

The Movement to Reform Korean Buddhism and the Limits Thereof

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Abstract

This study aims to understand the current state of Korean Buddhism by analyzing the development and limitations of the Buddhism reform movement during Korea's democratic transition since the 1980s. The study first focuses on the repoliticization of Korean Buddhism, following the activation of the religious market. The independence and democratization of the Jogye Order, disputes on discrimination of religions, and the critical discourse over religious power are the results of this repoliticization of Korean religion. Second, the study analyzes the trends in the Buddhist reform movement, beginning with the reforms undertaken by the Emergency Order in the 1980s, which exhibited social reform leanings. Thereafter, the movement led by Buddhist communities (sangha) in the 1990s centered on the practical reform of Mahayana Buddhism rather than social reform. This in turn paved the way for the Reformist Forum that focused on the institutional reform of the Jogye Order in 1994, and the current Reformist Order. Lastly, the study analyzes the tasks faced by the current reform of the Buddhist order, such as forming a new relationship with the state power, increasing Buddhism's social role, searching for a new order identity, and establishing a harmonized community among monastic monks (chulgaja) and lay Buddhists (jaegaja).

Keywords: Buddhist reform movement, social democratization, religious market, repoliticization of Buddhism, Emergency Order, practical Buddhism movement, Reformist Order

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Introduction

Korean Buddhism,¹ which boasts a history stretching about 1,700 years, is the largest religion in Korea.² While an estimated 10.7 million Koreans are believed to be Buddhists, over 60 percent of the state-designated cultural properties is Buddhist in nature. All in all, including the smaller orders, there are some 265 Buddhist orders in Korea (MCST 2012, 23). However, the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism (hereafter, Jogye Order) has inherited the culture and assets of Korean Buddhism (CCJO 2000, 47). Thus, the Jogye Order represents Korean Buddhism.

The Jogye Order was formed in 1955 as a monastic monk-oriented order to restore the traditions of Korean Buddhism through the Buddhist Purification Movement (*jeonghwa bulsa* 淨化佛事), which was initiated in 1954.³ Given the ideology and precepts spelled out in its Constitution (CCJO 2000, 47-50), the characteristics of the Jogye Order can be summarized as follows. The Jogye Order (1) is a legitimate order based on the Dharma lineage of the Bodhidharma, (2) adheres to the ideology of all-embracing universal Buddhism (*hoetong bulgyo* 會通佛教), (3) has been influenced by the ideology of Mahayana Buddhism, (4) has inherited the ideology behind the Buddhist Purification Movement, (5) has established itself as the endorser of the spirit of the Reformist Forum, (6) has promoted the sovereignty of the followers, and (7) has advocated playing a leading role in social and spiritual realms.

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1. Here, the term “Korean Buddhism” is limited to the form of Buddhism adhered to in Korea. In addition, as the Jogye Order has long represented Korean Buddhism, the terms “Korean Buddhism” and “Jogye Order” will be used in turn herein based on contextual necessity.
 2. According to the census survey conducted by the Statistics Korea in 2005, 22.8% of Koreans are Buddhists, 18.3% Protestants, and 10.9% Catholics.
 3. The Buddhist Purification Movement was designed to remove the Japanese-influenced Buddhism that allowed monks to marry and eat meat. This can be regarded as the foundation for the current Jogye Order. This provided the traditional monastic monk communities focused on the supermundane world with an opportunity to seize the leadership of the Jogye Order (Yoon 2001).

As can be seen through these features, although the Jogye Order has advocated a reformative ideology as well as the need for it to play a leadership role in society and contribute to its democratization, the Jogye Order was marred by collusion with the state and an internal power struggle between its various factions. Meanwhile, inspired by the democratization movement of the 1980s, younger Buddhists began to call for a reform of Buddhist orders. This movement was greatly influenced by the disgrace experienced by the Buddhist world with the October 27 Buddhist Incident,⁴ and the order's subservience toward the authoritarian government regime.

The Buddhist reform movement was initiated in conjunction with Korea's democratization movement of the 1980s. The first attempt was the so-called *minjung* Buddhist movement of the 1980s, which exhibited a strong social reform orientation. Thereafter, the practical Buddhism movement launched by a *sangha* community to reform Korean Buddhism, rather than concentrate on social reform, emerged in the 1990s. In 1994, the Jogye Order held the Reformist Forum to reform the order. The current Reformist Order can be seen as having inherited the spirit of this Reformist Forum.

This study reviews such trends in the Korean Buddhism reform movement that has accompanied Korea's democratization. An attempt is also made to analyze the future tasks of the current Reform of the Buddhist Order, which was born out of the Buddhist Reformation effort that began in 1980s. More specifically, this study will summarize the relationship between social democratization and Korean Buddhism, review the development of the Buddhist reform movement, and identify the reform-related tasks that the Reformist Order has yet to resolve.

4. The October 27 Buddhist Incident refers to the efforts initiated by the new military regime in 1980 to suppress Buddhism under the guise of a social cleanup (Yu 2005).

The Democratization of Korea and Korean Buddhism

In the aftermath of the June Democracy Movement of 1987, Korean society transformed into a democratic one in which the authoritarian suppression of the past was removed and civil society values, such as autonomy and participation, became important. Greater autonomy within each sector of the society entailed increased responsibility. The religious sector searched for countermeasures to cope, on its own terms, with this new environment marked by civil society.

Social Democratization and Religious Transformation

The inauguration of the Civilian Government in 1993 marked the institutional completion of Korea's democratization. Prior to 1987, many social interest groups across the religious spectrum had played active roles within society. The progressive wing of Christianity was able to expand its social influences based on its role as provider of asylum for political activists persecuted by the authoritarian regime. On the other hand, the conservative Christian factions used their collaboration with the government as a tool to expand their influence (Yoon 1997, 204-205), in particular, by organizing large-scale religious events to show off its growth.⁵ However, the advent of democratization and activation of civil society led to a diversification of actors involved in social movements, beyond its former concentration within the religious sphere. As a result, the politicization and social influence of religion within Korean society gradually decreased (Yoon 1997, 269-270).

Under the authoritarian regimes, religion played the social role of negotiating the conflicts of interest between the state and citizens and between citizens themselves. In the aftermath of democratization, how-

5. Large-scale religious events held in Korea during the 1980s include the 100th Anniversary of the Korean Protestant Church, the 150th Anniversary of the Diocese of Korea, large-scale mass for the canonization of Korean martyrs, the 200th Anniversary of Catholicism in Korea, and the International Eucharistic Congress.

ever, the civil society's ability to express their opinions and wage struggles led to the reduction of the scope in which religion could represent the interests of the community and socially marginalized groups. In other words, the public role of religion was greatly decreased. As a result, the religious sector was forced to relinquish the exceptional privileges⁶ it had received from the authoritarian governments. As such, religion lost its social negotiator function and was downgraded to the status of a private interest group after democratization.

In addition, by weakening the state's influence in religion, social democratization depoliticized religion and neutralized the state vis-à-vis religion. The depoliticization of religion is evidenced by the fact that the progressive wing of the Protestant Church increasingly turned conservative. Contrary to expectations, however, political participation amongst adherents of Korean Buddhism and the conservative wing of the Protestant Church has been activated (Kang 2000, 54). The current political participation of the religious sphere is of a completely different nature than the previous politicization during the authoritarian period. Social democratization repoliticized religion by facilitating the unique presence of multiple religions in Korea and necessitating the marketization of religion.⁷

The neutrality of the state that accompanied social democratization, characterized by reduced state control over religions and fair regulations based on secular law, also contributed to the revitalization of the religious market. As we can see from the development-environmental debate within Buddhist circles⁸ and the debate over the taxation of Christian churches and ministers (S. Kim 2011, 39-56), the state

6. This refers to the benefits given to conservative religious groups, such as support for large-scale religious events and international religious conferences, in exchange for their role in restraining the progressive faction's participation in anti-governmental politics.

7. Korea is a multireligious society, and since no religion has managed to gain the proverbial upper hand, the competition between the various religions has been very keen.

8. The social dispute over the preservation of life and natural ecosystems vis-à-vis the dominant values of modern society, namely development and growth, was actively taken up by Buddhist environmental movements.

attempts to manage religions based on secular law and in an equitable manner. In this regard, the support of religion to legitimize the state power is no longer needed in a democratized country.⁹ Nevertheless, the fact that contacts between the state and religion have in fact increased since democratization implies that the competition in the religious market has intensified. Furthermore, the decline in the growth of religion in the aftermath of democratization all but ensured that the competition was heightened. In this manner, the neutrality of the state has facilitated the marketization of religion and, subsequently the repoliticization of religion. The repoliticization of religion is, in turn, the result of religion's efforts to ensure the equitable distribution of resources through negotiations and trade, and is in no way associated with the symmetrical power structure that existed between the state and religion in the past (Kang 2000, 55). At this juncture, religion either incurs the intervention of the state, or threatens the state in order to obtain the latter's support. This is how religious power emerged in Korean society, and the critical discourse caused by this emergence of religious power expanded (KCFA/KBFA 2008). Given all this, the issue of how to cope with social democratization constitutes the core task of religion during the democratization era.

Korean Buddhism after Democratization

The neutrality of the state vis-à-vis religions leads the state to review the various privileges. A specific religion has exclusively enjoyed and also looked into the discrimination between religions as part of the process of opening up to other religions in an equitable manner. As such, all the state benefits a specific religion gained or discrimination it faced suddenly become a social and political issue. Korean Buddhism, which has long perceived itself a victim of state subjugation under the consecutive authoritarian regimes, has been at the forefront of the efforts to transform these legacies of the biased practices of the

9. The reduction in the budget for temple stays in the National Assembly's 2011 budget was to some extent related to this debate.

past into debatable issues. The Protestant church, which had enjoyed many institutional privileges, has also made an issue of the ramifications of the earlier relationship between the state and Buddhism. These debates have fostered the emergence of a challenge to the neutrality of the state in the form of allegations of religious favoritism. This debate over religious favoritism becomes even more pronounced in cases where an authoritarian state has distorted the religious market for a long period of time.¹⁰

The democratization of Korea activated the direct election system, further accelerating the repoliticization of religions. As the major religious denominations boast the largest autonomous organizations within Korean society, their influence under a direct election system cannot be ignored. The political influence of religion has greatly increased in a wide range of elections, including presidential, local, and even education superintendent elections. Religious entities even have come to be perceived as political powers since they strongly demand to the political sector that its interests be protected in the aftermath of democratization. Elections, thus, have greatly repoliticized religion and the social power of religion in the democratic era.

The adoption of independence and democratization as the main goals of the Reformist Order happened in the context of social democratization. This stemmed not only from its desire to compensate for the past subordination to the state, but also from its need to cope with the marketization of religion. Prior to democratization, Korean Buddhism, which sought to negotiate or follow the main trends, was strongly ensnared by state power (Kang 2000, 49-50). Religious privileges, such as participation in the military religious system, the revenues earned from admission to cultural properties, and the establishment of Buddha's birthday as a national holiday, were the recompenses for political subordination. However, the political awareness and

10. The state strongly influenced the religion market through various schemes such as state provision of supports to religious institutions, tax benefits for religious entities, the military chaplain system, and national holidays and ceremonies, and also by approving the indirect activities of religions such as mission schools, religious hospitals, media organizations, and social welfare organizations.

attitudes of Korean Buddhists underwent a profound transformation following the inauguration of Kim Young-sam's Civilian Government in 1993. Consequently, more antigovernment leanings began to merge in the Buddhist circle. It was amidst such circumstances that the Jogye Order launched its Reformist Order in 1994. The Reformist Order opted to gain advantage from maintaining tensions with the state, rather than depending on the benefits reaped from its subordination. It also adopted a new method of pursuing its interests based on institutional foundations rather than simple political negotiations.

The Movement to Reform Korean Buddhism and Its Development

The present reform movement has its origins in the Buddhist Purification Movement (*jeonghwa bulsa* 淨化佛事) of 1954. With the help of the military government that came to power following the 5.16 Military Coup of 1961, the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism was established in 1962 as an integrated order that brought together married monks and unmarried monastic monks.

However, the integrated Jogye Order soon faced legal challenges regarding its legitimacy. Through the mediation of the government, the married Buddhist monks eventually separated from the Jogye Order and established the Taego Oder in 1970. As such, the Jogye Order became for the time being an organization for monastic monks. The Jogye Order, nevertheless, continued to be plagued by internal power struggles that pitted the existing power group, which controlled key positions such as those of Supreme Patriarch of the Order, Executive Director of Administration, and others, against those who opposed them. This struggle culminated in 1980 with the disgraceful October 27 Buddhist Incident that occurred under the guise of the Drive to Clean Up Society. This incident not only greatly shocked Buddhist circles, but also provided them with an opportunity to reconsider their relationship with state power.

It was under these circumstances that a social democratization

movement named the *minjung* Buddhist movement emerged within the Buddhist sector during the early 1980s. Heavily influenced by this *minjung* Buddhism, the so-called Emergency Order, which claimed innovative reforms, was formed in 1983. Following in the footsteps of the Buddhist Purification Movement, the Emergency Order can be regarded as the onset of the second Buddhist reform movement. However, the Emergency Order eventually dissolved, and thereafter, the Reformist Forum was convened in 1994, during which reformist monks tore down the executive director system heavily associated with the monk Seo Ui-hyeon. The current Reformist Order in many ways inherited the spirit of this Reformist Forum.

The Emergency Order and the Buddhist Reform Movement

The Emergency Order, which was inaugurated in 1983, marked the emergence of the first Buddhist reform group in Korea. Prior to the Emergency Order, there were no groups within the Jogye Order that could be considered a Buddhist reform group. Even if this kind of reform group had existed, the active collusion between Buddhism and the government would have made it impossible for them to participate in the management of the Order. The emergence of a reformist group within the Buddhist sector can be regarded as a natural phenomenon coinciding with the democratization of Korea. In this regard, the intention was to combine Buddhist reform with the wider social democratization movement.

As evidenced by the name of the organization, the Emergency Order was tasked with the short-term management of an order that declared itself under the state of emergency.¹¹ Nevertheless, this orga-

11. The Emergency Order operated for about one year, from the Order's passage of emergency management procedures in September 1983 to the disbandment decision reached at the National Conference of Representative Buddhist Monks held in Haeinsa temple in August 1984. The rise of the Emergency Order was directly related to the murder of a Buddhist monk at Sinheungsa temple. However, the inauguration of the Emergency Order was in fact made possible by the incessant chaos that gripped the Order in the aftermath of the October 27 Buddhist Incident (SADU 1997, 60-61).

nization has significant implications in the history of Korean Buddhism in that it offered a blueprint for the reform of Buddhism. The participants in the Emergency Order were greatly influenced by the *minjung* Buddhist movement.

Having identified the *minjung* (people) and Buddhism as the main actors in social reform, this group intended to implement the simultaneous reform of both society and Buddhism. University students at the time were armed with progressive social theories that they intended to apply to the democratization movement. And the Emergency Order members who engaged with these students also came to possess a progressive social consciousness. In addition, they disagreed with the way in which the leading figures managed the Jogye Order, and instead placed their trust in lay Buddhists. These characteristics were reflected in the reform proposal put forward by the Emergency Order (B. Park 2012, 344-345). The conflicts surrounding the internal power struggles waged since the days of the Buddhist Purification Movement, and the wasting of the Order's resources, created the sense of desperation that without reform Buddhism was doomed. To this end, the lay Buddhists and monastic monks who joined the monastic order gathered together to actualize Buddhist reform.

Leaving aside issues of feasibility, the Constitution of the Jogye Order prepared by the Emergency Order contains contents that would be considered reformative even by today's standards. This document covered all the problems that had emerged within Buddhist circles since the Buddhist Purification Movement. It summarized the problems faced by the Order, as well as the countermeasures that should be taken, from an external vantage point. Viewed from the standpoint of the monks who possessed the vested rights at the time, such assertions were the equivalent of calls for a new framework governing the management of the Order. The framers of this Constitution searched for solutions to the conflicts within the Jogye Order caused by the struggles between the Legislative Central Council and the Executive Director of Administration, the problems associated with a centralized structure which had been maintained despite the absence of strong

administrative power, and the difficulties created by a power structure, which had been monopolized by a few members (RIBS 2001, 263).

The failure to implement this reform proposal was rooted in the fact that it also involved an attempt to establish a lay ministry system and to reorganize the Buddhist temple structure. As the establishment of a lay ministry system, which would be in charge of propagation, could potentially change the status of the Buddhist monks, the latter were hard-pressed to agree with the proposal. Moreover, the reorganization of the temple structure implied the destruction of deeply-rooted Buddhist clans (*munjung* 門中) and, as such, created a crisis amongst those monks whose status and privileges were based on their Buddhist order. The tacit objection by the majority of the monks led the Supreme Patriarch of the Order Monk Seongcheol to refuse this proposal.

Although the Emergency Order was only operational for a fleeting moment in the history of Korean Buddhism, it nevertheless greatly influenced its development. Park Boo-young has asserted that the reform proposal put forward by the Emergency Order was designed to facilitate the formation of a Buddhist community based on the never-before-seen notion of a coalition between lay Buddhists and monastic monks, and the establishment of a system that divided the roles amongst the lay Buddhists and monastic monks. Park also stressed the fact that the Emergency Order had failed to maintain a proper distance from the social democratization movement. However, he argued that although the reform proposal put forward by the Emergency Order had now faded into history, the work done by this committee had served as the groundwork for the Reformist Forum held 10 years later, and formed the foundation of Korean Buddhism up to the present (B. Park 2012, 357-359).

Moreover, Park has claimed: (1) The reform proposal put forward by the Emergency Order was designed to facilitate the formation of a Buddhist community based on the unprecedented notion of a coalition between lay Buddhists and monastic monks, and the establishment of a system that divided the roles amongst the lay Buddhists and monas-

tic monks; and (2) The reform proposal and experience gained by the Emergency Order did not disappear, but rather served as nourishment for Korean Buddhism. However, Park also stressed the fact that (3) the Emergency Order had failed to maintain a proper distance from the social democratization movement. But when all comes to all, the Emergency Order can be viewed as significant in that it not only brought to light the problems of Korean Buddhism, but also was the first to experiment with reform since the Buddhist Purification Movement.

While the initial impetus for the advent of the Emergency Order was provided by the democratization movement that began during the late 1970s, the direct sparks that led to the establishment of this order were the Gwangju Democratization Movement of 1980 and the October 27 Buddhist Incident. The Incident had the effect of creating an awareness amongst the young *minjung* Buddhists of the need to undertake the reform of Buddhism. These individuals set out to simultaneously implement social democratization and Buddhist reform, an effort that was given further form with the advent of the Sawonhwa Movement.¹²

This movement, which adopted the slogan “the *sangha* (the Buddhist community) for the secular world, and the secular world for the *sangha*,” intended to establish the status of Buddhism as an entity contributing to the local community and *minjung* as well as to eliminate Buddhism’s estrangement from society and perceived anti-*minjung* propensity (RIBS 2001, 258). The group created a significant stir when they held a conference at Beomeosa temple in July 1983, during which open calls were made for the reform of Korean Buddhism. They advocated: (1) the unity of young Buddhists (both lay Buddhists and monastic monks), (2) renovation of Buddhism, (3) actualization of national Buddhism, and (4) construction of Pure Land Buddhism. The unity of lay Buddhists and monastic monks, concept of national Bud-

12. The main actors involved in this Sawonhwa Movement belonged to the Korea Buddhist University Federation. These forces eventually played the leading role in the formation of the National Buddhist Youth Federation.

dhism, and Pure Land Buddhism subsequently became central themes in the movement to reform Korean Buddhism.

Having been pursued in earnest during the early 1980s, the *minjung* Buddhist movement brought about a qualitative transformation in May 1985 when 180 lay Buddhists and monastic monks inaugurated the *minjung* Buddhist movement Federation. Amidst strong government suppression, this federation carried out a campaign for the independence of Buddhism and the overthrow of the military dictatorship. The establishment of the Association of Pure Land Buddhism Sangha in June 1986 marked the emergence of an independent *sangha* organization composed of Buddhist monks of progressive tendencies.

As the democratization movement was reaching its peak in July 1986, reformist monks associated with *minjung* Buddhism, such as Seongmun, Myeongjin, Byeogu, Jingwan, and Hyeonggi, organized a Buddhist conference at Haeinsa temple. Arguing that the problems faced by the Buddhist sector emanated from unhealthy ties with the government, the participants in this conference strongly urged the government to remedy the situation. They demanded the abolishment of evil laws related to Buddhism, and the bringing to an end of the practice of turning Buddhist temples into tourist sites and resorts. Moreover, they also called for an investigation into an alleged case of sexual torture and a cessation of pressure to liberalize imports. They also identified the October 27 Buddhist Incident, a subject which had heretofore been taboo, as an act of *violence* and asserted that the main focus behind the concept of “Buddhism for national protection” should be the protection of the people rather than of the government regime (RIBS 2001, 265).

This conference marked a significant milestone in the history of Korean Buddhism reform movement in that reformist monks emerged at the forefront of the democratization forces. The conference helped the monks create a clear understanding of the legal and institutional fetters that had impeded the independence of Buddhism as well as the awareness that no authentic independence of Buddhism could be achieved without social democratization. However, the aggressive behavior and violent acts perpetrated by some young monks during

sit-in protests did not sit well with the powers within the Jogye Order. It was against this backdrop that the Buddhism reform movement gradually lost its political orientation and instead moved towards a focus on the reform of Buddhism and the methods to bring this about. Thereafter, the movement was separated into the *minjung* Buddhist movement, which adopted social reform as its priority, and the practical Buddhism movement geared towards the reform of Buddhism.

The Practical Buddhism Movement Led by Sangha Organizations

The further entrenchment of democratization in Korea following the Civil Uprising of June 10, 1987, caused the Buddhism reform movement, which had exhibited the characteristics of a democratization movement, to be reborn as a religious or Buddhist movement. Symbolizing this shift were the establishment of the Association of Mahayana Buddhism Sangha in March 1988, which emphasized the practice of Mahayana Buddhism, the Seonu Doryang in November 1990 as part of the search for a traditional Buddhist reform method called the “association movement,” and the Association for Practical Buddhism Sangha in October 1992, which emerged as the main advocate for the institutional reform of the Order.

The proponents of the Association of Mahayana Buddhism Sangha expressed the desire to implement a Buddhist reform movement rooted in “socialized enlightenment,” and applied the ideals of Mahayana Buddhism to social movements. They also advocated a national Buddhism movement that would serve as a standard-bearer for a new and creative Buddhist movement that could overcome the contradictions and limits of non-secular and Buddhism. In accordance with the general sentiment of the Buddhist community, this organization toned down the radicalism that had heretofore marked the Buddhist social movement. Given the fact that they turned enlightenment and history into a practical movement, this *sangha* organization can be regarded as having opened up a new horizon for the *sangha* movement in the 1990s (RIBS 2001, 269-270).

The Seonu Doryang was a *sangha* organization formed by 80

senior monks at Sudeoksa temple in November of 1990. They advocated the Buddhist association movement aimed at the enhancement of the Buddhist spirit and establishment of a desirable image of Buddhist practitioners (RIBS 2001, 272-273). The Buddhist association movement sought to reinterpret the traditional beliefs of Korean Buddhism vis-à-vis reform and to use them as the basis for a modern Buddhist association movement. This organization was significant in that it not only sought to reinterpret the traditions of Korean Buddhism, but also was centered on the senior monks who constituted the main power holders of Seon (Zen in Japanese) Buddhism. In other words, it garnered attention because the senior monks of Seon Buddhism assumed a front row position within the Buddhist reform movement, and this was in many ways reminiscent of the Bongamsa Association,¹³ which has widely been regarded as the starting point of the Buddhist Purification Movement.

Unlike the Buddhism reform movement of the past, the Seonu Doryang sought to enhance the Buddhist spirit and establish a desirable image of the practitioners of Buddha's teaching and precepts. In this regard, the Seonu Doryang can be seen as sharing the goals of the initial Buddhist Purification Movement of the 1950s. They established a reform program that linked together the actual religious field, meditation, and Buddhist associations.¹⁴ This *sangha* organization maintained that the problems which plagued the Buddhist community could not be resolved solely based on a simple generational change,

13. The Bongamsa Association has been regarded as the origin of the Buddhist Purification Movement of the 1950s. Organized by the monks such as Cheongdam, Seongcheol, Jaun, and Ubong from the fall of 1947 to the spring of 1950, it sought to overcome colonial Buddhism through meditation. The association established rules designed to live according to the law of Buddha and also approached matters based on this law.

14. This linking became the model for the "five association movement of the Jogye Order," which has been implemented since 2011. The movement consists of meditational, cultural, life, sharing, and peace associations. Please refer to the statement made by the Executive Director of Administration of the Order, Monk Jaseung on December 26, 2011 (http://www.buddhism.or.kr/bbs/board.php?bo_table=DN_Content_com&wr_id=7&DNUX=com_01_01; accessed August 8, 2012).

and suggested the need for a fundamental alternative that would allow the Buddhist community to play its rightful role in Korean society. They focused on identifying the underlying problems of modern Buddhism and suggesting Buddhism-based alternatives with which to resolve them. They held discussions concerning the actual state of Buddhist orders in Korea and the social roles of Buddhism during their meditational society meetings held twice every year. As such, the activities of the Seonu Doryang presented a new horizon for the Buddhist community in the 1990s.

Lastly, the main protagonists who led the foundation of the Association of Pure Land Buddhism Sangha (June 1986),¹⁵ which was disorganized in August 1992, came together once again to form the Association for Practical Buddhism Sangha in order to correct the political focus that had plagued the Buddhist reform movement in the past. This organization adopted devotion to meditation, development of enlightenment methods, and the actualization of Pure Land Buddhism as its basic code of conduct. They also played a leading role in the Reformist Forum of 1994, which paved the way for the establishment of the current Reformist Order. The core of what the order intended to promote was a reform of laws and institutions and this was for the most part consistent with the policies put forward by the Reformist Forum of 1994 (RIBS 2001, 271-272). Their major undertaking was the move to amend the Constitution and Laws of the Jogye Order, which stipulated the direct election of the members of the Central Council and a ban on holding more than one office.

The Reform Movement by the Reformist Order

Although the atmosphere within the Korean Buddhist circle was significantly different after the Buddhist conference held in Haeinsa temple in July 1986, the disputes caused by the power struggles within

15. The Association of Pure Land Buddhism Sangha, which advocated that democratization would lead to the actualization of Pure Land Buddhism, has not yet distanced itself from its social democratization movement leanings (RIBS 2001, 268).

the Jogye Order continued until the early 1990s. In particular, the democratization and Buddhist reform movements had failed to curb violent activities and court battles. These events were the result of the non-independent nature of the Order vis-à-vis the government, the arbitrariness and corruption of the prevailing powers, the deeply rooted antagonism between factions, and the defection of the reformist group. However, at their core, these events were rooted in the structural problems such as the quality of monks and the Order's institutions. Moreover, the abolishment in 1988 of the despised Buddhism Property Management Act, which had been regarded as shackling the Buddhist circle, and subsequent enactment of the Preservation of Traditional Buddhist Temples Act concerned solely with providing support to traditional temples¹⁶ had the effects of causing further splits within the Order and leading to the creation of new orders.¹⁷ This situation tells us that the structure of the Jogye Order had been maintained based on the framework of the government system and the administrative power vested in the Buddhism Property Management Act. It consequently caused a crisis of survival for the Jogye Order and urged the necessity for internal reform of Buddhist circles.

Amidst this crisis that rocked the Order, a new reformist force, the so-called Buddhist Reformation Committee, emerged within the Buddhist circle in early 1994. Shortly after its inception, the committee launched the Buddhist ceremony for the realization of dharma and a hunger strike to protest the actions of the Central Council of the Jogye Order. Although the public authorities became involved at the request

16. The Preservation of Traditional Buddhist Temples Act regulates the matters related to the preservation of traditional temples (enacted November 28, 1987; Act No. 3974). It was designed to designate and register traditional Korean Buddhist temples so that they could be preserved as cultural properties. It was enacted to mitigate the complaints from Buddhist circles that the Buddhism Property Management Act violated the Constitution of the Republic of Korea by invading the freedom of religion, and hindered the equality between religions.

17. Some of the elderly monks broke away from the Jogye Order and formed new Buddhist orders such as the Ilbung Seongyo Order and Mahayana Order (RIBS 2001, 278).

of the Order, the dispute was brought to an end with the resignation of the Executive Director of Administration of the Jogye Order Seo Uihyeon. One month later, the Reformist Forum was inaugurated through the National Buddhist Monks' Conference (*jeonguk seugga daehoe* 全國僧侶大會) held at Jogyesa temple. The smooth realization of all of these processes proves that the reformist factions had accumulated a strong willingness and capacity through the democratization movement. The Buddhist reformist faction led by the Association of Practical Buddhism Sangha actively participated in the Reformist Forum to establish a reform proposal for the Jogye Order.

The Reformist Forum identified the following five directions that institutional reform should take: (1) the actualization of the orthodox teachings of Buddha, (2) independence of Buddhism, (3) democratization of the Order management, (4) actualization of pure *sangha*, and (5) expansion of the social roles of Buddhism. The main contents of this reform proposal included: the separation of the Bureau of Missionary Affairs (Pogyowon), establishment of a *sangha* education system, a ban on the holding of more than one office (a move which was seen as a key to ensure the democratization of the order), direct election of the Executive Director of Administration of the Order, direct elections of the Central Council, increase of the female Buddhists quota within the Central Council, activation of district councils, organization of temple management committees, and the establishment of a relationship between the Administrative Headquarters and the Central Council. This continues to be the management system employed by the Jogye Order to this day. This institutional reform was geared towards improving the stability of the order through its democratization, publicly managed elections, and the direct election of the Executive Director of Administration.¹⁸

Another important outcome from the Reformist Forum was the establishment of a *sangha* education system. The education of the *sangha* had heretofore been left up to monastic monks and masters.

18. For more on the reform proposal put forward by the Reformist Forum, please refer to J. Lee (2012, 376-381).

However, since 1995 the education system for the monastic monks has been institutionally established and now a monastic monk can only officially become a monk when he or she has completed a six-month obligatory course and four years of basic education. Reeducation systems for the monks were also introduced.

Viewed from the standpoint of the Buddhist reform movement, however, these reform measures left much to be desired. Although the Reformist Forum sought to stabilize the management of the Order through institutional reform, very little ever came of such efforts. The limits of institutional reform were made evident when the order became engulfed in an internal conflict in 1998 over the election for a third term of Executive Director of Administration Song Wol-ju, a conflict which was resolved based on secular laws. Moreover, although it clarified the social roles of Buddhism, the Reformist Forum did not clearly suggest any future vision for the commonplace Buddhism.

Many lay Buddhist organizations demanded the right to have their representatives participate in the Central Council of the Order. However, the Reformist Forum refused to accept this proposal on the grounds that the participation of lay Buddhists in the management of the Order remained premature. In lieu of such a move, the Reformist Forum enacted the Temple Management Committee Act, which recognized the participation of lay Buddhists in the management of temples. This act was limited to the institutionalization of the qualification and education of lay Buddhists, and the composition of a laic central council based on the enactment of a laity act (RIBS 2001, 306-307). Thereafter, these temple management committees became all but powerless at actual temple sites. These outcomes can be linked to the fact that the main actors behind the reform were *sangha* organizations who sought to establish feasible alternatives that were motivated by the failures of the Emergency Order. This is evidenced by the fact that the Reformist Forum excluded the core reform measures put forth by the Emergency Order, namely the reorganization of mid-level personnel in charge of propagation and the alteration of temple management structures.

The current Reformist Order, which inherited the institutional

reforms put forward by the Reformist Forum, also has significant implications in that it has become the first entity to entrench reformist Buddhism within the Jogye Order. The Reformist Order, however, has exhibited the hopes as well as the limitations of Korean Buddhism (RIBSC 2011a). As long as the current structure of the Jogye Order is maintained, a structure that has revolved solely around Buddhist monastic monks, it will remain impossible to ensure the growth of Korean Buddhism. In addition, any search for social participation that does not encompass the broadened reform of Buddhism is inherently problematic. Nevertheless, Korean Buddhism has begun to distance itself from the past. While Korean Buddhism exhibited a subordinate relationship with the state prior to the reform of the Buddhist Order, it has increasingly moved in an independent direction. And although still centered on the *sangha*, Korean Buddhism is making strides towards becoming a religion of social participation. Moreover, the power struggle within the order has been mitigated by the dispersion of power and the ban on holding multiple offices.

However, the Jogye Order's continued employment of a Buddhist monastic monk-centered structure, which also emphasizes traditions and supramundane characteristics, will in all likelihood make it difficult for the Order to cope with periodic trends. Korean Buddhism's ability to move towards becoming an everyday religion will remain limited as long as the current method of vertically combining lay Buddhists within a *sangha*-centered structure is maintained. Such a structure can hardly bring about other results than the stabilization of the management of the order. It can be of suspect that Korean Buddhism has failed to establish a vision for its future, and instead continues to be preoccupied with its identity confusion and the institutionalization of religious power.

The Future Tasks for the Reform of the Buddhist Order

It is quite a challenge for the Jogye Order to reform itself into a modern, mass-oriented Buddhism. The current Reformist Order has faced

a dilemma in that the *sangha*, which has always focused on the supramundane world and restoring tradition, has had to move towards putting in place an everyday religion that resonates with the people.¹⁹ The gap between the *sangha*-centered elite religion and an everyday religion rooted in the people is significant. If the traditional identity of Korean Buddhism is emphasized, then a return to the image of the Buddhist Purification Movement of the 1950s becomes inevitable. On the other hand, if Buddhism is modernized with everyday world orientation, it will be difficult for the *sangha* to accept the emphasis on the public appeal of Korean Buddhism. As such, the reform direction of Korean Buddhism will be determined by how the traditional identity and mass appeal of Korean Buddhism are combined.

Formation of a New Relationship with the State Power

Korean Buddhism has searched for a new relationship with the state. In this regard, the Reformist Order has presented the independence of the order as the main reason for its very existence. Moreover, Korean Buddhism has maintained victim mentality vis-à-vis the political power in its relationship with the state. In establishing a new relationship with the state, the core issue concerns reinterpreting the historical notion of “Buddhism for national protection” (*hoguk bulgyo* 護國佛教) or “state Buddhism,” in modern society. Buddhist circles have asserted that the concepts of Buddhism for national protection and Buddhism for the royal family should be negatively identified and replaced by the notion of the Protection of Buddha-dharma or the construction of a Buddhist pure land.²⁰ However, such assertions do not reflect the fact that religion and the state were integrated in traditional society. Furthermore, although greatly corrupted by political

19. In general, the Korean Buddhism reform movement has been geared towards actualizing the ideologies of Mahayana Buddhism and the Pure Land Society. The ability to realize these goals is predicated on the establishment of Korean Buddhism as an everyday religion that is in keeping with modern society.

20. For criticism of the notion of “Buddhism for the protection of the nation,” refer to H. Park (2011).

power in the past, Buddhism for the protection of the nation could offer an important point of contact between Buddhism and society. This factor should be considered when reviewing the notion of Buddhism for national protection.

The relationship with the state cannot be fully amended solely by achieving independence from the political power. Korean Buddhism still identifies itself as the protector of national culture and defines itself as national Buddhism. If this persists, the independence of Korean Buddhism, in particular in its relationship with the state, will remain a complex issue. Moreover, the independence of the Jogye Order will continue to be a very difficult issue to discuss as long as Korean Buddhism receives national support set aside for traditional temples and cultural properties. To this end, the Jogye Order will be hard-pressed to refuse the support of the state, providing that lay Buddhists' political awareness and their willingness to carry the financial burden for Buddhism remain underdeveloped. The debate over the notion of Buddhism for the protection of the nation may in turn lead to disputes between independent Buddhism and national Buddhism.

Increase of the Social Role of Korean Buddhism

An increased social role has always been one of the components of the reform movement. This emphasis on the mundane can also be regarded as a natural task for Korean Buddhism because, since Korean Buddhism is associated with spiritual cultivation, it has always imbued itself with the challenge of emancipating sentient beings from suffering (*hahwa jungsaeng* 下化衆生). This is also the basic task of Mahayana Buddhism, which emphasizes the Bodhisattva practice. In addition, the further marketization and secularization wrought by the deregulation of religion in the aftermath of democratization has made it very important for Korean Buddhism to secure social publicness through social participation.

The social participation of Korean Buddhism has historically been carried out as a popular movement. The association movement exhibited a high possibility of success when it adopted a grass-roots

approach similar to that used by the *minjung* Buddhist movement. The Jogye Order recently implemented the “five society movement for introspection and reform.”²¹ However, this has proven to be a limited success as popular movement in that it has taken on a top-down rather than grass-roots approach. Doubts have even been raised about the motivation behind this movement, in that the movement stems from complaints related to the national budget set aside in support of Buddhism. Any top-down association movement that is not based on the willingness of the Buddhist masses will be hard-pressed to guarantee its success.

The Korean Buddhist circle has developed various civil movements for such issues as the environment, ecology, life, and peace. These civil movements are intended to promote an alternative lifestyle that seeks to decrease the human desires fueled by the capitalist lifestyle. This alternative lifestyle based on reducing consumerism has much in common with core Buddhism values, which are to curb desire and practice a causation-based perception of the world.²² Nevertheless, the lack of any concrete Buddhist social movements can be fundamentally ascribed to the lack of lay Buddhist participation. Since social participation is related to the everyday life in the mundane world and not associated with meditation methods in the supramundane world, this problem will not be easily resolved because lay Buddhists are unlikely to actively participate in social movements.

Searching for a New Identity for the Jogye Order

The religious identity of the current Jogye Order is based on word contemplation meditation (*ganhwaseon* 看話禪), which denotes studying a keyword or critical phrase (*hwadu* 話頭; literally “speech-head”) in order to find true self-nature and become one with the universe.

21. Please refer to the statement made by the Executive Director of Administration of the Order, Monk Jaseung, on December 26, 2011.

22. From a global standpoint, the zero food waste movement conducted by the Association of Pure Land Buddhism can be seen as an important example associated with the Buddhist position towards the environment (APLB 2006).

The monastic monks are mainly responsible for implementing this *ganhwaseon*; in fact, it is nearly impossible to realize *ganhwaseon* without them. Many have observed, therefore, that Korean Buddhism's ability to become Buddhism for everyday life is predicated on a reconsideration of the *ganhwaseon*. Some have argued that as self-awakening is only possible under the state of subjective absolute belief, the notion of *ganhwaseon* does not reflect modern thinking; furthermore, the notion of *ganhwaseon* is inherently limited by the fact that Korean Buddhism is an ascetic practitioner-oriented religion in which one must break from the secular world in order to be immersed in self-enlightenment.²³ As such, the notion of *ganhwaseon* in which one lives for meditation and religious services is one that is far removed from the everyday life Buddhism of modern society.

Controversy has risen over the identity of Korean Buddhism even within the Reformist Order. The controversy has been waged from two different standpoints (Hyeoneung 2012, 88-93). While the first is related to the name of the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, the other is concerned with the inheritance of a tradition that has adopted the notion of *ganhwaseon* as the main doctrine. Regarding the first issue, the Jogye Order claims to represent all Korean Buddhists based on the fact that it is the heir to Korean Buddhism and that the state has granted it the right to manage the traditional Buddhist assets. Then, it becomes necessary to bestow a new name upon the Jogye Order that truly encompasses all of Korean Buddhism. The very name Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism exposes the limitation that comes from being but one of the Buddhist sects, a denouement that was itself greatly influenced by Japanese Buddhism during the colonial period. As the emphasis on *ganhwaseon* only emerged in the aftermath of the colonial era, moreover, it is difficult to regard this notion as that of traditional Korean Buddhism. If the inheritance of the Korean Buddhist tradition is used as the overarching premise, then all-embracing universal Buddhism should be regarded as a more appropriate choice to represent all Buddhists. Viewed from this standpoint, the history

23. *Modern Buddhist News*, April 4, 2012.

and thought of Korean Buddhism becomes open to discussion.

The debate over the notion of *ganhwaseon* is quite complex as it is closely related to the identity and the characteristics of Korean Buddhism, and is centered on two major issues: the inheritance of traditional Korean Buddhist beliefs and the monastic monks' religious authority. After the Buddhist Purification Movement was launched, monastic monks and the *ganhwaseon* notion have comprised the main characteristics of Korean Buddhism. Few other countries have formed a meditation community of specialized practitioners possessing their own *hwadu*. However, the problem is that this *ganhwaseon* tradition has impeded the development of everyday life Buddhism. Many have also maintained that specialized monastic monks have monopolized religious power through the *ganhwaseon*, which in turn has prevented Buddhism from modernizing. *Ganhwaseon*-oriented Korean Buddhism will inevitably be limited to Buddhism for monastic monks; it will fail to realize Mahayana Buddhism's concentration on the emancipation of sentient beings from suffering or to develop the notion of *ganhwaseon* into a more public form of Seon Buddhism. These are the troubles the Reformist Order faces in pursuing everyday life Buddhism.

The Formation of a Harmonious Community between Monastic Monks and Lay Buddhists

Since the formation of modern Buddhism, the problem of what to do with the lay Buddhists has been positioned at the center of the Buddhism reform movement. The role of lay Buddhists in the recent Buddhist Purification Movement has been one of the core themes of the Buddhist reform. This was related to the concept of *sangha* based on the three treasures (Buddha, Dharma, and *sangha*). In other words, the problem is whether the traditional concept of *sangha* is effective in modern society as the backbone of the Buddhist community. The importance of lay Buddhism was relatively weakened as a result of the Buddhist Purification Movement's sole emphasis on the role of pure monastic monks.

By expanding the concept of *sangha* in accordance with the ad-

vent of a democratic society, modern Buddhism has in effect become a lay-centered Buddhism. Japan and Western countries have already ceased to make a distinction between lay Buddhists and monastic monks, and lay Buddhists in these countries have grasped the leadership within their respective Buddhist sects. From a historical standpoint, the separation between lay Buddhists and monastic monks can be regarded as having disappeared from the moment Mahayana Buddhism formed.²⁴ Korean Buddhism, however, rather than establishing a concept of *sangha* in keeping with Mahayana Buddhism when the latter was formed, continued to adhere to the preexisting concept of *sangha* (K. Lee 1989). Furthermore, Korean Buddhists has maintained a traditional concept of lay-centered *sangha* even in the modern period that separated politics and religion.

There is now a need to establish modern Buddhism in which the supramundane *sangha* represents a good lifestyle example and the lay Buddhists can play their role in the mundane world. In addition, the goal of harmonizing the roles of the lay Buddhists and monastic monks will require an examination of the Buddhist Purification Movement envisioned by monastic monks, and the notion of *ganhwaseon*. Because of its excessive dependence on tradition and focus on the supra-mundane world, the current Reformist Order may lose the impetus needed to adjust to modern society. A harmonized Jogye Order can be achieved through institutional reforms based on the Mahasangha (fourfold Buddhist community consisting of monks, nuns, and male and female lay Buddhists) and the improvement of the decision-making structure. The time has come to seriously deliberate on means to avoid the separation of Buddhist beliefs and social practices.

24. This shares many similarities with the compilations of the *Vimalakirtinirdesha Sutra* (The Holy Teachings of Vimalakirti) and the *Srimaladevi Simhanada Sutra* (The Lion's Roar of Queen Srimala), which serve as the scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism.

Conclusion

According to a recent religious survey, Buddhism has emerged as a promising religion that does not abuse its religious influence, preserves its culture and tradition, and is in tune with a new civilization (RIBSC 2011b). However, this has yet to translate into any marked increase in Buddhist believers. In this regard, it will be difficult to expect any reform progress until the issues of reestablishing the identity of Korean Buddhism and the lay Buddhists' participation in the order have been resolved. The active participation of lay Buddhists will make possible the democratization of the Jogye Order, creation of everyday life Buddhism, and institutionalization of the power of the Jogye Order. Should this reform fail, the gap between the ideal and reality of Korean Buddhism will inevitably be maintained.

The Reformist Order that began in 1994 was born out of the Buddhist reformation implemented during Korea's democratization. This effort has wrought many changes to the Jogye Order in terms of its administration, education, and propagation. Nevertheless, problems remain. The identity of Korean Buddhism characterized by the restoration of tradition and the supramundane world has conflicted with the efforts to modernize Korean Buddhism and move towards everyday life Buddhism. In the aftermath of the Buddhist Purification Movement, Korean Buddhism has, as a whole, been excessively focused on justifying its beliefs on account of the status and authority of the *sangha*. The Jogye Order, however, must now map out its future based on the independent Reformist Order and not the Buddhist Purification Movement created by the state. Yet a critical point has been reached where the independence of Buddhism, along with achievement of an everyday life religion as well as restoration of tradition at actual sites of belief will be difficult to realize. The time has come for Korean Buddhism to go beyond the Buddhist Purification Movement and boldly loosen the limitations faced by lay Buddhists in terms of their participation in the management of the Jogye Order.

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