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Buddhism in Ancient Korean Kingdoms

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Ancient Korea

Gojoseon was the first Korean kingdom, located in the north of the peninsula and Manchuria, later alongside the state of Jin in the south of the peninsula. The founding legend of Gojoseon, which is recorded in the *Samguk Yusa* (1281) and other medieval Korean books, states that the country was established in 2333 BCE by Dangun, said to be descended from heaven¹. While no evidence has been found that supports whatever facts may lie beneath this, the account has played an important role in developing Korean national identity². The historical Gojoseon kingdom was first mentioned in Chinese records in the early 7th century BCE.³ By about the 4th century BCE, Gojoseon had developed to the point where its existence was well known in China.⁴

Around 300 BCE, a state called Jin arose in the southern part of the Korean peninsula. Very little is known about Jin, but it established relations with Han China and exported artifacts to the Yayoi of Japan. Around 100 BCE, Jin evolved into the Samhan confederacies.

Many smaller states sprang from the former territory of Gojoseon such as Buyeo, Okjeo, Dongye, Goguryeo, and Baekje. The Three Kingdoms refer to Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla, although Buyeo and the Gaya confederacy existed into the 5th and 6th centuries.⁵

¹Hwang, Kyung-moon. *A History of Korea, An Episodic Narrative*. Palgrave Macmillan. 2010 p. 328.

²Connor, Mary E. *The Koreas, A global studies handbook*. ABC-CLIO. 2002 Print p.307

³Peterson, Mark; Margulies, Phillip. *A Brief History of Korea*. Infobase Publishing. 2009 Print.

⁴Lee Ki-baik. *A new history of Korea*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1984

⁵Lee, Hyun-hee, Sung-soo Park, Nae-hyun Yoon. *New History of Korea*. Jimoondang, 2005. Print. Ser. 30.

When Buddhism was originally introduced to Korea from the first dynasty of Imperial China in 372⁶, or about 800 years after the death of the historical Buddha, Shamanism was the indigenous religion. Shamanism holds that human beings, as well as natural forces and inanimate objects all, possess spirits which must be appeased. As it was not seen to conflict with the rites of nature worship, Buddhism was allowed to blend in with Shamanism. The two religions blended to produce a form of Buddhism that is uniquely Korean. An elementary form of Chinese Buddhism was being taught, consisting of the teaching of Karma and the search for happiness which seemed to blend well with the indigenous Shamanism, so it was quickly assimilated.⁷ The mountains that were believed to be the residence of spirits in pre-Buddhist times became the sites of Buddhist temples. Korean Shamanism regarded three spirits with special reverence and importance: the Mountain Spirit, *Sanshin* (who is usually depicted as an old man with a tiger at his feet), *Toksong*, or the *Recluse*, and *Ch'ilsong* (the spirit of the seven stars, the Big Dipper). Buddhism accepted and absorbed these three spirits and, even today, special shrines are set aside for them in most temples. The Mountain Spirit, in particular, receives due veneration following the ceremonies honoring the Buddha in the main hall. This is in case the local mountain spirits, on whose land the temple stands, should become angry.⁸ This blend of Buddhism and Shamanism became known as Korean Buddhism, although the fundamental teachings of the Buddha remained.⁹

During the 4th century CE, the Korean peninsula was politically divided into three kingdoms: Goguryeo in the north (which included territory currently in Russia and China),

⁶University, Columbia. *300 to 600 CE Expanding Zones of Exchange and Encounter*. 2009. Web. 2016.

⁷“Buddhism in Korea.” Buddhist Studies: Mahayana Buddhism: Korea. Buddha Dharma Education Association, 2008. Web 09 May 2017

⁸“*Buddhism in Korea*”. Korean Buddhism Magazine, 1997 Web. 09 May 2017.

⁹*Korean Buddhism*. 9 October 2016. Web. October 2016

Baekje in the southwest, and Silla in the southeast. There is substantial evidence of an earlier introduction of Buddhism than traditionally believed. A mid-4th-century tomb, unearthed near Pyongyang, is found to include Buddhist designs as part of its ceiling ornamentation.

Korean Buddhist monks traveled to China or India to study Buddhism in the late Three Kingdoms Period, especially in the 6th century. In 526, the monk Gyeomik from Baekje traveled through the southern sea route to India to learn Sanskrit and study the Vinaya (rules of conduct for the monastic community). Paya (562–613?) a monk from Goguryeo, is said to have studied under the Tiantai Master Zhiyi. Other Korean monks of the period brought back numerous scriptures from abroad and conducted missionary activity throughout Korea.

Several schools of thought developed in Korea during these early times:

1. Samnon or East Asian Mādhyamaka School focused on Mādhyamaka doctrine.
2. Gyeyul (*Vinaya* in Sanskrit) school was mainly concerned with the study and implementation of sila "moral discipline."
3. Yeolban (*Nirvana* in Sanskrit) school, which was based on the themes of the *Mahayana Mahāparinirvāṇa Sutra*.

Toward the end of the Three Kingdoms Period, the Wonyung School was formed. It would lead the actualization of the metaphysics of interpenetration as found in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* and soon was considered the premier school, especially among the educated aristocracy. This school was later known as Hwaeom and was the longest lasting of these 'imported' schools. It had strong ties with the Beopseong, the indigenous Korean school of thought.¹⁰

¹⁰*Korean Buddhism*. 9 October 2016. Web. October 2016

Korean Eras

Goguryeo (37BCE – 660CE)

By the beginning of the first century CE, most of the small states of the Proto-Three Kingdom Era were absorbed by three states that grew in political and economic clout.¹¹ Dongye, Okjeo, and Buyeo were absorbed by the rising state of Goguryeo. Goguryeo (Figure 1) was the most powerful of the three states of the Three Kingdoms Era. The two kings who brought much pride and renown to the kingdom were Gwanggaeto and Jangsu of the fifth century CE.¹²

Goguryeo was in constant rivalry with the smaller Baekje and Silla kingdoms, as well as the contemporary Gaya Confederation and regional heavyweight China.¹³ The kingdom flourished in the 5th and 6th century CE and had left a rich cultural heritage best seen in its tomb art and architecture. The kingdom was finally crushed by a combined Tang and Silla army in 668. After that, it became a Chinese province, but Goguryeo would not be forgotten as it gave its name to the modern state of Korea.¹⁴



Figure 1 Map of Korean Kingdoms

¹¹Candice Coucher, Charles Leguin, Linda Walton. "Religion and State: Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam." Candice Coucher, Charles Leguin, Linda Walton. *In the Balance; Themes in World History*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1998. Web. <https://www.learner.org/courses/worldhistory/support/reading_7_1.pdf>.

¹²Maps of the World. *Korean Empire*. 2012-2016. Web. October 2016. <<http://www.mapsofworld.com/world-ancient-history/korean-empire-map.html>>

¹³Cartwright, Mark. *Balhae*. 07 October 2016. Web. 21 October 2016. <<http://www.ancient.eu/Balhae/>>

¹⁴*Goguryeo*. 29 September 2016. Web. 21 October 2016.

Goguryeo people worshiped ancestors, considering them supernatural. The people also worshiped and respected Jumong, the founder of Goguryeo. At the annual Dongmaeng Festival, they performed religious rites to ancestors and gods. In Goguryeo, people considered mythical beasts and animals sacred. They worshiped the phoenix, dragon, and the Chinese three-legged bird of the Zhou Dynasty, considering the Chinese three-legged bird the most powerful of the three. Paintings of mythical beasts exist in Goguryeo king tombs today.

Political relationship with Buddhism

Goguryeo became the first kingdom in the region to adopt Buddhism. The government recognized and encouraged the teachings of Buddhism and built many monasteries and shrines during Goguryeo's history. Turning to domestic stability and the unification of various conquered tribes, Sosurim of Goguryeo proclaimed new laws, embraced Buddhism as the national religion in 372, and established a national educational institute called the Taehak.¹⁵

Notable Masters and Literary works

In 372, the monk Sun Dowan was sent by Fu Jian (337–385) of the Imperial Chinese dynasty Qin to the court of the King Sosurim of Goguryeo. He brought texts and statues (possibly of Maitreya, who was popular in Buddhism in Central Asia), and the Goguryeo royalty and their subjects quickly accepted his teachings.¹⁶ Early Buddhism in Silla developed under the influence of Goguryeo. Some monks from Goguryeo came to Silla and preached among the people, making a few converts. In 551, Hyeryang, a Goguryeo monk, was

¹⁵New World Encyclopedia. *Baekje*. 6 May 2016. Web. 21 October 2016. <<http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Baekje>>.

¹⁶R.E Buswell *Tracing Back the Radiance: Chinul's Korean Way of Zen*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991. Print.

appointed the first National Patriarch of Silla. He first presided over the "Hundred-Seat Dharma Assembly" and the "Dharma of Eight Prohibitions."¹⁷

Balhae (698CE-926CE)

Balhae existed as an ancient kingdom established after the fall of Goguryeo. After Goguryeo's capital and southern territories fell to Unified Silla, Dae Jo-yeong, a former Goguryeo general of possible Mohe ethnicity, established Jin (Chinese, Zhen), later called Balhae, by uniting various Mohe and Goguryeo elements. Balhae occupied southern parts of Manchuria (Northeast China) and Primorsky Krai, a northern part of the Korean peninsula. The Khitans defeated Balhae in 926, becoming a part of the Liao Dynasty as Goguryeo absorbed southern parts.

Balhae stands in the direct line of the mythical foundation of Korea in Dangun (2333 BCE) and legendary foundation in Gija (1222 BCE). The controversy boils between Chinese, North Korean, and South Korean archaeologists and anthropologists over the origin of the northern kingdoms, including Balhae. Many Chinese scholars claim Balhae, and previous kingdoms as provinces of China whereas many Korean scholars claim indigenous roots for the northern Korean people. The argument has political overtones as a way to lay claim to the territory of former Goguryeo, Goguryeo, and Balhae. Regardless, the influence of China upon northern Koreans has been pronounced.¹⁸

Despite the occasional breakout of hostilities, trade links were established with both of Balhae's immediate neighbors and with Japan. Such was the regularity of trade with its southern neighbor that a trade route with 39 stations wound down from Balhae to Silla. Diplomatic missions were sent by Silla in 792 and 812. Cultural ties were also strong with

¹⁷Buswell, Robert E. *The Zen Monastic Experience: Buddhist Practice in Contemporary Korea*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992. Print.

¹⁸New World Encyclopedia. *Goguryeo*. 18 December 2013. Web. 20 October 2016. <<http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Goguryeo>>.

China, as they had always been with Korea in general. Balhae exported metals and horses while China sent books and fine manufactured goods in return. Administration, laws, education, literature, and art all followed Chinese lines or displayed a marked influence.¹⁹ In return, Balhae sent students both for study and to enter the exams of the Tang administration. Buddhism was adopted, as it had been in the earlier Korean kingdoms, and Confucian principles were applied to the state's system of administration.

Buddhism flourished as the state religion. The remains of ten Buddhist temples have been found in the remains of the capital of Balhae, Sanggyŏng. Together with such Buddhist artifacts as Buddha statuettes and stone lanterns suggest that Buddhism played a predominant role in the life of the Balhae people. The Balhae tomb Majeokdal in Sinpo, South Hamgyong Province, are associated with pagodas and temples: This also indicates that Buddhism had a strong influence over the funeral rituals in Balhae. After the fall of Balhae, sixty monks from Balhae including the monk Jaeung fled together to the newly founded kingdom of Goryeo (918-1392).²⁰

Baekje (18BCE – 600CE)

The kingdom of Baekje reached the peak of its extent by the fourth century CE. The state encompassed the Mahan states and occupied most of West Korea. The state is known to have had rich cultural and trade exchanges with Japan and South China. The kingdom of Baekje centered on modern-day Seoul.²¹

Baekje holds a unique position in Korean history by its influence on the creation of Korean and Japanese culture. The impact of China upon Korea and Japan has been long known and accepted by East Asian scholars. On the other hand, the impact of Korea upon Japanese civilization has been hotly contested by Korean and Japanese scholars. The evidence from

¹⁹Cartwright, Mark. *Balhae*. 07 October 2016. Web. 21 October 2016. <<http://www.ancient.eu/Balhae/>>

²⁰Wikipedia. *Korean Buddhism*. 9 October 2016. Web. October 2016.

²¹Maps of the World. *Korean Empire*. 2012-2016. Web. October 2016. <<http://www.mapsofworld.com/world-ancient-history/korean-empire-map.html>>

documents and archaeological sites lends support to the claim that Baekje, and Korea in general, had a profound impact upon Japanese Buddhism and art. In the same way, Baekje had a profound impact on the culture and religion of the Unified Silla dynasty.²²

To contend with the military pressure from Goguryeo and Silla, Baekje, known as Kudara in Japanese, established close relations with the Japanese kingdom of Wa. According to the Korean chronicle *Samguk Sagi*, King Asin sent his son Jeonji as a hostage in 397. In exchange, Japan provided military support. The *Samguk Sagi* and *Samguk Yusa* cite Baekje royalty and nobility as influential dignitaries in the Wa court. Baekje maintained influence in Japan and ensured the continuation of the Yamato alliance with Baekje, as in the time of Emperor Yomei when the Buddhist constructed the temple of Horyuji. Scholars maintain that Muryeong of Baekje, the twenty-fifth King, had been born in Japan. Baekje's influence upon Japanese culture during the Yamato period has been a contentious issue in contemporary relations between South Korea and Japan. The exact nature of the relationship has been undergoing continual investigation with some scholars considering Yamato an extension/colony of Baekje's expansion efforts. Japanese scholars usually claim the opposite relationship. Soga no Koma in Japan, the father of influential Soga no Iname²³, referred to using the same Chinese characters as the abbreviation for Goguryeo. Soga no Iname promoted Korean Buddhism in Japan.²⁴

²²New World Encyclopedia. *Baekje*. 6 May 2016. Web. 21 October 2016. <<http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Baekje>>.

²³Soga clan was one of the most powerful clans of the Asuka period of the early Japanese state – the Yamato polity – and played a major role in the spread of Buddhism. Through the 5th and 7th centuries, the Soga monopolized the *kabana* or hereditary rank of Great Omi and was the first of many families to dominate the Imperial House of Japan by influencing the order of succession and government policy. (Wikipedia)

²⁴New World Encyclopedia. *Baekje*. 6 May 2016. Web. 21 October 2016. <<http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Baekje>>.

Chinese influence is confirmed by the Baekje monarch's adoption of the title *wang* (king) from the late 3rd century CE. Other instances of Chinese influence are seen in education, writing (adapted to the Korean language), poetry, the arts, and burial practices. Another area of influence was the early popularity of Taoism and, even more so, Confucianism.

Political relationship with Buddhism

In 384, during the reign of King Chimnyu, Buddhism was adopted as the state religion by the Baekje kingdom after it was introduced there by the Chinese monk Marananta. Buddhism replaced the former belief system based on the idea that the king was a son of God. Similarly, Baekje culture was exported abroad, especially with teachers, scholars, and artists traveling to Japan and with them went Chinese culture such as classic Confucian texts but also elements of Korean culture. An example, as can be seen in the wooden buildings constructed there by Korean architects.²⁵

Notable Masters and Literary works

In 526, the Baekje monk Gyeomik went directly to Central India and came back with a collection of Vinaya texts, accompanied by the Indian monk Paedalta. After returning to Baekje, he translated the Buddhist scriptures in Sanskrit into seventy-two volumes. The Gye-yul School in Baekje was established by Gyeomik about a century earlier than in China. As a result of the work, he is regarded as the father of Vinaya studies in Korea.²⁶

Silla (57BCE - 935CE)

Silla, the third of the three kingdoms, was located to the southeast of Korea. Developing around 20CE, Silla soon became a dominant power. Although often at war with

²⁵Cartwright, Mark. *Balhae*. 07 October 2016. Web. 21 October 2016. <<http://www.ancient.eu/Balhae/>>

²⁶Buswell, R.E. *Tracing Back the Radiance: Chinul's Korean Way of Zen*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991. Print.

Goguryeo or Baekje, Silla also had cultural exchanges with the two states.²⁷ Korea reached close to its present boundaries during the Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392), from which its Western name “Korea” is derived. The succeeding Choson Dynasty (1392-1910) further consolidated Korea’s national boundaries and distinctive cultural practices.²⁸

Political relationship with Buddhism

Buddhism became so popular during this period that many kings converted. Cities and locations were renamed after famous places during the time of Buddha.²⁹ Buddhist studies in this period were concentrated on the teachings of the Three Treatises,³⁰ Cheontae (Tiantai), and the *Nirvana Sutra*. Buddhism flourished under the patronage and protection of the royal houses and their associated aristocrats. The Buddhist teachings of reincarnation and rebirth, based on the concept of karma, justified their position as rulers. Religion offered a sense of well-being for the state and by extension for the ordinary individual. Monks enjoyed a high social status and were influential in the affairs of society. There were special ranks of recognition of *kuksa* (national teacher) and *wangsa* (King’s teacher). The Buddhist spirit was very influential in the political ideology. Many kings took Buddhist names: Pophung (Promoting the Dharma) and Chinhung (Truly Promoting). King Chinhung names his two sons after two of the four wheels of the Cakravartin king in Buddhist lore from India:

²⁷ Maps of the World. *Korean Empire*. 2012-2016. Web. October 2016. <<http://www.mapsofworld.com/world-ancient-history/korean-empire-map.html>>

²⁸ Asia Society. *Korean History and Political Geography*. 2016. Web. 21 October 2016. <<http://asiasociety.org/education/korean-history-and-political-geography>>

²⁹ Buswell, Robert E *Tracing Back the Radiance: Chinul's Korean Way of Zen*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991. Print.

³⁰ The Three-Treatise (or Sanlun) school is the orthodox Chinese Mādhyamika tradition, which was pioneered by Kumārajīva (344? –413?), a prestigious thinker and translator of Indian extraction, and his distinguished disciple Sengzhao (Seng-chao; 374? –414), and later vigorously revived by Jizang (Chi-tsang; 549–623). The school derives its name “three-treatise” from its emphasis on the three translation texts of early Indian Mādhyamaka, *the Middle Treatise (Zhong lun)*, *the Twelve Gate Treatise (Shiermen lun)*, and *the Hundred Treatise (Bai lun)*. Both Sengzhao and Jizang, the two leading philosophers of the school, uphold the view that all things are indeterminate and empty. Sengzhao affirms the nonduality of motion and rest, the myriad things and emptiness, and also the subject and the object. Jizang highlights the notion of non-acquisition (or nonattachment) and famously reinterprets and reconstructs the Mādhyamika doctrine of two truths. (Philpapers.org)

Kumnyun (Golden Wheel) and Unnyun (Silver Wheel). Queen Sondok was called by the name Tongman and Queen Chindok by the name Sungman.³¹

Silla Buddhism had three very distinct periods of development.

1. Early Period (From King Pophung(514-540) to the first half of King Munmu's reign (661-681).
2. Prospering Period(after unification)-the last half of King Munmu'time until King Hyeogong(765-780)
3. Declining period (lasting until the fall of the dynasty)

From the Prospering Period, there were major changes in the Buddhist tradition. The bodhisattva ideals faded and were replaced by a dependence on rituals and ceremonies which were performed by rote without the spirit of the Mahayana teachings. During the declining Period, thescholastic study of the Dharma had less support.³²

Notable Masters and Literary Works



The monk Jajang(Figure 2) is credited with having been a major force in the adoption of Buddhism as a national religion. Jajang is also known for his participation in the founding of the Korean sangha.³³ Another great scholar to emerge from the Silla Period was Wonhyo. He renounced his religious life to serve the people better. Wonhyo married a princess for a short time and had a son. He wrote many

*Figure 2*Jajang (590-658)

Lancaster, Lewis K., and Chai-Shin Yu. *Introduction of Buddhism to Korea: New Cultural Patterns*. Berkeley (Calif.): Asian Humanities, 1989. Print.

³²Lancaster, Lewis R., and Chai-Shin Yu. *Introduction of Buddhism to Korea: New Cultural Patterns*. Berkeley (Calif.): Asian Humanities, 1989. Print.

³³ Sangha is a word in Pali and Sanskrit meaning "association", "assembly," "company" or "community" and most commonly refers in Buddhism to the monastic community of bhikkhus (monks) and bhikkhuni (nuns). These communities are traditionally referred to as the *bhikkhu-sangha* or *bhikkhuni-sangha*. As a separate category, those who have attained any of the four stages of enlightenment, whether or not they are ordained monastics, are referred to as the *āryasaṅgha* "noble Sangha" (Wikipedia)



Figure 3 Uisang (625-702)

treatises on his philosophy which centered on the unity and interrelatedness of all things. He left for China to study Buddhism with a close friend, Uisang, but only made it part of the way there. The legend is that Wonhyo awoke one night very thirstily, found a container with cool water, drank, and returned to sleep. The next morning he saw the container from which he had drunk was a human skull and he realized all enlightenment depended on the mind. He saw no reason to continue to China, so he returned home. His companion, Uisang, continued to on to China. He studied under Chih-yen in China and later held the title of National Teacher. Uisang (Figure 3) received great acclaim as the founder of the Flower Garland school. When he returned from his studies, Uisang explained the school's philosophy and trained disciples. He approached the problem of unity through the teaching of One Vehicle, the major theme of the *Avatamsaka-sutra*. He was in agreement with the spirit of Wonhyo's teachings, but he taught it in pictorial form. A meander design made up of a poem consisting of 210 Chinese characters entitled the *Hwaomilsungpopkyedo*.³⁴ The meander begins with the word *pop* (Dharma) and the remaining characters weave their way until the final word near the center which is *pul* (Buddha). The poem taught one to go forward through the right path firmly holding the Dharma. Uisang stressed practice and monastic life. His emphasis on practice is reflected not only in his structure but also in the works of his disciples. The disciples either summarized the essences of the scripture for the purpose of practice or to explain the gate of contemplation and action to attain Buddhahood.³⁵ The monk Won'gwang set out the precepts of loyalty, filial piety, sincerity, courage, and benevolence as

³⁴Lancaster, Lewis R., and Chai-Shin Yu. *Introduction of Buddhism to Korea: New Cultural Patterns*. Berkeley (Calif.): Asian Humanities, 1989. Print

³⁵Bary, Peter H Lee and Wm. Theodore de. *Sources of Korean Tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. Print.

the *Five Commandments for Laymen*.³⁶ There was another famous meander made by a Silla monk, the *Haerin sammaedo* (The Ocean Seal Samadhi Meander), which follows the format used by Uisang. P'yohun, another disciple of Uisang, wrote a poem urging the realization of *pratitya-samutpada*. From the teaching of these monks, the people of Silla learned that these doctrines could be applied in the realm of social society. They saw that the individual and the group are not separate, but interrelated to one another. The rulers and people were also subject to this same notion of "being one" because there is no difference between self and others.³⁷

Buddhist influence on society and culture

The introduction of Buddhism meant the importation not only of the religion but also of an advanced Chinese culture because by nature Buddhism was neither closed nor exclusive. The inclusion of Chinese monks in Silla indicates that Buddhism provided the social and spiritual basis for the development of Silla into a state.³⁸ The Silla dynasty, emerging in the southern half of the Korean Peninsula during the third century CE, played a major role in developing Korea's cultural tradition. Based upon aristocratic "true bone" and "hallow bone" rank, an aristocratic class of rulers arose that brought splendor to Silla society. Gyeongju emerged as a city of wealth and power. Silla military developed tactics and weapons, including the famed Hwarang horse-back Buddhist warriors that overpowered their neighbors and won the respect of China. Silla's welcome to Buddhism and Confucianism,

³⁶Bowker, John, ed. *Cambridge Illustrated History Religions*. East Sussex: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 2002. Print.

³⁷Lancaster, Lewis R., and Chai-Shin Yu. *Introduction of Buddhism to Korea: New Cultural Patterns*. Berkeley (Calif.): Asian Humanities, 1989. Print

³⁸Peter H Lee and. Wm. Theodore deBary and *Sources of Korean Tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. Print.

blending with the already present Shamanism, created a rich spiritual culture adorned with beauty and knowledge.³⁹

Silla was the last of the three kingdoms to accept Buddhism. This occurred only after the martyrdom of the courtier Ich'adon, who offered to be executed in the hope that miraculous events stemming from his death would persuade ministers to look favorably on Buddhism; the religion was immediately recognized on his death. Paintings of this are in the temple at Haein-sa⁴⁰, and a stone monument honoring his martyrdom is at the National Museum of Kyongju. Buddhism rapidly changed Silla society; its ideological role, including politics, diplomacy and living style.⁴¹The ethical side of Buddhism also influenced the values of the Silla Kingdom. The idea that humans must live with a generous and compassionate attitude and humor in accord with the ideal of wisdom (*prajna*) was emphasized.⁴²

³⁹New World Encyclopedia. *Silla*. 18 September 2015. Web.
<<http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Silla>>

⁴⁰Haein-sa (Temple of the Ocean Mudra) is a head temple of the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism in the Gaya Mountains South Gyeongsang Province South Korea. Haein-sa is most notable for being the home of the *Tripitaka Koreana*, the whole of the Buddhist Scriptures carved onto 81,350 wooden printing blocks, which it has housed since 1398. (Organization)

⁴¹Bowker, John, ed. *Cambridge Illustrated History Religions*. East Sussex: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 2002. Print.

⁴²Ki-Yong, Rhi. "'Han'gukjok say ui il chont'ong" (A Tradition in the Korean Way of Thought) Tongbang hakchi." Rhi, Ki-Yong. *Han'guk pulgyo yon'gu (Study of Korean Buddhism)*. Vol. 10. Pennsylvania State University, 1982. 127-62.



Figure 4 Maitreya in Meditation

By the time of King Beopheung (514–540), Silla was a full-fledged kingdom. Silla absorbed the Gaya confederacy during the Gaya–Silla Wars, annexing Geumgwan Gaya in 532 and conquering Daegaya in 562, thereby expanding its borders to the Nakdong River basin.⁴³ There was a youthful warrior elite, Hwarang-do, some of whom were regarded as incarnations of Maitreya, (Figure 4) the savior Buddha of the Future. In ancient times poetry and music played an important part in the daily lives of the Korean people. Little of the early Korean poetry has survived. The word *hyangga* designates Korean songs, but the term specifically covers twenty-five extant poems produced from the seventh to the tenth centuries. The songs and music of the Three Kingdoms were closely allied to the religious life of people living in clan tribal societies. Both songs and music were essential to such rites as the Puyo, Koguryo and East Ye worship of Heaven or during the harvest festivals. Earlier songs, originating in shamanist chants, were sung during festivals and rites. Seventeen of the twenty-five *hyangga* are Buddhist for inspiration and content, reflecting certain trends in Silla and early Koryo Buddhism. Belief in the Pure Land of Maitreya and Amitayus is reflected in “Prayer to Amitayus,” “Song of Tusita Heaven.” Belief in Avalokitesvara the Sound-Observer is reflected in “Hymn to the Thousand–Eyed Sound Observer. Selections also include poems in praise of, the Hwarang-do.⁴⁴ The Buddhist ceremonies such as Inwanghoe, ‘the Assemblies of Benevolent Kings,’ or P’algwanhoe, ‘the Eight Prohibitory Commands for Laymen, served to protect the nation.

⁴³New World Encyclopedia. *Silla*. 18 September 2015. Web. <<http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=Silla>>

⁴⁴Peter H Lee and Wm. Theodore deBary. *Sources of Korean Tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. Print.

The Vinaya master Chanjan oversaw the building of the famous nine-story pagoda of Hwangnyong Monastery in the center of the Silla capital, Kyongju. It would reinforce Silla's dominance among the Three Kingdoms.⁴⁵ Buddhism provided a new philosophy to deal with duality, whether in subject-object relations or such important problems as life and death. This was based on the Mahayana teaching that samsara and nirvana are not different from each other.⁴⁶

Unified Silla (668CE – 935CE)

After the T'ang army, with the help of the Silla state in southern Korea, defeated first the Baekje state in 660 and then the Goguryeo in the North in 668, the Three Kingdoms period in Korea was at an end. The T'ang Empire is said to have had designs to annex all of Korea to its domains, but the Silla state cleverly managed to drive out the Chinese forces, after that it united all the three states under that Great Silla domain. The period that followed was unprecedented in its cultural achievement, heightened by a close relationship with T'ang China. Many Korean scholars and priests went to China, and Chinese teachers, priests, and artists came to Korea in return. Buddhism was a dominant factor in society during all of the Unified Silla periods, and magnificent temples were built throughout the land. The Silla capital at Kyongju in southeast Korea was created as a copy of the T'ang capital, with gorgeous palaces for the rulers. Of these glories remain today not only the tombs of these rulers but also many stone and bronze Buddhist images.⁴⁷

This was a high point in the scholarly studies of Buddhism in Korea. Silla monks were from aristocratic families and were both celebrated scholars and religious leaders of the

⁴⁵Bowker, John, ed. *Cambridge Illustrated History Religions*. East Sussex: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 2002. Print.

⁴⁶Lancaster, Lewis R., and Chai-Shin Yu. *Introduction of Buddhism to Korea: New Cultural Patterns*. Berkeley (Calif.): Asian Humanities, 1989. Print.

⁴⁷Neville, Tove E. *Eleven-Headed Avalokitesvara*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1998. Print.

nation. They traveled not only to Tang China but also to India to bring back the latest Buddhist teachings.⁴⁸The most popular areas of study were Wonyung, *Yusik* or East Asian Yogācāra, *Jeongto* or Pure Land Buddhism, and the indigenous Korean *Beopseong* (dharma-nature school). Uisang's work contributed to Hwaeom Buddhism and became the predominant doctrinal influence on Korean Buddhism together with Wonhyo's *tongbulgyo* (interpenetrated Buddhism) thought. Hwaeom principles were deeply assimilated into the Korean meditational school, the Korean Seon School, where they made a profound effect on its basic attitudes. Influences from Silla Buddhism in general, and from these two philosophers in particular, even crept "backward" into Chinese Buddhism. The intellectual developments of Silla Buddhism brought significant cultural achievements in many areas, including painting, literature, sculpture, and architecture. During this period, many large temples were built. Two paramount achievements were the temple Bulguksa and the cave retreat of Seokguram. Bulguksa was famous for its jeweled pagodas, while Seokguram was known for the beauty of its stone sculpture.⁴⁹

During the Declining Period, a new form of Buddhism emerged based on the Chan from China. Nine divisions of this school developed in Korea and became known as the "Nine Mountains of Seon" This form of Buddhism was not easy for the masses to understand. It was more closely related to the tastes of the aristocracy. Social upheaval which marked the decline of the dynasty brought about a return to popular religious practices, and until the stability of the Goryeo dynasty, the ruling classes lost their role of leadership in the society. Silla Buddhism provided a spiritual basis for the kingdom during its time of greatest

⁴⁸ Bowker, John, ed. *Cambridge Illustrated History Religions*. East Sussex: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 2002. Print.

⁴⁹ Wikipedia. *Korean Buddhism*. 9 October 2016. Web. October 2016

development and prosperity, the decline of Buddhism also marked the decline of the kingdom.⁵⁰

The Goryeo Dynasty (935CE-1392CE)

The Goryeo Dynasty ruled Korea from 935CE until about 1392CE. By 1231CE, the Korean Empire faced the onslaught of Mongol attacks by the Yuan Dynasty of China. The Yuan Dynasty was founded by Kublai Khan, grandson of Genghis Khan, the renowned Mongol emperor. From 1231 to around 1350, the Goryeo Dynasty ruled Korea as a vassal state of the Chinese Empire. By 1350, King Gongmin was fairly independent and dealt with the administration of his country as a sovereign ruler, but the end of the Goryeo Dynasty was near. In 1392, Taejo of Choson dethroned the Goryeo king and took over the empire, thus founding the Choson Dynasty.⁵¹

Political relationship with Buddhism

The first monarch of the Goryeo dynasty, T'aejo was a devout Buddhist who built ten great monasteries in the capital. Geomancy (the art of placing or arranging buildings or other sites auspiciously) was used to select an auspicious location for these temples. This reflected the syncretic character of Korean Buddhism. He instituted the Ten Injunctions which formed the moral constitution for his descendants, upholding Buddhist teachings being one of the first of these. The system of Wangsa, royal preceptor or kuksa, national preceptor, titles that had been granted to distinguished monks acting as state advisers since the Unified Silla dynasty continued. It also became customary for one of the members of the royal family to become a monk.⁵²

⁵⁰Lancaster, Lewis R., and Chai-Shin Yu. *Introduction of Buddhism to Korea: New Cultural Patterns*. Berkeley (Calif.): Asian Humanities, 1989. Print

⁵¹Maps of the World. *Korean Empire*. 2012-2016. Web. October 2016. <<http://www.mapsofworld.com/world-ancient-history/korean-empire-map.html>>

⁵²Bowker, John, ed. *Cambridge Illustrated History Religions*. East Sussex: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 2002. Print.

Notable Masters and Literary works

This period would produce some of Korea's most renowned Seon masters. Three important monks of this period who figured prominently in charting the future course of Korean Seon were contemporaries and friends: Gyeonghan Baeg'un (1298–1374), Taego Bou (1301–1382) and Naong Hyegeun (1320–1376). All three went to Yuan China to learn the hwadu practice of the Linji school (traditional Chinese: Korean: Imje) that had been popularized by Jinul. All three returned and established the sharp, confrontational methods of the Imje School in their teaching. Each of the three was also said to have had hundreds of disciples, such that this new infusion into Korean Seon brought about considerable effect.⁵³



Figure 5 Uich'on (1055- monks to be "three teachings"⁵⁴ exponents appeared.

Despite the Imje influence, which was considered to be anti-scholarly in nature, Gyeonghan and Naong, under the influence of Jinul and the traditional *tongbulgyo* tendency, showed an unusual interest in scriptural study, as well as a strong understanding of Confucianism and Taoism. This was due to the increasing influence of Chinese philosophy as the foundation of official education. From this time, a marked tendency for Korean Buddhist

Uich'on (Figure5) was one of the most prominent royal princes, the fourth son of Munjong (ruled 1046-1086). On his return from China, he became the abbot of the Hungwang Temple. There he established the KyojangTogam (Directorate for Buddhist Scriptures) to publish the texts he collected in China. He is regarded as the Korean founder of

⁵³ Wikipedia. *Korean Buddhism*. 9 October 2016. Web. October 2016.

⁵⁴ In Chinese philosophy, the phrase three teachings refers to Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism when considered as a harmonious aggregate. Some of the earliest literary references to the "Three Teachings" idea dates back to the 6th century by prominent Chinese scholars of the time. (Teiser)

the Tiantai School, whose principal teaching is based on the *Lotus Sutra*. The Avatamsaka School was also popular. Uich'on initiated the synthesis of the opposing Buddhist schools of Kyo (doctrinal) and Seon (meditation).

The unique merger of the two schools was accomplished by Pojo Kuksa, the National Preceptor of Broad Radiance, Jinul. His teachings that an individual's awakening should come first, to rescue the multitude, fostered self-discipline and total concentration or meditation. To achieve this goal he relied on *chong* (samādhi, composing the mind) and *hye* (prajñā, wisdom). He founded the Suson Monastery in Chogye Mountain, and his followers are known as the Jogye School, which became part of mainstream Korean Buddhism. Jinul's efforts saw the restoration of the Seon School, by harmonizing doctrinal and meditation traditions.⁵⁵

Buddhist influence on society and culture

This was a time of great turmoil throughout East Asia. The Yuan dynasty of Mongols rose and fell in China, but not before opening up the Eurasian land mass to international travel and commerce. Europeans were able to travel to China from Italy and return, and the modern world was emerging. Under Goryeo, Buddhism thrived as never before. However, at the same time, the Confucian approach to government and society was gaining power and influence among some of the officials. The Goryeo and the other kingdoms of Korea had often followed the patterns of kingship found among the nomadic and steppe empires to the west. These were patterns still based on confederation and selection of leaders based on merit and popularity rather than heredity, the levirate marriage of widows to the brother of the deceased husband and shared role between the king and the religious holy men in governance. As the Yuan dynasty collapsed and the Han People reassumed leadership under

⁵⁵Bowker, John, ed. *Cambridge Illustrated History Religions*. East Sussex: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 2002. Print.

the Ming, Korea moved rapidly toward Sinification and in particular government and society ruled by the Neo-Confucian values of Chu-shi. As part of this Sinification, the Goryeo was replaced by the Choson dynasty that rejected Buddhism and native religious traditions for the Neo-Confucian teachings. The Confucian values led to the establishment of a highly structured patrilineal pattern of descent. Under this new pattern of government, the Confucian rituals began to replace previous ones. The worship of ancestors was no longer allowed in the Buddhism monasteries or among the shamans. All ancestral veneration was delegated to family altars and with this came a complete focus on the male descent with the role of women being subordinated. The Confucian rituals became central to the life of the elite. It was ritual behavior that dominated society and gave instruction for behavior in public and private life. The Neo-Confucian teaching came to be known as *Sirhak, the Teaching of Substance*.⁵⁶

The Korean kingdoms were influenced by Chinese trade goods and culture. Korean writing systems, architecture, political systems, religions, and even musical instruments came from China. Koreans adapted these Chinese things and made them their own. Chinese scholars had devised a kind of printing system using carved wooden blocks. Koreans took this invention one step further and created the first world's first metal movable type in the 12th century. Adaptation of foreign things for their use is a historical characteristic of Korean culture, even today.⁵⁷

Numerous dharma meetings, ceremonies, prayers and offerings combined to bring about a flourishing period in Buddhist art. Splendid illuminated manuscripts of scriptures, written in gold and silver on indigo blue paper, and hanging silk scrolls of sumptuous Buddhist paintings were commissioned by royal or aristocratic devotees. The most frequently copied Buddhist texts were the *Lotus Sutra*, *Avatamsaka Sutra*, and *Amitabha Sutra*, while

⁵⁶Juergensmeyer, Mark, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Global Religions*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. Print.

⁵⁷PBS. *Hidden Korea*. n.d. Web. 2016. <<http://www.pbs.org/hiddenkorea/history.htm>>

paintings for private offerings and prayers often depicted Amitabha Buddha and other bodhisattvas related to the Pure Land, the Buddhist paradise. However, the gradual accumulation of wealth by the monasteries, the illegal endowment of land and the excessive powers of the monastic communities in the later Goryeo period resulted in a drastic deterioration in the spirituality of Goryeo Buddhism.

The collecting and printing of the Buddhist canon, *Daejanggyeong*, were the main tasks of the Goryeo dynasty. The merit accumulated by such a devout action is well documented in the editions of the scriptures. The first Goryeo edition of 5,048 volumes in woodblock print was produced under Hyonjong (ruled 1009-1031) when the Khitans (Liao Kingdom) invaded in 1010. The royal court had faith that Buddha's power would help drive out their enemies and demonstrate the cultural superiority of Goryeo to the 'northern barbarians.'⁵⁸

Tripitaka Koreana

A Tripitaka is a collection of Buddhist scriptures: the Chinese translation is called a *Dazangjing* and is otherwise known as *Yiqiejing* (*All in one Scripture*), *Zangjing* (*Basket Scripture*), or *Sanzangjing* (*Three-Basket Scripture*) The Chinese character zang is germane to the Sanskrit word pitaka (Basket) whose meaning morphed from a run of the mill basket for physical objects such as fruit to a repository of scriptures. A Tripitaka is the compilation of the *Sutra Pitaka* is the 'basket' of Shakyamuni's sermons to his disciples and the masses; the *Vinaya Pitaka*, of axioms to be obeyed by disciples and rules of communal conduct; and the *Abhidharma Pitaka* of commentaries to help understand the other two. This leads to the English term –tri 'three' + Pitaka'basket.'

⁵⁸Bowker, John, ed. *Cambridge Illustrated History Religions*. East Sussex: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 2002. Print.

Shakyamuni's teachings were not set down during his lifetime. Word of mouth was the only option then, in the absence of proper means of documentation, and before people realized the importance of records for posterity. Memory is inherently flawed, and the transmitted content varied depending on the narrator to the point of becoming unrecognizable in some cases.⁵⁹

The Buddha's disciples had to find a solution. Feeling the need to ascertain and set down the discourse before the memory faded, they gathered to exchange their thoughts. These meetings were known as the councils. Kasyapa, one of the chief disciples, convened the first Council shortly after Shakyamuni's passing. The specific decisions were not documented and are unknown. As a result, the first meeting paved the way for subsequent councils, which provided the basic framework for Buddhist scriptures. The disciples who attended the council each recounted what they had heard from the Buddha. These versions were then validated by Ananda, who had been tending Shakyamuni until the months of his death. Shakyamuni's words were gradually assembled and organized into sutras through that process.

The councils held from the 1st century BC to the Mid-1st century BCE. Up to that point, monks would memorize and recite the discourses and did not think of writing them down. The monk's method had intrinsic limitations which raised awareness of the importance of recording the teachings. After many councils, the teachings were finally committed to writing in the form of patra-leaf sutras.⁶⁰

A variety of materials, including leaves of other trees and bamboo, were used in addition to patra leaves to record Shakyamuni's teachings. The subtropical climate with excessive heat and humidity wreaked havoc on the otherwise rot-proof patra-leaf sutra. New

⁵⁹Park, Sang-Jin. *Under the Microscope: The Secrets of the Tripitaka Koreana Woodblocks*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007. Print

⁶⁰Park, Sang-Jin. *Under the Microscope: The Secrets of the Tripitaka Koreana Woodblocks*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007. Print

editions were made continually, with the text evolving slowly. The orders that emerged each recorded their version of the discourses. At some point, several orders were unified into Mahayana Buddhism, whose idea was to guide the masses to the right path toward enlightenment. The tradition expanded its influence in India and beyond. As it did so, it continued revising the content of the sutras. Buddhism made its way to China before a unified framework for Buddhist scriptures was in place.

The sutras took the Silk Road route. This stretched through northwestern India, the Himalayas, and the Taklamakan Desert. The most pressing matter after the introduction of the new doctrines was the translation of the Sanskrit texts into Chinese. The project initially was random and carried by missionary campaigns and the focused attention of the ruling class. It received support from the state that viewed it as a political tool.⁶¹

The translation of sutras took place mostly over 900 years from the 2nd century to the 11th century. The early translators were Chinese speakers from India or Western and Central Asia. It was Xuanzang (602-664) of Tang who became commonly known as “Master Tripitaka” in the *Journey to the West*, that ushered in the golden age of that monumental undertaking which reached its conclusion in the Song Dynasty. Most of the originals written in Sanskrit disappeared. Only the Chinese Tripitakas survived to become the mainstay of the Buddhist faith.⁶²

As the production of Chinese language Tripitakas surged, so did the translators need for a medium to which to write down the scriptures, a number of materials were used to that end, including bamboo strips, wood strips, tree bark, silk, and leather, which were less than ideal for long-term preservation and whose prohibitive price made bulk purchase impossible. Paper was invented in China around that time, but only a select few could afford it. Paper was

⁶¹Park, Sang-Jin. *Under the Microscope: The Secrets of the Tripitaka Koreana Woodblocks*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007. Print

⁶²Park, Sang-Jin. *Under the Microscope: The Secrets of the Tripitaka Koreana Woodblocks*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007. Print

not a suitable option regarding availability and even less from the perspective of maintenance or preservation. Tripitakas were created in stone or metal to ensure permanence. The Fangshan Stone Sutras at Yunju Temple in China is the best-known stone Tripitaka; it consists of, 14,278 engraved stone tablets.

Tripitaka projects were undertaken despite such challenges so as to broaden the readership of the Buddha's discourses. The hand-copied sutras produced on an individual basis were a major obstacle to the propagation of Buddhism. Woodblock Tripitakas were conceived to facilitate maintenance, preservation and mass production through printing.⁶³

The *Tripitaka Koreana* or *Palman Daejanggyeong (Eighty-Thousand Tripitaka)* is a Korean collection of the *Tripitaka*, carved onto 81,258 wooden printing blocks in the 13th century.⁶⁴ It is the world's most comprehensive and oldest intact version of Buddhist canon in Hanja script, with no known errors or errata in the 52,330,152 characters which are organized in over 1496 titles and 6568 volumes. Each wood block measures 24 centimeters in height and 70 centimeters in length. The thickness of the blocks ranges from 2.6 to 4 centimeters, and each weighs about three to four kilograms. The woodblocks (Figure 5) are almost as tall as Mount Baekdu at 2.74 km when stacked, measure 60 km long when lined up, and weigh 280 tons in total. The woodblocks are in pristine condition without warping or deformation despite being created more than 750 years ago.⁶⁵ The *Tripitaka Koreana* is stored in Haein-sa, a Buddhist Temple in South Gyeongsang province, in South Korea.

⁶³Park, Sang-Jin. *Under the Microscope: The Secrets of the Tripitaka Koreana Woodblocks*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007. Print.

⁶⁴UNESCO. *Haeinsa Temple Janggyeong Panjeon, the Depositories for Tripitakia Koreana Woodblocks*. n.d. Web. October 2016.

<<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/737/documents/%23ABevaluation>>.

⁶⁵Cultural Heritage Administration. *World Heritage in Korea*. Seoul: Mir Printing Co, 2011. Print.



Figure 5 Tripitaka Koreana

There is a movement by scholars to change the English name of the *Tripitaka Koreana*.⁶⁶ Professor Robert Buswell, a leading scholar of Korean Buddhism, called for the renaming of the *Tripitaka Koreana* to the *Korean Buddhist Canon*, indicating that the current nomenclature is misleading because the *Tripitaka Koreana* is much greater in scale than the actual Tripitaka, and includes much additional content such as travelogues, Sanskrit, and Chinese dictionaries, and biographies of monks and nuns.⁶⁷

Throughout its history, the dissemination of Buddhist teachings has been closely tied to the scriptures and the translations of the many texts which constitute it. As the centuries passed for the Chinese Buddhists, hundreds of texts were translated from Sanskrit into Chinese and also there developed a sizable corpus of literature composed of the writings of learned and inspired monks and nuns within China. From this extended collection of material, there occurred a steady influx of documents into the growing community of Korean Buddhists from the fourth century onwards. There is no complete record of this introduction

⁶⁶Tong-hyung, Kim. *Tripitaka Koreana may be renamed*. 4 November 2013. Web. October 2016.

⁶⁷Suh-young, Yun. *Name of Tripitaka Koreana should be changed*. 3 September 2013. Web. October 2016.

of Buddhist literature, but a few major landmarks help us to see the volume of writing which were brought into the states established in the Korean peninsula. In the sixth century, a Baekjemonk came back from India with a teacher as his companion, and they brought Sanskrit texts, especially focusing on those belonging to the *Vinaya* (rules of conduct for the monastic community) and *Abhidharma* (philosophical and commentary literature). Liu Su, an envoy from the Ch'en court, and Shih Ming-kuan arrived in Korea in CE. 565, bringing with them a complete set of the canon in 1700 *chüan*. This is the earliest recorded date for the availability of the whole of the Chinese Buddhist translations in Korea. Since the printing blocks of the sort so famous in later centuries were not yet in use, this material was in the form of manuscripts. Requiring the efforts of many scribes, complete sets of the canon were by no means common, and it was not until CE. 928 that the histories record the arrival of another collection of the scriptures.

Buddhist texts continued to come from China into Korea in what must have appeared as a never-ending flow of riches. In 1010 the Liao forces invaded Korea. King Hyōnjong turned to Buddhism for aid and made a solemn vow that if the invaders were removed from his country, he would have the entire Buddhist canon carved on printing blocks.⁶⁸ After eleven days, the invaders did leave the capital and began a march northward. When life had resumed something of its normal course of activity, the King, true to his vow, commissioned the first complete set of Korean carvings of the Buddhist texts. Thus it has been said through the centuries that the carving of these blocks was done to protect the nation against invaders and disasters. Another possible reason for the carving suggested by the Korean historians is that of cultural interest. The carving and printing of the Buddhist canon were a feat worthy of the best that the Chinese could produce and so this work went forward as an outward show of

⁶⁸ Lancaster, Lewis R. "The Korean Buddhist Canon: A Descriptive Catalogue." 2004. www.acmuller.net

the strength and culture of Goryeo contrasted with the invaders, who appear as little more than pillagers.

Since the work of carving went on for more than forty years, it is assumed that there was something beyond the danger of a particular invasion to prompt such an investment of time and skills. The existence of such a revered object in the nation must have been a source of pride and have encouraged the people to hope for better days with the power of their talisman. It may well have been that the news of the effectiveness of the blocks was spread to prospective invaders so as to give them pause since many of them were also practicing Buddhist.

When the canonic material was finally available through the imprint from these blocks, a different but extremely important task was begun by Ŭich'ŏn, with great facility in scholarship and possessed the inclinations of a collector and librarian. So strong was his determination to have copies of the entire collection of Buddhist literature, including commentaries and writings by his contemporaries all over East Asia, that he made a trip to China even though the King was in opposition to such a journey.⁶⁹ Staying in China for nearly a year, he managed to collect an impressive array of texts and returned to Korea with more than 3,000 *chüan*. He dispatched buyers and collectors to Japan and other parts of China and as a result brought together what he termed an "extension" of the canon that is the acceptance of texts written by East Asian Buddhists as a part of the canon. In 1090 he published his famous catalog of this collection concerning 1,010 titles in 4,740 *chüan*.

In recognition of the importance of these texts, blocks were carved for each of them. When this supplementary extension of the canonic blocks was completed, it marked a major new development in the treatment of Buddhist texts, since these East Asian writings were given the highest possible status. It may well be that Ŭich'ŏn's greatest contribution went

⁶⁹ Lancaster, Lewis R. "The Korean Buddhist Canon: A Descriptive Catalogue." 2004. www.acmuller.net

beyond his role as a collector and is found in the fact that he considered this literature as worthy of notice and due to a place alongside the translations from India. As a result of all these efforts, by the end of the eleventh century, Korea possessed one of the most complete and comprehensive libraries of Buddhist texts. Not only did they have copies of these materials but they were able to make xylograph copies for distribution.⁷⁰

When Mongols invaded the area in 1232 the King and his court had to take refuge on Kanghwa Island. The blocks of the canon and the supplementary extension gathered by Ŭich'ŏn were housed in the Puin Monastery near Taegu. During the winter after the court had removed from the capital, the invaders took charge of the monastery and in the act of wanton destruction burned the entire set of blocks. This may have been in part aimed at convincing the Koreans that they no longer had a sacred protector and it might even have made the invading Mongols feel safer to know that the blocks were no longer in existence.

As flames engulfed their homeland, the masses were lost in despair, with no one to trust or turn to. What was to be done and how was it to be done? The one possible source of hope in their wretched life was the creed of the Buddha, the only religion up to that point and a world promising an easy passage into death, where at least their afterlife might be salvaged. Choe U and others in power needed a religious extravaganza that would captivate the public and made it their lofty cause to bring back to the life the *Tripitaka* that had been lost to fire. The slogan appealed to the populace given the precedent of the first *Tripitaka*. Following the necessary preparations, the entire country was busy logging, sawing and sanding timber and engraving the *Tripitaka*.⁷¹

Four years after the fires at Puin Monastery, the work was once again underway to carve a second set of printing blocks. The work went on for fifteen years from 1236-1251.

⁷⁰ Lancaster, Lewis R. "The Korean Buddhist Canon: A Descriptive Catalogue." 2004. www.acmuller.net

⁷¹ Park, Sang-Jin. *Under the Microscope: The Secrets of the Tripitaka Koreana Woodblocks*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007. Print.

King Kojong in his 38th year of rule gathered with his subjects at the great hall outside the western gate of the Kanhwa capital for a commemoration ceremony. The last production of the Tripitaka, in the middle of the Mongol invasions, attracted considerable attention. It was here that the prayer of Yi Kyu-bo was given which made reference to the events related to the first carving. Reflecting on the significance of this project, he believed that publishing the *Tripitaka* would guarantee the safety of the nation. The publication of the *Tripitaka* demonstrated the faith of the Koreans and their belief in the power of the Buddha to afford them divine protection.⁷² The project was a large one, for there were 1,512 titles to be included comprising 6,791 *chüan*. The editing work was a masterful job of scholarly effort, and in the second set of blocks, the Koreans once again provided the major part of Buddhist texts, to be found in Chinese, in a readily available form.

Xylographs from these blocks have played a major role in the modern editions of the Buddhist canon, serving as the basis for three versions of the canon published in Japan: *Shukusatsu zōkyō*, printed during the years of 1880-85, the *Manji zōkyō*, printed 1902-05, the *Zoku zōkyō* and the *Taisho shinshū daizōkyō*, 1924-34. Thus our present-day Buddhist studies owe a great debt to the past efforts of Korea, a debt which is, for the most part, unrecognized and consequently our study of Korean Buddhism is neglected.

For many years little was known about these blocks outside of Korea; and even within the country, during the Yi dynasty when Buddhism had been suppressed, there was a lack of attention from the court or government officials. At the beginning of this century, some reports about the blocks began to appear in Japanese publications, the most detailed being those of Mr. Sekina, an architect. Today the collection is recognized by the government as well as the people of Korea as one of the priceless treasures and a heritage of the skill and

⁷² Peter H Lee and Wm. Theodore deBary. *Sources of Korean Tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. Print.

expertise of the past. It is housed in two large buildings which are integrated into the monastic complex at Haein-sa Temple.(Figure 6) The storage buildings are built, so there is free circulation of air through open grilles, and the blocks are on racks in separate niches extending the whole length of the buildings and reaching from floor to ceiling. Recently a newferroconcretestructure has been erected for the purpose of preserving the blocks, and they will no longer be found in their current location. In those instances where a block from the original set was found to be missing or damaged, new replacements were carved some fifty years ago.⁷³



Figure 6 Haein-sa Temple

The front yard of Haein Temple is always bustling with hundreds to tens of thousands of visitors per day that come to see the Tripitaka woodblocks. Visitors scan the labels posted here and there, marveling and wondering at the endless stacks of innumerable identical tablets as they peer into the building through wooden slats. The Tripitaka Koreana woodblocks are shrouded in secret, and the unknowns outnumber the known facts. Who engraved the tablets, and how did the carvers go about the task? How did the woodblocks find their way to Haein-sa which is off the beaten path even by today's standards? Except for

⁷³ Lancaster, Lewis R. "The Korean Buddhist Canon: A Descriptive Catalogue." 2004. www.acmuller.net

their birth date, most of our questions remain unanswered.⁷⁴The Koreana Tripitaka was designated a National Treasure of South Korea in 1962 and inscribed in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register in 2007.⁷⁵

The Choson Dynasty (1392CE–1910CE)

In 1392, having taken over the empire, King Taejoset out to administer somereforms for the welfare of the people. With the movement of the capital to Hanyang, modern-day Seoul once again became the center of political power in Korea. During the reign of King Taejo, the Gyeongbokgung Palace was built in Seoul.The empire faced repeated invasions; first Japan and then Manchu attacked and invaded Korea in 1592 and 1620. When King Yeongjo came to power in 1724, he brought the land much stability, but the kingdom again fell into corruption and social vices. TheChoson Kingdom followed a policy of isolation.⁷⁶

After destructive invasions by the Japanese at the end of the sixteenth century and by the Manchus of Northeast Asia in the early seventeenth, Korea enforced a policy of strictly limited contact with all other countries. The main foreign contacts officially sanctioned by the Choson Dynasty were diplomatic missions to China three or four times a year and a small outpost of Japanese merchants in the southeastern part of Korea near the present-day city of Pusan. Few Koreans left the peninsula during the late Choson Dynasty, and even fewer foreigners entered. For some 250 years Korea was at peace and internally stable (despite growing peasant unrest from about 1800), but from the perspective of the Europeans and Americans who encountered Korea in the nineteenth century, Korea was an abnormally isolated country, a “hermit kingdom” as it came to be known to Westerners at the time.⁷⁷

⁷⁴Park, Sang-Jin. *Under the Microscope: The Secrets of the Tripitaka Koreana Woodblocks*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007. Print.

⁷⁵Cultural Heritage Administration. *World Heritage in Korea*. Seoul: Mir Printing Co, 2011. Pring.

⁷⁶Maps of the World. *Korean Empire*. 2012-2016. Web. October 2016. <<http://www.mapsofworld.com/world-ancient-history/korean-empire-map.html>>

⁷⁷Asia Society. *Korean History and Political Geography*. 2016. Web. 21 October 2016. <<http://asiasociety.org/education/korean-history-and-political-geography>>.

Political relationship with Buddhism

Though it initially enjoyed wide acceptance, even being supported as the state ideology during the Goryeo period, Buddhism in Korea suffered extreme repression during the Choson era. The repression lasted over five hundred years. During this period, Neo-Confucianism became more dominant than Buddhism.⁷⁸

There were five centuries of Buddhist persecution during Choson dynasty pro-Confucian national ideology. The anti-Buddhist spirit initiated around the end of the Goryeo dynasty began to develop during the early years of the Choson dynasty. The neo-Confucians who had presented the anti-Buddhist memorial to the Goryeo king plotted to ostracize Buddhism with the founding of the Choson dynasty. The Choson court started to wield an anti-Buddhist policy, initiating five hundred years of Buddhist oppression. In 1393, King T'aejo confiscated the property of a great many monasteries and turned the land over to the state. In 1405, King T'aejong abolished the clerical posts of Wangsa and kuksa. Neo-Confucians tried to enforce the policy to do away with Buddhist temples and force Buddhist monks to secede from the order. In 1406 the number of temples was reduced to 242, and the number of sects was reduced to seven. The number of monks who could live in any given temple was set by the government. Most temples lost their tax-exempt status, and the number of temple attendance was strictly limited.⁷⁹

Neo-Confucianism rapidly gained favor, and although royalty continued to practice Buddhism privately, Confucianism ruled administration and society. Among the Choson monarchs, even the great King Sejong (ruled 1418-1450), under whose direction the Korean alphabet Hangul, was invented, was a devout practitioner of Buddhism. In 1424 he decreed that the number of temples in the country be limited to thirty-six and that the seven remaining

⁷⁸ Wikipedia. *Korean Buddhism*. 9 October 2016. Web. October 2016

⁷⁹ Bary, Wm. Theodore de and Peter H Lee and. *Sources of Korean Tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. Print

sects be combined into two authorized schools, the Sonjong (Meditation school) and Kyojong (Doctrinal school). His nephew, King Sejo (ruled 1455-1468), established the Kankyong Togam, Royal Superintendence for Sutra publication in 1461. It had the purpose of translating Chinese Buddhist scriptures into Hangul text.⁸⁰

Notable Masters and Literary works

During this time of rejection and oppression, Korean Buddhism survived in the remote mountain valleys. Although this Buddhism was not identified with any particular sect, the main Buddhist practice was Seon. The monks tried to keep temples from ruin and keep the order in existence even while bearing all sorts of oppression from the Choson court officials and the Confucian aristocrats.⁸¹ In 1492, during the reign of Songjong, the law providing for the ordination of monks was rescinded, and all monks were under pressure to return to lay status. During the reign of Yonsangum (1494-1506), many temples and Buddhist images were destroyed, and the protective umbrella of state recognition of Buddhism was withdrawn. The monk examinations and ranks disappeared. Under King Chungjong (1506-1544) the Buddhist department of state examination system was abolished, and the destruction or appropriation of Buddhist property increased.⁸²

Although significantly restricted in their activities, monasteries during the Choson period still produced outstanding spiritual leaders. Some Buddhist thinkers tried to vindicate Buddhism against Confucian criticisms or attempted to find grounds for reconciliation with Confucianism. The most famous of these thinkers are Kihwa (1376-1433), Pou (1515-1565) and Hyujong (1520-1604). It is notable that all three had studied Confucianism before becoming Buddhist monks, and had the knowledge and confidence to compare Confucianism

⁸⁰Bowker, John, ed. *Cambridge Illustrated History Religions*. East Sussex: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 2002. Print.

⁸¹Chung, Bongkil. *The Scriptures of Won Buddhism: A Translation of the Wongbulgyo Kyojon with Introduction*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 2003. Print

⁸²Bary, Wm. Theodore de and Peter H Lee and. *Sources of Korean Tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. Print

with Buddhism. They played a leading role in their times and occupied prominent positions in the history of Choson Buddhism. The Seon master, Hyujong and his disciple Samyong Yujong (1544-1610) were national heroes when the Japanese under Hideyoshi invaded the Choson kingdom in 1592-1598. Hyujong was appointed Commander of the Eight Provinces monk's army while Samyong later became the emissary of the Choson King meeting Tokugawa Ieyasu in Edo in 1604. Hyujong continued the Goryeo tradition of harmonization between Seon and Kyo, teaching that 'kyon song song bul'-that penetrating the mind is to become a Buddha essence of Meditation practice.⁸³ In general, however, the survival of Buddhism under the Choson dynasty during the period of suppression and persecution should be attributed mostly to the efforts of those monks who devoted themselves to continued study and practice in remote mountain monasteries and to the pious support of lay Buddhists, including both ordinary people and women of the upper class.⁸⁴

Buddhist influence on society and culture

Under a continuing policy of repression, Buddhism was banished to the mountains and monks were treated harshly. However, this banishment proved to be quite valuable to Buddhism in two respects: the temples became centers for the communal flourishing of Seon practice, and Buddhism established strong bonds with the common people.⁸⁵

King Chongjong abolished Buddhist rituals in the court. All the lands of the Buddhist order except seventy temples were taxed for the states armaments, and all the male and female servants of the temples were allocated to the government offices. The system of royal and national masters was abolished and the certificate system for priests strictly enforced making it difficult to become a Buddhist monk. Eventually, the monk certificate system was

⁸³Bowker, John, ed. *Cambridge Illustrated History Religions*. East Sussex: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 2002. Print.

⁸⁴Bary, Wm. Theodore de and Peter H Lee and. *Sources of Korean Tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. Print

⁸⁵Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism. *History of Korean Buddhism*. 2014. Web. 21 October 2016. <http://www.koreanbuddhism.net/bbs/content.php?co_id=110>.

abolished, and all the monks were drafted for military service, leaving the Buddhist temples virtually deserted. The Buddhist nunnery was abolished making the nuns into court servants. All the temple land was confiscated by the government. The harshest anti-Buddhist policy was the abolishment of the dual systems of Korean Buddhism, Seon, and Kyo, relegating Korean Buddhism to that of no sect or school. All the temples in each province were closed, making the temple lands the property of the Confucian shrines. Great bells were melted to make weapons and the wood from temples distributed to households that had been demolished earlier. All the copper and bronze Buddha statues melted down to make weapons and the remaining Buddha statues destroyed.

There was a short time of Buddhist revival in 1545 when the two schools of Buddhism, Seon, and Kyo, were restored. The enforcement of the laws for becoming a monk and the national examination for selecting high priest helped this revival. Many able monks took the examination. Buddhism again declined after the royal assassinations conducted by fanatic Confucians. Finally during 1725-1776 Buddhist monks were prohibited from entering the capital city of Seoul.

The ban on Buddhist monks was lifted when the failing Choson court was compelled by the remonstrance of Japanese Nichiren missionaries, effectively ending the five hundred years of Choson dynasty oppression of Buddhism.⁸⁶

Conclusion

There are three general themes that we can recognize in the history of several religious traditions of Korea. The influence of indigenous beliefs on religion, periods of religious dominance and the conservative nature of the Korean religious experience.

⁸⁶Chung, Bongkil. *The Scriptures of Won Buddhism: A Translation of the Wongbulgyo Kyojon with Introduction*. Honolulu: University o Hawaii, 2003. Print.

The indigenous beliefs of Koreans including Shamanism, nature and ancestor worship is the original and most ancient religious practice in Korea. Among the functions of the clan or tribal leader during the ancient period was the role he played between his people and the realm of the spirits. As in other societies with a shamanistic type of fundamental religion, shamans interceded on behalf of ordinary mortals for the purpose of obtaining blessings, the curing of disease and the quieting of the spirits of the dead. The fundamental religion of the ancient period did not disappear with the arrival of Buddhism in the fourth century. It became the foundation of all Korean religious experience. Shamans help to shape the development of all philosophies which have been passed on to Korea, including Buddhism, Confucianism, Catholicism and Protestant Christianity.

The religious history of Korea can be divided into four broad periods. Each one has particular religious traditions formed the dominant or most dynamic religious force in the society at that particular time. The four eras would be:

1. The era of Shamanistic practices
2. The era of Buddhism dominance
3. The era of Confucian dominance
4. The post –Confucian era.

The first era would encompass all Korean history from primordial times to the beginning of Chinese civilization in the fourth century. The second era, the period of Buddhist dominance would extend from the fourth to the fourteenth century. During this period of Buddhist spiritual sway, the spiritual, intellectual and aesthetic culture of the Koreans formed along the Buddhist lines, largely to the exclusion of other traditions. The greatest works of Buddhist art, for example, came from this period and not later. The third era, the period of Confucian dominance, witnessed a complete reversal of the positions of Buddhism, with the result that Korean culture for the next five hundred years formed by

Confucian concepts and values almost to the exclusion of other traditions. The fourth era, the post-Confucian period, shows the decline of the formal Confucian influence on society and the revival of Buddhism and the rapid growth of a new religion, Christianity.⁸⁷

From its introduction into Korean consciousness, Buddhism quickly became an integral part of Korean spirituality. Korean Buddhist monks took the information they received and created forms of Buddhism that are uniquely distinct and structured for a Korean audience. Each historical era and each Korean kingdom played a vital role in the advancement of Korean Buddhist thought. Through trade links and cultural exchanges, Korean monks and teachers were able to increase their access to Buddhist scriptures. When Korean Buddhism enjoyed the support and participation of the ruling authority, Korea's enjoyed great advancements in literature, arts, architecture and philosophy.

The 20th century brought a focus on social welfare and constant conflict with Japanese invasions and colonization. Even when Korea was isolated and then occupied by foreigners, Korean Buddhism philosophies lay just beneath the surface of Korean society. Once liberation came from Japanese occupation, Korean Buddhist thought sprang back into the forefront of Korean society. The indigenous religions along with Won Buddhism and Seon Buddhism played vital roles in resistance to foreign occupation and the revitalization of the Korean identity. All forms of Korean Buddhism seek to make enlightenment possible for everyone and applicable to regular life. The scriptures are simplified so that they are easy to understand. Practical applications to life are made clear. Practice is simplified so that anyone, regardless of their wealth, occupation, or other external living conditions, can still practice

⁸⁷Grayson, James Huntley. *Korea-A Religious History*. New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002. Print.

Buddhism.⁸⁸ Today the Jogye order still maintains that philosophy with the operation of Dongguk University.

The 21st century has brought still more changes for Korean Buddhism. Today they have different competition with Christianity and a much different form of political system ruling the country. Korean Buddhism has become part of the cultural fabric of Korean society, making it difficult to see where culture and religion separate. As Korean Buddhist thought has adapted, been analyzed, suppressed and currently flourishing, over two thousand years the fundamental teachings of the Buddha have remained.

⁸⁸ “Won Buddhism.” Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, 11 May 2017. Web. 15 May 2017

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