSP is symptomatic of a society that is now forced (by itself or by economic imperatives) to integrate with the outside world, but not necessarily the signs of a culture (Buddhist or otherwise) that is adapting to such integration in a meaningful way. Deterred by the ultimate fear in South Korean society, that of being branded 'leftist' and therefore 'anti-state', the Chogye Order reneged on their commitment to host a reconciliation event for victims of war atrocities. Their pro-state activities center around collaborating with the Ministry for Culture & Tourism in running the TSP. The TSP takes place in a society expected to become 'super-aged' in the coming years and is projected to need some 15 million immigrants by 2060 if the economy is to sustain growth.²⁵ The purpose of the TSP is not necessarily to afford participants a deep understanding of Korean Buddhism or culture, or indeed to facilitate any meaningful integration between Koreans and non-Koreans. But one identifiable goal is to boost the image of Korea and Korean Buddhism and to give the impression of engagement.

Undermining Simulations

Korean temples are also in danger of becoming simulacra of themselves.²⁶ The likelihood of undermining genuine religious practice in temples intended for that purpose is indeed a concern but furthermore, the "theme-parkification" of some Korean temples is but one facet of the theme-parkification of the country generally. The Korean Buddhist orthodox establishment is not only complicit in average mainstream attitudes, but in mainstream trends as the country's cities, saturated with an endless replication of the same franchises have become theme-parkified simulacra.

Hardline Korean Protestantism also sees itself as having the nation's best interests at heart when inciting no small amount of anti-Buddhist sentiment—Buddhist temples have been vandalized, artefacts destroyed and one Protestant preacher called for the

²² Kim Kyu-Nam & Kim Sung-Hwan, "Vietnam Veterans Force Cancellation of Victims Event in Seoul". *The Hankyoreh* (April 7, 2015).

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ian Gregory, "Buddhist Brawl in Seoul". *BBC World News* (October 12, 1999). Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/472155.stm>. [accessed on 05.06.2015].

²⁵ Cho Gyeong-Leob, *Korea Economic Research Institute Report* (December 2014). Available at: <http://blogs.wsj.com/korearealtime/2014/12/15/immigration-needed-to-bolster-workforce-study-says/>

²⁶ Kaplan, *Simulations of Monasticism*.

destruction of every Buddhist temple on the peninsula.²⁷ In a generally competitive religious culture, the Chogye Order is gladly lending itself to simulations of traditional culture in a direct attempt to buttress its claim to being the true inheritor of Korea's spiritual heritage via its *Koreaness* (and therefore its claim to legitimacy). By extension it indirectly undermines other religions such as the above-mentioned Protestantism. It could also be said that the mainstream of Korean Buddhism or at least the Chogye Order, has no other option but to take refuge in the role of protector of traditional culture if it wants to endure in such a climate.

In a land where saving "face" *ch'emyŏn* (체면) is imperative, the Chogye Order's TSP as their international face of Korean Buddhism is merely a simulation of engagement. When compared to rigorous monastic-style meditation retreats for laity like the well-known 10 day Vispassañā course available in South East Asian countries where participants meditate for up to 10 hours a day in silence, and in which the integrity of the practice environment is maintained at all times, this certainly seems to be the case. Many TSP temples in Korea are now adjusting their age-old traditional schedules to fit that of the TSP. The Korean TSP is usually run over two days and runs something like the following:²⁸

Day 1

<u>TIME</u>	<u>CONTENTS</u>
14:00	Registration and orientation
15:00	Opening ceremony
15:30	Temple Tour
17:00	Dinner
19:00	Evening Ceremonial Service
19:30	Sŏn (Zen) meditation
20:30	Tea Ceremony with monks
21:30	Lights Off

Day 2

<u>TIME</u>	<u>CONTENTS</u>
3:30	Wake Up
4:00	Pre-dawn Ceremonial
5:00	Walking meditation
6:00	Breakfast
8:00	Communal work
9:30	Temple program (tour to hermitage, making lotus lanterns, sutra printing, martial arts, etc.)
11:30	Lunch
13:00	Closing Ceremony

²⁷Henrik Sorensen, "Buddhism and Secular Power in Twentieth Century Korea", in *Buddhism and politics in twentieth-century Asia*, edited by Ian Harris, (London: Continuum International, 2001), 127.

²⁸ Source: http://en.templestay.com/detail.asp?t_id=woljeongsa&idx=6&eday=2015-06-08

It does not cater for laity, Korean or otherwise, who might wish to practice meditation more intensively.

Looking out from the Temple Gate

Many monks this author has spoken with (who chose to remain nameless) emphasise that the TSP represents only a glimpse of what Korean Buddhism is really all about. The TSP is operated in less than 100 temples. There are more than 3,000 branch-temples and Buddhist centers in the 25 national districts of Korea. There is a huge monastic population in Korea (41,362 monks according to the 2002 monastic census) and 90 monasteries dedicated to the practice of Sōn (禪) where monks and nuns partake in intensive 3 month retreats during Summer and Winter. The lack of any deep synergy with mainstream society does remain however, and the perception of the whole tradition based on programs marketed at tourists is a cause of concern to many monks.

In December of 2014, I had the pleasure of meeting a Korean Zen Master unaffiliated to any order who spent much of his training period in a cave open to the elements. The temple he later built himself by hand is not “on the grid” so to speak. He is the anonymous co-author of two popular books in Korean on Chiri mountain monks. Though invited to join various orders, he chose to remain independent, teaching those in his immediate proximity at any given time. He administers to a sizeable lay congregation near his temple on Chiri Mountain in the south of the peninsula and travels to Taiwan periodically to teach practitioners there, coming and going as he pleases due to his lack of affiliation. Meeting him reinforced the point that there is still a living tradition of Sōn (禪) being practiced in the Korean mountains. In addition, due to him not being affiliated with any order, I was able to meet him in an intimate setting through a mutual friend. He was both kind and formidably gracious. He was equally penetrating and discussed Buddhism with me easily.

This was in stark contrast to my frequenting of the luxurious Anguk Zen Center in Seoul (under the direction of the Chogye Order) between 2006 and 2010. I never got to meet the resident patriarch, and I and an American colleague (who was teaching classes there on Korean Buddhist philosophy every Saturday) were barred from participating in their Anguk-meditation retreat because, and I quote “foreigners will disturb the practice”. This had changed by 2012 when the Anguk Zen Center had begun to allow visiting foreigners to participate in their meditation retreats. These ‘microaggressions’ are not necessarily malicious, but reflective of a deeply ingrained “us & them” mentality in Korean culture, which institutional and culturally-bound Buddhism in Korea, despite its doctrines of loving-kindness and awareness of universal Buddha-nature, remains oblivious to. Fortunately, institutional clerical Buddhism is not the complete picture of Korean Buddhism.

Contemporary Korean Lay-Buddhism

A lay Buddhist group, the intellectual ‘Buddhist Solidarity for Reform’ (참여불교재가연대, *ch’amyōbulgyojaegayōndae*) was founded in 1999 by a Professor of Physics at Seoul’s Sogang University, Bak Gwang Sō, as a watchdog organization with an eye on the Chogye Order and for the express purpose of defending the integrity of

Buddhist teaching. “Its agenda includes human rights, social justice, social welfare, and the reunification of Korea”.²⁹ By now a prominent lay-people’s Engaged-Buddhist group in Korea—to keep innovating and to return the benefit of their meditation practice to society is one of their main goals according to the group’s website.³⁰ Korea University Professor Cho Sungtaek’s *Hwajaeng Academy* in the palace district of central Seoul is also a space for lay-people, Buddhist or otherwise, as well as interested monks, to participate in debate and dialogue on all things pertaining to modern Buddhist life. A regular schedule of conferences, debates and lectures is maintained on a wide-range of Buddhist and non-Buddhist related topics, which engages the wider public.

Another lay group is the Korean Buddhist Promotion Foundation-KBPF (대한불교진흥원, *taehanbulgyojinhŭngwŏn*), which has a more ecological focus. They are concerned with promoting Buddhism purely as a philosophy as opposed to the more faith based religious type of worship that has characterized much of lay-people’s approach to Buddhism and other religions in Korea. The KBPF are interested in meditation as a philosophical enquiry. While the TSP promotes an image of Korean temples as ecologically self-sufficient and self-sustaining (which is true of some of the more isolated *non*-TSP temples located in the mountains), the TSP temples themselves are largely sustained by the money they get from participants of the TSP program (up to \$150,000 per annum in extra income for the more organized TSP temples).³¹ In contrast, the KBPF is directly involved in promoting awareness of sustainable living and renewable energy in society and a large part of their work is in the field of Buddhist-Ecology. Apart from their headquarters in the Mapo district of Seoul, they also run the Soomdo Cultural Center, which hosts art exhibitions, theater and promotes traditional Korean culture in the center of Seoul.

Buddhist Solidarity for Reform and the KBPF are reflective of a growing movement within lay Korean Buddhist society, not only of increasing self-sufficiency in terms of practice away from temples, but of a move towards an increasingly philosophical and socially engaged Buddhism. This approach might be summed up by recent comments by the current president of the KBPF in the Foundation’s biannual magazine “He [the Buddha] still sends a strong positive message to us living today through his rejection of the status quo [...] the universal values of freedom and equality are propagated by truly sincere minds, not by any one organization or political power” which encapsulates the growing spirit of lay Korean Buddhism.³² Such universal ideals however, were not compatible with the increasing consolidation of the state for self-preservation during the Chosŏn dynasty and neither were they practical during much of the twentieth century. Many Lay Buddhists in Korea are now anxious to make up for lost time.

Conclusion

The TSP simulates social engagement, but as I have shown, it is not viewed as an opportunity to redefine relationships with people from abroad in a land where immigration is a hugely contentious issue. Ultimately, multicultural teething-problems are symptomatic of an interfusion and interpenetration already taking place. As this paper has

²⁹ Cho Sungtaek, “Buddhism & Society: Buddhism & Society: On Buddhist Engagement with Society”. *Korea Journal* 42:4 (2002), 121.

³⁰ www.Buddha21.org [accessed on 12.06.15].

³¹ Kaplan, “Simulations of Monasticism”, 85.

³² Kim Gyuchil, “Meaning of Buddha’s Birthday in the Perspective of Human History”. *Buddhism and Culture* 1:1 (KBPF, 2015), 19.

illustrated, Buddhism in the hands of lay Koreans is in the midst of a transition to being more socially active, which ultimately means being less concerned about being “Korean” as it has been thus far in the modern era and more about being simply ‘Buddhist’ which was how it operated in the glory days of the Unified Silla Period. The Chogye Order’s pursuit of ‘credentials of *Koreaness*’ speaks for its aspirations towards a relationship with the state through a type of modern *hogukbulgyo*.

The growth of lay-Korean Buddhism and its rejection of a clerical Buddhist establishment who merely seek to maintain their status as patriotic and protectors of the state, is indicative of the inability of that establishment to meet the needs of its laity. Korean laity and not the clergy are the ones now being syncretic in Korea. I have also shown that the Chogye Order if not the mainstream of Buddhism in Korea, does not seek to actively engage the populace or resolve conflicts (such as the Vietnamese victims of atrocities) but actively seeks a relationship with the state. Hence, the TSP can be interpreted as an offering of itself to the State in an effort to reclaim the status it once occupied as national authority on spiritual affairs.

With regard to historical Buddhist figures in Korea, Robert Buswell observes that “if they were to refer to themselves at all, it would *not be as Korean* Buddhists, but as ‘disciples’, ‘teachers’, ‘proselytists’ ‘doctrinal specialists’ and ‘meditators’”.³³ Scholars and practitioners like Wonhyo (元曉, 617-686) were of the highest class in terms of scholarship because they lived when the pan-peninsular identity being shaped at the time was integrative and inclusive. The contemporary rigid status quo is a vestige of the more recent Neo-Confucian ideology, infused with a post-colonial nationalistic reflex which is exclusivistic.

A Buddhist Church which collaborates with the state as it has been doing, by reinforcing the status quo and being concerned with its own image as truly Korean, seems best suited to temple administration of which the TSP is an elaborate form. However, it seems unlikely to contribute more to the greater harmony in society, which was the intended purpose of Buddhist teachings. The cancelled reconciliation event for Vietnam War survivors of atrocities and indeed the TSP as a whole seem to be missed opportunities in this regard. As this study has highlighted, the mainstream Buddhist establishment does not operate outside of the collective and nationalist consciousness in Korea.

In the spirit of *Hwaōm* (華嚴)³⁴ from which the modern tradition in Korea derives its identity in no small part, globalisation and multiculturalism, and indeed the TSP are inevitable symptoms of *wōnyung* (원융) or ‘interfusion’ (圓融).³⁵ South Korea is now opened up to the world. Both in theory and in practice however, the mainstream of Korean Buddhism remains entrapped anachronistically by a *Hogukpulgyo*, which was as much a misapplication of Buddhist doctrine in the Three Kingdoms period as it is now. This paper has shown that lay Korean Buddhists are taking Buddhist philosophy and its implications for ecology, human rights and equality in the world at large, into their own hands. Given the rate of change in Korean society, the Buddhist Orders, whose temples are mostly attended by middle-aged and elderly women,³⁶ (a phenomenon known in

³³ Buswell, *Currents and Countercurrents*, 9. Emphasis added.

³⁴ The Avatamsaka School of Buddhism (Chinese: Huayen) which has had such a huge influence on Korean Buddhism with its ‘doctrine of interpenetration’.

³⁵ Doctrinally this word is used to describe the interfused nature of *Ultimate Reality* though I apply it here in a more conventional sense.

³⁶ Frank Tedesco, “Socially Responsive Buddhism in Contemporary Korea”. *The Review of Korean Studies* 5:1 (2002), 135.

Korea as ‘*chima pulgyo*’ or ‘Skirt Buddhism’) may very well find in a few short years, that people have moved on without them towards a socially-engaged Buddhism, in a society which is much more tolerant of differences than it is now. This will surely be the consummation of the Korean *T’ongbulgyo* endeavor; Syncretic-Buddhism, not just in doctrine but in practice (in this case *yong*, 用), the functioning of a revised *Hogukpulgyo* (in this instance, the essence of that function, *che*, 體) whose affection for the nation protects it not by sectarian reinforcements of identity, but by spreading out beyond its borders.

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