

THE JOURNAL
OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
BUDDHIST STUDIES

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Volume 1

Number 1

1978

c/o Department of South Asian Studies, University of Wisconsin, Madison,
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Buddhism and Political Power in Korean History

by S. Keel

It is a well-known fact that in spite of, or perhaps because of, Christ's word, "My kingship is not of this world," the Christian church in the West has generally managed to maintain its ecclesiastical autonomy in the world over against the secular political authority. Thus Christians have been able to maintain their double citizenship of the earthly kingdom and the heavenly kingdom at the same time, even though at times they had to pay dear cost for this "privilege." One could observe that Buddhism, as a religion of supramundane salvation, could also have developed a similar institutional autonomy over against the secular political power. But in fact that was far from being the case, particularly in Mahāyāna countries, which led Arnold Toynbee to characterize Mahāyāna Buddhism as "a politically incompetent religion."¹

From the very beginning, the Buddhist *saṅgha* was a rather loosely organized body of monks with no firm hierarchical structure of authority. Śākyamuni Buddha himself did not devise any such system, nor did he claim himself as the authoritarian leader of the *saṅgha* at all. The Buddha was such a humble figure that even during his life-time one of his disciples, Devadatta, was able to challenge his authority and almost destroy the unity of the *saṅgha*. The Buddha always commended the impersonal Dharma, not his own person, as the final authority his disciples should resort to, even though in the eyes of his followers the two were often inseparable. Moreover, even from the very early period of Buddhism, there was no unanimity among the monks concerning what the Dharma was; nor was there any effective way to prevent doctrinal dissension, as is evidenced by the story of a certain monk named Purāṇa who came along immediately after the First Council to challenge it and declared that he would continue to

follow his own version of the Dharma. Despite the series of Buddhist councils, the *saṅgha* could not maintain unity due to its intrinsic non-authoritarian style of community life. Thus there did not develop in India any unified hierarchical body of universal *saṅgha* at all, comparable to the Roman Catholic Church in the West. At the same time, it is to be remembered that Indian political authorities generally tended to allow religious freedom, so that it may well have been the case that the *saṅgha* felt little conflict with the state and no clear need to assert an extra-terrestrial authority. On the whole, we could safely say that Buddhism and the political power enjoyed peaceful co-existence in India, with neither notable frictions nor particularly intimate connection either—this seems to hold true even in the case of Kushan Kaniṣka or Mauryan Aśoka. Close as their relationship with Buddhism was, it is clear that they did not make it their state religion.

When we turn our attention to the Chinese scene, however, the situation becomes different. From the ancient period of her history, the power of the ruling class in China over against the masses of peasants was direct and almost absolute, leaving no room for other institutional forces to compete with the state for the allegiance of the people. The Chinese emperor did not merely possess the secular political power but he also had cosmic religious aura as the Son of Heaven, and his government was a sacred affair. Thus, throughout Chinese history, the Buddhist *saṅgha* was never fortunate enough to be granted the kind of laissez-faire atmosphere that prevailed in the land of its origin, but was always under the tight control and surveillance of the state, whether that meant copious support or harsh suppression—the two being opposite sides of the same coin in the long run.²

It was under the influence of this general ethos of Chinese Buddhism that Buddhism in Korea came to be formed. Korean Buddhism has often been noted for its strong characteristic of “*hoguk pulgyo*,” meaning “state-protecting Buddhism,” due to the intimate connection that has traditionally existed between Buddhism and the state in Korea. The basic ideology of this *hoguk pulgyo* finds its support in such Mahāyāna scriptures as the *Inwang-gyōng* (*Jen-wang Ching*) and the *Kūmgwangmyong-gyōng* (*Chin-kuang-ming Ching* or the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa Sūtra*)³—hence their enormous popularity in Korean court circles as in the Chinese and Japanese. The fundamental idea of *hoguk pulgyo* is the belief

that the king would enjoy peace and prosperity of his state if he followed and promoted the Buddhist Dharma, particularly the study and circulation of those *sūtras* themselves—which, however, actually meant the support of Buddhism in general. While this idea of state-protecting Buddhism is not an exclusive phenomenon of Korean Buddhism, with the possible exception of Theravada Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism (which of course were formed each in an entirely different historical context from East Asian Buddhism) there seems to be no doubt that nowhere else has this belief been put into practice more thoroughly than in Korea; and nowhere else has the relationship between the state and Buddhism been more intimate than in Korea, especially during the five hundred years of the Koryŏ Dynasty (918-1392) when the Buddhist *saṅgha* had all the power and privilege as the established religion of the state. The purpose of this article is to examine the historical circumstances of this development and its significance for Korean Buddhism by focusing our attention upon the most salient developments in each of the successive periods of Korean Buddhist history.

When Buddhism was introduced into Korea in the latter half of the fourth century A.D., Korea was divided into three separate kingdoms, each forming an ancient state of a tribal confederation trying to expand its territory at the expense of the others. Among them, Koguryŏ in the north was the earliest in forming a centralized state power and it was by far the strongest of the three. It was in 372 during the reign of King Sosurim that Buddhism was officially introduced into Koguryŏ. King Sosurim maintained a friendly relationship with the Former Ch'in in northern China which had destroyed the former Yen, the enemy of Koguryŏ. It was in this political context that Fu Chien, the most powerful ruler of the Former Ch'in as well as an ardent supporter of Buddhism, sent an envoy and a monk named Sundo together with Buddha images and scriptures to Koguryŏ. It is very significant to note that in the same year King Sosurim accepted Buddhism he also established the so-called T'aehak, an academy for Confucian learning, and the next year promulgated legal codes, thus laying the foundation for a centralized state.

While Buddhism came to Koguryŏ by way of the Former Ch'in in the northern part of China, it reached the kingdom of Paekche, situated in the southwest of the Korean peninsula, from Eastern

Chin in southern China, with which Paekche was in close diplomatic alliance. As in the case of Koguryō, it was not a mere coincidence that Buddhism, a new religion with a universalistic ethos, was introduced into Paekche around the time when it was in the midst of consolidating the central royal authority—most notably by King Kūnch'ogo (346-375)—over against the tribal powers with their primitive religious faith and practices.

The kingdom of Silla, being situated in the southwestern corner of the peninsula, was geographically not in a favorable position to absorb the high culture of the Chinese continent. Hence Silla became the latest recipient of Buddhism as well. Even though according to the official record of the *Samguk Sagi* [Chronicles of the Three Kingdoms] Buddhism came to Silla as early as the time of King Nulchi (417-447), it was not able to make much progress at first, apparently due to the severe opposition of the ruling aristocratic families who were still deeply rooted in the tribal religious tradition.⁴ But along with the continued strengthening of the central royal power, the kings and the supporters of the court kept a constant interest in Buddhism as a new ideological force which would not merely loosen the tribal ties but also have an edifying effect on the people at large. Thus, on the occasion of the martyrdom of I Ch'a-don, a loyal minister, King Pōphūng proclaimed the official recognition of Buddhism in 527 A.D. His very name "Pōphūng" means "Flourishing of the Dharma." Earlier in 520 he had promulgated legal codes, and two years after this official recognition of the new faith he prohibited killing of life in the land. Eda Shunyū, a noted scholar on Korean Buddhism, attributes King Pōphūng's adoption of Buddhism to four reasons or motivations: his personal faith, edification of the people, protection of the state, and absorption of Buddhist and higher culture of the continent.⁵

This brief survey of the political circumstances surrounding the introduction of Buddhism into the Three Kingdoms already indicates to us the close tie that existed between Buddhism and the political power from the early period of Korean history. Eventually, among the Three Kingdoms, Silla proved the victor and accomplished the great task of unifying the peninsula in the year 688 A.D. Let us now consider in more detail what role Buddhism played in Silla in this political achievement, for it was during this period that the fundamental nature of the future relationship into

which Buddhism and the state were to enter in subsequent history of Korea was firmly established.

It was King Chinhŭng, the successor of Pöphŭng, who laid the solid foundation not only for the Silla state as a strong political power but also for the lasting fruitful relationship between it and Buddhism. He built many Buddhist monasteries and welcomed many foreign monks, including the eminent monk from Koguryō, Hyeryang, whom he appointed the *sŭngt'ong* (the chief of monks)—an act which obviously had political implications. Chinhung also legally allowed people to become monks, and he himself became a monk around the end of his life, taking the name *Pöbun* (Dharma cloud), and the queen followed suit. This can be taken as an explicit act demonstrating the unity of *saṅgha* and state, the king assuming the leadership in both areas⁶—a continuation, in Buddhist form, of the tribal tradition where the chief of a tribe often coincided with the shamanistic religious leader. Buddhism, although an “advanced” religion of salvation, did not yet effect the separation of religion and state, and this is already a foreboding of the dominant type of Buddhism to come in the future, namely the *hoguk pulgyo*; Buddhism was accepted by the kings as an ideology transcending tribal barriers, but it was another matter whether it could transcend the state or the royal authority as well.

It was also during Chinhŭng's reign that the famous system of *hwarang* was organized on a national level. This was a system of recruiting fair-looking youths from noble families to train them both physically and spiritually so that they could be mobilized in the case of national emergencies, and their role, military as well as moral, was great in Silla's unification of the Three Kingdoms. What interests us most in this system was its Buddhist elements, particularly its association with Maitreya faith, for there seems to have been a widespread belief (and wish) that a *hwarang* was the incarnation of Maitreya Bodhisattva.⁷ Thus, for instance, the followers of the famous *hwarang* Kim Yu-sin were called *yonghwa hyangdo* (Fragrant Followers of the Dragon Flower), *yonghwa* being the name of the tree under which Maitreya is supposed to attain enlightenment in his future rebirth here on earth from Tusita Heaven, according to the *Mirŭk hasaeng sŏngbul-gyōng* (*Mi-le hsia-sheng ch'eng-fo Ching*; T. 14, No. 454).

If the *hwarang* was believed to be the incarnation of Maitreya Bodhisattva, King Chinhung himself was identified with Śankha, the *cakravartin* (the universal monarch) mentioned in the *sūtra*—and the Silla state, by implication, was the pure land described there. Thus Chinhung named his sons respectively “Kūmnyun” (Gold Wheel, one of the seven treasures of the *cakravartin*) and “Tongnyun” (Bronze Wheel). Like the famous King Aśoka, he erected monuments when he patrolled various parts of his territory, and on such occasions he would be accompanied by a monk—something which suggests that he understood his territorial expansion to be an act of conquest of truth, thus identifying *pulpōp* (the way of Buddhism) with *wangpōp* (the way of kingship).⁸

This policy of political mobilization of Buddhism and the spirit of religious patriotism were vigorously continued by the other kings following Chinhung such as Chinp’yōng, Sōndōk, and Chindōk in seventh century Silla; many of them adopted Buddhist names, such as Śuddhodana, Māyā, Srīmālā—for themselves and their families, apparently seeking Buddhist sanctification of the royal house. Kim Ch’ōl-chun aptly calls this period from King Pōphung to Chindōk “the period of Buddhist royal names.”⁹

Behind this marriage of the court and Buddhism, however, were the outstanding Buddhist monks who offered the ideology for it. Good examples of this can be found in Wōn’gwang and Chajang, two eminent Silla monks. Wōn’gwang was one of the earliest Silla monks to study abroad in China. He returned to Silla in 600 A.D. at the request of the king. The most significant thing about him as a monk is the fact that he was clearly aware of the conflict between the universalistic ethic of Buddhism and the particular demand of behavior by the secular world, but he ultimately found no serious problem in compromising these two norms of behavior. This is well illustrated by the following story:

In his thirtieth year (608) King Chinp’yōng, troubled by frequent border raids by Ko[gu]ryō, decided to ask help from Sui to retaliate and asked the master to draft the petition for a foreign campaign. The master replied, “To destroy others in order to preserve oneself is not the way of a monk (śramaṇa). But since I, a poor monk, live in Your Majesty’s territory and waste Your Majesty’s clothes and food, I do not dare disobey.” He then relayed the king’s request [to Sui].¹⁰

And this was the very spirit underlying his so-called *sesok ogye* (five precepts for laymen) about which we have the following story: Kwisan and Ch'wihang from Saryang district came to the master's door and, lifting up their robes, respectfully said, "We are ignorant and without knowledge. Please give us a maxim which will serve to instruct us for the rest of our lives." The master replied, "There are ten commandments in the Bodhisattva ordination. But, since you are subjects and sons, I fear you cannot practice all of them. Now, here are five commandments for laymen: serve your sovereign with loyalty; tend your parents with filial piety; treat your friends with sincerity; do not retreat from a battlefield; be discriminating about the taking of life. Exercise care in the performance of them."¹¹

Chajang was another important figure who had decisive influence in setting the basic ethos of Silla Buddhism around this critical period. His stories are no less illuminating for us. Born of a high aristocratic family, he went to T'ang China in 636 A.D. Once on Mt. Wu-t'ai he is said to have heard while inspired the following words from Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva: "Your king is of the seed of the Indian Kṣatriya; she [Queen Sōndōk] had already received the Buddha's prophecy [concerning her attainment of Buddhahood] and thus has special relation [to Buddhism], and she is not like the eastern barbarian stock. . . ."¹² Coming down from the mountain, the *Samguk Yusa* continues to tell us, another significant incident happened to Chajang:

When he passed by the side of T'ai-huo lake in China, suddenly a divine man appeared and asked him, "Why have you come here?" "To seek enlightenment," replied Chajang. The divine man paid homage and asked again, "Does your country have any difficulty?" "Our country," said Chajang, "is bordered by the Malgal [a Tungus tribe in Manchuria and eastern Siberia] in the north and by the Japanese in the south; the two countries, Koguryō and Paekche, invade the borders and the neighboring pirates swarm around, causing trouble among the people." The divine man said, "Your country has a woman as the king. She has virtue but not authority; this is why your neighboring countries plot [to invade your country]. You should quickly return to your country. . . . If you, upon returning to your country, build a nine-story pagoda in the monastery [the famous Hwangyong Monastery in the capital city of Silla], the neighboring coun-

tries will surrender and the nine Hans [barbarians] will come to offer tribute, so that the dynasty will enjoy everlasting peace." (T.49, p.990c)

It is difficult to determine how much historical truth is contained in the above stories, but their message is unmistakable and their connection with the great monk Chajang does not seem to be accidental at all. Thus far, we have examined the political role and significance of Buddhism for the Silla society, particularly for the ruling class, before the unification of the peninsula. Just when Silla was emerging as a strong political power in the peninsula in the sixth and seventh centuries, Buddhism was available as the politico-religious ideology which would serve the cause of building a powerful centralized state with a sacred royal authority, and it was the genius of the Silla political leaders to get hold of that ideology in their drive to achieve the unification of the land. It is no wonder that along with this height of Silla's political power in the latter half of the seventh century we also witness the great efflorescence of the doctrinal studies of Buddhism, best represented by Wŏnhyo (617-686), who is commonly regarded as the greatest Buddhist figure in Korean history.¹³ At any rate, once this political efficacy of Buddhism was proven to the Silla ruling class, there was no reason for them to question the belief in the idea of the *hoguk pulgyo*, and the solid foundation was laid for the enduring bond between Buddhism and the state in the subsequent period of Korean history.

The final period of the Silla Dynasty saw great social turmoil and unrest. The central authority of the government collapsed due to the political struggle among the central aristocrats, the poor administration of the kings, and the rise of the powerful local warlords. In the end, the country was again torn into what is called the Later Three Kingdoms. Out of this political confusion the order was restored by a local warlord by the name of Wanggŏn who became the founder of a new dynasty, Koryŏ (918-1392). It was this T'aejo, as he was called later, who set the basic tone for the intimate connection between Buddhism and the dynasty for about five hundred years after him. T'aejo seems to have been well aware that formerly Silla, when it was about to achieve the unification of the Three Kingdoms, had greatly promoted Buddhism. Thus he built, for instance, the Pagoda of Nine Stories in the

city of P'yöngyang in imitation of the famous one built by Queen Söndök in Kyöngju, the capital city of Silla, not long before the unification. After all, it was not politically astute to disrespect the tradition that had already been deeply entrenched in the life of the people for such a long time. His attitude toward Buddhism is best expressed by one of his so-called "ten rules of exhortation": "The great task of our country was surely based upon the protecting power of the Buddhas. Therefore, build monasteries for Sön [Ch'an] and Kyo [Chiao], dispatch abbots and cultivators of purity, and let them carry out their work."¹⁴ So he built numerous Buddhist monasteries in the capital as well as in the countryside and sponsored various popular Buddhist festivals. T'aejo was at the same time a firm believer in the theory of geomancy (*p'ungsu* or *feng-shui*); he attributed his success in the reunification of the land not merely to the grace of the Buddhas but also to the "earth-power" (*chidök*) of the mountains and rivers. Thus, even the construction of Buddhist monasteries was done according to the geomantic principles and hence those monasteries were called "*pibo sach'al*," meaning that they were designed to curb the evil forces of the geomantically unfavorable places of the country. What all this amounts to is the fact that while the dynasty had changed, Buddhism as the religio-cultural force remained without being challenged or called into question—which occurred around the end of the Koryö Dynasty after it had enjoyed the long period of state patronage. Also evident in this instance of T'aejo and his continuous support of Buddhism is the fact that, at least for the kings and nobles of the dynasty, Buddhism was understood primarily as the state-protecting religion, *hoguk pulgyo*, not as the supra-mundane truth of salvation for individuals.

Buddhism as the state religion of Koryö became even more pronounced at the time of King Kwangjong (949-975), who not merely initiated the civil service examination modelled after the Chinese system but also established the monk examination system parallel to it.¹⁵ As Takahashi Töru points out, the idea behind this appears to have been that whereas the civil ministers serve the state through their administrative works the monks serve it through spiritual advice and ritual performances.¹⁶ At the same time, the two systems were designed to curb the power of the local warlords by opening up a legitimate way for them to participate in government, and to put monks, apparently not insignificant in number

and power, under the control of the state. Along with this system of *sūngkwa*, as the monk examination was called, a clerical ranking system called *pōpkye* was devised as well. Thus the monk who passed the examination began to climb up the ladder of the clerical ranks, and no one who did not pass it could be appointed the abbot of a monastery in principle. Throughout the Koryō period, this system gave a great deal of incentive to the Buddhist monks and added to their prestige as well. Many of great learning and noble birth competed in the examination for the accompanying honors. Thus to be a Buddhist monk was, unlike in the Yi dynasty later, as we shall see, a respectable career worthy for men of high ambition to pursue in Koryō society.

In short, what happened to Koryō Buddhism was that not merely did the state itself become the *dānapati* (almsgiver, patron) of the Buddhist *saṅgha*, but the latter also became part and parcel of the state bureaucratic organization. One of the most serious consequences of this was that the *saṅgha* evidently did not feel any pressing need to reach down to and serve the masses, for everything was provided by the state. Koryō Buddhism was bound to be an aristocratic affair predominantly oriented to the powerful and the wealthy; and what these wanted was not liberation from the world but rather worldly success and security. What was to become of Buddhism when the state withdrew its lavish support could also be predicted easily, and this was in fact what happened at the dynastic change from Koryō to Yi after the long period, about eight hundred years, of the continuous patronage of Buddhism by the state. State patronage of Buddhism itself would by no means necessarily mean its loss of religious autonomy. On the contrary, it is conceivable that Koryō Buddhism could have utilized its enormous secular power as a means for establishing strong religious autonomy and authority. But the fact that it failed to do so is painfully demonstrated by the crucial test it was to undergo in the following dynasty with the change in political power. It is now time for us to consider the abrupt turn of fate Buddhism encountered during this final period of traditional Korea.

During the Koryō Dynasty the Buddhist *saṅgha* had amassed enormous wealth under state patronage. There were various ways of accumulating wealth: contributions from the court and the nobles, the privilege of tax exemption, the practice of usury, and various commercial activities.¹² But when the *kongjōnje* (public

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field system), the very foundation of Koryŏ economic order, began to break down seriously around the end of the dynasty due to the sequestering of large land holdings, called *nongjang* (manor), by powerful high officials in the capital as well as by many influential Buddhist monasteries throughout the country, it became a matter of grave concern among some officials, especially among the younger lesser bureaucrats who did not have this privilege and who, moreover, came under the influence of the newly introduced Neo-Confucianism around this time. Thus the voice of anti-Buddhist accusations, mostly economic and secular but some clearly moral and religious, began to be raised and heard openly. These accusations were heeded already at the time of King Kongmin (1351-1374) of Koryŏ, but the decisive measures were not taken until Yi Sŏng-gye took power in 1389, representing the new social force that called for land reform, pro-Ming diplomacy over against the Yüan court, and naturally the curbing of Buddhism.

Yi Sŏng-gye, who founded the new Yi Dynasty (1392-1910), was himself a rather pious Buddhist. But with the change of the social and economic structure and the shift of political power, it was inevitable that Buddhism, which had been so closely identified with the established order of the previous dynasty, had to suffer losses. Thus he abolished the tax exemption privilege of the Buddhist monasteries, banned new construction, and initiated the monk license system called *toch'öpche*. The anti-Buddhist recommendations by the Confucian literati and the corresponding measures taken by the kings became more and more severe as time went on. T'aejong (1400-1418) officially recognized only about 250 monasteries, confiscating the land and slaves of the others and laicizing a great many monks. In the capital only one monastery representing each sect was allowed to exist, and in the provinces only two, representing Son and Kyo, were permitted to go on. Then King Sejong (1418-1450) took even more drastic steps, consolidating the existing Five Schools of Kyo and Two Orders of Sŏn¹⁸ into simply the Two Orders of Sŏn and Kyo (*Sŏn'gyo Yangjong*). Thus Sŏn and Kyo themselves became the names of Buddhist denominations, an unprecedented phenomenon in the history of Buddhism in any country. The number of state-supported monasteries now shrank to thirty-six, and many in the capital were converted into public buildings. Toward the end of his life, Sejong's attitude toward Buddhism suddenly turned around, and he support-

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ed many pious Buddhist works, but the damage he had done was never to be repaired again. King Sejo (1455-1468) was also a devout Buddhist who lent copious support to Buddhism, but after his death an even stronger reaction set in. Thus King Sōngjong (1469-1494), a dedicated man of Confucian learning, completely forbade people to become monks, at least lawfully. The famous despot Yōnsan'gun put an end to whatever official relationship the state still had with Buddhism. He abolished the monk examination system altogether, destroyed the two headquarters of Sōn and Kyo in the capital, and took other extreme measures. Belief in the ideology of *hoguk pulgyo* seems to have completely disappeared.

The interesting thing in the midst of this radical development is the fact that while all these harsh measures were being taken against the Buddhist community, we do not see any sign of serious protest or disruptive movement breaking out on the part of the monks and monasteries—a phenomenon in sharp contrast to the situation among the various Buddhist sects during the turbulent period of medieval Japan until the establishment of the Tokugawa order.¹⁹ Suddenly stripped of the protection of kings and nobles, which the Buddhist *saṅgha* had taken for granted, it lacked its own independent capability to respond to this crisis. We could also observe that Buddhism, despite its external flourishing under the protection of the ruling classes in previous dynasties, had no truly deep roots among the common people. Perhaps it did not even feel such a need, for the kings and nobles had always been there to provide the *saṅgha* with its necessities; the only thing it had to do was to pray for their welfare in return. The monasteries themselves were the landlords, so to speak; who would have stood up for them when they were in trouble? This seems to have been the sad fate of the ideal of *hoguk pulgyo* that had once inspired the Silla state and culture.

At any rate, due to the harsh measures mentioned above and the establishment of Neo-Confucian order at the same time, Buddhism came to lose the social respect and honor which it had enjoyed for almost a millenium, and it was pushed deep into the mountains to become the concern only of country women and the lowest stratum of the society in general. To be sure, many court ladies continued to respect and support the *saṅgha*, and many hermit monks with great talent continued to nurture it throughout the generations down to the present day. But, as a whole, the past

glory of Buddhism was gone irretrievably, and its social influence was reduced to a minimum. For a brief period during the reign of King Myōngjong (1545-1567), when his mother Queen Munjōng took charge of governmental affairs behind the screen, Buddhism seemed to revive under her lavish patronage and under the able leadership of the monk named Pou. The monk examinations for Sōn and Kyo were revived and the various restrictions against Buddhist activities were removed. It was during this time that Sosan, regarded as the greatest monk of the Yi Dynasty, took the examination and began his religious career. But, once again, a violent reaction against this temporary resurgence followed, and Pou was exiled to Cheju island in the south and murdered there. Never again was Buddhism to see such a turn of fortune until around the end of the dynasty. Apparently, Pou's group failed to read the signs of the time and history, not realizing clearly what went wrong fundamentally with the Buddhist sangha of their time. Thus Buddhism was *revived* temporarily by them, but not *reformed*.

Conclusion

Through our study thus far one thing stands out very clearly regarding the relationship between Buddhism and political power in Korean history; Buddhism did not maintain nor ever develop institutional autonomy from the secular authority. In order to do that, Buddhism had to maintain a certain degree of aloofness from, or tension with, the secular world itself. Often Buddhism is charged for its "other-worldly" tendency. This may be true of Korean Buddhism as far as some individual monks are concerned, but its history shows us ironically that Buddhism as an institutional force, as the *saṅgha*, was not "other-worldly" at all but all too "worldly." The fundamental problem for Korean Buddhism was not its "other-worldliness" but rather its "over-worldliness," so much so that it became part and parcel of the secular order, lacking the spirit of autonomy that arises out of the transcendent tension Buddhism as a religion of salvation would have with respect to the world. Or, is it rather the case that Mahāyāna Buddhism, with its doctrine of the identity of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, is intrinsically unable to maintain such a tension? But the idea of the identity of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* does not mean mere conformity to the world

nor a blind affirmation of it, but rather the transcendence of the worldly spirit and the supreme freedom from every form and force of bondage, including the one arising from religion itself. Not only that, this doctrine of identity could also work in the direction of the Buddhist *saṅgha's* powerful historical awareness and affirmation of religious autonomy in this very world of *samsāra*.²⁰ At any rate, we conclude that the political failure of Mahāyāna Buddhism has nowhere been so patently illustrated as in Korea where Buddhism once saw as great a flourishing as in any other country of the world.

NOTES

1. Toynbee bases this judgment particularly upon the case of the Mahāyāna Buddhism of Northern China during the period of disunity, and its failure to utilize the "political patronage of barbarian rulers." He says: "The contrast between this political failure of the Mahāyāna in Northern China in a post-Sinic Age and the success with which the Christian Church seized and harvested its corresponding opportunities in Western Europe in a post-Hellenic Age brings out the fact that—at any rate by comparison with Christianity—the Mahāyāna was a politically incompetent religion. The patronage of the parochial princes in Northern China during the best part of three centuries, running from the break-up of the United Tsin Empire to its reconstitution by the Sui, was of no more avail than the more potent patronage of the Kushan Emperor Kanishka had been at the turn of the first and second centuries of the Christian Era. Even this royal aid failed to give the followers of the Mahāyāna a firm seat in a political saddle." *A Study of History*, IX (London, 1954), 40-41.

2. That Chinese Buddhism did not enjoy religious autonomy even during its heyday of the T'ang period is well shown by Stanley Weinstein's article, "Imperial Patronage in the Formation of T'ang Buddhism," *Perspectives on the T'ang*, ed. Arthur F. Wright and Denis Twitchett (New Haven and London, 1973).

3. See particularly chapter 5 of *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* (henceforth abbreviated as T.) 8, No. 245; chapter 6 of T. 16, No. 663.

4. This has been pointed out by Yi Ki-baek, "Samguk sidae pulgyo chōllae wa kū sahoejōk sōngkyōk" [Introduction of Buddhism into the Three Kingdoms and its Social Character], *Yōksa Hakpo*, No. 6 (1954).

5. Eda Shunyū, "Shiragi no bukkyō jūyō ni kansuru shomondai" [Problems concerning Silla's Acceptance of Buddhism], *Bunka*, No. 8 (1935), pp. 975-77.

6. This has been pointed out by Yaotani Takayasu, "Shiragi shakai to Jōdokyō" [Silla Society and Pure Land Buddhism], *Shichō*, VII, No. 4 (1937), p. 162.

7. The best study of this association of the *hwarang* system with Maitreya faith is Cho Ae-hi's "Shiragi ni okeru Miroku shinkō no kenkyū" [A Study of Maitreya Faith in Silla], *Shiragi bukkyō kenkyū*, ed. Kim Chigyōn and Ch'ae In-hwan (Tokyo, 1973).

8. This finds a striking parallel in the first emperor of Sui Dynasty of China. In his edict he proclaimed: "With the armed might of a Cakravartin king, We spread the ideals of the ultimately enlightened one. With a hundred victories in a hundred battles, We promote the practice of the ten Buddhist virtues. Therefore We regard the weapons of war as having become like the offering of incense and flowers presented to Buddha, and the fields of this world as becoming forever identical with the Buddha-land." Quoted from Arthur F. Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History* (New York, 1965), p. 67. The emperor Wen of Sui is later than Chinhūng (540-576).

9. Kim Ch'ol-chun, "Silla sidae ūi dual organization" [Dual Organization in the Silla Period], *Yōksa Hakpo*, No. 2 (1952), p. 94.

10. Peter H. Lee, trans. *Lives of Eminent Korean Monks: The Haedong Kosūng Chōn* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), p. 78.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79; I left out the Chinese characters from Lee's text. It is very interesting to note that according to Lee's footnotes, both Kwisun and Ch'wihang were killed in their campaign against Paekche and were granted posthumous titles by King Chin-p'yōng.

12. *Samguk Yusa* [Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms], T. 49, No. 2039, p. 990c.

13. His biography is contained in the *Samguk Yusa*, T. 49, p. 1006c as well as in the *Sung Kao-seng Chuan*, T. 50, p. 729a.

14. This is only part of the first rule. The text of the ten rules is provided and discussed in Yi Pyōng-do, *Koryō sidae ūi yōn'gu* [A Study of Koryō Period] (Seoul, 1948) from which the present passage is translated. See particularly pp. 28-48 where Yi refutes the view proposed by Imanishi Ryū that the ten rules were not established by T'aejo but were a later forgery ("Shiragisō Dōsen ni tsuite," *Tōyō gakuō*, II, No. 2 (1912), pp. 247-63). "Sōn (Ch'an) and "Kyo" (Chiao) refer to the two basic divisions or camps of Buddhism current at the time in Korea.

15. There is no sure record to indicate its beginning in the time of Kwangjong, but scholars generally agree in attributing its beginning, if not full practice, to him. Concerning this system, see Takahashi Tōru, "Daikaku Kokushi Giten no Kōrai Bukkyō ni taisuru keirin ni tsuite" [On the National Preceptor of Great Enlightenment Ūich'ōn's Plan for Koryō Buddhism], *Chōsen gakuō*, No. 10 (1956), pp. 119-23.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 122-23.

17. Concerning the temple economy of Koryō, see Takashi Hatada's "Kōraichō ni okeru jiin keizai," *Shigaku Zasshi*, XLIII, No. 5 (1932), pp. 557-93.

18. There are some problems regarding the names and identity of these

schools and orders. For a comprehensive examination of the complicated denominational shuffling that occurred around this time, see Takahashi Tōru, *Richō Bukkyō* [Buddhism in Yi Dynasty] (Tokyo, 1929), pp. 137-44.

19. Also to be noted in relation to this is the phenomenon of relative absence of vigorous sectarian movements and conflicts in Korean Buddhist history.

20. That the Mahāyāna world-view, be it its "ahistorical" character or the doctrine of the identity of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, cannot be a sufficient explanation for its "political failure" is easily demonstrated by the case of Japanese Buddhism, certainly the most extreme form of Mahāyāna Buddhism.