

# **A Monk of Mukti and Karma: The Life and Thought of Baek Yongseong**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper sheds light on the life and thought of Baek Yongseong (1864-1940) and demonstrates his success at balancing “mukti” and “karma.” At the turn of the century, when Korea lost its independence, Baek saw the predicament Korean Buddhism was in, facing the invasion of Japanese Buddhism and the introduction of Christianity. Baek sought to revitalize Korean Buddhism by making it understood and accepted by the general public. He also declared economic independence for Buddhist organizations and decried the newly established Japanese Buddhist institution. Above all, his balance of “mukti” and “karma” has become the standard for many contemporary Korean Buddhists, and as such allows us to draw important lessons from him. First, as an important shaper of modern Korean Buddhism, Baek taught that individual salvation must be accompanied by action for the benefit of the people. He also advised Korean Buddhist organizations to neither claim exclusive use of the “gongan” method nor overemphasize words and letters (bullip munja). Finally, he never defined how balance between “mukti” and “karma” should be maintained, but instead said followers must strike their own balance out of compassion for other beings.*

**Keywords:** Yongseong, *mukti*, *karma*, Manhae, Daegakgyo, Great Enlightenment Movement, Avalokitesvara, Seon meditation

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## Historical Background

In Korean history, the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century was a troubling period marked by the political failure of the Joseon dynasty and Japanese oppression and colonialism. For modern Korean Buddhists such as Baek Yongseong (1864-1940) as well as Man-hae (Han Yong-un, 1879-1944), this period represented the seizure of national identity and dignity, a time when freedom, independence, purity, vigor, and sensitivity to the changing times gave way to restraint, submission, corruption, powerlessness, and backwardness.

Along with the loss of Korean people's freedom and independence, the decline in vitality of Buddhist organizations and its loss of touch with the realities of ordinary people (*min*), and the absence of purity among professional Buddhist practitioners become the primary context within which we should understand Yongseong. The Buddhism of the period had been severely diminished through 500 years of oppression under the Joseon dynasty's "anti-Buddhist, pro-Confucianist" policy. With little social influence, it was barely able to survive. Monasteries were forced to retreat deep into the mountains and were subject to exploitation by officials. Despised as the lowest stratum of society, monks were often abused by people and strictly forbidden from even entering Seoul or from engaging in missionary activities. They were unable to attain any social standing or establish plausible organizations. Buddhism survived mainly as a private faith, amalgamated with Shamanism, Taoism, and folk beliefs. Both before and after liberation from Japanese occupation, the idea has persisted, like a cherished myth, that the Joseon dynasty's continuous suppression of Buddhism was responsible for the reduced presence of modern Buddhism.

An even bigger problem for Korean Buddhism, which had become enervated and unorganized, was the invasion of Japanese Buddhism and the introduction of Christianity and its rapidly growing popularity among people. The time period dating from the invasion of Japanese Buddhism in 1870 to the proclamation of the 1911 ordinance regarding Korean monasteries can be divided into two stages.

During the first stage, prior to the proclamation, Japanese Buddhism laid the groundwork for the assimilation of Korean Buddhism. During the second stage, dating from Japanese annexation in 1910 to the proclamation in 1911, Japanese Buddhism solidified its control over Korean Buddhism. Baek Yongseong and Han Yong-un's subsequent opposition to the ordinance and their advocacy of the separation of state and religion in 1912, represented a struggle against the control by and constraints of the colonial government. One of the most important results of the invasion of Japanese Buddhism was the appearance of married monks and their rise to power. Korean Buddhism had traditionally only allowed celibate monks and nuns. The advocacy of clerical marriage had aroused the opposition of celibate monks even before liberation, and this issue led Yongseong to distinguish himself from more liberal Buddhists like Han Yong-un. Aside from this issue, Yongseong felt a strong similarity of consciousness in regards to many aspects of their other deeds.

Now let us turn to the introduction of Christianity and its growing popularity.<sup>1</sup> Yongseong exerted a great deal of energy for revitalizing Buddhist organizations and reinventing the Buddhist view of the "world-arising" (*segye gisi*) in order to suppress the spread of Christian evangelism. Many of his writings, including *Gwiwon jeongjong* (Going Back to True Religion, 1913), *Simjo manyuron* (Treatise on Mind Creating All Things, 1921), and *Gakhae illyun* (Enlightenment Ocean Like the Sun, 1931), contained numerous passages which were intended to replace the existence of God and the creation narrative with the Buddhist version of the "world-arising" which was based upon his adaptation or reinvention of an old Buddhist "Mind-Only" (*yusim*) theory.

Yongseong calmly perceived the unhappy predicament Korean Buddhism found itself in, and he became full of sadness, shame, and

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1. Han Bogwang, a well-known contemporary scholarly monk, painfully observed that the history of propagation of Buddhism to Seoul is less than one hundred years, which is far shorter than that of Catholicism and Protestantism. Han B. (1998, 29-30).

anger and was finally stirred by compassion to change it. When Yongseong felt the loss of the country's independence deeply, he joined Han Yong-un in the March First Independence Movement in 1919, which may be considered a direct expression of his nationalist sentiment. But upon his release from prison in 1921, he redirected his concern and energy to Buddhist issues, setting aside political ones, perhaps indirectly revealing that sentiment by means of the Daegakgyo movement.

### Keeping the Balance between *Mukti* and *Karma*

In Mahayana Buddhism, the aim of believing and practicing Buddhism is often expressed in the phrase, "seeking enlightenment above" (*sanggu bori*) and "transforming sentient beings below" (*hahwa jungsaeng*). Let us call the first half of this phrase the motive for *mukti* (individual salvation), the second the motive for *karma* (actions saving others). Quite different from other contemporary monks, Yongseong chose a middle way between *mukti* and *karma*. When we put Yongseong's entire mendicant life in a nutshell, he becomes one of the most important shapers of modern Korean Buddhism, in that he was able to achieve and keep a balance between *mukti* and *karma* by gradually extending the scope of sentient beings to include even city dwellers, such as Seoulites. In this paper, I will try to show how well balanced his life and thought were, and I will argue that such balance should become the standard model for future Korean Buddhists.

Yongseong, which is his dharma name, was born in Jeolla-do province in 1864; his secular name was Sang-gyu. He was a traditional monk in that he put a great deal of emphasis on sincerely practicing meditation and preserving precepts, but he was also an adventurous revolutionary in that he used various methods to popularize Buddhism, even among city dwellers, and to establish and strengthen Buddhist organizations. In taking measures that were revolutionary, at least for his time, he experienced a great deal of suffering, heated

words (*guseol*), and quarrels (*sibi*).<sup>2</sup>

Many scholars on Yongseong agree that his mendicant life should be divided into two segments, with considerable justification. For example, Han Bo-gwang draws a dividing line at the age of 47 (1910), calling the first half the period of asceticism in the mountains (*sanjung suhaenggi*), which lasted nearly thirty years from the time he left home in 1879 at the age of 16, and the second half the period of transforming the masses (*daejung gyohwagi*).<sup>3</sup> The first half was mainly devoted to "seeking enlightenment above" (*mukti*), the second half to "transforming sentient beings below" (*karma*). The year 1910 may be seen as a major watershed in his career. Up to the year 1910, he almost solely devoted his life to learning, practicing, and transmitting Buddhism, living mostly in hermitages in the mountains.<sup>4</sup>

If we presume that "transforming below" requires enormous determination, energy, passion, courage, and forbearance, as well as compassion, and if cultivating all these qualities calls for a lengthy period of time, then the entire scope of the first half of his life was preparation for the second. In approximately thirty years of his mendicant life, his most radical action was his direct participation in the March First Independence Movement (1919). Considering his wide range of activities for reinventing and popularizing Seon (Zen; Chan) Buddhism, many scholars nowadays believe, following Yongseong's own proud words, that it is mainly due to his efforts that the word *chamseon* (Seon meditation) became popular with ordinary folks. Yongseong never compromised the importance of Seon meditation, maintained his pride of belonging to the Linji school, and understood that the observance of precepts was a prerequisite for keeping Bud-

2. For more details, refer to Dae-eun's writing "Go Baek Yongseong daejongsa-ui chumo" (The Memory of the Late Seon Master Baek Yongseong), in Han B. (2001, 66-69).

3. Han B. (1998, 27-50).

4. But he spent the last seven years (1903-1910) of his ascetic period in Seon meetings of the monks, which may be seen as the first preliminary practice of "transforming below."

dhist organizations pure and healthy.

Leaving behind the hermitic way of life at mountain retreats and dismissing the world as pessimistic and self-righteous, Yongseong advocated and practiced a “revolutionary people’s religion” (*hyeong-myeongjeok minjonggyo*), which is, together with the phrase “transforming below,” I think, the most suitable phrase to depict the second half of his mendicant life. The term “revolutionary people’s religion” was probably first used around 1927, in his letter sent to Master Gyeongbong (1892-1982), where Yongseong also mentioned his Great Enlightenment Teaching (Daegakgyo).<sup>5</sup> But the spirit of “revolutionary people’s religion” seemed to emerge in his mind after his first visit to Seoul in 1905 and strengthened with his imprisonment. Afterwards he never lost sight of this spirit, although after his release from prison, he considered the translation of scriptures to be the most suitable way of realizing it.

From the perspective of “revolutionary people’s religion,” old teachings are not themselves “great” if those who have learnt them do not heed the cries of the people and cannot find a more efficient means for adjusting the old teachings to their needs and demands. Yongseong heard the cries for the survival of Korean Buddhism, which was gasping its final breath while being squashed by hostile forces, including Confucianism, the powerful spread of Christianity, and the invasion of Japanese Buddhism. He helped to ensure at least the survival of Korean Buddhism, if not its victory over other teachings, as a worthy cause. To revitalize old Korean Buddhism, he wanted to make Buddhism understood and accepted by the general public. He also claimed economic independence for Buddhist organizations, disclaimed the newly introduced Japanese institution of thirty head temples, and gave up alms-begging on the streets. His Great Enlightenment Movement was going back to the masses, which was, he thought, another way of returning to Shakyamuni Buddha, by way of reinventing traditional Seon Buddhism.

5. Myeongjeong (1997, 175). The text does not indicate what year this letter was written. But it should be dated, according to its content, after the introduction of Great Enlightenment Teaching in North Jiandao in 1927.

### Compassion as the Source and Power of Action (*Karma*) and the First Four Awakenings

Transforming contemporary Buddhism, that is, recovering its independence and renewing it for people, was not a simple and easy task but rather a huge and difficult one. This often put him beyond the limits of his own control, thus requiring such personal qualities as strong determination, sincerity of vows, energy, passion, courage and forbearance, as well as insight into the direction of the changes that were taking place. However, the most important quality for promoting and practicing people’s religion appears to be a compassionate mind.

He underwent various ascetic practices, through which he wanted to reduce himself to zero. In the experience of zero, zero represents emptiness, void, blank, and impracticality, but at the same time, it represents the possibility of producing all things and becomes the necessary condition for non-dual experiences with other beings and for compassionate actions toward them. These practices continued through the entire first half of his mendicant life, from the age of 16 to 47. They include recital of spells (dharani or mantras), examination of the “nothingness *gongan*” (master’s statement; *koan* in Japanese), and perusal of scriptures, beginning with *Liuzu tanjing* (The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch).

Among the five awakenings, which result from various practices, the foremost significant awakening was deeply connected with the spell of Great Compassion in the *Qianshoujing* (Thousand Hands Sutra), which, according to Han Bogwang, Yongseong seemed to begin as soon as he became a monk. Master Suwol Yeongmin (1817-1893) told the sixteen-year-old Yongseong, “The Sage has been gone for too long. Demons are strong, and the dharma is weak. Thus karmic obstructions are heavy, so it is difficult to cultivate [your mind]. If you wholeheartedly take refuge in Buddha, dharma, and the Buddhist Community (Sangha) and diligently recite the spell of Great Compassion, your karmic obstructions will spontaneously dissolve, your mind will dawn brightly, and your afflictions will be

penetrated.”<sup>6</sup> The spell refers to a passage, *sinmyo janggu dae darani*, from *The Thousand Hands Sutra*, which culminated in the spell of six syllables (*yukjaju*), that is, *om ma ni pad me hum*. After a six day-long sincere recitation of this sacred spell, his mind was awakened at the age of 21. This first awakening was symbolically expressed by the phrase, “A thought is experienced, as if the bottom lid of a bucket suddenly fell off.”<sup>7</sup> This “suddenly fallen off lid” was, in Seon tradition, often used to ascertain that our mind become brighter with the removal of karmic obstructions that have accumulated for eons.

The Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, Yongseong’s favorite, was a living quasi-deity whose name he recited, not only during his early years, but throughout his whole life. Through the simple repetition of the name, he could express his earnest devotion and prayer to the Bodhisattva. Yongseong established the house of Avalokitesvara at Bogaesan mountain in Gangwon-do province in 1905. He translated *The Thousand Hands Sutra* into Korean in 1938, two years before his death. Thus, it appears that, throughout his life, Yongseong numerously repeated the following phrase in the sutra, “The Vast, Consummate, Unimpeded, Great Compassion, Great Dharani of the Thousand-Handed, Thousand-Eyed Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva Invocation.”<sup>8</sup> Note that this phrase is followed by, “I bow my head before the great compassion of Avalokitesvara” (稽首觀音大悲呪).

Then, the sutra refers to ten vows coming after each recitation of the following phrase, “Homage to the greatly compassionate Avalokitesvara” (南無大悲觀世音). By repeating the name of Avalokitesvara, and utilizing the power of the vows (*wollyeok*), Buddhists express their yearning to be saved from suffering. In the same process, they also transform their petty minds into compassionate ones, which in turn becomes a foundation for saving other sentient beings. Thus, in this sutra, we find the phrase that enumerates the various places they should go as soon as they are transformed. Those places include the

6. Baek (1991, 1:378).

7. “Susimnon” (On the Cultivation of the Mind). See Baek (1991, 1:10).

8. 千手天眼 觀自在菩薩 廣大圓滿 無碍大悲心 大陀羅尼 啓請.

Mountain of Swords Hell, the Boiling Fire Hell, the realm of the hungry ghosts, and the realm of the Asuras. As soon as they arrived in these places, all kinds of suffering are immediately removed and all beings present there are spontaneously satiated. Furthermore, if they go to the realm of animals, they spontaneously attain great wisdom.

The significance of *The Thousand Hands Sutra* and Yongseong’s yearning for saving people was epitomized in the Six Syllables, *om ma ni pad me hum*. This mantra does not have a literal meaning. The simplest translation possible is, “Praise to the Bodhisattva of Compassion.” The Bodhisattva of Compassion is said to exist as long as there are living beings to be saved. Though recitation of the mantra was not uncommon among novices in the late Joseon dynasty, his recitations of *The Thousand Hands Sutra* and his bows to Avalokitesvara indicate that Yongseong was committed to a life of non-duality, “seeking enlightenment above” and “transforming sentient beings below,” long before the second half of his mendicant life began.

Now let us return to the discussion of his second awakening. At the age of twenty, he began to take the nothingness *gongan* as a subject of meditation, under the guidance of the Seon Master Muyung.<sup>9</sup> The following year, he reached the stage in which his mind became empty. The verse symbolizing this second awakening is as follows.

Dispensing clouds and grasping mists, I found Manjushri Bodhisattva,  
Once attaining him, he was totally empty.  
Form is emptiness, but emptiness again becomes empty;  
Emptiness is form, and this process is endless.<sup>10</sup>

Manjushri Bodhisattva is symbolic of the perfection of wisdom. But attaining this perfection does not make that perfection graspable, rather it makes one feel empty, and feel that emptiness is empty. This verse signifies the non-duality of form and emptiness, an important realization Yongseong seemed to abide by for the next 50 years. In

9. As of now, he was known to us by name only.

10. Baek (1991, 1:379).

relating this experience of non-duality to the aspiration of helping others, the first awakening achieved by repeating *om mani pad me hum* may be understood as a prerequisite for the non-duality of form and emptiness. His strong denial of the view of “bad attachment to emptiness” (*akchwi gonggyeon*) is also found in his letter to Master Gyeongbong (1892-1982).<sup>11</sup> For Yongseong, the realm where sentient beings are found to exist cannot be one of negative emptiness. An enlightened being who cannot save other beings is likened to one living in the space of emptiness.

When he turned twenty-one, he received *bhiksu* (Buddhist monk) and bodhisattva precepts from the Platform of Diamond Precepts (*geumgang gyedan*) instituted at Tongdosa temple in Gyeongsangnam-do. Yongseong believed that the non-observance of precepts struck at the root of Korean Buddhism. Thus, for Yongseong, receiving precepts was not simply a formality but a deadly serious business, and observing precepts was not only the core of being a monk and of keeping a monastery pure and healthy, but was also the essential feature of being an authentic human being.<sup>12</sup> Without observing precepts, there is no way to return to the true religion, to Shakyamuni Buddha, and to the Great Enlightenment that was his newly translated word for the Buddha.

The third awakening was attained when he read the following phrase from *Chuandenglu* (The Record of Transmitting the Light): “The moon is like a curved arrow; it rains only a little, but the wind is very strong.” This phrase states that though there is a moon shining in the clear sky, you have strong afflictions and delusions in your mind, with little dharma-rain showering on you. This experience was symbolically expressed by the following phrase: “As my nostrils were beaten up, the sun Buddha and the moon Buddha, and the meaning of the nothingness *gongan* were shining brightly, leaving no trace of doubt.”<sup>13</sup> Interpreting this phrase, Han Bogwang says:

11. Myeongjeong (1997, 185-186).

12. He even argued that only with observance of five precepts we could be born into human beings. See Baek (1991, 6:286).

This refers to the fact that Yongseong attained the stage where the five aggregates disappear, and where the nothingness *gongan*, sentient and non-sentient beings, and mundane and supra-mundane worlds are all empty.<sup>14</sup>

In the autumn of 1886, at the age of twenty-three, near the Nakdonggang river, Yongseong was said to have attained the fourth awakening. He symbolized this awakening in the song: “In Geumosan mountain, a thousand-year old moon rises; waves rise for ten thousand miles in the Nakdonggang. Where has the fishing boat gone? I dream in a field of reeds as in the old days.”<sup>15</sup> This song sounds rather neutral but will be used when he declares the tenets of the Great Enlightenment movement for the world.<sup>16</sup>

After these four awakenings, Yongseong meditated and examined *gongan*, and tried to confirm his awakenings by perusing scriptures, such as *The Platform Sutra of Sixth Patriarch* and *The Record of Transmitting the Light*. Though we have no record of his whereabouts and achievements for the following seven years (1893-1900), according to Han Bogwang, Yongseong appeared to struggle within himself and strengthen his awakenings during these years.<sup>17</sup>

### Prison Experience: An Opportunity for the Fifth Awakening and Translation of Buddhist Scriptures

The first four awakenings did not seem to be sufficient in starting and guiding the Great Enlightenment Movement. His fifth awakening, the only awakening not mentioned in his *Yongseong seonsa eorok* (The

13. Baek (1991, 1:379).

14. Han B. (1998, 39).

15. Baek (1991, 1:380).

16. Kim Gwang-sik made a short comment on this somewhat enigmatic phrase: “This verse shows his last awakening, and the state of rising above the world.” See Kim G. (1999, 40). Of course, his “rising above the world” cannot mean leaving the world behind.

17. Han B. (1998).

Sayings of Seon Master Yongseong), was also needed. This was the awakening of his sensitivity to the changing milieu of the country and the cries of people in pain. This awakening slowly emerged since his first short visit to Seoul in 1905 and began to take shape through his participation in the March First Independence Movement in 1919 and his subsequent imprisonment.

In a short remark entitled “Yeokgyeong-ui chwiji” (The Significance of Translating Scriptures) attached to his translation of *The Brahamajala Sutra* (1933), he said, “as I ‘calmly perceive’ (*jeong-gwan*) the trend of thought in the world and the change of literature in 1921, I immediately started to translate scriptures and published forty-five thousand volumes.”<sup>18</sup> This “calm perception” which might have led him to understand the realities of people, amounts to what I call the fifth awakening.

I would claim that all five awakenings put together were the main energy source for his initiating, directing, and keeping the Movement going. Without the earlier four awakenings, vows and compassion were not cultivated for the purpose of initiating and driving forward the Movement. But, without the fifth awakening, the direction and contents of transforming Korean Buddhism would not be given to him.

In a short essay, “Jeosul-gwa beonyeok-e daehan yeon-gi” (Reasons for Writings and Translations), attached to *Joseon-geul hwa-eom-gyeong* (The Korean *Avatamsaka Sutra*) (1928), we have the following key paragraph.

As one of representatives of the Declaration of Independence, I suffered bitterly in the Seodaemun prison for three years. There were numerous political prisoners like me, though belonging to different religions. Each of them asked to bring in their own religious texts, and continued to learn and pray.<sup>19</sup> When I perused their books, I found that they were all translated into Korean. There were almost

18. Baek (1991, 3:7).

19. One must note that, among the thirty-three signatories to the Independence Declaration, fifteen were Christians.

no books printed in the original Chinese. I felt that this was most deplorable. Thus, I took a great vow [to translate Buddhist scriptures] . . . . Today when there are so many things to learn, such as philosophy, science, and mechanics, spending several decades learning Chinese characters is not only a stupid act but is also an obstacle to the development of civilization. . . . Just as Chinese people are fond of the Chinese script, so the Korean language is suitable for Koreans. Men and women of all social classes can easily understand writings in Korean when they begin reading, and the language is also easier to propagate. I made up my mind that once I was released from prison, I would immediately muster men under my banner and make every effort to translate Buddhist scriptures into Korean. I regarded this task as my compass for truth searching. Some time after my release from prison in March 1921, I discussed the matter with several people. There was none who agreed with me, but there were many who scorned me.<sup>20</sup>

This paragraph shows that, in addition to the realization of his calling at that time and the real condition of the people, his prison experience awakened him to the following facts: Buddhism should not be confined to educated persons but extended to include even the non-educated people, thus requiring that all Buddhist scriptures be translated; Buddhists should pay more attention to other branches of science, like philosophy, natural science and mechanics. Otherwise they cannot catch up with the development of civilization. Thus, in response to the call of his time, Yongseong resolved to embark upon translating scriptures in order to efficiently propagate Buddhism among the people. He acted quickly, beginning as soon as he was released from prison. Within a month of his release in April 1921, he established the Samjang (*Tripitaka*, three divisions of the Buddhist canon) Translation Society. But his fellow monks greeted him only with blame for his actions.

The ulterior motive behind his participation in the March First Independence Movement (1919) may have been his hope for national

20. Baek (1991, 12:987).

independence, which was certainly political. However, that political motivation did not, after his release, continue in the same direction and with the same degree of intensity. Instead of fighting directly against Japanese colonial rule, he became focused upon transforming and popularizing Buddhist teachings in Korea.

### Great Enlightenment as Social Movement and Experiential Realm

The balance between *mukti* and *karma* was well demonstrated in the Great Enlightenment Movement. Considering his first use of the term *daegak* (great enlightenment), which appeared in *Palsangnok* (Record on Eight Phases of a Buddha's Life) published in 1922,<sup>21</sup> Han Bogwang argued that the Great Enlightenment Movement seemed to begin when Yongseong was 59, in 1922. Since the term "great enlightenment" was simply his translation of Buddha,<sup>22</sup> the literal meaning of Great Enlightenment Movement is the movement of Buddhism. Yongseong believed not only in the teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha but also in its transmission to Mahakasyapa. Yongseong also made it clear that he believed in the Buddhist narrative that describes how, during his sermon on Vulture Peak, the Exalted One held up a golden lotus blossom to all those assembled. Only Kasyapa understood and smiled.<sup>23</sup> This element of the story has been an important aspect of self-understanding in the East Asian Seon tradition, regardless of its historical authenticity. In this way, Yongseong fully accepted the succession of the Seon lineage, although he attempted to reinvent and rediscover it whenever he felt the need to do so.

His view of what an authentic Buddhist should be is well expressed in a passage from *Gakhae illyun*, as he replied to the question: How should a Buddhist produce merit?

21. Han B. (1998, 26).

22. Baek (1991, 9:729).

23. Baek (1991, 9:725-885).

There is no place where you cannot be blessed (*bokjitgi*). If you are filial to your parents and respect your teachers and elders; if you are friendly to your brothers and harmonize your family; if you keep your residence clean; if you work for the public good according to your ability and keep clear of private desires; if you propagate the truth of Great Enlightenment to all people in the world (*cheonha daejung*) so that they break down superstition, and tread a righteous path; if you are pleased with the fact that you see other people go well; if, when you offer holy food to Buddha, you wish that all sentient beings, beginning with people, should be freed from the suffering of the triple worlds and that each of them should become a Buddha; if you relieve a person of poverty and disease; and if you do not commit any evil but instead practice good deeds, then you will be blessed.<sup>24</sup>

Of all his works, this paragraph may best represent his accomplishments over the last twenty years and the work he continued to do over the following ten years. The gist of the Great Enlightenment Movement may best be summarized as follows: "Be blessed through various kinds of *karma* (activities)."

Yongseong started making substantial efforts to expand the Great Enlightenment Movement. He opened the Daegak Sunday School in 1928, and held the Seon meeting in Daegaksa temple. The Daegakgyo building, which he constructed in the Yongjeong region of Manchuria, was the first Korean Buddhist propagation center in a foreign country. Moreover, he established Hwagwawon in Hamyang in Gyeongsang-do province, declaring it a productive form of Buddhism, and practiced "Seon-Agriculture Buddhism" (*seonong bulgyo*) by himself. He created original rituals for Daegakgyo and the new *silareceiving* ritual for lay people.

The Sunday school founded in the Daegakgyo center and textbooks compiled especially for children reveals Yongseong's interest in training the younger generation for the Movement. In addition, he

24. Baek (1991, 6:329).



published *The Korean Avatamsaka Sutra*, retranslated its Korean-Chinese combined version, and published numerous books and translations through the Samjang Translation Society and the headquarters of the Great Enlightenment Movement. Translating sutras, compiling books for children, and practicing Seon-Agriculture Buddhism may be seen both as “mysterious function” of his enlightenment and reinventions of old Buddhist teachings.

So far the external or social aspect of the Great Enlightenment has been discussed. But the Movement had a deeper level, that is, the personal experiential realm that enabled him to go beyond all binary oppositions in his mind and develop compassion toward sentient beings. This realm eventually expressed itself through his various actions.

In *Simjo manyuron*, he referred to the experience of one true mind as the source of all things. He believed in the “one true mind, greatly shining substance” (一真心大光明體, Vairocana Buddha), and argued that in this true mind there was a common source for heaven, earth, and “me,” and that there was the same body both for myriad things and “me.” Thus, if this argument is true, the experience of one true mind enabled him to become one with heaven and earth, and with myriad things under heaven and above the earth.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the experience of one true mind became the foundation for realization of the non-duality of all things, and thus also the source of compassion toward all living beings.

One of the most important aspects of non-dual experiences for social activity (*karma*) is the non-duality of truth (*jin*) and convention (*sok*). In *Gakhae illyun*, he said: “One is called a Hinayanist because one does not realize that truth and convention are ‘completely merged’ (*yungtong*) so that all dharmas eternally exist, neither arising nor disappearing.”<sup>26</sup> Then, one who is awakened to the complete mergence of these two is a Mahayanist, not negating all dharmas, even all kinds of actions, including various kinds of merit-pro-

25. Baek (1991, 4:13-14).

26. Baek (1991, 6:378).

ducing actions.

Yongseong’s understanding of the merging of truth and convention easily reminds us of his denial of empty emptiness. In a letter to Gyeongbong in 1928, he criticized what may be named the view of a negative attachment to emptiness by repeating, “emptiness is empty”:

In the case of present-day monks who are said to realize the Way (*dao*), what they have realized is nothing more than emptiness. Both emptiness and “non-emptiness” (*bulgong*) are empty, and emptiness is also empty. Though emptiness is empty, they cannot see their “true nature” (*jinseong*) even in dreams. Emptiness is empty, and emptiness is still empty. Though emptiness is empty in this manner without an ending, it is difficult to leave behind emptiness. Though one may express the fact that one has attained self-realization through long-standing silence, it is not appropriate. For religious masters, emptiness without words cannot be called the Way, since emptiness is neither the Way nor the “principal nature” (*seongni*). Just as an empty space is not in itself “myriad forms,” so is the principal nature of Enlightenment.<sup>27</sup>

That Yongseong was very critical of the empty emptiness and long-standing silence may be understood by his notion of “revolutionary people’s Buddhism,” which required a non-dual experience of truth and convention as its experiential basis and expressed itself through such myriad activities as building, managing, writing, and translating. This sort of critical attitude toward realizing empty emptiness and maintaining long-standing silence in solitude is very similar to Manhae’s view of religion.<sup>28</sup> Yongseong would fully agree with him in the belief that Buddhism’s ultimate objective is neither “tasting” the dharma in the remote mountains nor transcending the secular world so as to become an enlightened person. Religion must lead one to be an authentic person with authentic activities within this world. Otherwise, the emptiness will be literally blank without form or

27. Myeongjeong (1997, 185-186).

28. See Huh (2000). Especially see the chapter “The Goal of Buddhism and the Two Worlds.”

activity, ending in a meaningless emptiness. In this sense, the concept of a “revolutionary people’s religion” is not far from that of Manhae’s *minjung bulgyo* (people’s Buddhism).

### Mind-Only Causal Theory: A Key Reinvention

Yongseong’s first defense of Buddhism against the rapid growth of Christianity was found in the second volume of *Guiwon jeongjong*. After enumerating the ten commandments of the Old Testament, Yongseong quotes the first passage of the work of Jinul (1158-1210), *Encouragement to Practice: The Compact of Samadhi and Prajna Community* (勸修定慧結社文): “A person who falls to the ground gets back up by using that ground. To try to get up without relying on that ground would be impossible. Sentient beings are those who are deluded in regard to the one mind (*ilsim*) and give rise to boundless defilements. Buddhas are those who have awakened to the one mind and have given rise to boundless sublime functions. Although there is a difference between delusion and awakening, essentially both derive from the one mind. Hence, to see Buddhahood apart from the mind is impossible.”<sup>29</sup> Yongseong goes on to say:

Bodhidharma said that those who sought Buddhas and patriarchs apart from the mind of sentient beings were “heavenly demons and heretics” (*cheonma oedo*). . . . There are people who seek Heaven (*cheon*) apart from mind-nature (*simseong*) and worship it, and there are those who say that Heaven is creating [something], but they are all deluded.<sup>30</sup>

Yongseong was convinced that the Christian doctrine of God and his creation was deluded and false. But it seems that he was greatly impressed with and alarmed by the persuasive force of the Christian creation narrative. He seemed to think that one of the most efficient

29. Baek (1991, 8:843). Quoted from Buswell’s translation (Buswell 1983, 97).

30. Baek (1991, 8:844).

ways of protecting Buddhism against Christian evangelism was to offer a Buddhist narrative of the arising of the world and humanity. It is important to note that the word “arising” (*gi*), not creation (*changjo*), was used. In *Guiwon jeongjong* and *Palsangnok*, he gave a very detailed Buddhist counterpart to the Christian creation narrative.

His Buddhist version of the Christian creation story utilized or reinvented the *Alaya-vijnana* (store-consciousness) theory, a key doctrine of the Yogacara school of Buddhism. This Buddhist version seemed to be one of the most interesting reinventions of old Buddhist teachings. According to the *Alaya-vijnana* theory, store-consciousness stores up all potential energy for mental and physical manifestations of one’s existence and supplies substance to all existences, beginning with heaven, earth, and humanity.

An earlier reinvention was found in *Simjo manyuron*.<sup>31</sup> The first portion was named “the world-arising” (*segye gisi*), whose intention was to establish the mind as the origin of all dharmas, including the four great elements of earth, water, fire, and wind. He also attempted to enumerate and elaborate ten causes for human life: the essence of the true mind (*jinsim seongche*), non-enlightenment (*bulgak*, that is, alaya-consciousness), “thought-arising” (*yeomgi*), “view-arising” (*gyeon-gi*), “object appearance” (*gyeonghyeon*), “grasping dharmas” (*jipbeop*), “grasping ego” (*jiba*), “desire-anger-ignorance” (*tamjinchi*), “making karma” (*jo-eop*) and “receiving results” (*subo*). In one of the key passages, he further argues:

Our Buddhism is a religion which teaches mind, but not a religion which worships Heaven or God, sun, moon, and stars. There is no Buddha except the mind, and there is no mind except Buddha. Buddha is another name of the true mind (*jinsim*). Buddhism is not

31. See Baek (1991, 4:13ff). As far as this work is concerned, Yongseong seemed to read various Mind-Only literatures and the Awakening of Faith attributed to Asvaghosha, as he used the words, the true mind, one mind, “ignorance-wind” (無明風), as well as the notion of causality (隨緣), the harmony of the non-phenomenal mind and the phenomenal consciousness. It clearly reminds one not only of the Awakening of Faith but Wonhyo’s commentary on it.

theism but atheism. It makes us directly perceive the human mind and be awakened to the “true nature.” It brightens the one mind (*ilsim*) through myriad dharmas. It is true that our original true nature (*bonwon jinseong*) creates heaven, earth and myriad things, but it is not true that Heaven (*cheon*) or God (*sin*) creates heaven, earth, all things and the self. All things in the triple worlds are created by the mind only.<sup>32</sup>

Yongseong did not mention what sort of theism he refers to exactly, but it seems that he meant Christianity. He did not treat the question of the “world-arising” as just a hobby but as a deadly serious business. The most elaborate form of this theory is found in *Gakhae illyun*, where Yongseong explained the myriad things as resulting from the mind.<sup>33</sup> In *Gakhae illyun*, he uses many words to refer to some sort of ultimate experience which transcends all kinds of dualities. This experience eventually turns into the beginning point of various arisings.<sup>34</sup> Included in those “various arisings” are heaven and earth, human beings, and animals.

This sort of ultimate experience, as the beginning point of world-arising, has many names, such as original enlightenment, the nature of mysteriously perfect enlightenment, true enlightenment, the nature of greatly perfect enlightenment, and the mysteriously bright true mind. All these names refer to the ultimate personal experience. Then, from this mysteriously bright true mind, a thought arises “suddenly.” This thought is called *alaya-consciousness* and is the first moment of the “world-arising.”<sup>35</sup> However, it must be remembered that this suddenly arising eighth store-consciousness is deluded.<sup>36</sup>

He even attempted to explain in terms of male and female ener-

32. Baek (1991, 4:14-15).

33. In this work, Yongseong even composed what may be called “Verse of Creation.” Baek (1991, 6:273-280).

34. Baek (1991, 6:262).

35. See Baek (1991, 6:262).

36. In *Simjo manyuron*, we can see the following passage. “The ‘ignorance-wind’ which moves and turns itself into the *alaya-consciousness*, that is non-enlightenment.” Baek (1991, 4:20).

gies what we normally understand as natural phenomena, for example, seasonal changes, the blooming of flowers, the ripening of fruits, and the alternations of day and night. Then, he criticized both Christian explanations and so-called scientific ones: “All these things are not the work of God (Okhwang Sangje) or some ghosts (*gwisin*).”<sup>37</sup> He also did not believe that this work was done by nature.<sup>38</sup> He asserted that there is neither God nor ghosts behind all these natural phenomena. “Thus, the Buddha said, ‘all dharmas arise and fall, depending upon conditions (*yeon*).’”<sup>39</sup>

In a short chapter titled “Explaining the World Creation”<sup>40</sup> in *Gakhae illyun*, he continued to elaborate on the process of the world-arising. It begins with the mysteriously bright true mind (or the pure great enlightenment). When this true mind moves very subtly, “store-consciousness” occurs. Once store-consciousness starts to move, it internally obstructs the mysteriously true mind and externally causes all kinds of forms (*hyeongsang*) to rise. This obstruction is so subtle that it cannot be grasped by ordinary people. Only the Buddha in his “great calm illumination of *samadhi*” (大寂光三昧) can grasp it.<sup>41</sup>

Now, as store-consciousness moves, it divides itself into two: stubborn, evil emptiness and perceptive knowledge. From the stubborn, evil emptiness arises the world of non-sentient beings, and from the perceptive knowledge arises the world of sentient beings. When the world of non-sentient beings arises from stubborn and evil emptiness, various kinds of energies emerge. The interactions of

37. Baek (1991, 6:265).

38. Baek (1991, 6:264).

39. Baek (1991, 6:265).

40. Baek (1991, 6:269-273).

41. His explanation of the “world-arising,” based upon Great Enlightenment and *alaya-consciousness*, clearly reminds us of the Samkhyan one; Samkhya philosophy explains the evolution of the world by supposing the independent existence and movement of the primal matter (*prakriti*); The role of *prakriti* is similar to the role of store-consciousness in Yongseong’s elucidation of the “world-arising.” Realizing *purusha* (primal person) may be likened to realizing Great Enlightenment. However, the fundamentally dualistic philosophy of the Samkhya philosophy can not explain *prakriti* in terms of *purusha* as Yongseong would have done it.

these energies create all things.<sup>42</sup> Yongseong even tried to explain such social phenomena as empires, republics, labor and communism in terms of Mind-Only. He said: “If what claims materialism is not mind, then what does?”<sup>43</sup>

In Part II of *Gakhae illyun*, he further attempted to explain all kinds of beings in Buddhist terms. These beings include those that are “worm-born,” “egg-born,” “moisture-born,” and “born by transformation” (*hwasaeng*); “beings with form” (*yusaek jungsaeng*), “beings without form” (*musaek jungsaeng*), “beings without form but with thought” (*musaek yusang*), “beings without thought” (*musaek jungsaeng*), etc. Human beings are worm-born, but the Christian God (Haneunim) belongs to beings without form,<sup>44</sup> while idols shrined in the Mountain God’s Shrine or in the shrine of a tutelary deity are idols with form. Suffering and happiness were among the experiences he tried to explain.

In later portions of the *Gakhae illyun*, he tried to replace the existence of the Christian Heaven with an *arupa* realm (*musaekgye cheon*, non-form realm Heaven), attainable by cultivating the four emptiness meditations (*samujeong*). Then, he said: “Our Great Enlightenment teaching is intended not for one to go to Heaven (*cheondang*), but to liberate oneself forever from the suffering world of life-death by ‘realizing perfect Buddhahood’ (*daewon gakseong*) and to awaken all sentient beings [to it].”<sup>45</sup>

42. Baek (1991, 6:271-272).

43. Baek (1991, 6:291).

44. Baek (1991, 6:355-356).

45. Baek (1991, 6:103, 371). Similarly, in *Odo-ui jilli* (The Truth of My Way), which was against the Christian doctrine that when people die they go to heaven or hell, he put forward a Buddhist version of life and death: “The birth of a man is to give rise to ‘function’ (用) from ‘substance’ (體); and the death of a man is to gather ‘function’ into substance, that is, going back to origin (返本還源). Thus, there is no need to mention heaven and hell.” See Baek (1991, 4:959-960). It is interesting to point out that Yongseong did not say what Christians call Heaven and Hell are totally absurd or useless. Rather he accepted the usefulness of talking about Heaven. But he gave a Buddhist version of Heaven in order to compete with the Christian Heaven. The reason may be that outright negation of Heaven could have offended the ordinary masses.

When and how does store-consciousness occur? Why does a deluded thought suddenly occur from perfect enlightenment, which is by definition not deluded? Who or what gives rise to delusion, and for what purpose? Why suddenly? Yongseong did not raise all these quasi-theological but difficult questions. Elsewhere he told us how the evolution of the corrupted world “naturally” proceeded.<sup>46</sup> It appears that the words “suddenly” and “naturally” convey that all these issues are unnecessary, which looks like a way of “explaining away.” In this way, beginning with *Guiwon jeongjong* and continuing through *Gakhae illyun*, Yongseong tried to reinvent or rediscover the Buddhist teachings of Mind-Only in order to defend Buddhism against the rapidly popularization of Christianity.

### Responses to Confucianism

Throughout his life, Yongseong saw Confucianism as less intimidating than Christianity, but he still felt the need to criticize it in order to protect Buddhism. In the first portion of *Guiwon jeongjong*,<sup>47</sup> he tried to address what he thought of as Confucian critiques of Buddhism. One such question was as follows: “What use does the world have for the *sramana* (mendicant), a son of the Shakyas clan, who does not know the Three Bonds and the Five Moral Imperatives in human relations (*samgang oryun*), enjoys solitude in deep mountains, and does not work for humanity?” Yongseong replied: “You do not know the skeleton of the Sage’s teaching. Our Buddha, the Bhagavan (World-honoured) is empowered to make all forms (*ilchesang*) empty in order to establish the knowledge of all dharmas, and to save sentient beings according to their conditions.”<sup>48</sup> He argued that the skeleton of Confucian teachings is already embedded in the Buddha’s teachings. It is true that this argument was somewhat far-fetched. Even while treating Confucianism as a rival, he adopted a

46. Baek (1991, 6: 263-264).

47. Baek (1991, 8:763-784).

48. Baek (1991, 8:763).

tactic of finding similarities between Confucianism and Buddhism then arguing for the latter's superiority.

In "Discussion of Confucian Scholars in the Song Dynasty Not as Deep as the Way of Confucius," a chapter in *The Sayings of Seon Master Yongseong*, Yongseong argues that the *in* (humanity or benevolence) in Confucianism is the same as the mind (*sim*) in Buddhism. He then makes a rather sharp distinction between Confucius and Neo-Confucians like the Cheng brothers, criticizing the latter by saying that they did not understand the Way of Confucius and did not reach his level.<sup>49</sup> He also quotes a passage from Hamheo Deuktong (1376-1433) who lived in the Joseon dynasty, in order to claim the unity of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism.<sup>50</sup>

Yongseong was very critical of such Neo-Confucians as the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi (1130-1200). He argued that Zhu Xi had mistakenly assumed that Buddhism taught nihilism and annihilation, and that it had neither practical applicability nor real substance. However, according to Yongseong, Buddha's talk of annihilation referred to the deluded mind, not to the "true mind and mysterious function" (*jinsim myoyong*).<sup>51</sup> He supported the true mind or the truthfulness (*jinseong*) of Buddhism by quoting the following passage from *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti*: "You should absorb yourself in contemplation in such a way that you can manifest all ordinary behavior without cessation."<sup>52</sup> Then, he retorted: "How is possible that substance (*che*) exists without function (*yong*)?"<sup>53</sup> According to Yongseong, as long as we have the true mind, this mind will function in the ethical realm of the Three Bonds and Five Moral Imperatives in human relations. The tactic of finding similarities between Buddhism and Confucianism and criticizing Neo-Confucianism may well be justified, if not perfectly, provided we recall his proposition of performing meritorious activities in the secular world.

49. Baek (1991, 1:434ff).

50. Baek (1991, 1:435).

51. Baek (1991, 8:790).

52. 不起寂滅證 而顯諸威儀. Quoted from Thurman's translation. See Thurman (1976, 24).

53. Baek (1991, 8:790).

As time went on, Yongseong seemed to feel no need to criticize Confucianism, perhaps because he thought it had lost vitality and influence on Korean society, posing no threat to Buddhism. For example, in *Gakhae illyun*, he casually referred to Confucius in his discussion of causality, but no direct attack on the Cheng brothers was found.

### The Decline of the Great Enlightenment Movement

Despite more than ten years of Yongseong's heroic efforts, the Great Enlightenment Movement began to decline in the 1930s. Han Bogyang offers three reasons for that. First, there was insufficient support for the Movement. At times, even the Buddhist Order itself obstructed it. Secondly, there was the intervention of the Japanese colonial government. Due to Japanese oppression, it became so difficult to hold onto property that Yongseong left the Daegakgyo property in trust to a bank in Busan, and again entrusted it to the Gyeongseong Propagation House of Beomeosa temple in 1936. This was seen as dispersing the Movement. Thirdly, there was an internal reason, that is, the Movement failed to educate the persons necessary for continuing the movement.<sup>54</sup>

There was a time when Yongseong was very proud of his achievements. For example, when he began the Seon movement in Seoul in 1912, he wrote a short note titled "On Establishing One Thousand Seon Meditation Society," where he said, "I had three thousand believers after three years' propagation. Due to my work, the word Seon meditation began to be used."<sup>55</sup> Three thousand is no small number for three years of work, even by today's standards. His pride in this feat was completely legitimate. But this sense of pride and contentment was a rare one for him. He often felt disappointed, faced with so many adversities.

54. Han B. (1981, 108-111).

55. Baek (1991, 1:546).

In one of his letters to Gyeongbong in 1928, at the age of 65, this old monk lamented:

This year, I have fulfilled my responsibility to the Seon monasteries, but I am unable to give further assistance. I have struggled with my bare hands to manage business on the North Jiandao and in the city of Nanam in Hamgyeongbuk-do province in order to keep the house in Seoul. In addition to this, I have just embarked on the Buddha-work (*bulsā*) of [translating] *Hwayen Sutra*, yet sometimes I feel no desire or capacity. Furthermore there is no single monk suitable for the Seon monasteries. Is this due to time or fate? What can be done about it? I am afraid that Buddha's dharma disappears by itself. . . . I have become old, gradually enervated, and it is even difficult to walk. My body and mind are exhausted. This is because I was born at the hour of Buddhism's doom (*bulbeop myeolmang sidae*), which is due to my sin. Thus, Buddhism has been quite exhausted. But all the traveling monks in Seoul paid no attention to this situation and got together only to eat greedily. In the midst of this danger, what I have received are only various kinds of bills. Therefore, even the word "Buddha" has become a pain to me. It was told that Zhao Zhou (Chao-Chou, 778-897) said: "I do not want to hear the word Buddha." This saying is indeed a truthful one.<sup>56</sup>

This letter reveals how grave and severe his mood of deep sorrow, despair and exhaustion was. However, as if battling his own sin and destiny, he continued to publish his works, including *Imjonggyeol* (One's Last Word) in 1936, *Odo-ui jilli* (The Truth of My Way) in 1937, and *Odo-neun gak* (My Way is Enlightenment) in 1938. He also translated and published *The Thousand Hands Sutra* in 1938. Through translating and publishing, he once again proclaimed his deep conviction of Enlightenment, that is, his unshakable belief in Buddhism.

Except for a few enjoyable moments of success, he was mostly pained, disappointed, and so deeply disappointed that he felt he had been born at the hour of Buddhism's doom. In preparation for his

56. Myeongjeong (1997, 183-184).

final release from a life full of vicissitudes and agony, he transmitted his dharma and Buddhist precepts to a few disciples, which again shows his steadfastness in transmitting the pure form of Buddhism to the next generation.

### Yongseong, Manhae, and Seongcheol

Now, where should we locate Yongseong's life and thought in the history of modern Korean Buddhism? One of the best ways of doing so is to compare his life and thought with those of other makers of modern Korean Buddhism. For example, Manhae and Seongcheol (1912-1993) left their vivid footprints in the sand of modern Korean Buddhism. Manhae was well-known for his *minjung* Buddhism;<sup>57</sup> Seongcheol, for his pure and absolutistic type of Buddhism and for strict observance of precepts.

Yongseong was similar to Manhae in that he extended the notion of sentient beings to include not only mendicant monks and nuns but also ordinary people (*min*). However, Yongseong was more traditional than Manhae in putting the pure, true celibates at the center stage of all his activities, and in pointing out the observance of precepts as a key difference between human beings and animals.

We all know that a loose attitude toward precepts has been one of the most salient features of Japanese Buddhism. To many Japanese Buddhists and Korean sympathizers, not strictly observing precepts is fully compatible with practicing Buddhism. Against this trend, Yongseong twice submitted to the Japanese colonial authorities in 1926 the "Geonbaekseo" (Petition), which petitioned the colonial government to purge temples of those monks who broke precepts through such unbecoming activities as clerical marriage and meat eating. In the first paragraph of his first petition (1926), he castigated the corrupt Buddhist organization and the revision of the Temple Code (Sabeop), which allowed those who breached these

57. For details, see Huh (2000).

precepts to become temple abbots.

These days, a group of shameless demons have soiled their minds with the five desires, destroyed the Buddha's True Law, dared to have wives and eat meat, and turned pure temples into dens of demons, while having totally forgotten Seon meditation, invocation of the Buddha's name, and the reading of scriptures. For this reason, all the Heaven-Gods weep and the Earth-Gods become angry.

Despite his efforts, he had no listeners among the Japanese colonial authorities. Considering his critique of the Temple Code and the Japanese Buddhists' attitude on precepts, one may interpret his emphasis on precepts as an indirect attack on Japanese Imperialism. Although we cannot find Yongseong's specific criticism of Manhae's loose attitude toward celibacy precepts, it is quite possible that Yongseong was intending to show disapproval of Manhae when he submitted two petitions to purge the Buddhist Order of unbecoming activities.

Yongseong opposed external, political interference in religious matters, including the 30 Head Temple System established by the Japanese colonial government. After his prison experience, however, he seemed to develop a distaste for politics and departed from the political realm, something to which Manhae would not agree. His departure from politics was already evident, as he revealed his motive for participating in the independence movement to the Japanese prosecutor: "Having nothing to do with politics, I have nothing to complain about nor to be satisfied with, but I thought it was better for Joseon to become independent."<sup>58</sup> His reply seems ambiguous, evasive, or even self-contradictory. Thus, Yongseong's "revolutionary people's Buddhism" is less revolutionary in that his view of and understanding of people (*min*) is not broad enough to include nationals who suffered from the deprivation of rights as a result of Japanese foreign rule.

58. Han B. (1981, 175).

Manhae, too, left the exchange with his Japanese prosecutor. The latter asked: "Are you going to commit yourself to the Joseon independence movement from this moment on?" Manhae replied: "Certainly. I will not change my mind. Even if my body perishes, I will maintain that spirit for eons."<sup>59</sup> This sort of religious-political characteristic of Manhae's Buddhism and his firm belief in the inseparability of politics and religion were even more conspicuous in the short essay, "Na-neun wae jung-i doeonna?" (Why Did I Become a Monk?), a simple piece containing Manhae's reflections, written eight years after his release from prison in 1922. "Even so, shall I finish my life as a man and as a monk? Isn't there a political forum in front of us? Didn't I become a monk because no such forum existed?"<sup>60</sup> Although he did not give his own answer to the question, this entire piece shows that as far as Manhae himself was concerned, even after his prison experience, he could not leave behind the political forum.

Elsewhere, Seongcheol shared his assessment of Yongseong's Buddhism, where we get the gist of his own view of Buddhism.

When the long night of darkness has fallen over the modern history of Buddhism, how greatly our deceased teacher [Yongseong] presented the "eternal, true dharma" (*manse jeongbeop*), as if it were an act of showering compassion like fallen weeds! Though they can turn the sun cold and the moon hot, no demon can destroy the "true words" (*chamdoen malsseum*) of Shakyamuni Buddha. No one in modern times was superior to our deceased teacher [Yongseong] in promoting the "treasury of the eye of the true dharma" (*jeongbeop anjang*). . . . He became the model for his juniors through his observance of the pure precepts. Like the wind and moon seen outside a beaded hanging screen, he is as bright at night as it is by day. And just like the flowers growing in front of the withered tree-rock, it always represents spring.<sup>61</sup>

59. Han Y. (1980, 372).

60. Baek (1991, 1:412).

61. Baek (1941, 3).

These words are, of course, not a systematic, full-scale assessment of Yongseong's achievements, but they sufficiently shows Seongcheol's view of the history of modern Korean Buddhism and of what genuine Buddhist Enlightenment should be. To his eyes, compassion, true Dharma, and observance of pure precepts are the features that deserve to be praised and admired in Yongseong's life. But he fails to point out Yongseong's political engagements, his response to the needs of the time and the cries of people in pain, his sensitivity to the changing time, and, in short, the deep significance lying behind the notion of revolutionary people's Buddhism. Thus he fails to inherit the scope of Yongseong's compassion, which had a wider range than that ordinarily understood.

In general, we may place Yongseong's Buddhism in the middle between the far-left people's Buddhism of Manhae and the far-right elitist, pure Buddhism of Seongcheol. Yongseong's Buddhism was so revolutionary that Seongcheol turned his face away from his most important endeavor; that is, expanding the scope of his compassion. But his version of Buddhism ceased its engagement with the political realm and became less revolutionary than the "people's Buddhism" of Manhae.

Prior to concluding this essay, a word is necessary concerning the future relationship between Korea and Japan. We have noticed that non-dual experience and compassion toward beings go hand in hand. But we must admit that the non-duality experienced by Yongseong was limited by the historical context, as it did not transcend a specific time-space. Because he opposed the invasion of Japanese Buddhism into Korean Buddhism, even present-day Korean scholars are fond of pointing out that the invasion was wrong. But they sometimes get easily carried away with this critical attitude in their dealings with Japan-related issues. In other words, nationalist sentiment is still at play between the two countries. We must try to find a way to reduce this sentiment if we really believe that the non-dual experience, which is often taught and discussed in the East Asian Seon tradition, knows no national boundary.

## Conclusion

This paper opens with the statement that Yongseong's Buddhism kept a good balance between "seeking enlightenment above" (*mukti*) and "transforming sentient beings below" (*karma*). The balance demonstrated in the thirty years of his second mendicant life, including more than ten years of the Great Enlightenment Movement, may serve as a brightly shining example for future generations in the history of Korean Seon Buddhism. The balance between *mukti* and *karma* may also be referred to as a balance between the true mind and mysterious function, or that between contemplation and all ordinary behavior, or that between substance and function. Considering these balances, a few lessons may be drawn from Yongseong's life and thought.

Firstly, as a powerful founder of modern Korean Buddhism, he tells us that individual salvation should always be accompanied by action (*karma*) for the people. Yongseong's admonition, "Be blessed through various kinds of *karma*," leads us to believe that "*mukti* without *karma*" makes Buddhism less than a perfect teaching. His legacy for future generations may be summarized in the form of this question: "How do we keep a balance between *mukti* and *karma*, that is, between seeking enlightenment above and transforming sentient beings below?" Of course, we must admit that we ourselves are the ones who should find the balance, working with different people and with different sets of circumstances. Thankfully for Korean Buddhism, the country regained political independence, Buddhist organizations have grown and enjoyed substantial stability and freedom, and the *Goryeo daejanggyeong* (Tripitaka Koreana) has been translated into Korean and made readily available to ordinary folks.

In reality, however, this era is more deceptive, complex, and more burdensome than the nineteenth and twentieth century, because people often are confused as to the authentic meaning of freedom and independence. Servitude masquerades as freedom, dependence masquerades as independence, and corruption as purity. People have become so deeply intoxicated with their carnal pleasures that they



feel no pain at all, though they are in peril of self-destruction. Thus the questions, “Who deprives us of freedom and independence?” and “What are the cries of people in pain?” are so tricky that no reply is persuasive enough for people to accept it. Thus we need to have calmer sight to see reality, more compassionate ears to hear the cries of people in pain, and more diligent bodies to complete various activities.

Secondly, we must seek other training methods to be awakened to our mind and to become sensitive to the rapidly changing milieu of the twenty-first century. The realm of an individual *mukti* is a comparatively small, cozy one simply because that realm is so narrow that one is able to correctly and freely walk, stand, sit, and lie down, inviting no political or economic intervention in these four departments. Thus there is need to take vows and pray. But “*karma* with *mukti*” or “*mukti* with *karma*” normally requires one to go beyond the limit of one’s control, thereby asking one to feel a strong need for vows, devotion, and prayer to the Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva. It is for the benefit of all beings that this need for vows, devotion, and prayer should arise in us. Therefore, Korean Buddhist organizations would be advised to neither claim the exclusive usage of the *gongan* method nor the overemphasize words and letters (*bullip munja*). Rather, the *gongan* method should not only be supplemented but also accompanied by other means. Included among them are reading scriptures, praying to various bodhisattvas, exercising deep concern for the secular world, serving social needs, enhancing the sensitivity of “calm perception” to the changing world, and cultivating a compassionate mind to hear the cries of people who have fallen unwittingly into possible self-deception.

Thirdly, Yongseong opposed the political intervention of Japanese imperialism in Korean Buddhism.<sup>62</sup> However, he was less revolutionary or less political than Manhae, thus leaving the following questions with us: “How much should a Buddhist engage him or her-

62. *Bulgyo* (Buddhism) 93 (1932); *Hanguk bulgyo japji chongseo* (Collection of Korean Buddhist Journals) 10:172.

self in political matters?” and “How can a Buddhist act against the political failures of the secular world, which were the main cause of the fall of the Joseon dynasty and Japanese oppression and colonization?” Thus, we call Yongseong the monk “hanging in the balance of *mukti* and *karma*.” That is, he is the monk who never told us how to maintain balance between these two, but instead told us to strike our own balance according to our compassionate insight into sentient beings, including humanity.

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## GLOSSARY

<i>akchwi gonggyeon</i>	惡取空見	<i>daewon gakseong</i>	大圓覺性
<i>alaya-vijnana</i> (Skt.)	阿賴耶識	<i>dharani</i> (Skt.)	陀羅尼
<i>arupa</i> (Skt.)	無色	Geonbaekseo	建白書
<i>asuras</i> (Skt.)	阿修羅	<i>geumgang gyedan</i>	金剛戒壇
<i>Avalokitesvara</i> (Skt.)	觀世音菩薩	<i>gi</i>	起
<i>Avatamsaka Sutra</i> (Skt.)	華嚴經	<i>gongan</i>	公案
<i>bhiksu</i> (Skt.)	比丘	<i>Goryeo daejanggyeong</i>	高麗大藏經
<i>bodhisattva</i> (Skt.)	菩薩	<i>gunsang</i>	群相
<i>bokjitgi</i>	福	<i>guseol</i>	口舌
<i>bonwon jinseong</i>	本源眞性	<i>gwisin</i>	鬼神
<i>Brahmajala Sutra</i> (Skt.)	婆羅門經	<i>gyeon-gi</i>	見起
Buddha (Skt.)	佛陀	Gyeongbong	鏡峰
<i>bulbeop myeolmang</i>	佛法滅亡	<i>gyeonghyeon</i>	境現
<i>sidae</i>	時代	<i>hahwa jungsaeng</i>	下化衆生
<i>bulgak</i>	不覺	Hamheo Deuktong	涵虛得通
<i>bulgong</i>	不空	Haneunim	
<i>bullip munja</i>	不立文字	Hwagwawon	華果院
<i>bulsa</i>	佛事	<i>hwasang</i>	化生
<i>chamseon</i>	參禪	<i>hyeongmyeongjeok</i>	革命的
<i>changjo</i>	創造	<i>minjonggyo</i>	民宗教
<i>che</i>	體	<i>hyeongsang</i>	形相
<i>cheon</i>	天	<i>ilchesang</i>	一切相
<i>cheondang</i>	天堂	<i>ilsim</i>	一心
<i>cheonha daejung</i>	天下大衆	<i>in</i>	仁
<i>cheonma oedo</i>	天魔外道	<i>jayeon</i>	自然
<i>Chuandenglu</i> (Ch.)	傳燈錄	<i>jeongbeop anjang</i>	正法眼藏
<i>daegak</i>	大覺	<i>jeonggwon</i>	靜觀
Daegakgyo	大覺教	<i>jeungdeuk</i>	證得
<i>daejung gyohwagi</i>	大衆教化期	<i>jiba</i>	執我

<i>jin</i>	眞	<i>segye gisi</i>	世界起始
<i>jinseong</i>	眞性	Seodaemun	西大門
<i>jinsim</i>	眞心	Seon	禪
<i>jinsim myoyong</i>	眞心妙用	Seongcheol	性徹
<i>jinsim seongche</i>	眞心性體	<i>seongni</i>	性理
<i>jipbeop</i>	執法	<i>seonnong bulgyo</i>	禪農佛教
<i>jo-eop</i>	造業	<i>seupsaeng</i>	濕生
<i>karma</i> (Skt.)	業	Shakyamuni (Skt.)	釋迦牟尼
<i>Kasyapa</i> (Skt.)	迦葉	<i>sibi</i>	是非
<i>koan gongan</i>		<i>sil</i> (Skt.)	戒
<i>Liuzu tanjing</i> (Ch.)	六祖壇經	<i>sim</i>	心
<i>Mahakasyapa</i> (Skt.)	摩訶迦葉	<i>simseong</i>	心性
<i>Mahayana</i> (Skt.)	大乘	<i>sin</i>	神
Manhae	萬海	<i>so-o</i>	所悟
Manjushri Bodhisattva	文殊菩薩	<i>sok</i>	俗
(Skt.)		<i>sramana</i> (Skt.)	沙門
<i>manse jeongbeop</i>	萬世正法	<i>subo</i>	受報
<i>min</i>	民	Suwol Yeongmin	水月永旻
<i>minjung</i>	民衆	<i>taesaeng</i>	胎生
<i>mukti</i> (Skt.)	解脫	<i>tamjinchi</i>	貪瞋痴
<i>musaek jungsaeng</i>	無色衆生	Tongdosa	通度寺
<i>musaek yusang</i>	無色有想	<i>Tripitaka Koreana</i>	高麗大藏經
<i>musaekgye cheon</i>	無色界天	Vairocana Buddha (Skt.)	毘盧遮那佛
<i>musang jungsaeng</i>	無想衆生	Vimalakirti (Skt.)	維摩詰
Muyung	無融	<i>wollyeok</i>	願力
Okhwang Sangje	玉皇上帝	<i>yeomgi</i>	念起
<i>Palsangnok</i>	八相緣	<i>yeon</i>	緣
<i>Prajna</i> (Skt.)	般若	Yogacara (Skt.)	瑜伽(宗)
Sabeop	寺法	<i>yong</i>	用
<i>samadhi</i> (Skt.)	三昧	<i>yukjaju</i>	六字呪
<i>samgang oryun</i>	三綱五倫	<i>yungtong</i>	融通
<i>samjang</i>	三藏	<i>yusaek jungsaeng</i>	有色衆生
<i>samujeong</i>	四無定	<i>yusim</i>	唯心
<i>sangu bori</i>	上求菩提	Zen Seon	
<i>sanjung suhaenggi</i>	山中修行期	Zhao Zhou (Ch.)	趙州

(Ch.: Chinese; Skt.: Sanscrit)