



Hwansoo Ilmee Kim. *Empire of the Dharma: Korean and Japanese Buddhism, 1877–1912.* Harvard East Asian Monographs Series. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013. 415 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-06575-8.



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The Ill-Fated Pursuit of Korean-Japanese Dharma

In 1910, tragedy befell Korea's Buddhists. Not only had Japan just finalized its decades-long effort to colonize their nation, but they also succumbed to the equally intrusive and imperialistic aims of Japanese Buddhists by agreeing to the attempted Soto-Wŏnjong Alliance. As with all else in that fateful year, the attempted alliance marked the beginning of Korean subjugation to Japanese rule, and the erasure of distinctly Korean culture for the following nearly four decades. The foregoing account has dominated the perception of Korean Buddhism's subdued and marginal place in the religious history of colonial Korea. Overshadowed by the extraordinary and unusual dominance of Christianity in modern—and especially colonial—Korean history, Buddhism has been as marginalized in scholarship on colonial Korea as its adherents were in Korean society on the eve of Japanese colonization.

Hwansoo Ilmee Kim's thorough and carefully researched new work, *Empire of the Dharma: Korean and Japanese Buddhism, 1877-1912*, offers a nuanced and sophisticated corrective to this conventional narrative. In

no way diminishing the catastrophic effects of Japanese colonization, Kim argues nonetheless for the need to fundamentally reframe the study of Korean Buddhists and their relationship with Japan, particularly in the years leading up to colonization. By focusing on the period between the Treaty of Kanghwa and 1912, the book displaces 1910 as the singularly pivotal moment in Korean history. Kim points to the 1911 Temple Ordinance as the key event that undermined the decades-long effort on both sides to forge an alliance that would serve common interests. Instead of examining these decades for evidence of the inevitability of colonization, he asks what these priests aspired to before colonization was a foregone conclusion. The answer, as it unfolds in the book, is in many ways a tragedy, the story on both sides of Buddhist priests burdened with very different historical legacies desperately seeking out methods of transforming their beliefs, practices, temples, and social significance as their societies and the broader world transformed before them with bewildering speed.

Kim's dual emphasis on both Japanese and Korean

priests and their complex interests—often informed by inter- and intra-denominational debate and contestation as much as international concerns—likewise removes the political question of colonization as the main focus. This is not to say that Kim disregards the significance of Japanese territorial aggression. But by shifting the framework to the concerns of this diverse and often motley group of Buddhists demonstrates that as important as Japanese intrusion was, other concerns seemed equally critical to historical actors prior to 1910. In other words, Korean Buddhists were not simply hapless and lacking in national fervor, nor were their Japanese counterparts merely agents of the Japanese government intent on controlling Koreans. In fact, Kim argues in his introduction that these two groups of Buddhists briefly sought in one another partners in rehabilitating Buddhism in Asia, particularly in order to thwart the overwhelming successes of Western Christian missionaries, leading to a dynamic and creative relationship that had not been seen before nor has it been repeated since (p. 4).

The chapters of this detailed volume proceed chronologically. As Kim points out in his introduction, domestic sectarian competition and conflict were often critical to the decision to seek out alliances, and thus he gives particular attention to the local and sectarian contexts in addition to addressing Korean-Japanese interactions and exchanges. Chapter 1 provides an overview of both late Chosŏn and early Meiji Buddhism. For both groups of Buddhists, the historical contexts in which they were embedded shaped their perspectives and, more important, their impulse to look across the ocean as one means of furthering their interests. Both groups had been, or were, experiencing marginalization and seeking relevance in worlds that were recently turned upside down. Whereas Japanese Buddhists were overcoming their shock at seeing their centuries-long political and social influence undermined by an emergent nationalism that associated Buddhism with effete and decadent foreign (i.e., Chinese) influence, Korean Buddhists had suffered a more long-standing and comprehensive marginalization under Chosŏn rule. Thus, for Japanese Buddhists, Korea—and Korean Buddhism—presented one possible venue in which to both demonstrate their continued relevance and perhaps assert a different kind of influence no longer possible in Japan. For Korean Buddhists, Japanese Buddhists, who possessed resources and influence unimaginable in Chosŏn Korea, appeared as potentially valuable allies who could aid their efforts to emerge from the profound marginalization and discrimination they endured.

Concentrating on the Japanese side, chapter 2 examines the academic discourse on *fukkyō*, or evangelism, in modern Japanese Buddhism. Faced with the recent intrusion of Christian missionaries in Japan, Buddhists began constructing new understandings of Buddhism that rendered it fundamentally evangelistic in nature. This involved recasting Buddhism's history in Japan as evangelical and expansive in the same way that Christianity seemed to be. This chapter also introduces Japanese Buddhist missionary efforts in Korea.

Chapter 3 delves further into sectarian interests, specifically how the efforts of missionaries from different sects influenced the Korean government's attitudes toward Buddhism in general, and how this resulted in new Korean state attitudes toward Buddhism. The Korean Buddhist response to their Japanese counterparts is the focus of chapter 4, in addition to both the Korean government and Japanese resident general's often suspicious response to the efforts of Japanese missionaries to seek control of Korean Buddhism. One fascinating aspect of this is the degree to which the Japanese authorities undermined Japanese Buddhist efforts, seeing their involvement as potentially counterproductive to government interests. This is in stark contrast to the Government General's later full-fledged support of Japanese Christian missionary efforts in colonial Korea. The Japanese Christians were a tiny group, however, and the drastic difference in scope and scale may account for the Japanese colonial government's very different approaches to these two groups.

In chapter 5, Kim homes in on a key figure in the attempted alliance: Takeda Hanshi (1863–1911). Long considered the villain in this story, Takeda is instead recast as an advocate who tried to leverage the institutional influence of his own Soto Zen sect to revitalize Korean Buddhism. Chapter 6 follows this line of inquiry further, examining the negotiations and debates leading up to the infamous Soto-Wŏnjong Alliance by highlighting the role played by Yi Hoegwang (1862–1933). Rather than consider the alliance as the ruthless takeover of Korean Buddhism by Japanese Buddhism, Kim argues that Yi, in particular, viewed the potential alliance with Takeda and the Soto sect as a way of advancing the domestic interests of the Wŏnjong sect. He also reveals the important role of the largely forgotten Kim Yŏnggi (1877?) in negotiating this alliance.

The eventual failure of the alliance is the focus of chapter 7. Kim presents an in-depth analysis of Takeda's *Treatise for the Six Truths of the Wŏnjong*, a present-

ing it as an attempt to envision a framework for the revitalization of Korean Buddhism. Kim argues that the failure of the alliance can partly be explained by the efforts of Korean Buddhists to strategically play different Japanese sects off each other. Ultimately the 1911 Temple Ordinance, in which the newly established Korean Government General arrogated to itself full authority over the establishment and maintenance of temples and ordination and promotion of clergy, made it impossible for Japanese and Korean Buddhists to carve out a space of their own. Far from being eager agents of the state, Japanese Buddhists were ultimately made impotent by government intervention.

The main chapters are followed by a brief conclusion and postscript that present broader observations concerning the long-term significance of these earlier Buddhists's attempts to forge an alliance based on a common vision of a pan-Asian Buddhism in opposition to an intrusive and invasive Christianity. Kim also argues that the 1911 Temple Ordinance helped shape long-standing structures within Korean Buddhism that far outlasted the colonial period.

Kim's study is a welcome and refreshing perspective on a topic and issues that have often been burdened by an overdetermined view of a particularly fraught historical period. The comprehensiveness of this work, a deliberate choice by the author to demonstrate that sectarian and regional contexts mattered as much as international and diplomatic concerns, is well-taken in theory, but the effect can at times be overwhelming. Kim does provide lists of key figures and brief overviews of the main organizations and institutions that figure in this study, but even with these aids, keeping track of participants and the diverse and often inconsistent ideas and motives that drove them can be challenging at times. But the effort is well worth it: Kim's use of a rich multilingual archive—including obscure sectarian periodicals—and his careful attention to the concerns and aspirations of this diverse group of transnational Buddhists at the eve of Japan's colonization of Korea is a welcome addition to scholarship on Japanese empire, modern Korea, and transnational imperialism, in addition to Buddhist and religious studies.

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