

WOMEN IN GRAY ROBES: CONTINUITY IN THE TRADITIONAL AND
CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS IDENTITY OF KOREAN BUDDHIST NUNS

By

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To my Mom and my family

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- G *Goryeosa* (고려사 高麗史, History of the Goryeo Dynasty). Jung, Inji 정인지. Translated by Gojeonyeongusil 고전 연구실. 11 vols. Seoul: Sinseowon, 2001-2002. (<http://www.krpia.co.kr/pcontent/?svcid=KR&proid=1>)
- HBJ *Hanguk bulgyo jeonseo* (한국불교전서 韓國佛教全書, The Collected Texts of the Korean Buddhism). Edited by Dongguk Daehakgyo Hanguk bulgyo jeonseo pyonchan wiwonhoe 東國大學敎韓國佛教 全書編纂委員會. 12 vols. Seoul: Dongguk Daehakgyo chulpanbu, 1979-1996. (<http://ebti.dongguk.ac.kr/>)
- HBIS *Hanguk bulgyo inmyeong sajeon* (한국불교 인명사전 韓國佛教 人名辭典 Dictionary of Korean Buddhist Names). Edited by Yi Jeong 李政. Seoul: Bulgyosidaesa, 1993.
- S *Samguk sagi* (삼국 사기 三國史記 The History of the Three Kingdoms). Kim, Busik 김부식. Translated by Lee, Byeongdo. 2 vols. Seoul: Dugyeohaksuljadan. (<http://www.krpia.co.kr/pcontent/?svcid=KR&proid=4>)
- SY *Samgukyusa* (삼국유사 三國遺事, Memorabilia of the Three Kingdom) Ilyon 일연. Translated by Lee, Byeongdo. 2 vols. Seoul: Dugyeohaksuljadan. (<http://www.khaan.net/history/samkooksagi/samkooksagi.htm>)
- T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經 (Revised Tripiṭaka compiled during the Taishō period). Edited by Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaikyoku 渡辺海旭. Tokyo: Daizōkyōkai, 1924-1935. (http://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT/index_en.html)
- YSB *Yijo sillok Bulgyo chojon* (이조실록 불교초존 李朝實錄 佛教鈔存, *Extracts of Buddhism in the Annals of the Yi Dynasty*) 권상로 Kwon, Sangro. Seoul: Boryeongak, 1976.

Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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This dissertation will explore the lives and practices of the Korean Buddhist nuns of the famous seminary of Unmunsa by combining historical analysis and ethnographic research, and by applying a hermeneutic perspective. Korean women have been involved with Buddhism for almost 1,600 years, but in the course of this long history they have often been marginalized and subordinated. Despite that, they have built their own traditions and identities, as well as established autonomous roles in Korean religious society.

By combining historical and ethnographic research, this dissertation will illustrate how, throughout their history, Korean nuns have maintained their system of ordinations and have independently managed their own female monastic communities and educational systems. This is particularly true of modern Korean nuns whose status, along with that of Korean women in general, has dramatically changed since the Korean War of 1950-53. Although there have been several attempts at academic analysis of both Buddhist monastic life and Western interpretation of Zen and Seon (선禪) religious traditions, my proposed study will be the first comprehensive English-language academic exploration of its kind, examining the intersection of religious identity and autonomy among Korean nuns. More

specifically, its main focus will be the monastic life and education of the nuns of the Unmunsa, which is affiliated with the Jogye Order (조계종 曹溪宗), the largest Buddhist sect in Korea, known for its emphasis on monasticism.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: STUDYING NUNS IN KOREAN BUDDHISM

Initial Encounter

The role nuns have played in Korean Buddhism historically and even contemporarily, is not well known or understood in western academia. In addition to this, when I prepared this dissertation, I encountered three different obstacles with regard to conducting scholarly research on nuns in Korean Buddhism. These can be illustrated through the following examples:

Case 1: “Do not appear in public”: lack of written records. Beophui (法喜 1887~1975) is considered a leading nun who had worked hard to restore Seon meditation tradition into Korean Buddhism in the modern era. When she received dharma transmission from her male master she was above admonishment. She is possibly the first nun to open a Seon meditation hall for nuns in modern Korean Buddhist history. She was an eminent nun and led numerous disciples. However, she never gave official dharma talks to either lay devotees or nuns and her enlightenment poem was spread through oral transmission alone, until three years ago when a nun compiled her stories into a written composition. Beophui left no written record of dharma talks, lessons, etc.. Instead, her religious life and achievements were transmitted solely by her disciples. All written records of her life are derived from oral sources, and those few written accounts are rare despite the fact that Beophui passed away only thirty five years ago.

Beophui’s case is far from unusual. The lack of women’s records is the most common hindrance to the study of Korean religious history. One might easily assume women were not active agents in the past when one considers how little of the historical record of nuns has reflected why or how nuns achieved what they have. Although historical documentation and textual sources are not absent, they may be insufficiently transparent

with regard to the extent of women's involvement in Korean Buddhism and/or they may be cursory due to a lack of interest in women's dharma. Scholarly research is needed to recover this involvement. While the historical interpretations and understandings of the Buddhist nuns themselves may not appear in historical and/or textual sources, this may be the result of the "invisibility" of women in Korean society, or it may be because the women have woven their own mythology—or perhaps it is a combination of both factors. Focus on texts and historical documents may overlook the potential accuracy of the nuns' historical narratives, while naive acceptance of the nuns' understandings may similarly lead one astray. It is the twofold approach of comparing and contrasting historiographic and ethnographic data that provides the fullest, most comprehensive portrait of women's involvement in Korean Buddhism. It is through critical oral accounts of and ethnographic data on Korean nuns, as I will provide in this dissertation, that the comparing and contrasting of these two methodologies can best proceed.

Case 2: "Thanks, but I am ashamed. I am still a living being": Buddhist women's concepts of humility. These are the initial words of Myeongseong after I explained my project to her. She knows very well it is an urgent issue to study Korean nuns' lives and practices. But she thought there were numerous nuns with greater legacies who practiced sincerely and anonymously throughout history. Recalling Buddhist women in history was our first task. Despite her humility, she was eager to elaborate on her own experiences and the pride she held for Unmunsa Monastic College. She felt a certain amount of shame in my wanting to tell her story, she told me, as she felt she had not yet forged a proper legacy.

With the advent of modernity, from the Japanese colonial period up to the present day, the status of nuns in Korea has dramatically changed in terms of educational equality.

Presently Korean nuns receive full ordination, and they independently constitute a well-ordered system of education, practice, and social activities. In this process, Myeongseong has been a pivotal leader during the last five decades but she is a Korean woman and nun. In Korean culture and in Buddhism, modesty and humility is valued over pride in one's self. Particularly for religious specialists such as nuns, talking about themselves and their religious lives is generally discouraged. Silence or just showing physical actions are the good examples for others. Interviews with nuns—even the eminent ones who are most active in their communities—proved more difficult than I had anticipated.

Case 3: “Do you think this is a suitable topic for a Ph.D?”: East Asian devaluation of ethnography. When I met a nun to consult with her on my field work she asked the above question after looking at the first draft of my table of contents. A nun and professor at Dongguk University, she is a renowned scholar in Chinese Buddhism who has published numerous books and articles on the subject of women in Buddhism. She is one of my former professors and she knows that I am studying in the United States. When I did my field research in 2008, she was both a professor and the Dean of Donghaksa Monastic College for nuns. For her, my study of women in Buddhism meant exploring primary textual sources. She expected me to translate Sanskrit or classical Chinese texts and be able to explain their meaning clearly. As a leading scholar on women in Buddhism, she well understood the importance of my work, yet was uninitiated in ethnographic methods of research.

The majority of studies on Korean Buddhism so far have focused primarily on textual sources. Although the anthropology of East Asian societies has begun to expand more recently, Western ethnologists focused on Buddhism were primarily interested in South or Southeast Asian Buddhism. More recently, ethnologists have carried out research on

Mahayana Buddhist societies, but the imbalance persists because Korean Buddhist culture is still relatively undocumented. Almost all field research on the various traditions so far has focused on Tibet, Taiwan, and Japan, while Korea is still relatively neglected. I will show that, in the words of Robert Orsi, “the world of the text is really not the world,”¹ and I will provide the necessary corrective to that problem through scholarly research of the actual world of Korean Buddhist nuns.

Research Theories and Problems

Feminist Buddhist scholar Karma Lekshe Tsomo, a professor at the University of San Diego and the president of the Sakhyadhita (Daughters of the Buddha) International Association of Buddhist Women, said nuns in Korean Buddhism are “powerfully isolated”² in the sense that they have been neglected in historical sources, despite indications that they have a long, active, and large presence in Korea. Nuns in the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism are able to obtain full monastic ordination³, and the population ratio of monks and nuns is almost even.⁴ They have their own independent nunneries with their own

¹ Orsi, Robert A. *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars who Study Them*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2005), 164.

² Tsomo, Karma Karma. *Buddhist Women Across Cultures: Realizations*. (New York: State University of New York Press. 1999), 18.

³ The genealogical origin of the Jogye Order begins around the 9th century during the period of Unified Silla in which Seon master Doui introduced Huineng’s *Sixth Patriarch* from China at about 820 C.E. During the Goryeo Dynasty, the Jogye Order was considered the national religion. Later, in the Joseon Dynasty, which lasted for approximately 500 years, Buddhism was officially prohibited. After that, the name “Jogye Order” was used for “Nine Mountains of Seon.” In modern times, after Korea’s liberation from Japan in 1945, Seon monks tried to re-establish the celibate Buddhist orders. The Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism officially re-formulated in April 11, 1962.
(http://www.koreanbuddhism.net/jokb/content_view.asp?cat_seq=78&content_seq=209&page=1)

⁴ According to the Jogye Order’s statistics, in 2008, the total number of temples was 2501, in which 13,860 monks and nuns were living. There are 5,331 nuns and 5,413 monks who are fully ordained and there are 1,194 female novice nuns and 1,922 male novice monks practicing. Given this fact, this gender ratio clearly

abbesses. Financially, they are also independent from the monks. More importantly, with equal opportunity of monastic education their engagement in religious and socially-engaged activities is notable and is increasing dramatically as part of a constant, ongoing process. Nuns themselves say that Korean nuns are almost unique in their status as successors to the Buddha, not only in that they are following the Buddha's teachings but they are preserving Buddhist community cultures. Unquestionably individual nuns show self-confidence in their authority and religious identity. But why are they isolated?

Perhaps when Tsomo said that Korean nuns are isolated, her intent was to point out that Korean nuns have a strong community, yet are not very well known outside of Korea. Korean nuns themselves, however, are isolated from their own historical continuity. There is no written source on nuns having been ordained in Korean history. There is no historical continuity in literature and material sources indicating that nuns activated their religious identity and formed religious cultures. Is their claim to legitimacy valid? Can their identity and religious authority be justified?

The purpose of this dissertation is to attempt to establish that nuns' religious identity and authority in Korean Buddhism in the twenty first century is part of a historical tradition. Currently, more than two hundred nuns in Unmunsa Monastic College (雲門寺 僧伽大學) are living and training to pursue a religious and spiritually meaningful life.⁵ Their everyday life

shows that nuns played an important role in Korean Buddhism. (Compendium of Statistics of the Jogye Order, 2009.)

⁵ Korean Buddhism, according to Korean government statistics, has 27 sects; if only three persons decide to register their religious group with the government the sect can be officially accepted. The major sects of Buddhism are the Jogye, Taego, Chuntae, Jingak, etc. The Jogye Order is the largest sect and almost 85% of Buddhists (monks, nuns, and lay devotees) belong to the Jogye Order. The Jogye Order is divided into 25 head temples. Unmunsa is officially a branch temple of 9th head temple Donghwasa. The Unmunsa is a temple for nuns and is the largest educational monastery. Unmunsa principally follows the Jogye Order's doctrine and

itself is the practice and training of the Buddha's doctrine and cultures. Their spiritual identity is derived from their understandings of the teachings of the Buddha and their authority is gained from their religious identities within a social context. Nuns have clearly played an important role in Korean history, and contemporary nuns can be well-trained to take advantage of many opportunities when they join a Buddhist monastic community. For valid justification, it needs to be demonstrated how they have maintained religious continuity throughout history, and how they have taken advantage of educational opportunities and are an institution operating within the socio-cultural context of Korean Buddhism. One prerequisite for the justification is based on validation of their account of historical continuity and of their scholastic achievements in the Buddhist community.

Therefore, my research centers on the possible continuity between history and nuns' contemporary status. That is to say, I argue that there is no logical break between the study of historical continuities and contemporary ethnographic work. While the ethnography presented in this thesis is predominantly contemporary (as opposed to historical ethnographic surveys), it seeks to make direct connections to the historical development of the Jogye 'Sect'. I argue that the nuns' authority is based primarily on their educational equality over the last four decades. The eminent nun, Myeongseong, has been at the

directions. Unmunsa temple and Unmunsa nuns are exemplary representatives for the Jogye Order. Thus, the all nuns at Unmunsa are nuns of the Jogye Order.

The Jogye Order has 2,501 temples including 34 temples outside Korea. Every temple is within a branch of 25 national administrative districts in which there is a head temple in each district. The criterion of distinctions is generally based on geological proximity. The 25 head temples and the number of their accompanying outlying temples are as follows: 1. Jogyesa (460), 2. Yongjusa (97), 3. Sinheungsa (44), 4. Woljeongsa (64), 5. Beopjusa (82), 6. Magoksa (64), 7. Sudeoksa(68), 8. Jikjisa (66), 9. Donghwasa (133), 10. Eunhaesa (42), 11. Bulguksa (86), 12. Haeinsa(157), 13. Ssanggyesa(60), 14. Beomeosa (169), 15. Tongdosa (152), 16. Gounsa (68), 17. Geumsansa (98), 18. Baekyangsa (51), 19. Hwaeomsa (44), 20. Seonamsa (1), 21. Songgwangsa (79), 22. Daeheungsa (56), 23. Gwaneumsa (42), 24. Seonunsa (53), 25. Bongseonsa (103) and special temples for military service (122). The Unmunsa is situated in the *Hogeoh* Mountains, located in the mid-South in South Korea, and is one of the branch temples of Donghwa temple. (Compendium of Statistics of the Jogye Order, 2009)

forefront of improving the educational process. By synchronizing my research methods, i.e., textual study and field work, I conclude that their religious life is legitimate and holds an important position not only in the Buddhist community but also in Korean society.

Brief Review about Academic Discourse on Nuns in Korean Buddhism

Western and Korean scholars have produced a large corpus of important publications in the field Buddhist studies, thereby giving substance and specificity to the field, but the academic study of Korean Buddhism has not yet reached its maturity. English sources on Korean Buddhism number approximately ninety volumes.⁶ Those materials can be divided into two groups: the research of Korean Buddhism in its East Asian context and the translation of some Korean Buddhist texts and eminent Korean monks' literary sources or sermons such as the Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment.⁷ In the article "The Study of Korean Buddhism in North America," Richard D. McBride provides a thematic analysis of the trend in the study of Korean Buddhism in English academia. McBride scrutinized the scholarship of the study of Korean Buddhism in Western academics, particularly in North America during the last thirty years. He identifies that the first trend is an analysis of Korean

⁶ The Buddhist weekly newspaper of Bepbo, which is engaged in a project focused on studies of Korean Buddhism produced abroad. They provide the list of those books.
(<http://beopbo.com/article/view.php?Hid=63242&Hcate1=2&Hcate2=280&Hcmode=view>)

⁷ Most of the works in English about Korean Buddhism are focused on the doctrinal study based on eminent monks such as Wonhyo (617-686 CE), Jinul (1158-1210 CE), and Seongcheol (1912-1993CE). Some examples include: Buswell, Robert, *Tracing Back the Radiance: Chinul's Korean Way of Zen*. Classics in East Asian Buddhism, no. 2. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991.). Buswell, Robert, *Cultivating Original Enlightenment: Wonhyo's Exposition of the Vajrasamadhi-Sutra (Kumgang Sammaegyong Non)*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007.). Kim, Jongin. *Philosophical Contexts for Wonhyo's Interpretation of Buddhism*. (Seoul: Jimoondang 2004.). Barry, Brian, *Echoes from Mt. Kaya*. (Seoul: Changgyonggak, 1988.). Barry, Brian, *Opening the Eye*. (Seoul: Gimmyeong, 2002.). Muller, A. Charles. *The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment: Korean Buddhism's Guide to Meditation, with the Commentary by Kihwa*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999.). Scholars at Dongguk University and State University of New York at Stony Brook are currently working together to translate Wonhyo's twenty-three works into English. Seongcheol's works are also in the process of being translated into English. For more detailed information about English sources on Korean Buddhism, see (<http://www.acmuller.net/kor-bud/korbud-bib.html>).

Buddhism in its East Asian context in which Lancaster and Buswell had important roles.

Based upon this observation, Lancaster initiated projects such as translations of Korean texts into English. Buswell inserted the contribution of Korean Buddhism into East Asian Buddhist history.⁸ The second trend McBride observed was studies of the practice of Korean Buddhism, as in Buswell's book *Zen Monastic Experience*, which I will discuss later.

Finally, McBride noted common trends toward discussion of Korean Buddhism associated with philosophical paradigms, modernity, and postmodernity. To illustrate this trend he

⁸ Lewis Lancaster, a pioneering American scholar on Korean Buddhism, pointed out in his paper titled "The Significance of Korean Buddhism in East Asia" presented at the First International Conference on Korean Studies in Korea in 1979 that Korean Buddhism is merely East Asian Buddhism—a branch of a shared East Asian Buddhist tradition. Richard D. McBride, "The Study of Korean Buddhism in North America: Retrospective and Recent Trends," (McBride, 2006, 32).

Sanghyeon Kim (2007), in the article "The Identity of Korean Buddhism within the Context of East Asian Buddhism," analyzed the discussion on the characteristics of Korean Buddhism by Western scholars such as Buswell and Jorgensen, as well as Korean scholars such as Sim and Keel, etc. Kim pointed out that even though there are a lot of productive debates and analyses, the characteristics of Korean Buddhism are still ambiguous. Each scholar's claim has a limited validity, but becomes more problematic when applied more broadly over Korean Buddhism's long and diverse history. Kim emphasized that, although difficult to achieve, a methodical integration of approaches toward Korean Buddhism's particularities based on specific topics and themes would be better. In the book, *Currents and Countercurrents: Korean Influences on the East Asian Buddhist Traditions*, Buswell (2005) demonstrated that the transmission of Buddhism was not one-sided from India through China into Korea into Japan. Rather Korean Buddhists influenced such traditions as Chan in China and the Japanese Pure Land tradition in East Asia.

Scholars have provided insightful analysis of the characteristics of Korean Buddhism in a broad sense, as it is generally related to East Asian Buddhism, but much more can be done.

Among the characteristics of Korean Buddhism, scholars—not only Korean⁸, but also Western academia—commonly highlight two aspects which make it unique: Korean nationalism—more specifically called "national protection Buddhism" (*Hoguk Bulgyo*, 호국불교 護國佛教)—and the synthesis of mainstream Buddhist thought and practice with more localized forms—called "unifying Buddhism" (*Hoetong Bulgyo*, 회통불교 會通佛教) or "harmonization" (*Hwajaeng*, 화쟁 和諍).

Several scholars such as Sanghyeon Kim, Heeseong Keel, Jaeryong Sim, and John Jorgensen participated in the debates on the origins, the meanings, and the limitations of "national protection Buddhism." Of those scholars, Buswell argued that the concept is merely a construction utilized for political gain. Buswell (1998, 2007) argued that the idea of "Korean Buddhism" among Korean Buddhists is a kind of constructed conception which was developed first by modern Buddhist scholars, specifically Choi Namseon in the 1930s during the Japanese colonial period. Even though Buswell's observation is insightful, Korean scholars have offered some substantial evidence to the contrary. Even given the limitations of the nationalistic perspective, the characteristic exists in the minds of Korean Buddhists, and the conception is still widely accepted in the study of Korean Buddhism among Korean academia. Sim (1999) argued that the characteristic of "unifying Buddhism" originated from the influence of the concept of national protection of Buddhism. Jorgensen agreed with Sim's claims. However, Han Bokwang, and Yi Bongchun, etc., and Korean scholars defended "unifying Buddhism" through the illustration of Wonhyo's *Tathāgatagarbha* notion.

analyzed postmodern thought in the Ph.D dissertations of Jin Y. Park and Pori Park, both of which are unpublished. Even though there are several academic studies of Korean Buddhism, those are still limited to a particular period, a certain text, or a historical thinker.

Written scholarship on nuns in Korean Buddhism is difficult and befuddling to track down, both from a historical and a contemporary standpoint. Yet since 2000, there has been a move to change attitudes in Korea about Korean nuns. I did, however, find and review some scholarly English language sources. Two conferences about nuns in Korean Buddhism were held but those results are unpublished.⁹

The only published volume in English on the topic of Korean Buddhist nuns is Martine Batchelor's *The Life of a Korean Zen Nun: The Autobiography of Songyong Sunim*. The volume is composed of Batchelor's experiences of Seon practice in Korean temples and briefly provides the small autobiography of the nun Songyong. As a French nun practicing the Korean Buddhist tradition, Batchelor provides a unique first-hand account. However, it is oriented toward popular, and not scholarly, audiences.¹⁰ Based on her personal

⁹ Recently there was a scholarly panel in a conference about nuns in Korean Buddhism within the American academy. Its title was "Researching Buddhist Nuns in Korea" and was held at the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) annual conference on April 4-7, 2002, in Washington DC. The presenters and titles of the papers were: Hyewon Kang, "The Practice and Seon of Korean Nuns;" Heejung Kang, "Patronages for Buddhist Art in the Late Joseon Dynasty;" Hyangsoon Yi, "Neither Mountain Nor Marketplace: Placing the Buddhist Nun in Contemporary Korean Literature;" and Paula Arai, "Researching and Interpreting Buddhist Women." Enusoo Cho was presenter with Robert Buswell responding. Despite its importance and meaning, I could not get the papers but I could only get the information on the conference.

Two years later there was an international conference on Korean nuns in Seoul, South Korea titled "Korean Nuns within the Contexts of East Asian Buddhist Traditions." Barbara Ruch gave the keynote address entitled, "One Mind and One Gender: Female Footprints that Mark the Buddhist Path." Tonino Puggioni presented "On the Buddhist Activities of Goreyo Ladies in Yuan Chna;" John Jorgensen addressed "Marginalized and Silenced: Buddhist Nuns of Joseon Period." Additionally, five foreign scholars presented on Buddhist culture, Buddhism in East Asia, and Taoist nuns in China, etc. Some of the presented papers can be accessed under limited conditions such as direct sharing by the Korean author-scholars because the works were not officially published.

¹⁰Two unpublished dissertations have been written. Inyoung Chung researched the nun Myoeom's life within the contexts of contemporary Korean Buddhism. As a nun, she is the disciple of nun Myooem. Inyoung

meditational experience in Korea for almost ten years, she romantically describes nuns during the mid-1970s to early 1980s concentrating in Seon mediation in meditational halls, with little emphasis on their community engagement.

Robert Buswell's work, *Zen Monastic Experience* stands alone as scholarly research on Korean Seon Buddhism, and includes his own personal experiences at a Korean Buddhist monastery. It is an introductory focus on Seon meditation and practice. His volume, however, is based on his (male) monastic life in Korea in the 1970s, and is not particularly relevant to nuns in Korean Buddhism.

Research Sources and Method

Textual Sources

My research draws on both textual accounts and fieldwork. With both these sources, my analysis centers on the efforts of Korean nuns to create a female monastic tradition that is in accord with their interpretations of Buddhist teachings on monasticism and equality. Efforts are made to harmonize ethnographic and textual research by providing a balance between actual female monastic practice and the more idealized, normative accounts of textual sources.

To my knowledge, there are no scholars who specialize in the topic of nuns in Korean Buddhism in Korea. Scholars have partially researched them and only in certain subjects. I was, however, able to glean valuable information from several different Korean sources,

Chung's Ph.D dissertation title is "Crossing over the Gender Boundary in a Gray Robe: The Life of Myoŏm, a Korean Buddhist Nun" (University of Virginia, 2008). There is also anthropological research about an immigrant Korean Buddhist community in America. The research focused on how Korean immigrants as lay Buddhist devotees in Los Angeles are pursuing their religious activities in terms of mindful meditation of Buddhist doctrines. Sharon Ann Suh's Ph.D dissertation is "Finding/Knowing One's Mind in Koreatown, Los Angeles: Buddhism, Gender and Subjectivity" (Harvard University 2000).

though I found these sources lacking in data on Korean nuns. I critically analyze Korean scholars' works for the little information they provide that deals with nuns. I use those and also partially use primary textual sources whenever I need to confirm my analysis on particular points. The writings of western scholarship are used to help illustrate and refine my argument.

I also contribute to the field by using primary textual materials from Korean sources which were written into classical Chinese.¹¹ To delve into their historical continuity, I use primary texts commonly composed in classical Chinese. Key texts from the Chinese Buddhist canon are used to illuminate historical accounts of Korean nuns' lineage and monastic regulations.¹² One research method follows a textual analytic approach. In particular, I synchronize primary textual sources and secondary Korean scholarship. In addition, I utilize western scholarship on Buddhism and women, and doctrinal study and interpretation, whenever necessary.

Fieldwork

Participant-observation

When I decided on this topic, I thought about which temple would be the best representative for Korean Buddhist nuns. I visited the Jogye Order and met nun Sugyeong, the head of the Department of Cultural Affairs in 2008 and a close colleague when I was a graduate student in Korea. She introduced me and explained my project to each monastery

¹¹ Such primary texts are *Samguksagi* (삼국사기 三國史記, *The History of the Three Kingdoms*), *Samgukyusa* (삼국유사 三國遺事, *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdom*), *Yijo sillok Bulgyo chojon* (이조실록 불교초존 李朝實錄 佛教鈔存, *Extracts of Buddhism in the Annals of the Yi Dynasty*), and *Hanguk bulgyo jeonseo* (한국불교 전서 韓國佛教 全書, *The Collected Texts of the Korean Buddhism*), etc.

¹² The texts are *Dharmaguptakavinaya* (四分律, *Sabunyul, Four part Monastic Codes*) and *Chanyuan qinggui* (禪苑清規, *Seonwon chungyu, Rules of Purity the Chan Monasteries*).

head by phone. Initially, I attempted to contact all five monastic colleges for nuns; I was able to contact four of them, and subsequently visited and interviewed the heads of three of the temples. I know that each temple was not quite different from a Western perspective. I decided that Unmunsa was sufficient for my dissertation and thus I did field research there.

Another factor that was important in my decision to focus on Unmunsa was the reputation of Unmunsa and nun Myeongseong. Before the start of the project, I knew several of Myeongseong's disciples and one lay male disciple who was one of my colleagues. I called him and requested permission to conduct my research and Myeongseong approved it. When I met Myeongseong the first time she already knew a little bit about my project and me and asked what I needed and assigned nuns related to my project.

I did formal field work for almost two months in the summer of 2008, and informally for two weeks in the summer of 2009. I participated in daily ritual ceremony but I did not always observe all classes. I used the break time on my own. At the beginning of my research, several nuns kindly helped me acclimate to life in a monastery. During my stay, three nuns were rotated according to their schedules. Basically, these nuns and I shared walks on the hills around the temple while drinking our coffee every morning. We talked a lot and asked each other questions. Also, they helped with my life in the temple. During the daily schedule, I spoke with and asked several questions to the nuns in the kitchen, and they reciprocally talked and asked questions of me. I worked directly together with some of them; I took notes and from some of them I just got ideas.

During my interviews with individual nuns I was asked the same question several times. "Why are you studying Buddhism instead of practicing it? That is not actually Buddhism. If you want to study Buddhism, you have to practice." As a potential scholar, I

do not agree with their point of view, but I do not want to find fault with their opinions. I tried to understand their opinions about Buddhism from their perspective. I also needed to validate my pursuit of an academic study of Unmunsa to the 'natives.' As an observer, there was very little new for me to experience except to catalog the nuns' everyday experience because I already have several experiences at various Korean temples as a lay devotee. This could be a weakness in this work because if someone asks me an interesting question about specific aspects of my research and writing which I take for granted as a lay devotee, then I may not be able to supply the information they are seeking and consequently the conversation might "close down." I was an outsider at the temple but I could be regarded an insider as a Korean female lay Buddhist. As a scholar who is neither wholly an "insider" nor wholly "outsider," I do not pursue the evasive and vacuous goal of absolute neutrality and impartiality.¹³ I got 119 responses in all from my survey questions.¹⁴ I am not sure exactly how many nuns I interviewed on a thorough basis. All in all, I spoke with or interviewed approximately 20 nuns at Unmunsa Monastic College and a few nuns from outside sources. Though student nuns helped me immensely I keep them as anonymous sources.

Quantitative research

To know who nuns are and what they think on specific matters is the main goal of this work. The systematic investigation of properties and their relationships are necessarily required. I collected data from one hundred eleven student nuns at Unmunsa Monastic

¹³ Geertz, Clifford. "From the Native's Point of View: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding." In *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, (New York: Basic Books, 1983.), 55-70.

¹⁴ See appendix A.

College. Nine of twenty eight inquiries were analyzed using quantitative methods. Each respondent did not answer every question on the survey. I deleted the missing numbers and the remaining total responding is measured, which is why there are different total numbers in the results of each inquiry. The process of measurement of the data used is the SPSS program.

Qualitative research

In the dissertation, in seeking to understand nuns' behavior and their own opinions within their monastic community, I used two methods. Verbal interactions with nuns are directly and indirectly used and were partly recorded as notes and on a tape recorder. The other source of data is their own responses to the open inquiries on the survey. The analysis of their qualitative answers on the survey is divided within similar groups.

The same methods were applied to my collection of data for Myeongseong's biography. Verbal communication with Myeongseong and her disciples and other relevant people is used. Myeongseong's disciples were planning to publish her biography. They made tape recordings and they took notes of their interviews with her. Their data, as of the date of this dissertation, was not published but when I cited directly from their notes, I used their page numbers (40 pages in total).¹⁵ Nevertheless, when I found the same information in newspapers or other documents I tried to cite from the published documents. I used the DVD entitled *Un Mun Sa* and the VCR tape entitled *Myeong Seong*, both of which were produced by Unmunsa Monastic College.

¹⁵ I cite this source as "Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong."

Chapter Outlines

In chapter two, even though the activities of nuns have been broadly dismissed or overlooked by historians—allowing an already isolated minority to sink further into obscurity—I investigate through literary sources the experiences of female practitioners as active agents of history, and how they have continuously adapted and progressed in terms of agency and autonomy, from the very first phases of the introduction of Buddhism on the Korean peninsula. Despite the paucity of historical materials on Buddhist nuns—specifically, on how and where they existed— I seek to trace their ways of life as female practitioners who have joined the renunciate community or who have otherwise contributed to socio-religious performance in the limited but flourishing social milieu of women’s Buddhism in Korea. In this chapter, I describe the nuns’ spiritual quests as Buddhist practitioners via their social interactions in the monastic community and within patriarchal society. Social circumstances were quietly oriented to the patriarchal structure and Buddhist communities were not exempt from a male-dominated structure. However, when I focus on nuns as individual practitioners, I argue that their religious practices and activities have not been substantially subordinated. Thus, the superficiality that stems from typological characterizations commonly practiced in the genre of traditional viewpoints should be carefully re-considered and revised.

Chapter three focuses on the history of nuns in the pre-modern and contemporary periods, from both oral accounts and literary sources which trace contemporary nuns’ lineage and identity. Changes in various Korean forms of religiosity as Korean society has rapidly moved from a traditional society with agricultural heritage to an affluent, modernized society illustrate how nuns have struggled and continue to struggle and modify

their circumstances. Also, this part more directly illustrates how individual oral transmission has been the primary mode of communication of the accounts of women nuns throughout their history and certainly today. Until pre-modern times, there has been no clear nuns' lineage in the history of the *samgha* (Buddhist monastic community), but each nun, in terms of Buddhist family ties, has succeeded in maintaining her lineage connections through oral or narrative transmission. In 1982, the Jogye Order re-established dual-ordination and exclusively clarified nuns' lineage; thus I can eliminate exclusive reliance on their authority. In addition, by tracing the nuns' educational system and practical circumstances previous to Unmunsa monastery, I am trying to clarify the historical continuity of Unmunsa in the history of Korean Buddhism.

In chapter four, I describe and explain the development of Unmunsa Temple as an institution. The history and the structure of the temple are described by focusing primarily on the three major practical facilities and their roles: the Monastic College, a meditation center, and a precepts center. This chapter also provides a description of the educational system at Unmunsa according to the regulations of the Jogye Order, which Unmunsa and other institutions should follow. At Unmunsa, female novitiates are trained to become highly qualified religious specialists. They study Buddhist doctrine and prepare to give religious lectures to lay devotees and they reflect on how their religious achievement can contribute to society. Along with the educational schedule, periodic special religious rites such as the Buddha's birthday, and social activities are described in detail. Overall, this part explores how Unmunsa has succeeded as a religious institution and why it is one of the most important educational centers of Korean Buddhism. I highlight important related sources of

Korean Buddhist history that help explain why Korean Buddhist nuns are very influential in contemporary Korean society.

In chapter five, I describe more specifically my ethnographic fieldwork using such techniques as participant observation, quantitative surveys, and qualitative interviews, including those completed with participants in various monastic lifestyles at Unmunsa. There I surveyed over one hundred informants, and also observed events such as the nuns' everyday lives, meditation, classes, special ceremonies, and temple activities. By focusing on my participation observation, I specifically illustrate how a nun lives and cultivates her religiosity in everyday activities within the community. Based on my survey research with the informants, I carefully analyze my fieldwork data and construct a general profile of Unmunsa. I seek to understand the nuns' visions and views about monastic life in contemporary Korean Society. I have spoken with or interviewed approximately 20 nuns at Unmunsa and I had a chance to discuss with six out of a total of nine instructors about my survey questions and my initial impressions of the results of the survey. I formulate a critical review of how the textual sources are different from the lives and experiences of individual nuns. In most of the survey responses and the personal communication and interviews, there is a strong suggestion that they think the nuns' status in the monastic institution is still lower than that of monks. Yet they do not have major barriers in pursuing their religious lives because they can live and practice in their own ways. By illustrating the results of my field work, I argue that actual nuns' responses were different from textual accounts or scholars' viewpoints. They do not feel discrimination in their individual religious lives and social activities. Rather, they feel discrimination in the institutional hierarchy system in the Jogye Order. I show how nuns understand and accept specific

doctrines or rules despite academic criticism of those doctrines and rules. I present the nuns' perspectives on their history, their practices, and their interpretation of their lives. The last part of this chapter traces how and where the alumnae of Unmunsa are working as religious specialists and leaders within the monastic community and beyond, and describes the nuns' socially engaged activities.

In chapter six, I focus on the life of the nun Myeongseong who has been the main contributor to nuns' educational equality. Information is gathered from a biography of this abbess that concentrates on her religious experiences after joining the monastic life. Her training and practice are examined in order to show how she represents Buddhist nuns in the rapidly changing social culture. I point out that Myeongseong's charismatic religious leadership was constructed on three levels: her religious family background, her eminent intellectual ability in the doctrinal studying and teaching of Buddhism, and her pioneering spirit with regard to gender equality. She has a strong Buddhist family background in that her father was an eminent monk. She was influenced by her father, and partly for that reason she was able to study Buddhist doctrines. With her monastic educational history, Myeongseong helped elevate Korean nuns' status and dramatically changed not only the monastic life of nuns, but also their social circumstances. On the one hand, she as an educational specialist struggles to improve the educational conditions for nuns; on the other hand, she, as religious leader of the Korean Nuns Association, endeavors to improve their social standing and ability to engage in social activities outside the monastery. Myeongseong's religious life itself indicates that nuns are struggling to improve their religious autonomy and social status. By focusing on the significance of a religious

specialist's history, this part demonstrates how female religious leadership can contribute to broader issues of gender equality and thus recover historical authority for Korean nuns.

In my conclusion I explain how my research contributes to scholarly studies of Korean Buddhism in several ways. My work provides ethnographic and historical analysis using academically rigorous methods and theories, and my research critically analyzes Batchelor's romantic views on Korean Buddhist nuns. Also, by problematizing gender issues in Korean monasticism, this research helps expand the area of study beyond Buswell's description of Korean monasticism. And by providing a new anthropological data it should extend the anthropology of Buddhism.

CHAPTER 2
NUNS IN THE HISTORY OF KOREAN BUDDHISM (4TH C-1910)

While Buddhism engenders some feminist aspects, like most major religions it is overwhelmingly patriarchal—a male-focused tradition institutionalized and dominated by men whose religious and social ideals it mirrors and serves. The marginalization of women engaged in its practice and the lack of focus on their roles in the history of Buddhism are problems that have become widely recognized in the academy, and Korean Buddhism is no exception to this inclination. In one sense females are often considered to be essentially passive, secular, inferior, and hindrances. But also the emphasis on preserving the practices and narratives of monks over that of nuns in Korean and other forms of Buddhism is the result to the lack of historical accounts of female agents.

The activities of nuns or females in early Korean Buddhism were broadly dismissed or overlooked by historians, allowing an already excluded minority to sink further into obscurity. Therefore, Buddhist women in the early period of Korean history are hardly visible in official monastic records or historical materials, and the information pertaining to nuns is even more sparse. But this is not an issue of history but one of historiography.¹ Female practitioners, as active agents of history, have been continuously involved in several aspects from the beginning phase of the transmission of Buddhism into the Korean peninsula. Despite the paucity of historical materials on Buddhist nuns—on how and where they existed—we can trace their way of life through female practitioners who have joined the renunciate community or who have otherwise contributed to socio-religious

¹Paula Arai, *Women Living Zen: Japanese Sōtō Buddhist Nuns*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 7.

performance in the limited but flourishing social milieu of Buddhism practiced by women in Korea. In this chapter, I explore this approach, first detailing the genesis of Korean women's monasticism and then describing the nuns' spiritual quests as Buddhist practitioners via their narratives and their social interactions in the monastic community and within patriarchal society.

The First Nuns on the Korean Peninsula

When Buddhism first arrived on the Korean Peninsula, male monks could be fully ordained, and, from almost the same time, women began to be ordained as well, creating their own community, the *bhikṣunīsamgha*, or nuns' monastery.² However, because there is little on record, it is difficult to learn about the specific lives of women in ancient society even though women actively contributed to the construction of Buddhism and were granted nuns' precepts so that they could lead lives as practitioners.³ Due to the paucity of records of specific women who were Buddhist nuns, I have only been able to infer specific roles and

² Buddhism transmitted into the Three Kingdoms in 372 C.E through Goguryeo (고구려 高句麗 37 B.C.E.-618 C.E.) in the north was the most powerful of the Three Kingdoms, and received the new religion first when King Fu Jian (苻堅 . 357-384) of the Former Qin Dynasty (前秦, 351-394) sent the monk Sundo (順道) to the Goguryeo kingdom with Buddhist scriptures and the Buddha's images. Around the same time, the Baekje kingdom (백제 百濟, 18 B.C.E.-660 C.E.), occupying the southwestern part of the peninsula, was introduced to Buddhism in 384 through another monk who had come from Eastern Jin. The kingdom of Silla (신라 新羅, 57 B.C.E.-935 C.E.), in the southeastern part of the peninsula, was officially introduced to Buddhism about two centuries later than the other two, in 527. However, even though these dates are only viewed as the official introductions of Buddhism, the actual contact or introduction could have occurred much earlier. For general information on the beginning of Korean Buddhism see, Buswell, Robert. *Tracing Back the Radiance: Chinul's Korean Way of Zen*. (Kuroda Institute, University of Hawai'i Press, 1991). Lancaster, Lewis R. and C.S. Yu, eds. *Introduction of Buddhism to Korea New Cultural Patterns*. (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1989.). The Korean Buddhist Research Institute ed. *The History and Culture of Buddhism in Korea*. (Seoul: Dongguk University Press, 1993.) Jogye Order comp. *What is Korean Buddhism?* (Seoul: Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism Press. 2007.).

³ For general information about the history of Korean Buddhism see, *What is Korean Buddhism?* Seoul: Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism Press. 2007. Kim, Yeongtae 金煥泰. *Hanguk bulgyosa gaeseol* 韓國佛教史概說 (An Introduction to the History of Korean Buddhism). (Seoul: Kyongseowon, 1990.). Buswell, Robert. "Buddhism in Korea." *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. vol. 2. (New York: Macmillan, 1987.), 421-426. Buswell, Robert. ed. *Religions of Korea in Practice*. (Princeton: Princeton University, 2007.).

features from a few records and legends. The first legendary appearance of the story of women in Korean Buddhism was during the Garak Kingdom (駕洛, or 伽耶. First to sixth century C.E.).⁴ According to the legendary story contained in the *Samguk yusa*, (三國遺事, *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms*),⁵ Buddhism was first introduced to the Korean peninsula from India via the southeastern coast of the Garak Kingdom in the first century. An Ayodhyan princess from India tried to journey east at her father's request, but she could not safely navigate due to the anger of the sea god. When she returned to India and the king designed a stupa to protect her mission, she was able to safely arrive on the south coast of the Korean peninsula. She married King Kim, Suro (金首露 r. 42~199), the first king of Garak, and became known as queen Heo, Hwangok (許皇玉), the first Buddhist queen on the Korean peninsula. The stone stupa in Hogsya temple (虎溪寺) in Kimhae (金海) features four

⁴ The kingdom did not belong to the three major kingdoms and so scholars regarded the accumulation of ancient history of Korea and consequently considered the early Korean Buddhism as nothing but Three Kingdom Buddhism. The Garak was a small and regional kingdom in the Kimhae (金海) area to the south of the Peninsula. For general information about the heritage of Garak kingdom see, (<http://www.gayasa.net/gaya/index.html>)

⁵ The Goryeo Buddhist monk Iryeon (一然, 1206 - 1289) wrote and compiled the book in Classical Chinese, which was used by literate Koreans at that time at the end of the 13th century, a century after the *Samguk Sagi*, the oldest extant Korean history. In contrast to the more factually oriented *Samguk Sagi*, the *Samguk Yusa* contains various legends from many Korean Kingdoms, such as, Gojoseon and Gaya, regional folktales, and biographies about early Korean history. The book is the major source of the hagiographical anecdotes that provide much of the detailed story and the structure seems a hodgepodge of historical people, places, and events, short stories, and so on. It is compiled the mid-Goryeo period (918-1392), but many of the narrative stories are contained in earlier historical documents, such as biographies, stele inscriptions, gazetteers, and collections of wonder tales which are overall focused to emphasize for the traditions and validity of the Silla Kingdom. Nevertheless, it preserves much useful information on the accounts of female Buddhism in the early epoch when used carefully and judiciously. Though most Korean scholars do not question its legitimacy, Western scholars are doubtful of the value of the book because of its fanciful subject material and anachronisms. For more information see, Sørensen, Henrik H. "On the Sinin and Ch'ongji Schools and the Nature of Esoteric Buddhist Practice under the Koryeo." *International Journal of Buddhist Thought and Culture* 5 (February 2005): 49-84. "Problems with using the *Samguk yusa* as a Source for the History of Korean Buddhism." *Cahiers d'Études Coréennes* 7 (2000): 271-288. Richard McBride, McBride, II, Richard D. "Is the *Samguk yusa* reliable? Case Studies on Chinese and Korean Sources." *Journal of Korean Studies* II, no.1 (Fall 2006): 163-189.

sides and five stories, and the carvings on the sides were famous for their majesty. Portrayed in its carvings is an Ayodhyan princess.

The *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms* explains that before the coming of the Indian princess, there was no temple and no image of the Buddha, and no one knew about Buddhism. Owing to this ignorance, there was no traditional place to put the stupa. It was only later in 452, in the 2nd year of the 8th Garak King Jilji (銓知 r. 451-492) that Wanghusa temple (황허사) was built.⁶ According to this story, Buddhism was not popular in the Garak Kingdom before the building of the temple but this is still prior to the spread of Buddhism in the Three Kingdoms. The princess gained legendary praise for the introduction to the Korean peninsula of the Buddha's truth, new culture, and the *bhikṣunīsamgha*. However, only a few legends about Buddhism in Garak still exist while the story about Indian princesses is nonexistent. It would be a hagiographical source to embody the genesis from India as the homeland of the Buddha. Also the story, according to scholarly analysis, does not necessarily establish any historical truth.⁷ Thus, most Korean scholars believe that unless new historical evidence is found, the story should be regarded as merely legend.

The first scholastically confirmed transmission of Buddhism into the peninsula was from China during the Goguryeo Kingdom (高句麗 37 B.C.E.-618 C.E.) via Dharma Masters Sundo (順道) and Ado (阿道) at the time of King Sosurim (小獸林 r. 371-384).⁸ In Goguryeo,

⁶ *Samguk yusa* fascicle 3.4. Recited from Hanguk biguni yeonguso 韓國比丘尼研究所, comp. *Hanguk go jungse bulgyo yeoseong biguni jaryojip: Jeongsaryupyeon* 한국 고중세 불교여성 비구니 자료집: 정사류편 (Collected Materials on Buddhist Lay Women and Nuns in Ancient and Medieval Korea: Records from the Official Historical Texts). (Seoul: Teuran, 2007.).

⁷ Kim, Yeongtae 金煥泰. *Hanguk bulgyosa gaeseol* 韓國佛教史概說 (An Introduction to the History of Korean Buddhism). (Seoul: Kyongseowon, 1990), 25-32.

⁸ Ibid.

however, the existence of Buddhist nuns has not been confirmed, and it has been only inferred based upon the introduction of Buddhism into the other two kingdoms, where nuns were known to have existed. A Goguryeo monk, Hyepyeon (惠便) first traveled by sea to Japan with the purpose of transmitting Buddhism in the late sixth century. He met a Buddhist nun named Beopmyeong (法明) who had come from Goguryeo for the same purpose.⁹ When they received requests of ordination and teaching from women who decided to become Buddhist nuns after hearing their words, they accepted the requests of the women and made them follow the principles of Buddhism.

According to volume 19 of *the Chronicles of Japan, Nihon Shoki* (日本書紀), though, Hyepyeon was solely responsible for the ordination of the first three Japanese Buddhist nuns in 587 C.E. —known as Seonsin (善信), Seonjang (禪藏), and Hyeseon (惠善). This description of the process and requirements for nuns' ordination shows that the first ordained Buddhist priests in Japan were women and that they became ordained without meeting the standard requirement of receiving precepts from ten monks and ten nuns, a fact that may have caused some controversy.¹⁰

Another version of the same story has the three women who were led by Hyepyeon requesting and receiving permission to travel to Baekje in order to officially become Buddhist nuns, considering the insufficient situation for full ordination in Japan.¹¹ Arriving

⁹ Sim, Jungsub. "Biguni: Lee gus lee hanguk cholcho" (Nuns: This is the first in Korea) Beopbo Newspaper. 2009. (<http://beopbo.com/article/view.php?Hid=59936&Hcate1=226&Hcate2=369&Hcmode=view>)

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ The government official asked the master from Baekje about the system for the Buddhist Samgha in Baekje. The master from Baekje specifically explained the ordination system in Baekje. The diplomat said that in order to become Buddhist nuns, it was necessary for the novice nuns to get the approval from a total of ten Buddhist monks and ten nuns. Also it was necessary for nuns and monks to live closely to each other, within hearing

in Baekje in 584, they received novice precepts, as well as full ordination in 588, studying monastic regulations for three years before returning to Japan.¹² This passage implies that a formally recognized female order existed in Baekje in an advanced state of development at that time. That event marks the beginning of Japanese Buddhist nuns.¹³

In addition to providing clues about the dates of transmission, *The Origins of Gangoji temple, Gangoji engi* (元興寺緣起) contains a more detailed account of the ordination of Buddhist nuns. Whether Hyepeon and the nun Beopmyeong from Goguryeo lived in Japan or not, it is clear from all versions of the accounts that in 587 C.E. three women joined the *samgha*, and Beopmyeong was their teacher. Considering that they were female, Beopmyeong could have been primarily responsible for teaching them Buddhism. In the year of 587, an official at the Japanese court asked an envoy about their procedure for ordination of nuns. However, it was impossible to become a Buddhist nun in Japan, because there was no proper system, even if it was possible for those women to shave their heads and become Buddhist devotees. The Korean envoy explained that the nuns' ordination required the quorum of twenty qualified masters: ten monks and ten nuns. The envoy then suggested that the Japanese court should invite Korean monks and nuns because no qualified monks and nuns could be found in Japan to carry out the proper dual ordination. The envoy further elaborated on the relationship between *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣunīsamgha* in Baekje.

distance of the bell between them. Thus, it was necessary to build a temple that could be reached within one day for every fifteen days. The destination of the locations of the temples for the monks and the nuns had to be close. Sim, Jungsub. 2009.

¹² Sin, Hyeunsuk . “Ilbon Biguniwu Sosik” (The News of Japanese Bhiksuni) BulGwang 2007 Autumn.

¹³ Akira Hirakawa, translated by Kama Lekshe Tsomo, “The History of Buddhist Nuns in Japan,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 12 (1992): 49. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, ed., *Sakyadhita: Daughters of the Buddha* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1988), 128 -131.

According to him, nuns in Baekje resided in nunneries near a monastery that they could visit in a day trip to receive teaching from *bhikṣus*.¹⁴ *The Gangoji engi* also mentions that Japanese nuns traveled to Baekje in 588 for *bhikṣunī* ordination. Upon arriving in Baekje, they were first ordained as novice, *śikṣamāṇā* (式叉摩那 probationer) under the six rules. In the third month of the following year, they were ordained as *bhikṣunīs*. After receiving the full ordination, they returned to Japan in 590.

Details of the chronicle stories differ slightly and the name of Beopmyeon, is only mentioned in the account of *the Origins of the Gangoji Temple*. However, since the contents are similar enough, and the name Beopmyeong is a unique textual clue, one can infer that there were Buddhist nuns and a community of nuns in Goguryeo. There is, however, no historical documentation of these events in Korea. It is possible to learn the facts about the Buddhist nuns at that time only through those documents in Japan, including *the Chronicles of Japan, Nihon Shoki* and *the Origins of Gangoji Temple*. In any case, this entire story evidently imparts that there were Buddhist nuns in Goguryeo, the country that officially accepted Buddhism, and that Baekje established for the first time the proper ordination system for nuns. Even though the story of Beopmyeong is the only one that mentions the situation of the Buddhist nuns, the person who indoctrinated the nuns to the teachings of Buddhism in Japan was Beopmyeong of Goguryeo.

¹⁴ Kim Yungtae inferred the following: An envoy from Baekje explained their ordination ceremony to the Japanese court as follows: the way to receive their bhiksuni ordination is thus; they received their pratimoksa precepts from ten bhiksuni preceptors and then they went to a bhiksu temple and requested ten bhiksu preceptors, such that they received precepts from twenty monks and nuns. However, in this country [i.e. Japan] there were only bhiksuni. There is no bhiksu preceptor or bhiksuni preceptor, thus if these bhiksunis wanted to receive the bhiksuni ordination properly, they should establish a bhiksu order first. Also they have to invite bhiksuni preceptors from Baekje. Kim, Yungtae. *Baekje Budlgyo sasang yeongu* (Study on Buddhist thought of Baekje) (Seoul: Dongguk Daehakgyo chulpanbu, 1986): 75.

The ordination in Baekje was firmly established by at least the late sixth century as a systematically constituted nuns' monastery. Although no Korean records are available on the ordination, Japanese sources appear to confirm that it was fully institutionalized in Baekje. By considering the existence of Buddhist nuns in Goguryeo and Baekje, we know that Korean women could be actively involved in the creation of monasteries and transmission of Buddhism from the first appearance of Buddhism in the region. Moreover, women could be fully ordained at a similar time as men on the Korean peninsula. In addition, Korean Buddhism was mutually exchanged with China and Japan, areas where women were involved.

Unlike Goguryeo and Baekje, the records of Buddhist nuns in Silla (新羅, 57 B.C.E.-935 C.E.) are known in Korean documents. The earliest record of a Buddhist woman in Korea comes from *Samguk yusa*, in which mention is made of a woman known only by her surname, Sa (史), who was a younger sister of Morye (毛禮), a local leader in the Ilseon area of Silla, which is today's Sunsan north of Gyeongsangdo, in Korea.¹⁵ Both of them are said to have helped a monk from Goguryeo, Ado, perform his missionary work--spreading Buddhism some one hundred years before it was officially accepted by the Silla Kingdom. Ado fortuitously had the opportunity to cure the disease of the Silla princess, and in doing so, gained the trust of King Michu. As a result, Ado was authorized to construct a temple. When Ado built the small temple, Sa became the Buddhist nun involved with the teachings

¹⁵ In Silla, after the martyrdom of Lee, Chadon (異次頓, 501-527) in 527, King Beopheung officially accepted Buddhism as the state religion. However, it can be said that the religion had been widespread in the country before it was accepted officially due to the propagation of the priests. The main region for the propagation of Buddhism was Ilseongun. The house of Morye was considered to be the main place for the secret activities related to the propagation of the religion.

of Ado. She built Youngheungsa (永興寺) in the area of Samcheongi (三川岐) to carry out the propagation of Buddhism. Lady Sa became a nun, thus marking the first recorded appearance of a Buddhist nun in Korean history.¹⁶

However, scholars believe that since Buddhism was not officially accepted in Silla, Sa did not have a proper master who could officially approve her becoming a Buddhist nun. Therefore, it is reasonable to think that she was only a novice nun and cannot be regarded as the first fully ordained Buddhist nun. Also, it is also questionable whether she was a historical person.¹⁷ The historical question is raised since Ado is regarded as the same person who visited Goguryeo in 264 under the reign of King Michu (未離, r.262- 284) in Silla. He may be a legendary figure created by a combination of all the stories about the Buddhist monks and the transmission of Buddhism from Goguryeo to Silla.

The first Buddhist nun who can be recognized officially was the queen of King Beopheung (法興 r. 514-540). The king officially accepted Buddhism in Silla through the martyrdom of Chadon Lee.¹⁸ Soon afterward, he actively promoted Buddhism as his governing principle throughout the country, and as a result he successfully strengthened his power. He even became a Buddhist monk in his later years after giving the duties of his kingship to his successor in 539. King Beopheung also built the Daewang Heungryunsa

¹⁶毛祿之妹名史氏投師爲尼亦於三川岐創寺而居名永興寺末. *Samguk yusa* fascicle 3. “Beopheung” Recited from *Hanguk biguni yeonguso* 韓國比丘尼研究所, comp. *Hanguk go jungse bulgyo yeoseong biguni jaryojip: Jeongsaryupyeon* 한국 고증세 불교여성 비구니 자료집: 정사류편 (Collected Materials on Buddhist Lay Women and Nuns in Ancient and Medieval Korea: Records from the Official Historical Texts). (Seoul: Teuran, 2007.)

¹⁷ This inference is suggested by Kim, Youngtae, Sim, Seongsub.

¹⁸ Kim, Yeongtae 金煥泰. *Hanguk bulgyosa gaeseol* 韓國佛教史概說 (An Introduction to the History of Korean Buddhism). (Seoul: Kyongseowon, 1990), 25-32.

temple (興輪寺) in the capital. When the construction of the temple was completed, he became a Buddhist monk and took the name Beopgong (法空).¹⁹

The queen of Beopheung followed and became a Buddhist nun by following the principles of Buddhism, living in Youngheungsa. *Samgukyusa* states that in 535 the queen became a Buddhist nun by following the spiritual lessons of lady Sa. Like the king, the queen built a temple, Youngheungsa (永興寺), in Samcheongi (三川岐), on the opposite side of the original temple Heungryunsa constructed by her husband, King Beopheung. She passed away after living in Youngheungsa for several years. Her Buddhist name was Myobeop (妙法).²⁰

As in the case of lady Sa, no official record exists that can be used to prove that Myobeop was officially approved to become a Buddhist nun. However, when one considers that it was in the year 527 when Silla officially accepted Buddhism, and the year the temples Heungryunsa and Youngheungsa were built was 535, it is reasonable to assume that the eight year difference in the time period was enough to achieve the condition of fully ordained female nuns. Also, the possibility remains that priests from Goguryeo and Baekje were invited to ordination ceremonies; it was even possible that the number of priests who participated in the ceremony for the ordination of monks and nuns was less than 10 at that

¹⁹前王妃姓金氏出家法雲 字法空 僧傳與諸說亦以王妃出家名法雲名法雲又真興王爲法雲又以爲真興王之妃名法頗多疑混 *Samguk yusa* fascicle 3. “Heungbeop”

²⁰冊府元龜云姓募名秦初興役之乙卯歲王妃亦創永興寺慕史氏之遺風同王落彩爲尼名妙法亦住永興寺有年而終 Ibid.

time.²¹ Even though there is a lack of confident evidence, still it is thought that Myobeop, the queen of King Beopheung, was the first Buddhist nun in the history of Korean Buddhism. She was officially recognized as the first Buddhist nun, and Heungryunsa and Youngheungsa became the first temples for monks and nuns in Silla.²²

Presumably, the first nun in the Goryeo dynasty (高麗王朝, 918–1392) was Sinhye Yu, empress to dynasty founder Wanggeon Taejo (太祖 877–943); however, there is strong reason to doubt this. Buddhism in the Goryeo dynasty was strongly supported as the state religion. Sinhye Yu entered the Buddhist monastery when she spent a day with the first king and he failed to continue contacting her. Later, the king asked her to be his queen, and she returned to the secular world. For this reason, it is not appropriate to consider her to be the first Buddhist nun in Goryeo. Among the other wives of the first king, two sisters Daeseowon (大西院) and Soseowon (小西院) became Buddhist nuns after each of them spent one night with the first king. When they met with the first king later, they asked him to build a temple.²³ Therefore, the king built two temples, Daeseowon temple and Soseowon temple,

²¹ Sim, Jungsub. “Biguni: Lee gus lee hanguk cholcho” (Nuns: This is the first in Korea) Beopbo Newspaper. 2009.

²² On the other hand, Kim, Youngmi argues that the queen of King Beophung, along with her husband, converted to Buddhism at the time of its official acceptance in 527. When the king became a monk after renouncing the throne in 540, the queen also became a nun, “out of respect for LadySa’s path.” However, Sa and the queen could not have received official ordination. Women were only allowed to become Buddhist nuns after a decree was issued to that effect in 544, the fifth year of the reign of King Jinhung (540-576), the successor of King Beophung. So, the first nun should be said the queen of Jinhung. Yungmi Kim 金英美. “Silla sidae yeoseongui Jonggyo sanghwalgwa sungryeodml yeoseongeidaehan leehae 신라시대 여상의 종교 생활과 승려의 여성에 대한 이해 “The Religious Life of Woman and The Monks’ Understanding of Woman in The History of Buddhism in Silla” *Feminist Theology Review* 여성신학 1 (1995), 144-146.

²³ *Goryeosa* (고려사 高麗史, History of the Goryeo Dynasty). Jung, Inji 정인지. Translated by Gojeonyeongusil 고전 연구실. 11 vols. Seoul: Sinseowon, 2001-2002.

which managed land and farmers for them in Seogyeong. Thus, according to the historical records it appears that Daeseowon and Soseowon were the first Buddhist nuns in Goryeo.

The first nun in the Joseon Dynasty (朝鮮王朝 1392-1910) was Gyeongsun (경순), a princess who was the daughter of the first king, Taejo (Seonggye Lee). She entered the Buddhist priesthood for the first time by the recommendation of the king. Seven years after Taejo ascended to the throne; there was a dispute among the princes. As a result all the children of queen Kang were killed, and the king recommended princess Gyeongsun, who was born between him and queen Kang, to enter the Buddhist priesthood.²⁴ Princess Gyeongsun entered the Buddhist priesthood at the Cheongryongsa temple in which she received monastic codes under the monk Muhak. At that time, interestingly, Hyebin Lee, the former queen of King Gongmin in Goryeo dynasty, was the abbess of the Cheongryongsa. As a result, the former queen of Goryeo and the princess of Joseon lived together as Buddhist nuns. The Cheongryongsa at that time was known as Jeongeopwon. Jeongeopwon first appeared in the record for King Eui, the 18th king of Goryeo.²⁵

²⁴ The government of the Joseon dynasty from the beginning promulgated an anti-Buddhist policy in which Buddhism was challenged as the privilegestate religion. The dynasty adopted Neo-Confucianism as the prevailing social-ideology and religious rituals and so Buddhism and Buddhists faced social suppression and discrimination. The government tenaciously restricted the spread of Buddhism and monasteries could not be built near urban areas but could only to be constructed in the mountains.

²⁵ Jeongeopwon contributed greatly to the development of the system for the Buddhist nuns in the period of Joseon. Jeongeopwon was destroyed and restored several times. In the period under the reign of King Jungjong, the temple was destroyed. It became the place for the scholars of Seonggyungwan, the academic institute, to live in. Also, there were such temples as Insuwon and Jasuwon for the Buddhist nuns to live in. Such temples were completely destroyed under the reign of King Hyeonjong. As a result, the temples for Buddhist nuns, which acted as the connecting medium between the palace and the Buddhist temple, disappeared.

The Motivation of Female Renunciation

After appearing on record, Lady Sa, the queen of King Beopheung and the queen of King Jinheung became Buddhist nuns. In Silla, there was a custom for the queen and the women in the noble families to join the Buddhist *samgha*. *Samguksagi*²⁶ mentions that King Jinheung (眞興, 540-576) accepted Buddhism, shaved his head in his later years, and became the Buddhist monk named Beopwoon (法雲).²⁷ Also, it notes that the queen became a Buddhist nun and lived at Youngheungsa. The passage on the Jinpyeong mentions that the Buddhist statue of Youngheungsa broke one day, and the Buddhist nun who had been the queen of King Jinheung died soon thereafter in February of the year 614.²⁸ Therefore, it is believed that King Beopheung and King Jinheung entered the Buddhist priesthood consecutively, and their queens became Buddhist nuns and practiced until they died at Youngheungsa. However, there are no other records for any other queen becoming a Buddhist nun in Silla. There is no specific description of the reason why the queens joined with Buddhist monastery following their husbands. One can infer only that the two queens followed suit behind their husbands.

In the Goryeo period, Lee and Yeom, the queens of King Gongmin (恭愍王, 1351–1374), also entered the Buddhist priesthood after the king was murdered. They refused to

²⁶ *Samguk sagi* (The History of the Three Kingdoms) was compiled by Kim Busik (1075-1151) during the years 1136 to 1145. These books are well known as the oldest extant Korean histories. The History preserves important facts regarding the Silla royalty's deployment of Buddhist symbolism in order to provide legitimacy vis-à-vis the powerful hereditary aristocracy.

²⁷ *Samguksagi*, fascicle 4.

²⁸ *Samguksagi*, fascicle *Jinpyeong*.

take the offers of Hongryeun and Hanan while maintaining their social standing and wealth.²⁹ Therefore, it can be said that they became Buddhist nuns to honor the dead king.

The *Samguksagi Yeoljeon* states that in the period under the reign of King Jinpyeong (진평) and King Munmu (문무), the wife of Kim, Yusin (金庾信, 595-673) named Lady Jiso (智炤), who was one of the most powerful people to unify the Three Kingdoms, became a Buddhist nun. She was a princess, the third daughter of King Taejong. When her husband died Jiso shaved her head and became a Buddhist nun.³⁰ However, there is no firm reason recorded for her becoming a Buddhist nun beyond the coincidence of her renunciation following her husband's death. Also, the same case in the Silla Kingdom can be found for the wife of Heun Kim.³¹

Similarly, there are many examples in the Goryeo period of women who became Buddhist nuns after their husbands died.³² If we consider Jiso's life before she renounced the secular world, her husband was the most renowned politician and military strategist to unify the three kingdoms, and her son, Wonsul was a leader in society, serving as a Hwarnag warrior (literally "flower youth," the group of elite warriors). She was certainly more fortunate than other women of her time in that she left her own name in history. Jiso seems to have been a wise wife who enthusiastically supported her husband and successfully raised her children. She was also a capable political leader. However, in the historical source there

²⁹ Ibid., 100.

³⁰ *Samguksagi*, fascicle 43.

³¹ *Samguksagi*, fascicle 44.

³² Kim, Yungmi 金英美. "Goryeosidae yeoseongui chulga 고려시대 여성의 출가 (Women's Renunciation during the Goryeo Period)." *Ewha sahak yeongu 이화사학 연구* 25 (Ewha Studies in History, vols, 25, 26, 1999.), 29-74.

is a clue implying why she became a nun after her husband died: during the procedure of the Unification of the Three Kingdoms, her son behaved against his father's and the King's orders. After that, her husband never met his son, and Jiso did not forgive her son, begging him to apologize for his behavior, even though he contributed a great deal to the Kingdom later.³³ So, it might be more reasonable to infer that Jiso became a nun because of the strained relationship between her husband and her son, not merely to honor the death of her husband.

Lady Kim, the wife of Heo, Gang in the Goryeo dynasty, and granddaughter of Kim, Younghu in Sangrakgun, became a nun for her chastity. After her husband died, Sindon tried to marry her because of her higher social status and possessions. She told him that if he kept trying to marry her she would commit suicide, as is noted in the 132nd book of *Goryeosa* when she states, "My husband did not look at any other woman when he was alive. So how can I betray him? If you keep trying to marry me, I will kill myself."³⁴ As was noted, Munhwagun became a nun to honor the death of her husband, as is mentioned in a stone inscription: "She shaved her head by herself, in order to honor the death of her husband. She tried to forget the affairs in the secular world and enter the world of Buddha. She spent her life without much trouble, and did good things for others for forty years."³⁵ In addition, in a similar story the second wife of Daeyong Sung was not the official wife, but

³³ Lee, Baeyoung. *Women in Korean History*. (Seoul: Ewha Women University Press. 2008), 133-36.

³⁴ Kim, Yungmi 金英美. "Samguk Goryeosidae Biguni Sam Gwa Suhang" 삼국 고려시대 비구니의 삶과 수행 "The Life and Practice of Nuns in the Three Kingdom and Goryeo period" In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwasam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007), 86.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 86-87.

she became a nun to honor the death of her husband.³⁶ As shown above, these women entered the Buddhist priesthood after their husbands died. Their reasons for entering the Buddhist priesthood cannot be known for certain, but it is clear that they entered the Buddhist monastery after their husbands died. It could be said that these women became nuns in order to pray for their husbands after their deaths, to remain faithful to them, and to avoid remarrying. Women's chastity was increasingly emphasized in the ancient kingdom where a patriarchal social system was firmly taking root. Chastity was an extreme moral value imposed on women, whether their husband was alive or not. Wives were required to prove their fidelity to their dead husbands. Society as well as the government eulogized and celebrated those women. The government admitted these women to become Buddhist nuns as a way to honor their dead husbands.

The life of a particular woman in the period of Goryeo who became a nun by the interpretation of a name written on an inscription on a tombstone stands out as especially interesting. Mrs. Heo, the wife of Yangcheongun, was the first daughter among nine children of Gong Heo. She was born in the forty-second year under the reign of King Gojong. When she was fourteen years old, she married Byeon Kim (1268) and later gave birth to four sons and three daughters. Due to disease, her husband passed away in the twenty-seventh year (1301) under the reign of King Chungryeol.³⁷ The life of Mrs. Heo after

³⁶ Ibid., 87.

³⁷ Her husband, Byeon Kim started his career as a government official when he was 16 years old, and passed the national test for government officials in the 9th year (1268) under the reign of King Wonjong. In the 12th year of King Wonjong (元宗 1259–1274) (1271), he went to China which was under the reign of the Won Dynasty with the prince who would become King Chungryeol later (忠烈王 1274–1308). He stayed there with the prince for four years, and came back with the king and the queen in 1274 when King Chungryeol was officially named as the king. He was appointed as a second-class official for his dedication to the king. Later, Byeon Kim took various positions in the regional and the central governments.

the death of her husband is notable in the activities of Buddhism. After her husband died, Mrs. Heo built the temple named Gameungsa with her own possessions, in order to pray for the spirit of her husband. For three years, she went to the grave of her husband regularly on the first and fifteenth day of each month in order to carry out a ceremony for her dead husband. Even after the three-year period, she always went to the grave for the ceremony on special days. While she was visiting the grave of her husband, she listened to the words of Buddhist monk Mu from China. She was also taught by the Buddhist Priest Cheolsan. At age fifty-seven, she traveled to Mireukdaewon, Mt. Yeolban and Mt. Cheongryang. It seems that Mireukdaewon was another name for Mireukwon of Chungjumok, and she carried out Buddhist services there. Mt. Yeolban was another name for Mt. Geumgang. Mt. Cheongryang was probably the mountain located in the west of Jaesanhyeon of Andong Province. In all these areas, there were famous temples. Therefore, it is assumed that her pilgrimage was to visit such temples. After Mrs. Heo returned from her spiritual journey, she entered the Buddhist monastery at age sixty-one, in the second year (1315) of the reign of King Chung Suk.³⁸

If Mrs. Heo's actions after the death of her husband are carefully considered, it can be said that she was a true Buddhist devotee. But one wonders why she waited fourteen years after her husband's death to enter the priesthood. After her death, she was named as Buddhist nun Jinhye and given the posthumous title of *yeodaesa* (literally, "female master") by the government because she followed the way that was respected and appreciated by others. The official reason for her entering the Buddhist priesthood was to honor the death

³⁸ Ibid., 82-85.

of her husband. However, this can be reasonably doubted because she became a nun after a considerable amount of time after the death of her husband.³⁹

To be fair, though, we should consider that Heo could not enter the Buddhist priesthood immediately because she had a young son and daughter who were not married at the time of her husband's death. It seems that she was able to start her travels to the famous temples when all of her children were grown and had families or became Buddhist monks. So, it could be said that it was possible for a woman to become a nun when all her children were grown up even if their husbands passed away. And we know it was possible for women to become Buddhist nuns as a way of honoring their dead husbands.

As we will see, cases of other women who had proper reasons for becoming Buddhist nuns show that women could enter the Buddhist monastery after their husbands died and their children were grown. Apparently women only officially entered the monastery after completing secular duties such as childcare and marriage.

A few unique cases exist for women entering the Buddhist priesthood in the period of Goryeo at the very end of their lives. Such women as Choi (1227-1309), the wife of Park Gu Kim, (1249-1318), the wife of Seo Choi, and Yu (1247-1326), the wife of Deokson Lee, did not enter the Buddhist priesthood until after their husbands died and just before they died themselves. In *Goryeo Myojimyeongjipseong*, there is a passage on Choi (1227-1309), the wife of Gu Kim, who lived alone as a widow for thirty years after her husband passed away.

³⁹ What we need to consider is the part about the children, which was shown on the tombstones of Byeon Kim and his wife, Heo. In the 27th year (1301), on the tombstone of Byeon Kim, there was a saying that the fourth son and the third daughter were still young. However, in the 11th year (1324) under the reign of King Chung Suk, there was a part on the tombstone of Heo, saying that the fourth son became a Buddhist priest with the name of Yeochan. It also said that the last daughter married Seonji Won of Sanghogun, Miljikbusa.

She entered the Buddhist priesthood when she was eighty-three years old (1309), one day before she died. Her Buddhist name was Hyangjin. In another record, there is a passage on Park (1249-1318), the wife of Seo Choi, who died after carrying out prayers. When her death approached, she entered the Buddhist priesthood with the teaching of the monk from Myoryeonsa. She received the Buddhist name of Seonggong.⁴⁰

Both of these women became Buddhist nuns before they breathed their last breath, long after they began their lives as widows after their husband's death. They were given their Buddhist names; however, they did not stay at temples and died at home. It is important to learn the reason for their decisions to enter the Buddhist priesthood at the end of their lives. A simple statement clearly explains such a reason. On the tombstone of Choi, the wife of Gu Kim, the inscription says that it is possible for people to go to heaven if they spend only one day in training for the Buddhist priesthood. Such a passage is also mentioned in such books as *Seungjiyul* and *Bonyeongyeong*. People believed that all their bad karma would be gone if they spent one day to honor Buddha. The fact that Park, the wife of Seo Choi, chanted to Amitabha Buddha before she died illustrates this belief that ordination was a way of reaching heaven.⁴¹ However, the women's entry into the Buddhist priesthood just before they died was not considered as the acceptable process by the government.

⁴⁰ Kim, Yungmi 金英美. "Samguk Goryeosidae Biguni Sam Gwa Suhang" 삼국 고려시대 비구니의 삶과 수행 "The Life and Practice of Nuns in the Three Kingdom and Goryeo period" In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwasam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007), 87-88.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

The record also shows that some women entered the Buddhist priesthood because of poverty. The two daughters of Jisuk Kim were able to become Buddhist nuns because of poverty even though they were not married.⁴² We cannot know the exact reasons why each woman decided to renounce the secular world to venture into the forest. But we can say that reasons for women to join a monastery were various and included joining for the sake of chastity, to carry out Buddhist practices, to search for the truth, to become a nun, to be punished or to avoid punishment, as well as yearning for being reborn in heaven and pure land.

Religious Practice

The fundamental principles and goals from the teachings of the Buddha are to reach enlightenment, self-realization, and to help others, and the life of Buddhist nuns extols the same principles. In order to achieve self-realization, the Buddhist nuns practice in several ways, such as studying doctrine, chanting scriptures, and engaging in meditation, among other things. Based on their achievements, they carry out the propagation of Buddhism in order to help others. It appears that from the start of Buddhism in the Korean peninsula Korean nuns also carried out these disciplines. We do not, however, find records of female masters whose names are singled out for notable Buddhist practices or deeds. Thus, the nuns and laywomen of this period remain generally anonymous. In a few cases, nuns' names do

⁴² Also, women were forced to become Buddhist nuns as part of their punishment. Some became nuns to avoid punishment. Yungmi Kim 金英美. "Goryeosidae yeoseongui chulga 고려시대 여성의 출가 (Women's Renunciation during the Goryeo Period)." *Ewha sahak yeongu 이화사학 연구* 25 (Ewha Studies in History, vols, 25, 26, 1999.), 29-74.

appear on record, either on lists of disciples of great male masters or as those from distinguished family backgrounds.⁴³

We can conclude that some Buddhist nuns made earnest efforts to practice for enlightenment. On the tombstone inscriptions of such representative Buddhist monks as Jigong, Naong, and Bowoo in the late period of Goryeo, there are the names of monks and nuns who were disciples. The featuring of such Buddhist nuns is particularly prominent in the late period of Goryeo in the records of Buddhist nuns. The number of such names is large, proving that the status of the Buddhist nuns was high.

According to *Jogyejingak Guksa Eorok* and *Korea Buddhist History*, Buddhist nuns such as Jongmin, Cheongwon, Yoyen, and Heewon participated in the summer retreat at the Sooseonsa temple in the second year (1213) under the reign of King Gangjong.⁴⁴ They were the disciples of the Buddhist monk Jingak Guksa Hyesim (1178-1234), who was appointed as National Preceptor from the Dynasty. These nuns received gongans or *hwadu* (a meditative phrase to be repeated over and over) from Hyesim, and practiced Zen meditation.⁴⁵ It is said that Hyesim told the nun Jeonggyeon to study a *hwadu* in order to break out of the world of illusion. Similarly, he instructed Jongmin to study her *hwadu* at all times in daily life. Jongmin meditated with the *gongan* that there was no truthfulness in

⁴³ Yungmi Kim 金英美. “Samguk Goryeosidae Biguni Sam Gwa Suhang” 삼국 고려시대 비구니의 삶과 수행 “The Life and Practice of Nuns in the Three Kingdom and Goryeo period” In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwasam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007), 87.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 89-91.

⁴⁵ Altogether only inscriptions have been found so far that record the names of male masters' female disciples, and these masters were all Seon monks rather than monks belonging to the doctrinal schools. Kim, Youngmi “Goryeo sidae biguni ui hwaldong kwa sahoe jeo jiwi” (A Study of the Activities and Social Status of Buddhist Nuns in the Goryeo Dynasty), *Hanguk munhwa yeogu* (Korean Cultural Studies), vol. 1 (Ewha Woman's University, Hanguk Munhwa Yeonguwon, 2001), 48-54.

dogs; Yoyeon received the example of the Chinese Buddhist nun Yoyeon. The Chinese Buddhist nun Yoyeon was a student of the Buddhist priest Goandaewoo and meditated in Mountain Mal of Seju. At that time, the monk Gwangye came and asked for answers, which were referred to the Buddhist Nun Hyesim. Buddhist nuns challenged Buddhist monks through the meditative practice of questions and answers.⁴⁶ So, for Hyesim and his followers, *hwadu* practice was to result in enlightenment “now,” in this life. The fact that he had nuns participate in summer meditation retreats and urged them to *hwadu* practice in daily life connects to the view on women’s enlightenment in which there is no discrimination against or inferiority of female practitioners. This evidence points to non-discriminatory practices with women or men in Buddhist religious practice in Goryeo period.

Religious pilgrimages by a woman in Goryeo dynasty helps to further convey the devotional life of nuns. The activities of nun Seonghye (1255~1324) were very peculiar, mainly consisting of the pursuit of religious journeys. Seonghye was the wife of Byeon Kim, and as explained previously, she left home at the age of sixty-one after praying for the wellness of her husband for fourteen years. After her husband’s death, she left home in the second year (1315) under the reign of King Chung Suk. In the next year, she went to Tongdosa and traveled to Gyerim and returned home. Seonghye said that Gyerim was a good place with many famous Buddhist monks. She finished her travels by obtaining the Buddha’s bone at Tongdosa and observing Gyerim. According to her, it was enough to

⁴⁶Kim, Youngmi. “National Preceptor Hyesim’s Theory of Women’s Enlightenment and the Life of Buddhist Nuns in the Goryeo Period,” in Conference Proceedings: Korean Nuns within the Context of East Asian Buddhist Traditions. 2004, 39-48.

enjoy the place and revel in the wonderful landscapes in Gyerim. She came back from Gyerim, finishing her journey. After completing her travels, Seonghye built a small temple next to the house of her eldest son. She stayed there and lived as a Buddhist nun for ten years, until she died. She was named *Yeodaesa* (female master) Jinhye as the great teacher. She was also said to be an ideal wife and named as Byeonhanguksa Jinhye after her death, because she followed the willingness of the king. The government's recognition of her position as a Buddhist nun had important meaning. In addition to the remarkable fact that she began these journeys at such a late age, one is also impressed by her travels to Tongdosa and Gyeongju. Accordingly, Seonghyo was thought to have the freedom to pursue a journey at a time when it was not easy for women to travel.⁴⁷

The Joseon Dynasty presents further insight into the religious life of nuns. In spite of the way the Confucian-oriented rulers of Joseon imposed rigid moral doctrines upon women nuns still contributed to the survival of Buddhism during the Joseon Dynasty, acting as a touchstone between Buddhist devotees and temples for Buddhist Priests. The example of Yesun (1587~1657) in the early seventeenth century under Confucian ideological society sheds light on this dynasty. Yesun's mundane name was Yeosun (女順), and she was the daughter of Gwi Lee (李貴) who held a powerful political position.⁴⁸ According to the

⁴⁷ Heo, Heungsik "Joseon ui Jeongyu wa Goryeo ui Jinhye: Du sida yeodaesa nu bigyo" (Jeongyu of Joseon and Jinhye of Gorye: A comparison of two female masters of the two eras), *Jeongsin munwhan yeongu* 27-4 (2004 December), 175-198.

⁴⁸ She was born in king Seonjo 20 and lived during the era of the king, Gwanghae and Injo. Her father was an official during the era of the king, Gwanghae and he did the main role of the political change, the year, Gye, and after the king, Injo got the shrine, finally he became YeonPyong Buwongun, one of the most official powerful positions. Yi, Hyangsoon 이향순. "Joseonsidae biguniui samgwa suhaeng 조선시대 비구니의 삶과 수행 (The Lives and Practices of Bhikṣuṇīs during the Joseon Period)." In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 115-119.

“Annals of the Joseon Dynasty” (조선왕조실록) she was intelligent enough to master the letters and she began to read at the age of six or seven. She married Jagyeum Kim, the brother of her father’s political colleague. However, Kim died four years into her marriage, and she became a widow. From the time of her youth, she was fond of reading, and this continued even after her marriage. The interesting point here is that her husband, Jagyeom Kim, was very much devoted to Buddhism. Yesoon, who loved reading, probably spent time reading Buddhist books with her husband. Even his friend, Eongwan Oh joined in for readings.⁴⁹ The couple and Eongwan Oh related to each other as religious colleagues and considered each other as equals, something very uncommon for members of the opposite sex in this setting. They talked about Buddhism throughout the day and often late into evening.⁵⁰

As mentioned, the Joseon rulers created a rigid environment that made it difficult for women to pursue religious life. Since the Confucian-oriented rulers were morally restrictive, women had to hide their faces when they went out of their houses. Unlike under Goryeo, no longer were they allowed to visit Buddhist temples or ride horses. The strict rule of sex segregation was defined as *naeobeop*, literally the “law separating the outside and inside.” Men and women, and even husband and wife, were strictly distinguished and had to adhere to a code of etiquette with each other.

⁴⁹ Dictating Yesoon's words, since my husband who was devoted with the good will studying, they did not remain to have ordinary marriage life to have babies, so on. Ibid., 121.

⁵⁰ She said that Kim, Jagyeum predicted the day he was to die and told his wife, and at the moment dying, he composed a poem. The poem is on "EuoYadam." Ibid., 126.

After Yeosun became a widow at a young age, she left the mundane world and went into the mountains, which turned out to be the bud of troubles to come. Eongwan Oh still visited her after her husband's death to talk about Buddhism, as her husband requested before his death.⁵¹ Through her interaction with Eongwan Oh she learned that there were many nuns in Odaesan Mountain, and she unsuccessfully attempted to travel there. However, when, on the 4th of June in 1614, she heard that Oh was going to visit Durk Yusan, a pilgrimage site in the mountains, she left a good-bye letter to her secular family, and became a nun on Durkyu Mountain. She was twenty-eight years old.⁵²

Later, Yeosun and Eongwan Oh took an excursion together, and they were arrested in Aneum-hyeon. They concealed their identities by falsely claiming that they were a married couple, and Yesun used the feigned name of Yeongil. Their group included a young widow, Jeongi, who was previously a second wife of Na Jeongeon, a local governor. When Jongi became a widow she heard rumors that people “appreciated” Yeosun, so Jeongi joined her but was arrested and tortured after a 3-year accompaniment with Yeosun and Eongwan Oh. Three people in the group strongly denied the assumption of adultery. This case seemed to be closed when the two females were jailed and Eongwan Oh died during torture.⁵³ With

⁵¹ Oh, Eongwan was the concubine son of Oh, Gyeum (吳謙), and he was so smart that he was an expert in discourse. He read all kinds of Buddhist books, and went sightseeing to the all temples. Ibid., 114.

⁵² Ibid., 118.

⁵³ The political impact of this case continued that Yeosun's father, Lee Gwi, was punished to be deprived from his official position and expelled out of the capital city because of the ground that he did not prevent his daughter from ruining her chastity. Jeong Sukjong and Park, Byeongseon “Joseon Hugi Bulgyojungchaekwa Wandaong: Niseungwu Jonjaeyangsangwol Jungsimeoro” (조선후기 불교정책과 원당: 승니의 존재양상을 중심으로.) (*The Palace of Minjokmunhwanonchong* no.18.19.), 229-232.

Eongwan Oh's death in jail and Yeosun's own life in peril, she wrote a poem entitled "Jatan" (self-deep mourning, 자탄) to leave to his younger brother.

Now my robe has been polluted with yellow dust.
Why are humans not allowed to enter blue mountains?
The secular world only restricts my physical body (four elements).
The government is difficult, prohibiting the minds which travel far away.⁵⁴

This poem, composed as a quatrain with seven Chinese characters in each line, offers the vantage point of the emotional reality Yeosun experienced. It expresses well a female's deep feelings about her circumstance with worldly affairs and at the same times her enthusiastic religious ambition. It describes the agony the ascetics could surely face. A severe grief is evident in the narrator's tone, and the word, "yellow dust (*Hwangjin*)" expresses remorse toward the living world. The "blue mountain" is the symbol of integrity and religious truth. It also expresses the idea that this world offers no resting place for her physical body. And the physical body, according to Buddhist doctrine, is composed of four elements: earth, water, wind, and fire. In self-doubt, the nun has turned into a restless and rootless wanderer. The first part of the passage is about the painful emotion that the Buddhist practitioner experiences. Her dust-covered robe points to having fallen under the suspicion of having engaged in lewd conduct which might block her from entering the blue mountain. But the latter part of the passage is about her strong belief that although she was detained without reason, the prosecutors could never keep her mind from seeking the truth even in jail. It means the free spirit does not fear death. In this poem, she depicted herself as

⁵⁴祇今衣上汚黃塵 何事青山不許人 字只能因四大 金吾難禁遠遊神 The poetry was in the Yeowoyadam Yi, Hyangsoon 이향순. "Joseonsidae biguniui samgwa suhaeng 조선시대 비구니의 삶과 수행 (The Lives and Practices of Bhikṣuṇīs during the Joseon Period)." In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 113.

a practitioner who already was wearing the Buddhist robe. Regardless of her status she identifies herself as a nun. However, in this case, which finally led to an impeachment against Gwi Lee, officials focused on her suspect chastity rather than on her admiration of Buddhism. The case attracted public interest due to its sensationalism. It was a significant ordeal under the strict order of Confucianism that a daughter of a high official, who was also a young widow from a noble family, was arrested as a political offender as well as an immoral woman. Even the King himself expressed his intention to investigate. The chronicler closed this case by writing that “Three basic principles have been destroyed. How can the nation be preserved?” By this process, Yesun was stigmatized in the formal history as a lewd woman who ignored basic social morality.⁵⁵

Yesun’s situation revisited a quarrel over housewives’ love affairs, when royal wives or noble wives seldom entered into Buddhism. It resulted in a strict warning against Buddhism that had a strong and consistent message among noble wives. A very important statement to back this conclusion is on *Eowoo Yadam*. This statement, omitted from the official historical record, is about Yesun’s perilous confession of faith at the end of the investigation. Though it is rather long, the complete translation shows the religious viewpoints of the wives of dynasty leaders’ wives.

Sakyamuni, who was a royal prince, abandoned his country and ran out of his castle, and became Buddha after practicing in the snowy mountains. Munsu used to be a woman in a previous generation, and [she] finally achieved truth-enlightenment by participating in the truth, taking no care of her own body. Lady Wonwang, who was a previous incarnation of Gwaneum (관음), departed on a long journey to seek the truth and she sold her body when she was not able to reach the truth and keep practicing. Like this, there were countless

⁵⁵ However, it is not clearly proven that her coarse behaviors with her dead husband’s friend occurred. If we compare the True Record of the Joseon Dynasty with other historical records, this case could be felt to imply political or religious suppression. As we get hints from the punishment against Lee Gwi, who was a member of Western People, Yeseon provided a good target for Northern People. Ibid., 118.

people who practiced and achieved enlightenment. Even through the Tang period, which did not encourage Buddhism yet, numerous housewives became nuns although their records are hard to trace. Past and present are different from each other, but not for the meaning, because truth is the same.⁵⁶

She then confesses to the reason why she has to practice Buddhism.

Buddhism clears the mind into purity so that it is like a white moon up in the sky.⁵⁷ Evil habits die off and agony disappears. Gradual communication turns everything into marvelous change, when it cuts the circulation and removes the hell. Wrong deeds of the past disappear like clouds scattering and rain falling. You cross over the hill with your favorite things and enemies altogether. A single dust is like this, that it is hard to say about other things. I cannot reach the utmost truth to arrange for the King and deliver benefits to people, as I was born as a woman and I tried to study Confucianism. And Taoism steals the harmony and plays with it. Therefore, I tried to learn Buddhist Truth to get one clue to it, and I tried not to betray the favor from the mountains for my whole life by returning it. I have just a few days to live under a big transgression. However, it is like I take off my shoes and my skeleton scatters. To live and die is just to leave the night and meet the morning. And I shall die without a crime, that to die is to live. With that, I do not regret.⁵⁸

Yesun explains her ultimate reasons for devoting herself to Buddhism along with the attractiveness of it in her clear and reasonable voice. As a female, Confucianism could not work for her as a religion because it functions primarily as a political ideology. After completing inquiries in jail, Yesun requested to pay a royal visit to the palace, and though he was initially opposed, Kwanghaegun approved of it. Yesun risked her status to be executed, but when she was given a chance she reacted very swiftly to fulfill his requirement and

⁵⁶ Yi, Hyangsoon 이향순. “Joseonsidae biguniui samgwa suhaeng 조선시대 비구니의 삶과 수행 (The Lives and Practices of Bhikṣuṅīs during the Joseon Period).” In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 118-119.

⁵⁷ She also explains the other two religions, “There are 3 teachings, which are Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Confucianism is about illuminating the faith of yourself, and that of others. It helps everybody enlighten five morals and insects and weeds and trees benefit from it, which is a feature of Confucianism. Daoism protects against disease and agony, which keeps aging and death away. However, as demolition does not reach circulation, it just limits itself into longevity.”

⁵⁸ Yi, Hyangsoon 이향순. “Joseonsidae biguniui samgwa suhaeng 조선시대 비구니의 삶과 수행 (The Lives and Practices of Bhikṣuṅīs during the Joseon Period).” In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 119.

because of such kind character she was permitted to stay at Jasuwon as she wished. Yesun's boldness could be confirmed from her behavior since she was allowed to visit the palace.⁵⁹

Yesun was a religious woman with strong charisma. According to Lee Geungik, she was revered by royal persons in the palace as a living Buddha, though this premise may not be true. According to Jeongi, Yesun used to be enlightened with good favor, and she emanated splendor even though she did not eat or sleep. Even though these descriptions are not more than subjective opinions, the fact remains that Yesun appeared as a divine Buddhist to the extent of being a living Buddha. Even Jangjijun in his writing *Jinhwisokgo*, stated that Yesun, through strict discipline, was outstanding in her writing and speech, and as such she was regarded as a Buddha in the palace even to have “the manner of Jeonghyang” for her.

Based on the record of that time, it is obvious that Yesun's religious life appears to be dynamic. She practiced consistently; it was the outcome of eight or nine years of training and discipline for the worship of Buddha. From her time with her husband and Eongwan Oh, they considered Yesun's divine theory was at a considerable level. Another interesting fact is that both her husband and Eongwan Oh were eager to practice Seon. So, it is safe to say that Yesun might have been involved in Seon practice since she was under their influence. Her rebuilding of the temple is also recorded.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Yi, Hyangsoon “Vicissitudes in the Order of Buddhist Nuns during Choson Korea” in Conference Proceedings: Korean Nuns within the Context of East Asian Buddhist Traditions. 2004,

⁶⁰ Yi, Hyangsoon 이향순. “Joseonsidae biguniui samgwa suhaeng 조선시대 비구니의 삶과 수행 (The Lives and Practices of Bhikṣuṇīs during the Joseon Period).” In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 123.

Regardless of differing records, one clear fact is that she had an ability to attract people, which finally proved to be an action of political power. It is a common feature in the Joseon Dynasty to become a nun in order to pray for the soul of one's deceased husband, and to spend the remainder of life as a widow in silence. Yesun, within the same status, committed herself to becoming a nun. She never gave up under pressure, and she maintained her cause in achieving the realization of Buddhism once she became determined to seek the discipline. As a widow from the upper-class, *sadaebu*, Yesun represents the population group who could become nuns relatively easily, even under the harsh anti-Buddhist ideology. For instance, women were not permitted to visit Buddhist temples, and unmarried girls were prohibited from becoming nuns.⁶¹ In general, however, this regulation was not strictly enforced for widows, including the consorts of deceased kings.⁶² Also given her socio-economic circumstance, it is notable that Yesun was literate and engaged in writing activities. She actively and courageously entered Buddhism with an aim to achieve the discipline to obtain the teaching of Buddha. She was a nun from an influential aristocratic family that maintained close connections with the royal family, making a vital contribution to the survival of Buddhism during the Joseon dynasty.

Social Activities within Patriarchal Society

Buddhist nuns actively participated in Buddhist affairs by donating their property in several ways. In the period under the reign of King Jinpyeong (眞平王, 579–632) in the Silla

⁶¹ Lee, Giun 이기운. "Joseonsidae Jeongeobwonui seolchiwa Bulgyo sinhaeng 조선시대 淨業院의 설치와 불교신행 (The Establishment of the Purifying Karma Nunnery and Devotional Buddhist Practice)." *Jonggyo yeongu* 종교연구 (Religious Studies) (no. 25. 2001.), 30.

⁶² In the eleventh year of his reign (1469-1494), however, king Seongjong ordered that all women were forbidden to renounce the home life. *Ibid.*, 79.

Kingdom, Buddhist nun Jihye (智慧) tried to repair the temple of Anheungsa (安興寺) but lacked enough money for the project.⁶³ She dreamed one day that she met a mother goddess of the mountain of Seondo (仙桃山) who gave a gold bar for her to use in reconstructing the temple. The goddess requested her to manage Buddhist dharma talks every spring and fall for ten days. After awakening in a state of surprise from the dream, Jihye discovered gold at the temple and was able to finally repair the temple. She then organized the Buddhist public dharma talks and led the lectures for lay devotees in meetings that gathered every spring and autumn to practice the Buddhist ritual ceremonies for ten days.⁶⁴ It is notable that the story combines Buddhist myth and indigenous Korean shamanistic features. More importantly, the Buddhist lectures led by Buddhist nuns had begun in the period of the Silla Kingdom.⁶⁵

Other stories tell of Buddhist nuns in the period of Unified Silla (統一新羅, 668 CE - 935 CE)⁶⁶ who donated possessions for the propagation of Buddhism. The nun Wonjeok (圓

⁶³ Kim, Yungmi 金英美. "Silla sidae yeoseongui Jonggyo sanghwalgwa sungryeodml yeoseongeidaehan leehae 신라시대 여상의 종교 생활과 승려의 여성에 대한 이해 "The Religious Life of Woman and The Monks' Understanding of Woman in The History of Buddhism in Silla" *Feminist Theology Review* [여성신학] 1 (1995), 144-146.

⁶⁴ *Samguk yusa* fascimile 5.

⁶⁵ Buddhism at the beginning of the transmission was regarded as a new type of the indigenous religion. Monks and nuns were commonly considered to be shamans devoted to spirits, gods and goddesses. This story also indicates that Buddhism was accompanied by a new, distinctive culture, which gradually attracted the interest of people. It was of special importance as the residence of the mountain goddess who guarded the capital. As the spirit of that mountain, the divine goddess was widely revered throughout the land. Buddhism as a new religion mutually developed with indigenous deities, a feature that was typical of the association between indigenous Silla religion and the newly imported tradition of Buddhism. By adapting local spiritual cults into its own literature Buddhism was able to spread its beliefs with harmonization of national identity. Inoue Hideo "The Reception of Buddhism in Korea and Its Impact on Indigenous Culture." ed. Lancaster, Lewis R. and C.S. Yu *Introduction of Buddhism to Korea New Cultural Patterns*. (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press.1989), 61-63.

⁶⁶ General Kim, Yushin of Silla, aided by Tang forces, defeated General Gyebaek and conquered Baekje when King Munmu ordered his armies to attack Baekje in 660 C.E. and he conquered Goguryeo in 668C.E. King Munmu was the first ruler ever to look upon the Korean Peninsula as a single political entity. The post-668 C.E. of Silla kingdom is referred to as Unified Silla.

寂), together with the monk Hyangjosa (香照), built a great stupa at the temple of Beopwangsa (法廣寺) by donating her assets in 828.⁶⁷ Another story tells about the Buddhist nun who donated to Jeomchalbo (a kind of fund for *dharma* talk about Jeomchal).⁶⁸ Through such a story, we know that it was possible for the Buddhist nuns to have their own possessions and retain a higher status. For the Silla Kingdom, after the unification, there were many Buddhist nuns who stayed in Silla or went to China and Japan for the propagation of Buddhism. Considering such a fact, it can be said that many women participated in the Buddhist community after the religion was accepted in the period of Three Kingdoms.

In the Goryeo Dynasty, since Buddhism was the national religion, Buddhist nuns more enthusiastically participated not only in repairing temples, but also by engaging in national Buddhist projects. When the great Buddhist monk Gakgong (각공) repaired the Euiwangsa temple in the twenty-fifth year (1195) under the reign of King Myeongjong in Goryeo dynasty, one Buddhist nun received a pair of wall paintings from him and repainted them.⁶⁹ Another Buddhist nun named Cheonghye (청혜) donated money with some Buddhist monks

⁶⁷ Kim, Yungmi 金英美. “Samguk Goryeosidae Biguni Sam Gwa Suhang” 삼국 고려시대 비구니의 삶과 수행 “The Life and Practice of Nuns in the Three Kingdom and Goryeo period” In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007), 93.

⁶⁸ The monk Wonkwang organized the *dharma* talk for academic lecturing of Buddhism in Silla, deeply studying Mahayana. He established Jeomchalbo and educated the people through the *dharma* talking about Jeomchal. He actually tried to change the way of people's thinking into Buddhist thinking. Hwang, Sooyung Hanguk Kumseok Yumun Iljisa, (1976: 145.). Recited from (Kim, Youngmi 2007), 96.

⁶⁹ “Anyangsawangsa” *Hanguk Gumsukmun* 1040. Recited (Kim, Yungmi 金英美. 2007.), 97.

and lay devotees in the thirty-ninth year (1252) under the reign of King Gojong, so that the ceiling of Anyangsa (안양사) on Mountain Giri could be built.⁷⁰

The Buddhist nun Moi (모이) contributed to promote the “national detailed map” in the tenth year (1323) under the reign of King Chung Suk. Moi was included in the groups who participated in this project and lived in Naksan. Naksan was regarded as the temple in the Yongam Forest in Jangdan District. Moi seemed to have a relationship with Naksan and took part in collecting properties for the purpose of wall painting. Considering that many women are referred to in the wall painting, she probably had a role in leading and promoting female learners.⁷¹

Buddhist nun Myodeuk (묘덕) inscribed portions of the *Baekwonhwasang Chorokbuljo Jiksim Cheyocheol* in gold in the third year (1377) under the reign of King Woo and delivered money when re-printing it with wood. Also, she collected money for the publishing of the book *Baekwonhwasangyeurok* and donated his property to build the Yeunpil grotto in the fourth year (1378) under the reign of King Woo.⁷² She also contributed to building the Budo monolith by submitting her property.

The Buddhist nun Myogwan sealed one Epsom of Nahonghyegeun who was the secretary of the king in the fourteenth year (1388) under the reign of King Woo in the eastern tower of Youngjeonsa. According to the contents of the tower, the great father Woonhyeon Seo and his wife Mrs. Jang were shown. Their Buddhist names were Gakwah

⁷⁰ Jung, Wootae 정우택. *Goryeo Sidaewu Bulhwa*. 고려시대의 불화 (Temples' Painting in Goryeo Period) (Seoul: Sigongsa, 1999.), 80-81.

⁷¹ Ibid., 81.

⁷² Baewoon hwasangorok jijisimchaejulyoo *Hanguk bulgyo jeonseovoi.6* Recited (Kim, Yungmi 金英美. 2007.), 96.

and Buyeon, and they were learners and submitted their property to build the tower.⁷³

Buddhist nun Myogwan contributed a significant role to acquire one relic of Nahong with the Buddhist priest Gaksu and seal it. From this historical information, it can be inferred that Buddhist nuns actively participated in Buddhist affairs or created and practiced on their own.

Unlike in the Silla Kingdom, evidence that nuns organized the regular Buddhist dharma meetings independently cannot be found during the Goryeo period. However, there is evidence of participation in public *dharma* talks for lay devotees by Buddhist nuns in cooperation with Buddhist monks. First, they participated in the secret meetings such as the “Manbul ceremony” which was popular during the late period of Goryeo.⁷⁴ Even if the names are anonymous, Buddhist nuns along with Buddhist monks participated in the *dharma* meetings taking place when 4100 people gathered. Also, they participated in the Buddhist meetings managed by the government. Furthermore, they prayed at dawn on the special day in memory of the death of the princess of Yeonbuxsa. Because thousands of Buddhist nuns and monks participated, the king gave them 800 drapers.⁷⁵

There is a remarkable incident in the public activities of Buddhist nuns. There was a Buddhist nun who practiced immediately after unification of the Three Kingdoms. She was described as an incarnation of Avalokiteśvara (Gwanseeum Bosal),⁷⁶ her figure was used to

⁷³ “Yungbaksajibojaejonjasaritap” Hanguk *Gumsukmun* 1040. Recited (Kim, Yungmi 金英美. 2007.), 98.

⁷⁴ *Goryeosa*85. (고려사 高麗史, History of the Goryeo Dynasty). Jung, Inji 정인지. Translated by Gojeonyeongusil 고전 연구실. 11 vols. Seoul: Sinseowon, 2001-2002.

⁷⁵ *Goryeosa*132. (고려사 高麗史, History of the Goryeo Dynasty). Jung, Inji 정인지. Translated by Gojeonyeongusil 고전 연구실. 11 vols. Seoul: Sinseowon, 2001-2002.

⁷⁶ *Samguk yusa* fascicle5. Tonggam.

diagnose the illness of King Hyeongheung (경흥) who was praised as a great king. This shows the social activities of Buddhist nuns figuratively.

Another case of nuns demonstrating engagement in social activities in a patriarchal society involves a display of dramatic public civilization by Buddhist nuns during the Goryeo era. One Buddhist nun called herself an incarnation of the Maitreya (Future Buddha, Mireuk Bosal) Buddha from Gaegyeong in May of the seventh year (1381) under the reign of King Woo. People donated rice and fabrics to her and they trusted her. However, she was taken into custody because it was deemed that her activities violated the monastic codes of Buddhist nuns and monks. To call oneself an incarnation of the Buddha was one of the four major breaches, enough to expel a Buddhist nun or monk from monastic community.⁷⁷ It was a critical crime with which is charged and severe punishment without privileges of the Buddhist devotees was meted out. While there were people who were not Buddhist nuns or monks who were executed for acting as an incarnation, the Buddhist nun was able to save her life because of her position. This implies that the government dealt with the illegal actions of Buddhist nuns, but in actuality, it shows an aspect of civic activity by Buddhist nuns.

The goal for public activities by Buddhist nuns expanded enough to include the queen. Buddhist nuns entered into relationships with the women in the royal class, taking a role in relaying information to the public. The daughter of Honghyu (홍휴) became a Buddhist nun

⁷⁷ Kim, Yungmi 金英美. "Samguk Goryeosidae Biguni Sam Gwa Suhang" 삼국 고려시대 비구니의 삶과 수행 "The Life and Practice of Nuns in the Three Kingdom and Goryeo period" In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwasam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007), 95.

after the death of her husband and dispatched public messages to the princess under the reign of King Chungryeol.⁷⁸

As previously discussed, historical evidence that specifically mentions Buddhist nuns in Baekje appears in Japanese materials.⁷⁹ According to *The Chronicles of Japan, Nihon Shoki* Baekje sent Buddhist missionaries, including a nun, to Japan in 577. The Baekje Kingdom regularly dispatched Buddhist doctrinal masters, psalmodists, iconographers, and architects to Japan. The Kingdom was attributed with introducing the rudiments of significant Buddhist thought and culture and laying the foundation for Buddhism in Japan from the sixth century to the late eighth century. In the sixth century, King Widok is recorded as having sent a *vinaya* Master, Seon Master and nuns among other people and items to Japan. In the seventh century just before the reunification of the peninsula, the Korean nun Beopmyeong also went to Tsushima Island in Japan in 655 where she cured the sick through her recitation of the *Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sūtras* after she practiced the principles.⁸⁰ This seems to indicate that Buddhist nuns in the period also read the contents of the Buddhist doctrinal texts or chanted Buddhist phrases. Some nuns at a highly educated level were able to study Buddhist doctrines. *The Chronicles of Japan* also describe that in

⁷⁸ *Goryeosa* 56. (고려사 高麗史, History of the Goryeo Dynasty). Jung, Inji 정인지. Translated by Gojeonyeongusil 고전 연구실. 11 vols. Seoul: Sinseowon, 2001-2002.

⁷⁹ Robert E. Buswell, Jr., "Buddhism in Korea," in Joseph Mitsuo Kitagawa and Mark D. Cummings, eds., *Buddhism and Asian History* (Macmillan Publishing, 1989), 152.

⁸⁰ According to scholars' analysis, from the early period of Buddhism, the Baekje Kingdom well established a systematized tradition in the study of Vinaya. The most famous monk was Gyeomik, who went to India in 526 to study Sanskrit and attain Vinaya texts. Returning with an Indian monk, Vinaya specialist in 531, he translated the Vinaya pitaka in 72 fascicles. Gyeomik's disciples interpreted commentaries in their entirety for the King Seong the ruler. Based on these records, scholars assume that the Baekje Buddhist ordination order already had been well-established by 588. However, some scholars argued that the story of Gyeomik's travels is to be distrusted. See Best, "Tales of Three Baekje Monks Who Traveled Afar in Search of the Law," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 51-1 (1991), 139-97.

April 687, twenty-two people, along with Buddhist nuns from the Korean peninsula lived in Mujangguk in Japan. Therefore, it is believed that the Buddhist nuns went abroad to carry out their propagation of Buddhism.

In the fourteenth century of the Goryeo period, Goryeo laywomen supported the financial and spiritual attributes of Buddhism in Yuan China.⁸¹ Buddhist temples were at the center of the Goryeo immigration community in Yuan China, where temples supported the needs of immigrants and travelers who could meet and exchange useful information. Goryeo laywomen patronized Buddhist temples and contributed to the exchange of Buddhist culture not only with China but also with India. Lady, Im, Son, Choi, and Yun financially supported the reconstruction or repair of temples. Sometimes, those ladies donated their houses for use as temples. A majority of activities were afforded to immigrants who could meet their brethren and talk in the mother language, as well as listen to religious lessons in the Goryeo tongue from monks of their home country. Lady Wi invited monk Jigon from India for a dharma talk and directly received Buddhist lay precepts from him.⁸² The aristocratic husbands married to Goryeo women invited Goryeo monks so their wives could become acquainted with the circumstances of Goryeo Buddhism. Eventually, those activities influenced and attributed to the fluent development of Buddhist culture in the Yuan area in China. So, lay devotees were tasked to contribute to Goryeo Buddhism for mutual exchange with foreign countries.

⁸¹ Tonino Puggioni, "On the Buddhist Activities of Goryeo Ladies in Yuan China: Goryeo Ladies and the Encouragement of Buddhism in Yuan China," in Conference Proceedings: Korean Nuns within the Context of East Asian Buddhist Traditions. 2004.

⁸² Heo, Hungsik, Goryeoro olmgin Indowi dungbul: Jigon Seonhyeon. 고려로 옮김 인도의 등불 (The Indian Lamp to move Goryeo: The Seon Master Jigon). (Seoul: Iljogak, 1997.), 32-45.

Once the Silla Kingdom officially accepted Buddhism and ordained Buddhist nuns, Buddhism flourished throughout their society; Buddhism did not just introduce a new religious morality but also fresh social ideologies.⁸³ In Silla, as more monks who had studied the principles of Buddhism in China returned, the system of Buddhism in the country became more independent. The system for the Buddhist nuns also became more independent.

One of the distinctive features about the Buddhist nuns in Silla was that the nuns were able to take on the roles of upper nuns. At the same time, the activities of Buddhist nuns also seem to have flourished. The existence of an official position called Doyunarang (都維那娘), apparently a representation of the head of nuns affairs, implies that there was a nun order with a substantial number of members.⁸⁴

The *Samguk Sagi* indicates that in the twelfth year under the reign of King Jinheung, the Buddhist monks Hyeryang (惠亮) from Goguryeo was appointed as Guktong (國統), Doyunarang (都維那娘) was appointed by Ani (阿尼) and Daedoyuna (大都維那) was appointed by Boryang (寶良). Scholars believe that *Doyunarang* was the title for a Buddhist nun, the highest rank of a female monastic at the time -- the Buddhist nun Ani was appointed with this title. In other words, in Silla, *Doyunarang* was the title of one who oversaw the management of the Buddhist nuns, and Ani was the nun who served in this role.⁸⁵ This is the

⁸³ During Silla and the subsequent Unified Silla period, the doctrinal study of Buddhism made its greatest advancements in Korean history.

⁸⁴ *Samguk sagi*, chikgwanji section.

⁸⁵ Kim Youngtae interpreted this part as the following, “the post title Doyunarang is clearly feminine due to the last character (rang, 娘), and is filled by what seems to be a Bhiksuni name, Ani, Hence, it is only reasonable to conclude that Doyunarang was a Bhiksuni post, a title that was never stated again in Korean or

only evidence in the record of an official post showing in the history of Korean Buddhism, even though it seems that scholars agree that the monks' monastic community and the nuns' monastic community has been widely recognized throughout history as a means to ordained priesthood.

As is often the case in women's religious history, the nuns' lives do not easily surface through straightforward readings of the records where those records exist at all. It is true that before the Joseon dynasty, Buddhism was enjoyed and supported as the state religion. In contrast to the statues of monks, nuns were relatively marginalized. Female activities were rarely described. Most currently existing material appears to have been catered to the needs of very specific goals, in which intentional description was employed to spread socio-cultural ideology.

At one time during the Goryeo dynasty, a rule was in place for preventing women from entering the Buddhist priesthood. According to *Goryeosa* and *Goryeosajeolyo*, it was forbidden for people to make their houses into temples or for women to become nuns.⁸⁶ In the eighth year (1359) under the reign of King Gongmin, it was forbidden for women to become nuns. In May of the tenth year (1361) under the reign of King Gongmin, the king accepted a proposal to prevent women from entering the Buddhist priesthood. In December of the first year (1388) under the reign of King Chang, there were rules punishing women for shaving their heads and preventing servants from becoming Buddhist nuns. It seems that

Korean Buddhist history.” “Historical Illumination on the Structure of the Bhikshuni Sangha in Silla” in *Conference Proceedings: Korean Nuns within the Context of East Asian Buddhist Traditions*. 2004.

⁸⁶ There is a part saying that in the 8th year (1071) under the reign of King Hyeonjong.

the history of the Buddhist nuns in Goryeo was not that smooth.⁸⁷ Ironically, after King Gongmin died his two queens became nuns. Even though the accuracy of the historical record is not clear, it indicates that perhaps women from royal families were not limited to secular laws in the prohibition of becoming a nun.

With anti-Buddhism as one of the ideological bases of the Joseon dynasty, the attitude toward women in the Joseon period was both patriarchal and misogynistic in accord with the attitudes of the Confucian ministers then in favor.⁸⁸ Except for the names of some queens and royal women who became nuns in palace cloisters inside the capital, numerous temples were removed from town centers to remote mountains, and monks and nuns were downgraded to the lowest social stratum which comprised butchers, slavers, executioners, courtesans, and itinerant entertainers. Stripping away many privileges enjoyed by the monastic community in the previous kingdoms, monks and nuns were banned from entering the capital.⁸⁹ Along with lower level of female education and status in the Joseon period, most records reveal virtually nothing about the lives of Buddhist nuns.

Activities of Buddhist women in Joseon dynasty became constrained as two issues emerged indicating the suppression of Buddhist faith among women, discouraging visiting

⁸⁷ Sim, Jungsub. "Biguni: Lee gus lee hanguk cholcho" (Nuns: This is the first in Korea) Beopbo Newspaper. 2009. (<http://beopbo.com/article/view.php?Hid=59936&Hcate1=226&Hcate2=369&Hcmode=view>)

⁸⁸ Even under the reign of the more liberal King Sejong, in 1428, women were forbidden to attend the Lantern Festival so that they would not mix with men. *Sejong sillok* 10,3rd and 4th month; YSB 1:369 Such calls intensified, even in Sejong's time. Thus, in 1434, complaints were made that elite women were staying overnight in Huiam Monastery 檜岩寺. This was deemed a violation of the great gender boundary. The monks, nuns and monks involved were all flogged. *Sejong sillok* 16, 4th month; YSB1: 408-416.

⁸⁹ Lay devotee who wanted to join the monastic life must obtain an authorization from the government and pay taxes. Once they were ordained as a monk, they had to carry the official identification called "dochup."

temples, and becoming a nun.⁹⁰ Although the ban on pilgrimage was not limited to women, it was targeted principally at ladies of the aristocratic class called “sadaebu” (士大夫). The anti-Buddhist policy also restricted those who could become nuns to certain elements of the population. Only widows who had no unmarried children and no unfulfilled duties of labor could leave home life. Additionally, if widows had not finished a three-year mourning rite for their deceased husbands, they were not allowed to renounce the world. The same policy also forbade unmarried young girls to join the monastic life.⁹¹

Given that such requests became even more strident, the official state records on Buddhist nuns are always negative, depicting nuns as deceptive or lecherous, or as criminals. For instance, the *Royal Chronicles of the Joseon Dynasty* (Yijo sillok) states a notorious case of a nun, Jungin (正因), who killed her master, a nun surnamed Hong(洪), over the attentions of a monk named Hagyun (學潤). At that time, Jungin was accused of becoming pregnant by Hagyun. Realizing she had been poisoned, Hong tried to notify her elder brother, Hong Gyungson (洪敬孫, 409-1481), a high civil official, but she died that day.⁹² Jungin claimed that she only wished to damage the nun Hong by putting poison in her meal. The monk Hagyun allegedly had been debauching Jungin and the superior for fifteen years. This case

⁹⁰ Thus, the first entry in the YS about women and Buddhism is a 1401 order severely prohibiting all women from going to monasteries. The reason given is that ‘the most important duty for women is to be properly modest, chaste and self-controlled.’ In 1413, all virgins of good families who had become nuns were ordered to be laicized and married, “in order to correct human morality.” *Taejong sillok* 13, 6th month; YSB 1:185.

⁹¹ A report stated; “The widows of good families who become nuns deeply fear the alienation of their feelings and wish to be entirely chaste. Now there are nuns who wear bamboo hats and shamefacedly walk in the streets. If one wishes to ... be a nun ... and be chaste, how could one shamefacedly walk the streets?” Therefore, a prohibition was issued forbidding such women from wearing the bamboo hats, and from walking and showing their faces in the streets. *Sejong sillok* 16, 6th month; YSB1:617. Yi, Hyangsoon “Vicissitudes in the Order of Buddhist Nuns during Choson Korea” in *Conference Proceedings: Korean Nuns within the Context of East Asian Buddhist Traditions*. 2004.

⁹² *Sungjong sillok* 6, 4th month, 23rd and 27th day; YSB 3:45-46.

was debated in front of the king in 1475. The king was told that Jungin's relationship with Hagyun had led to the killing of the superior. The final determination was that Jungin, fearing that her superior knew about her pregnancy and would punish her, used arsenic to poison her. Jungin's punishment was death by being drawn and quartered, which the king approved.⁹³

This long-running and notorious case threatened the very existence of nunneries in the capital, even the venerable palace nunnery, the Jungupwon. The Confucian scholars insisted the concern dishonored all nuns' behavior. They insisted that all the nuns of the city be made to live in one district, but this was opposed on the grounds that the Jungupwon already existed inside the city, and there was no need for another nunnery. Moreover, allegations were made that monks and nuns were able to enter the Jungeopwon without suspicion, and so it was easy for them to engage in indecency. The king then decided that the nunneries were the queen's prerogative. The queen approved that all the nuns -- inside and outside the city -- should be moved to one large nunnery. But since there was such opposition to this, the queen allowed all nunneries to remain in place.

Like this Jungin case, if nuns are found in the historical record, it is most likely due to the fact that they are royal women and wives, the noblewomen. What noted is activities related to the defense of the country, attendance of Buddhist services, and renunciation. The most notable works are the censure of the government over the existence of nuns' temples under the ruling class such as Jeongeop won, Jasu won, and Insu won. It is through these works that the locations and the history of the temples is sometimes best discovered and

⁹³ *Sungjong sillok* 6, 4th month, 23rd day to 26th day of seventh month; YSB3; 45-60.

understood. Jeongeopwon was the living place for the royal concubines and royal women who were converted to Buddhism and spent the late years of their lives and nuns were in charge of abbess all generations. The abbesses were the royal family's relatives and the queen appointed the abbess. Confucian scholars hurled out the appeals regarding the presence of Jeongeopwon, which always had faced to be abolished since the initial founding of the dynasty. Depending on the ruler's preference toward Buddhism, the temples could have meandering history to be removed, rebuilt, and repaired.

Jeongeopwon was finally destroyed after King Injo during the reign of King Yeonsan, who was the bloodiest expulsion ruler on Buddhism. King Sunjong, who was pro-Confucian and the king's mother, Insu daebi who was pro-Buddhist, had raised keen tensions. Yeonsan downgraded the nuns in Jeongeopwon to the lowly class. Nevertheless, as the concubine of king Yeonsan, lady Gwak was the abbess of Jeongeopwon during the reign of king Jungjong. The history of Jeongeopwon proves that as protective social forces of Joseon Buddhism, having the women inside the palace who kept the teaching of Buddha despite the dominance of male elites who absorbed Confucianism, they tried hard and ultimately succeeded in holding onto the religion—eventually winning out over Confucian hegemony. There were fewer obstacles for nuns apart from the monks by the strong presence of Jeongeopwon, and they could have better oblations from the queens and concubines, and the upper class. The palace nuns, especially through queens and dowagers, could exercise a positive influence on the lives of nuns throughout Korea. Despite all the restrictions placed on the palace nuns, the Jungupwon existed for most of the period from

1398 to at least 1661.⁹⁴ Several other cloisters also existed at various times inside the palace, for most of the kings managed to maintain these cloisters in the face of vehement opposition from the Confucians. In the reigns of Sungjong (1470-1495) and Myeongjong (1546-1567), these nunneries played a major role in the restoration of Buddhism.

According to historical records, the nuns from the royal families almost disappeared in the latter Joseon period, and the social status and prestige of the nuns was generally downgraded so much that the nuns of that time came almost exclusively from the lower classes. It indicates that the economy in the temple was worsened. The prohibition on monks and nuns entering the capital issued in the reign of Injo (1623-1649) and the abolition of the nunneries in 1661 meant that their roles became extremely limited. It is inferred that the alms amounts were used mostly for the temple services. The nun's group, which was composed of the lowly class people and not the nobles, exerted more efforts on menial labor rather than engaging in the practices that could lead them to the enlightenment world.⁹⁵

Unlike official historical records, the monastic bulletins written mostly in the late Joseon period provide some balance, and show the role of nuns and women donors in the building and refurbishment of monasteries, especially in the last reigns of the dynasty. They display a considerable regional variation, with some bulletins lacking even a single mention of a nun or female donor. The bulletins of Daesungsa contain many mentions of nuns and female donors that contain the lists of names of nun and lay female donors of buildings,

⁹⁴Lee, Giun 이기운. “Joseonsidae Jeongeobwonui seolchiwa Bulgyo sinhaeng 조선시대 淨業院의 설치와 불교신행 (The Establishment of the Purifying Karma Nunnery and Devotional Buddhist Practice).” *Jonggyo yeongu* 종교연구 (Religious Studies) 25 (Winter 2001), 30-32.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 53-54.

ritual implements and rice fields. These dates presumably were from the early nineteenth century, and the partial lineages of some nuns can be reconstructed from these records.⁹⁶ However, except for the names of nuns listed as donors, the bulletins rarely give any detail. Unusually, there is a funerary inscription for the nun, Sasin (思信, 1694-1765) of Singye Monastery (神溪寺). She took her tonsure from her nun-superior, Beopchan (法贊) on Jongnamsan (終南山). Her superior encouraged her to chant, and she made donations for construction, and she gained merit from the reconstruction of the Buddha Hall of Singye Monastery. When she died, she was cremated and her bones were buried in a stupa cast in the form of the monastery.⁹⁷ Nuns as Pogyum (包謙), Gunhun (近訓), Chaehwa (采華) and Sunmyeong (善明), with the help of laywomen, made major contributions to the building and refurbishment of monasteries in the nineteenth century.⁹⁸ Other nuns installed paintings on altars or gilded statues. For example, Jungil (淨一) made a statue of Kwanum and Jungil tramped all over the countryside with the assembly seeking donations to refurbish the dharma Hall. This nunnery was very poor, and had only six or seven nuns in residence. They had to beg to survive.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ The branch monasteries and nunneries of Jungungsa and Bongsunsa, Gyungbongsa, and Yujumsa. In the Taesung Saji, the records of two hermitages (am), Yunpilam 潤筆庵 and Myojukam 妙寂庵, [for their history, see Kwun, sangno (1979), Hanguk sachal Junsu, 한국사찰 전서 Dongguk Daehakgyo; Seoul, 2 vols 2: 947. Daesung Saji, 160, 184-185, 204-206, 209, 260-262, 273-275. Daesung Saji, 206.

⁹⁷ *Yujumsa Bonmal saji*, 257-258.

⁹⁸ Those temples are Chungryeonsa 青蓮寺, Chungsusa 淨水寺 and Wontong Monastery 圓通寺, and nunneries such as Wongtongam 圓通庵 and Naewon hermitage 內院庵, on Kanghwa Island and in nearby Kaepunggun, between 1798 and 1908.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

Lay women and nuns also assisted with repairs to various hermitages or nunneries belonging to this monastery in 1819 and 1883.¹⁰⁰ The supervising monastery, Pyohunsa (表訓寺), also had heritages such as Chongnyunam (青蓮庵) reconstructed by the nuns Chunggun (淨根) and Jisim (知心) with the assistance of female donors and Sinlimam (神淋庵) was rebuilt by a nun in 1882.¹⁰¹ Some buildings of the hermitages of Simweon Monastery (深源寺) in Kangweondo were rebuilt by nuns with the help of lay donors, including royal women.¹⁰²

Uniquely the *Chungdung ponmal Saji* provides a genealogy of nuns, but none of more than seven generations.¹⁰³ This suggests that lineages of nuns may not have been long lasting due to poor economic circumstances and the government's anti-Buddhist policies. It also hints at a regional revival of Buddhism by nuns after the end of the royal nunneries. These sources provide evidence only from the late Joseon period. Even though this evidence has an inherent bias toward the construction of buildings and donations of land, paintings, and statues, it is important that they tell of the Buddhist women who often had to beg, and that most practiced yumbul (念佛). Joseon Buddhist nuns were marginalized and effectively silenced by the anti-Buddhist policies instituted of the Confucian ideology within male patriarchal society. In spite of these social circumstances, nuns existed right through the

¹⁰⁰ For example, in the 1880s-1890s there was considerable activity in the Kyonbong Monastery and Yujom Monastery systems. In 1893, the nuns Sungyun 性允 and Jungsim 淨心 rebuilt Daewonam 大願庵, and nuns took part in the repair of buildings of Janan Monastery 長安寺 in 1881.

¹⁰¹ Yujum Sa ponmal Saji, 417-418, 480.

¹⁰² Jorgensen, John, "Marginalized and Silenced: Buddhist Nuns of the Joseon Period" in Conference Proceedings: Korean Nuns within the Context of East Asian Buddhist Traditions. 2004.

¹⁰³ Chongund ponmal Saji, 295.

Joseon period, and survived the obstacles placed in their way. Many women from the royal family had the tacit support of the dynasty royal clan. Moreover, some elite women gained the assent of their husbands to make donations for temples, and were able to support some of the nuns. Yet many nuns struggled against poverty and other constrictions to build Buddhist facilities. The lives of the vast majority of nuns, however, will remain in obscurity. It may be notable that there were 563 Buddhist nuns in the year 1909, the final period of Joseon dynasty and they still continued their tradition as Buddhist nuns in every part of the territory. It indicates that the numbers of nuns have increased. In spite of the dark age of the Joseon dynasty, nuns have never ceased their efforts to pursue religious life.

Since Buddhism was transmitted into the Korean Peninsula, nuns as well as monks have played important roles in their society, living their Buddhist beliefs socially and religiously. Women during the Three Kingdoms and Goryeo eras usually were able to leave home after the death of their husbands and the raising of their children. However, they tried to acquire truth and actively participated in public life, making efforts to influence Buddhist affairs. Considering it is seldom the case that the Buddhist nuns practiced for enlightenment by their fulfillment in the late period of Goryeo, there must have been a substantial change in the activities and positions of Buddhist nuns.

For Buddhist nuns, the activity of practices and public service in Buddhist affairs seemed to be different according to their previous positions in secular life. Some Buddhist books were read by literate upper-class women, but it was not possible for women in the lower classes to do so. After finishing the meetings and going back home, the nuns who received *hwadu* from the great teacher, the Master Hyesim, the Buddhist nuns written about in the Buddhist books must be the ones with governing levels. Also, nuns from the

aristocratic class participated in Buddhist affairs by donating their own property, which was possible because of their strong financial position. Possession of personal prosperity for Buddhist nuns or monks must have been illegal even during the Goryeo era on the basis of monastic codes, but some cases were connived. In the case of queen Hye, who was the second wife of King Gongmin, she received some benefits from the government so that she was able to donate her property after her renunciation. Also upper class women were able to possess property through family inheritance. Even if they were controlled by the rules and regulations of monastic code, they were able to keep their property. In contrast, women from other classes were unable to possess some property, so they participated in others ways and they could have relatively free family structures and engage freely in Buddhist affairs. Most remained anonymous, and they could participate in secret meetings. Under the Joseon dynasty women who became nuns generally did so in order to pray for the soul of a deceased husband as a life of widow to spend remaining life silently. Yesun, for example, distinguished herself by becoming a nun. She actively and courageously entered Buddhism with an aim to study the teachings of the Buddha and to practice meditation. She never gave up her cause in achieving her realization of Buddhism once she had determined to seek the discipline.

Women were subordinated under their husbands and within the social structure in society. So, it is also true that the status of nuns or orders were generally subordinate to monks. For example, in the Goryeo dynasty nuns could participate in summer retreats only if their involvement was approved by monks in leadership positions. There is no evidence that nuns took the national monastic exam to become nationally certified masters. Social circumstances were quietly oriented to the patriarchal structure and Buddhist communities

were not exempt from a male-dominated structure. Unfortunately, most official historical records do not reveal the historicity of female perspectives, for they are almost entirely male-oriented. However, if we focus on nuns as individual practitioners we can note that their religious practices and activities were not fully subordinated, and in many ways they were freer than those of laywomen. Thus, the superficiality that stems from typological characterizations commonly practiced in the genre of traditional viewpoints should be carefully re-considered.

CHAPTER 3

NUNS IN THE PRE-MODERN AND THE CONTEMPORARY ERA (1910-PRESENT)

As discussed in the previous chapter, the anti-Buddhist policies and Neo-Confucian ideologies of the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910) had a long-term damaging effect on the Buddhist order; particularly on nuns. Buddhist nuns had to endure gender discrimination since they lived in a society in which females had long been relegated to lesser status than males. The end of the Joseon period of Korean history was marked by the beginning of the period of Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945). During this tumultuous thirty-six year period, the Japanese Buddhist practice of allowing monks to marry permeated Korean monasticism, and the number of monks who adhered to the traditional Korean monastic practice of celibacy dwindled rapidly.

After the liberation, Korean Buddhism tried to erase the influence of Japanese Buddhism. With rapid social change Buddhism faced the demands of adapting to modernity. In the modern period, the observance and performance of the Buddha's teachings—in which Buddhist nuns gathered together to study and practice Seon meditation, read Buddhist scriptures in silence, and be educated—began to be achieved by the women themselves, as rising winds inspired a fervent wave of Seon meditation performance. Most major Buddhist nunneries in Korea were established after the “Purification Movement” of the 1950s.¹ These major monasteries stand in testimony to the appearance of the independence and autonomy of the nuns' orders in Korea, and to the women who established their own lecture nunnery (Gangwon) and meditation nunnery (Seonwon). As soon as the start of the modern

¹ For instance, Naewonsa monastery opened for nuns in 1955, Unmunsa in 1955, Daewonsa in 1955 and Sungnamsa in 1957. Jogye Oder ed. *Gangwon chongnam*. (Seoul: Bulgyo sidaesa, 2000.), 781.

period forced difficult challenges and decisions upon them, Buddhist nuns consistently participated in reform by purifying their orders and assisting in the reinstatement of Korean Buddhism. They contributed to the founding of the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism (1962) and tried to consolidate their order independently with its highly regarded history in mind. Furthermore, they organized the Udambara Association and finally established the Korean Bhikṣunī Association.

In this chapter I will take a look at the performance phase and characteristics of Buddhism and Buddhist nuns during the Korean modern and contemporary periods, first analyzing aspects of religious practice and focusing on Seon meditation. Then I will describe how the Jogye Order tried to institute a nun's educational system alongside the monks' established educational system. In the third part, I will explore how the lineage of nuns could be restored in the contemporary era while nuns advocate gender equality and extended religious status relative to monks. Last, with gender inequality and female identity in mind, I will examine how Korean nuns extended their religious activities and have accomplished religious autonomy in the contemporary era.

Religious Practice

In May of 1910, according to the survey investigated by the Japanese Government's domestic affairs records, the number of Buddhist temples at that time was 958, the number of Buddhist monks was 5,198, and the number of Buddhist nuns was 563.² During the Japanese colonial period, selected monks could gain access to higher education and received

² This statistic is reported in Hwangseong Daily (1919.5.5) and Daehan Maeil Sinbo (1919. 5.6). in *Hanguk Gunheyondae Bulgyosa Yeongpyo* (Chronicles of Buddhist Affairs in Modern and Contemporary Korea) Daehna Bulgyo Jogyejong gyoyukwon Bulhak yeonguso (The Institute of Buddhism of Education Division of Korean Buddhist Jogye Order 2000), 21.

support in their monasteries. Unlike Joseon society, which prohibited monks and nuns from appearing at social activities, monks and nuns were forced by the Japanese incursion to become involved in society as agents aiding colonization and modern initiatives. In this transformative time in the modernization of the Buddhist groups, Buddhist nuns did their utmost for the realization of the spirit of meditation in Seon Buddhism, Sutra chanting, Prayer to the Buddha, Ritual, and Protection of Buddhist Temple, all while contending with the public in difficult circumstances.

Since the Jogye Order is based on emphasizing Seon practice, the core of this order can be said to be Seon meditation. Most nuns exercise it, and they receive their names after severe Seon meditation such as meditation in the quiet life and 3 years of training. Monk Mangong (1871~1946)³ was the contemporary eminent Seon master, together with Hanam (1876-1951), who wielded the most influence on nuns' practice and education during colonial rule. Almost all of the prominent nuns during the colonial period had met them and received life-changing instruction from them.⁴ He accepted many of these nuns as his disciples and taught those who later became leaders of nuns' practice and education.⁵ Under the direction of, and for the first time with the full support of Manjong, the nuns' Seon

³ He succeeded the Buddhist dharma teaching of monk Kyounguh (1849~1912) whose performance encouraged the initiation of the modern religious body.

⁴On the other hand, nuns themselves opened female forums to protect female practitioners, inaugurated themselves as principals of the Seon class (Beophee, Inhong, Jang-il) and Directors (Bongong, Manseong, Seongyeong, Wolhye, Ilyeop, Jangil, Changbeop, Hyechun), and were devoted to teaching the public. Seongyeong communicated with great monks, Manseong received visitors with which to study, Seongyeong stimulated students to exchange their awakenings, Seongyeong, Beophee, Inhong, Jeonghaeng, Manseong and Queayu taught successive students and transferred their academic tradition. Scriptures and books depended on during practice were Geumganggyeong, Seonmunchwalyo, Dalmasahaengron.

⁵Nuns who received dharma names from Mangong are Beophee, Bogong, Manseong, Seongyeong, Ilyeop, and Yunho.

meditation center (Seonwon) was opened in January of 1916 at the Gyeonseongam branch of Suduksa and admitted nun practitioners.⁶ Gyeonseongam held the first official group retreat in 1928 and emerged as the first prominent place for nuns' Seon training.⁷ After establishing the nun's Seon meditation of Gyeonseongam, more than seven meditation centers opened for nuns by 1945.⁸ With the increase of nun's mediation facilities, many more nuns gradually have had the opportunity to practice Seon mediation. Even though all the facilities were opened in hermitages belonging to main monasteries in the countryside, nuns enthusiastically participated in mediation practice while having to attend to their statues and to the rehabilitation of their temples.

Nun Beophui (1887-1975) was an eminent disciple of Manjong and one of the pioneer nuns accomplished in Seon meditation in the modern era.⁹ From her religious practice was born the modern nun's lineage. Beophui was born to a humble family in a village in South Chungcheong Province and her father died when she was three years old. When she was four years old, she was adopted out to her Buddhist grandmother at Mitaam, a hermitage of the Donghaksa temple where she grew up under the care of the abbess of the temple.

⁶ Jeon, Horyeon. "Hanguk Gunhyeondae biguiui suhaenge daehan gochal" (The research of aspects on nuns practice in modern and contemporary). In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 131-133.

⁷ Hanam (Seongyeong, Daeyeong, Yunho), Yongseong (Hyeok), Seongcheol (Inhong), and Jeongang (Changbeop). Also Guha, Hyobong, Dongsan, Gyeongbong, Hyanggok, Cheongdam, Hyeam gave their directions and encouraged them. Nuns seemed to be under absolute influence from the great teachers of monks. Jogye Oder ed. *Seonwon chongnam*. (Seoul: Bulgyo sidaesa, 2000.), 679-680.

⁸ Sorim seonwon of Naejangsa opened in 1924 Budoam of Donghwasa opened in 1927 and Sujun of Jikjisa opened in 1928. Yunpilam of Daesungsa in 1931 and Jisangam of Woljeongsa in 1937 opened. Gukiam and Samseonsam of Haeinsa opened in 1944 and in 1945 respectively. *Ibid.*, 754-757.

⁹ Hyotan 曉呑. "Biguni seonpungui jungheungja, Myori Beophui seonsa 비구니 선풍의 중흥자, 묘리법회 선사 (The Reviver of Seon Practice of Bhikṣuṇīs, Seon Master Myori Beophui)." In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseoweon, 2007.), 199-220.

Beophui's mother went with her and became a nun, receiving the Buddhist name Docheon before dying when Beophui was eight years old. Because of her parents' untimely passing, Beophui developed keen insight into the suffering brought on by separation and death. She received the ten sramanera precepts and the Buddhist name Beophui at fourteen years of age. Beophui trained as a novice nun at Mitaam where she kept the daily temple schedule and studied Buddhist scriptures, rituals and ceremonial affairs. In 1910, at the age of twenty-three she received full ordination as a bhiksuni from Haegwang at the Haeinsa temple.¹⁰

After that she traveled on many pilgrimages and met various renowned doctrinal and Seon masters. According to legend, one day she met one of Mangong's disciples, Kobong, and was encouraged to learn and practice under the direction of Mangong. She decided to meet Mangong and went to Cheongyesa temple where he was practicing and teaching. When Beophui greeted him, he asked "who are you?" She replied, "my name is Beophui, but I do not know who I am and where I am from." Mangong accepted her as his student and Beophui lived at Gyeonseongam, the nearby nuns' hermitage in which she studied scriptures and practiced *hwadu* meditation under Mangong's guidelines.¹¹ Beophui devoted herself fully to experiencing enlightenment and truly understanding the Buddha's doctrine. Eventually, she received certification of her enlightenment from Mangong at

¹⁰ Ibid., 199-220.

¹¹ Hwadu meditation is focused on the one point or key line of a gongan (public case) such as "who am I?" and "does a dog have Buddha-nature?"

Gyeonseongam in 1916. This is the first case in which a nun was approved as a dharma master. The following describes this historical moment: ¹²

One day Mangong was allowing the public dharma talk to one word as an anecdote, and then challenged the audience. Among the assembly, the participants remained silent until Beophui abruptly stood up to reply amid the quiet public: “a fish is swimming in a pond so that the color of it blurs and a bird is flying on the air of heaven so that the feathers are falling.” Monk Mangong responded, “amid white snow, petals of flowers are shattering piece by piece Where are the shattered petals of flowers?” Then Beophui answered, “white snow melted down a piece of land.” Mangong praised her, saying, “only one piece of advice is gotten.”¹³ After this Mangong acknowledged Beophui’s enlightenment, awarded her another dharma name, Myori (묘리, Mysterious Principle) and composed a poem approving her dharma transmission. She was thirty years old.

After this, Beophui continually travelled to all the Seon meditation facilities in the country and devoted her religious life to practicing Seon meditation. She had an impressive reputation and was respected as an eminent Seon master. While increasing her reputation, several male Seon masters often visited her and exchanged dharma talks. In 1966, she returned to Gyeonseongam and served as headmaster of the Seon meditation center,

¹² Jeon, Horyeon. “Hanguk Gunhyeondae biguiui suhaenge daehan gochal” (The research of aspects on nuns practice in modern and contemporary). In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 114-115.

¹³ Ibid., 116.

devoting herself to training and teaching nun disciples for ten years. As result, her religious life, efforts, and practices provided a blueprint for nuns' Seon meditation.¹⁴

Another famous Seon master is Manseong (만성 1897-1975). Manseong was born to a destitute farming family and was married at a very young age. However, she soon became a grieving widow. One day, she heard a dharma talk from master Hanam and her tumultuous mind was set at ease. She inquired of Hanam, "I have heard there is a method for invoking the spirits of the dead. I have no other wish but to meet my husband one more time." Monk Hanam watched her face and responded, "you can only meet him if you become a nun. If you want to be free from suffering, take refuge in the Buddha." Soon after, Manseong visited monk Mangong and learned *hwadu* meditation. Mangong explained to her, "for someone with a superior root it takes seven days; for someone with a medium root it takes twenty-one days, and for someone with a lower root it takes a hundred days." After hearing the instruction, she set herself the limit of one hundred days and gave herself over to the practice. With some hindrance and doubt, she continued to practice her *hwadu* meditation for five years as a laywoman. With monk Mangong's approval she was confirmed a nun at thirty-nine years of age in 1936.¹⁵

Manseong led the Seon meditation center in a nunnery at Daeseongam located near Busan in 1956. She devoted her life to continuing her practice and taught both nuns and her disciples. Her practice method of teaching was very simple and silent. For instance, her

¹⁴ Eunsu, Jo, "From Anonymity to Self-Reinvention: Korean Buddhist Nuns in the Twentieth Century," in Karma Lekshe Tsomo, ed., *Bridging Worlds: Buddhist Women's Voices across Generations*. (Taipei: Yuan Chuan Press, 2004), 125-130.

¹⁵ Jeon, Horyeon. "Hanguk Gunhyeondae biguiui suhaenge daehan gochal" (The research of aspects on nuns practice in modern and contemporary). In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 145-145.

dharma talk with a young novice nun is described as follows: “have you ever practiced Seon mediation?” “No, I haven’t.” “Is there enlightenment or freedom between life and death?” “Who did bind your life and death with a rope?” “Did you attain any enlightenment?” “Ultimately, there is no distance between enlightenment and ordinary persons.”¹⁶

In this way, the nuns practiced and performed together or separately. Before a meditation nunnery for female practitioners was established, an individual nun could receive teachings from eminent monks and nuns. This custom contributed to the way that nuns began to revive their long-lost historical tradition in Seon practice, and finally their various efforts resulted in establishing systemized institutions for female renunciate practitioners. Part of the results after the “purification movement” was that nuns began to share in taking some monastery land to the major contemporary nunneries to which they were assigned. Major nunneries were established around the same time as the first victory of the celibates in 1955.¹⁷ Nuns loyally participated in the movement, yet came to occupy only a handful of temples. The temples that were assigned to nuns were all in terrible condition due to the Korean War. Nuns began to rebuild them from almost nothing to serve as the centers for their Seon practice and doctrinal learning. These Seon nunneries continued to develop through the present time as important retreat centers for nuns. Such Seon meditation nuns proved themselves able to reach as high as monks in their spiritual pursuits. They engaged in dharma talks with monk Seon masters on equal terms and gradually began to establish a

¹⁶ Ibid., 146.

¹⁷ Sugyeong 수경. “Hanguk biguni gangwon baldalsa (The History of the Development of the Monastic Seminary for Korean Nuns).” In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 30-32.

self-reliant tradition of teaching nuns themselves. As evidence of these developments, the three major Seon nunneries (Seonwon)—Naewonsa, Daewonsa, and Seongnamsa—were established. Suok (1902-1966) was appointed to Naewonsa in South Gyeongsang Province in 1955, Beopil (1904-1991) was appointed as the abbot of Daewonsa on Mount Jiri in South Junla Province in September 1955, and Inhong (1908-1997) was appointed to Seongnamsa in South Gyeongsang in 1957. These three nun leaders were close friends and they agreed to share the great task of building monastic compounds for nuns' practice.¹⁸

The nunnery repair and construction began when nun Inhong (1908~1997) was appointed abbess at Seongnamsa.¹⁹ In 1957, Inhong built a mediation hall, called Jeongsu Seonwon, and established the temple as a Seon center. This meditation hall hosted three-year retreats from 1963 to 1999, when it was replaced by a one-year retreat.²⁰ In 1999, Seongnamsa became the special temple for Seon meditation, as designated by the Jogye Order. Today, in any season, about 100 nuns practice in Seongnamsa. Seonnamsa is especially known for the strict observation of precepts; for example, its nuns begin their

¹⁸ By October 1955, the celibates had taken over about 450 monasteries out of 1000 from the married faction. With regard to the remaining ones, they gave only the right of operation to those married monks who agreed with the purification movement. Sugyeong 수경. "Hanguk biguni gangwon baldalsa (The History of the Development of the Monastic Seminary for Korean Nuns)." In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 42.

¹⁹ Seongnamsa was built 1200 years ago and was essentially destroyed during the Korea War. When Inhong arrived, the roof of the main hall and all buildings needed major repair, particularly the rotten floor and leaking roof. The temple had great debt and did not own any land. Under these conditions, every nun in the compound engaged in the physical labor of repairing and rebuilding. In 1962, Inhong formed Seolimhoe, a lay organization, which raised funds to buy land for the temple. Jogye Oder ed. *Seonwon chongnam*. (Seoul: Bulgyo sidaesa, 2000.), 772-777.

²⁰ Simgomdang Seonwon was built for advanced practitioners in 1963, and Kumdan Seonwon was built to accommodate the increased numbers of Seon practitioners in 1995. Park, Pori. "Establishment of Buddhist Nunneries in Contemporary Korea." in Conference Proceedings: Korean Nuns within the Context of East Asian Buddhist Traditions. 2004.

daily schedule by prostrating 108 times each morning. Everyone is also required to engage in physical labor in the complex.

While nun Inhong concentrated only on searching for spirit with 12 Cheonggyu including the content that ‘made Yookgeun (six parts of body) clean’ as the basis for practicing, she got a surprise in 1949, when she was 42 years old. Legend tells us that in the following year, when the Korean war started, she was suddenly confronted with soldiers of the North Korean People's Army while practicing in the Bongam temple in Baekryeunam. However, she was able to save her life. This illustrates her capabilities and her attitude as a truth seeker. After her purification at 50 years old in 1957, she was inaugurated as the chief of Seoknam temple, Gajisan, and managed the temple for 40 years. Her life and her popular identity as the “Tiger in Gajisan” serve as examples for future Buddhist nuns. She left this poem when she passed away in 1997: ²¹

I will follow the way three worlds Buddhas went through
There is no way besides nightmare in this world.
The place where a piece of a leaf is floating to leave
Only the full round moon is brilliant in the air.²²

As a result of her election as chief of the predominant Buddhist nun board in Jogye in 1987, Inhong functioned as the symbolic center of the Korean Buddhist nun world and played a vital role in establishing the homologation spirit of Buddhist nuns and their

²¹ Bongak 本覺. “Wonheodang Inhong seonsawa biguni seungga chulgajeongsinui hwangnip 원허당 인홍선사와 비구니승가 출가정신의 확립 (Seon Master Wonheodang Inhong and the Establishment of the Spirit of Renunciation of the Bhikṣuṇī saṅgha).” In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 317-342.

²² Jeon, Horyeon. “Hanguk Gunhyeondae biguiui suhaenge daehan gochal” (The research of aspects on nuns practice in modern and contemporary). In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 155.

positions.²³ Emphasizing always that “Buddhism is practice by the name itself” in her life, she practiced diligently, following the examples of Cheongyu and Gahaengjeongjim. She also worked for Buddhism purification during her 10 years as the councilor of the central meeting in Jogye Order, as position she held beginning in 1956.²⁴

Similarly, when nun Suok (1902-1966) was appointed as abbess in 1955, Naewonsa emerged as a nunnery. Suok, already an established doctrinal master, took over the task of rebuilding the temple, which took five to six years.²⁵ Her dedication to and hard work in rebuilding Naewonsa were recognized through several awards for rebuilding the temple and preserving its cultural properties. In 1958, Naewonsa completed a meditation hall called Seonhae Ilryun and began to accept meditation practitioners.²⁶ Eminent Seon masters, such as Beophui, Ponggong, and Seongyong, led the meditation group.²⁷ In 1972, Naewonsa built Seonnawon, a meditation hall for advanced practitioners.²⁸ In 1979, 50 nuns began a

²³ When she listened to the scriptures of monk Hanam (earthly good and bad things turned out to be foam and dreams. I forgot all after today’s scripture, the whole world is mine and there were only lights.), she was impressed, went to the Jigangam, and did homologation under the teacher of Woojeongja. Bongak 本覺. “Wonheodang Inhong seonsawa biguni seungga chulgajeongsinui hwangnip 원허당 인홍선사와 비구니승가 출가정신의 확립 (Seon Master Wonheodang Inhong and the Establishment of the Spirit of Renunciation of the Bhikṣuṇī saṅgha).” In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 345.

²⁴ Jeon, Horyeon. “Hanguk Gunhyeondae biguiui suhaenge daehan gochal” (The research of aspects on nuns practice in modern and contemporary). In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007). 156.

²⁵ For the biography of Suok, see, Ha, Chunsang 하춘생. *Kkaedareum ui kkot 깨달음의 꽃*, 2 (Flowers of Enlightenment, vol. I). (Seoul: Yeorae, 2001.), 207-220.

²⁶ Jogye Oder ed. *Seonwon chongnam*. (Seoul: Bulgyo sidaesa, 2000.), 696-702.

²⁷ Songyong (1904-1966), in particular, served as succentor (ipsung) from 1963 to 1973 and contributed to the establishment of the monastery as the leading one for Seon practice. *Ibid.*, 703.

²⁸ During these times, Seon masters Hyanggok and Gyeongbong came regularly to give dharma talks. Martine Batchelor, “The life of a Korean Zen Nun: The Biography of Seongyong Sunim As Told to Martine Batchelor,” *Korean Culture* (Spring 1992), 26-37.

three-year retreat, with Toyong as their mentor. By 1999, the monastery completed the three-year retreat six times, thereby establishing its reputation for Seon practice. About 50 Seon nuns usually gathered to conduct sitting meditation in each retreat season in both summer and winter.²⁹

Daewonsa also emerged as a nunnery when, in 1955, Beopil (1904-1991) came as an abbess. She and her disciples began the rebuilding of the temple, and they dedicated their lives to it for over 40 years.³⁰ The temple began to accept Seon practitioners in 1957 and continued to grow. Meanwhile, the temple engaged in a legal battle with the married monks over the ownership of the complex; however, the nuns finally won the battle in 1959. In 1986, the meditation hall was expanded, and Daewonsa became established as a major Seon center for nuns. During each season, about 40 nuns gather at the Seon retreat.³¹

As the preceding examples demonstrate, the lives, experiences, and institutions of Buddhist nuns changed considerably during the last century in Korea, changes that often paralleled or intersected with the dramatic alterations in Korean society itself. During this time of secular and sacred transformation, Buddhist nuns aggressively participated in religious purification in the midst of difficult situations and inherited traditional

²⁹ Park, Pori. "Establishment of Buddhist Nunneries in Contemporary Korea." in Conference Proceedings: Korean Nuns within the Context of East Asian Buddhist Traditions. 2004. Jogye Oder ed. *Seonwon chongnam*. (Seoul: Bulgyo sidaesa, 2000.), 28.

³⁰The temple had remained in ruins for eight years before Beopil arrived. In 1948, it was completely burned down, except for a pagoda, during the Yeosun Rebellion, which typified the conflict between the Right and the Left in Korea after liberation. Because the temple did not have any income or lay devotees at the beginning of their residence, the nuns had to go elsewhere to find donors. While raising funds, Beopil had to sleep on the road and endured winter storms and summer heat. Her hard work paid off with completion, in 1957. For the biography of Beopil, see Ha, Chunsang 하춘생. *Kkaedareum ui kkot 깨달음의 꽃*, 2 (Flowers of Enlightenment, vol. I). (Seoul: Yeorae, 2001.), 249-262.

³¹ Park, Pori. "Establishment of Buddhist Nunneries in Contemporary Korea." in Conference Proceedings: Korean Nuns within the Context of East Asian Buddhist Traditions. 2004.

performance, on the one hand during a pioneering new performance phase, while trying to unite independently under skyrocketing historical awareness. With their original motivation centered in cultivating Seon meditation, they lived quietly and comfortably at each place of Seon meditation for almost all of their lives and bravely devoted themselves to the practice of meditation. Nuns concentrated on building their own system of training and transformed the major temples into places where nuns could gather for Seon retreats. Their focus was on group training rather than promoting personal benefits. With meager means and resources, nuns sacrificed individual needs to build a community. As the nunneries emerged as centers for nuns, they began to produce their own Seon masters. Thus they became less dependent on monks for training and finally became a self-sufficient group. Their efforts resulted in institutions where nuns were free from discrimination.

Formulating Educational System

Buddhist monks only had been educated since the establishment of the educational system in the Joseon Dynasty, and nuns were excluded from this system.³² In the modern period, nuns came to realize the necessity of an educational system since women in Korean society could now take advantage of educational opportunities. Lack of educational institutions for nuns forced them to seek external institutions or teachers or to listen to

³² Korean Buddhist education began during the three kingdom era since every temple functioned as a practice site and also as an educational institution at the same time. The education in the temples was at first primarily non-Seon, but new developments combined the practice of Seon and the study of doctrine as they stood together in Goryeo dynasty after Seon was brought in from China in the late United Silla Dynasty era. It is not clear when the present monastic educational system started. However, since it stresses the practice of Seon but offers curriculum that includes both Seon and non-Seon from the middle of Goryeo dynasty, the origin of educational system could be reasonably found to stem from the national monk Bojo jinul (1158~1210) who insisted on Jeonghyessangsu and Donojeomsu based on combination of the practice of Seon and the study of doctrine. Sugyeong 수경. “Hanguk biguni gangwon baldalsa 한국 비구니강원 발달사 (The History of the Development of the Monastic Seminary for Korean Nuns).” In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 15-16.

lectures. Earnest and consistent longing for education by nuns in such poor circumstances made the need for a female education institution evident. This was the impetus for the establishment of a female monastic college. Through the support of several monk lecturers and the devotion of a handful of nuns, a female education system began to emerge in the 1900s. Although the number of students was minimal, educational conditions were poor, and the effort was short-lived due to societal instability under the reign of a Japanese colonial system, it was an encouraging event that opened the door for future female education.³³

Nuns became interested in their education at the same time that women in Korean post-colonial society at large were given educational opportunities. Certain changes had already afforded some nuns the opportunity for education, and they recognized the necessity and importance of education in their rapidly changing social environment. Such consciousness worked as the main power for the lecture doctrinal hall and prompted them to take advantage of the fact that monks were often not able to concentrate on education due to enlistment by Imperial Japan. Furthermore, prevailing trends in the time of revolution favored modern sciences rather than the lecture doctrinal hall system. Nuns longing for education were therefore able to take advantage of lecturers during this period of decreased demand.

Initially, nuns' doctrinal studies were heavily dependent on monks. During the colonial period, there were no doctrinal schools (Gangwon) exclusively for nuns. Nuns who wanted to study usually audited classes in monks' doctrinal schools. Another alternative

³³ Ibid., 17-20.

was to follow monk masters with whom they wanted to study and ask the teacher to have special sessions for a group of nuns. For example, even after the liberation in 1945, nun Myoeom followed doctrinal master Unho (1892-1980) through several monasteries as the master moved around.³⁴ However, nuns began to work toward self-sufficiency in doctrinal studies as well.

The first nun dharma master was Geumryong (1892-1965). She also was the first nun who received a formal doctrinal transmission from a monk master. After being recognized by Kuha in 1922, she gave lectures for 30 years as a dharma master, as well as lectures for about three months a year on the Lotus and Hwaeom (Avatamsaka) sūtras. Geumryong was one of the first three eminent female doctrinal masters, together with Hyeok (1901-1969) and Suok (1902-1966). Geumryong transmitted her teachings to Kwangwu in 1958 and Suok appears to be the first one to hold a regular lecturer position, teaching for three years at Namjangsa in Sangju beginning in 1937, and for another three years at Bomunsa nunnery in Seoul beginning in 1947. Bomunsa opened the first doctrinal school for nuns in 1936.³⁵

As educational institutions for nuns continued to be established throughout the late 1950s, the rate of change intensified in comparison to that achieved during the colonial period. The major Buddhist nunneries that began to appear in Korea after the “Purification Movement” of the 1950s represented the emergence of the independent operation of nuns, an effort which established a nun’s lecture hall (Gangwon), meditation halls (Seonwon), and

³⁴ Park, Pori. “Establishment of Buddhist Nunneries in Contemporary Korea.” in Conference Proceedings: Korean Nuns within the Context of East Asian Buddhist Traditions. 2004.

³⁵ Sugyeong 수경. “Hanguk biguni gangwon baldalsa 한국 비구니강원 발달사 (The History of the Development of the Monastic Seminary for Korean Nuns).” In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 21-23.

finally the first nuns' doctoral seminary at Donghaksa in 1956.³⁶ This seminary was founded with the support of monks Hogyeong (1904-1987) and Daeun, who insisted on and were devoted to female education. Nun Daehyeon (1916-1963) was appointed as abbess in 1956 and she opened nuns' doctrinal school at Donghaksa in February of 1956 by inviting the monk doctrinal master Gyeongbong. When nuns had first overtaken the monastery, it had been burned down in the Korean War. They had such extreme financial difficulties that, in 1957, they appealed to the government to rescue them from dying of hunger. Monk Gyeongbong served as doctrinal master (kangju) there until 1963 and transmitted the certificate of teaching to his nun disciples Myoom and Hyesong. Monk Hogyeong, who taught from 1967 to 1984, transmitted his teaching lineage to six nuns, and greatly contributed to the independent operation of the doctrinal school by nuns. Hyesong became the first nun doctrinal master (kangju) in 1969 at Donghaksa. In 1985, Donghaksa began to teach nuns by nun masters without the help of monk teachers.³⁷

Before opening the Donghaksa seminary, many nuns freely moved around to study in multiple doctrinal halls rather than staying in the same place. Nun Myoem studied under monk Gyeongbong and she was also taught by Woonheo.³⁸ Like Myoem's case, they traced after the same lecturer, and Myoem studied in those places that Woonheo moved in. However after the establishment of the Donghaksa doctrinal hall, nuns began to prefer

³⁶ Jogye Oder ed. *Gangwon chongnam*. (Seoul: Bulgyo sidaesa, 2000.), 446-474.

³⁷ Sugyeong 수경. "Hanguk biguni gangwon baldalsa 한국 비구니강원 발달사 (The History of the Development of the Monastic Seminary for Korean Nuns)." In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 31-32.

³⁸ Other examples are found in the same year from Taegyong taught by Manwoo, and Jigyong by Daeun. In 1958, Myeongseong was at Seongneungbokmun where four nun-lecturers were educated in 1950s. *Ibid.*, 33.

staying at this hall and moving to other doctrinal halls became rare. After the founding of Donghaksa, multiple doctrinal halls of varying sizes were also established throughout Korea. Still, leading female lecturers were often taught by male lecturers, such as Ilcho in Donghaksa, Myoeom in Bongnyeongsa, Myosun in Samseon Buddhist College, Myeongseong in Unmunsa, and Jihyeong in Cheongamsa.³⁹

Since their inception in Korea, there have been about 20 nuns' doctrinal halls up to the present.⁴⁰ There were four before the period of liberalization, and 17 after that, with the possibility of unknown doctrinal halls.⁴¹ Today, Korea is home to only five doctrinal halls: Donghaksa, Unmunsa, Bongnyeongsa, Samseon, and Cheonamsa. There are only four traditional temple doctrinal halls since Samseon is for commuting students who cannot afford to enter a traditional doctrinal hall. Since its establishment in 1956 and its first graduates in 1963, Donghaksa has produced 860 students through the 44th graduation in 2007. Bongnyeongsa, established in 1974, has produced 748 students through the 33rd

³⁹ Jogye Oder ed. *Gangwon chongnam*. (Seoul: Bulgyo sidaesa, 2000.), 446-474.

⁴⁰ There had been female education in such doctrinal halls as Gukilam of Haeinsa, Ongnyeongam of Tongdosa, Bomunsa, and Gwaneumam of Namjangsa before the post-colonial era. Although Gukilam and Ongnyeongam are ahead in terms of time, they are alleged to have educated their inmates. However, education itself under their situation can be valued as such a meaningful event. In case of Namjangsa, it shows a progressed phase as it promoted itself through public announcement to gather students and education was rendered by Hwasansuok in consideration of the Nuns' doctrinal hall but it did not last long under the Japanese reign. Bomun doctrinal hall was the frontier to open in 1947 backed by its experience before Liberalization and produced many students for 20 years. Sugyeong 수경. "Hanguk biguni gangwon baldalsa 한국 비구니강원 발달사 (The History of the Development of the Monastic Seminary for Korean Nuns)." In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwasam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 34-36.

⁴¹ Some lasted 1 to 2 years. Others lasted longer, such as Gaesimsa of Seosan, which opened in 1968 by Seongneung and lasted to 1979 with the Nun lecturer Jamin. Hwawoonsa opened in 1974 with the lecturer Hoyun and was maintained until 1985. Jeonghyesa of Jeonju opened in 1954 with Bogwang and closed after the reign of the Revolutionary group. It opened earlier than Donghaksa and lasted a long time. However, it was not widely known because the number of students had been limited. Now, only its name is left. Jogye Oder ed. *Gangwon chongnam*. (Seoul: Bulgyo sidaesa, 2000.), 446-474.

graduation in 2007.⁴² The nuns' commuting doctrinal hall at Samseon Buddhist College, founded in 1978, produced 217 students through the 23th graduation in 2007. Similarly, Unmunsa has produced 1,533 students from 1958 through the 43rd graduation in 2007, while Cheongamsa opened its doctrinal hall in 1987 and has produced 370 students through the 21st graduation in 2007.⁴³

These central five doctrinal halls have been ensuring the continuation of their non-zen tradition by the Succession of Teaching, and are strongly supported by the sense of duty and moral influence of each principal. The Succession of Teaching refers to the continuation of the academic tradition from master to disciple, which authorizes the qualifying disciple to teach three chapters of precept in the same way professors determine the qualification of new professors in our colleges. The Succession of teaching implies that the master publicly confirms the disciple's teaching ability, sincerity of practice, and morality. A lecturer is admitted through the Succession of Teaching ceremony after six or seven years of experience as a mezzanine lecturer.

⁴² Bongyeongsa was able to open its doctrinal school in 1974 by taking 30 students. It is located in Suwon, Gyeonggi province as a branch temple of Youngjusa. It was built in 1208 during the Goryeo dynasty. Myeom came to Bongyeongsa in 1971 after she taught at Unmunsa. When she moved in, it was a small hermitage in deterioration. She and her 30 nun companions repaired and rebuilt the complex with their own hands. Impressed by their dedication, donors and helpers came to rescue them financially. Myeom studied with doctrinal masters Unheo and Gyeongbong and received lineage transmissions from both. She graduated from the Buddhist Studies Department at Dongguk University in 1966. She became the founding teacher of the doctrinal school at Bongyeongsa and transmitted her teachings to her nun disciples in 1992. She continued to teach there and currently serves as the dean. The school was promoted to a Samgha Colleague (Seungga Daehak) in 1987 and, as of 2000, has 170 nuns studying there. Jogye Oder ed. *Gangwon chongnam*. (Seoul: Bulgyo sidaesa, 2000.), 391-415.

⁴³ Cheongamsa opened a doctrinal school for nuns in 1987, located in Kimcheon, North province. It became a nunnery in 1956, when the doctrinal master Hyeok (1901-1969) was appointed as abbess. The doctrinal school began in 1987 by doctrinal master Jihyeong. Jihyeong graduated from Donghaksa doctrinal school and studies with doctrinal master Bhikṣu Chigwan. She graduated from Dongguk University in 1980, began teaching at Cheongamsa in 1987, and continues to the present. As of 2000, 102 students study there. Jogye Oder ed. *Gangwon chongnam*. (Seoul: Bulgyo sidaesa, 2000.), 391-415.

Establishment resulted in expansion of educational opportunities and nuns' education has brought educational generalization, which contribute to improve society. To obtain a variety of roles to spread Buddhism in the complicated circumstance of the modern society can also be valued. We could feel a lot different if we look at the ceremony. Myoeom only reported to Gyeongbong that 'this person is now a lecturer,' which represented the public announcement.⁴⁴ Myeongseong has continued her lecture when one day Seongneung, the main lecturer, yielded his cushion to this mezzanine lecturer and never showed up. Compared with the ceremonies of these days, we can watch the Masters' true aspects when they yield their positions to their disciples.⁴⁵ This system may produce any quarrel about public trust as it is determined by the main lecturer and colleague lecturers only, but we cannot deny that education has been maintained under this system.

The current curriculum at a doctrinal hall is the traditional one settled upon in the era of Sukjong in the Joseon Dynasty, a curriculum intended to be completed in a series. They are properly edited to be characterized, except the precept of novice nun, that they promote Bodhidharma's zen style, raise practicing monks and nuns, in order to protect their own mission. As a result of certain doctrinal hall education reforms, curriculum was divided into inner subjects (traditional subjects) and outer subjects (auxiliary subjects), and further divided into essential subjects and optional subjects.⁴⁶ The term of study is usually 10 years,

⁴⁴ Sugyeong 수경. "Hanguk biguni gangwon baldalsa 한국 비구니강원 발달사 (The History of the Development of the Monastic Seminary for Korean Nuns)." In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 45.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 47.

⁴⁶ In addition to those, each doctrinal hall adopted as auxiliary subjects such topics as Introduction to Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism History, Korean Buddhism History, Introduction of Zen, Foreign Languages,

with a possibility of 11 years for the particular purpose of education. Seonghyeon of Geumcheonseonwon, a graduate of Donghaksa's first class, studied the curriculum for 10 years under Gyeongbong. Sinjiwon, a graduate of Unmunsa's first class, says it took her 11 years from Chimun to Hwaeom. Judging from the above, it usually took 10 to 11 years to complete the course from late Joseon to the 1970s. Since this time, it has been reduced to between five and seven years. Until the early 1980s, curricula often differed among the doctrinal halls; however, in August of 1984, a unified proposal was suggested on the matter of course subjects and length in the National Conference of Female Doctrinal Hall Lecturers. Unmunsa decided on a period of 4 years in 1985, and Samseon Buddhist College started to apply a 4-year term to its new students in 1991.⁴⁷

One of the most important issues in the development of temple education is the installation of the Revolution Group in 1994. The Revolution Group introduced modern methods in lecturing education in order to enforce and improve temple education, upon which, they believed, depended the quality for Buddhist practice. As a result, doctrinal halls have instituted many changes in their operations, touching particularly on the system of pre-education and post-awakening, the order between novices of monks and nuns, mandatory education in doctrinal halls, and the grading system by temple test. Also they delineated the purpose and spirit of temple education, the organization of the educational system (Basic,

and other general subjects. In 1985, Unmunsa adopted Introduction to Buddhism, Indian Buddhism History, Chinese Buddhism History, Korean Buddhism History, Introduction to Hwaeomhak, Gusaron, Yusikhak, as well as Oriental Philosophy (Four Books and the Three Classics), Computer, Japanese Language, English Language, Chinese Language, Buddhist Prayer, Flower Arrangement, Yoga, Calligraphy, and Four Gracious Plants. Other doctrinal halls chose their subjects depending on their fortune and favor. Until the Revolutionary group, auxiliary subjects were not emphasized as much as traditional ones.

⁴⁷ Jogye Oder ed. *Gangwon chongnam*. (Seoul: Bulgyo sidaesa, 2000.), 391-415.

Fundamental, Advanced, Re-education), separation of subjects (Essential, Recommended, Optional), term (4 years), admission requirements, approval and support to improve educational circumstances, publishing textbooks, and evaluation of education results.⁴⁸ They also helped to inform publicly as the terms of lecture doctrinal hall and Buddhist college are co-used, which could lead to be approved as a college graduate when a student go overseas to study. Furthermore, the individual maintenance of each temple and discretionary free selection of courses by each student are now regulated by a compulsory and authorized process under this new unified educational system. The increasing number of lecturers and students has helped these halls achieve higher status and contributes to the concentration on studying due to better opportunities and facilities. It is clear, therefore, that the Revolutionary Group has had a positive impact on temple education.⁴⁹

These changes have not taken place without certain consequences, however. Traditionally, students were required to study Chinese characters during their novice period by extensive reading and memorizing. Similarly, during the advanced period, students researched and discussed before interacting with the lecturers. Now, although most lecturers try to follow such methods, time limits often force them to substitute simple translation or explanation. Thus, sufficient understanding is not always confirmed. Critics argue that this makes students unable to see the forest for the trees. However, without changes in the curriculum or the four year term limit, efficient education methods can

⁴⁸ Park, Pori. "Establishment of Buddhist Nunneries in Contemporary Korea" in Conference Proceedings: Korean Nuns within the Context of East Asian Buddhist Traditions. 2004.

⁴⁹ Sugyeong 수경. "Hanguk biguni gangwon baldalsa 한국 비구니강원 발달사 (The History of the Development of the Monastic Seminary for Korean Nuns)." In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 51.

hardly be expected. I conclude that present doctrinal halls have brought a beneficial standardization of temple education backed by improved educational circumstances, but there are still matters to resolve to generate future-oriented education through a harmonious relationship with modern education.

The doctrinal lecture hall is a basic institution which succeeds the traditional education to keep the merits where three chapter (study) and trivium (practice) are disciplined at the same time. Its importance cannot be denied because a novice will acquire the basic elements of education from it. After the reforms following the Revolutionary Group, the general consensus was that there should be no obstacle against the doctrinal halls. However, there are an increasing number of students who wish to understand Buddhism in a systematic way and who therefore enter the Jungang College of Buddhist Monkhood at Dongguk University, the basic course. Many of these students then meet the requirements to enter into missionary work as soon as they graduate, even when they feel themselves lacking internal practice, systematic understanding, strong leadership and sufficient administrative ability. On such matters, the Board searches for an internal solution by critiquing exegetical studies in Chinese scriptures, Seon-oriented subjects, and lack of expertise as well as inviting external lecturers to supplement the outer subjects. Thus they work to achieve harmony between traditional and modern education.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Kim, Kyeongjip 金敬執. “Geundaegangwonui yeoksawa gyoyukgwajeong 近代 講院의 歷史와 教育過程 (The History and Curriculum of the Modern Monastic Seminary).” In *Worun seunim gohui ginyeom Bulgyohak nonchong* 月雲스님古稀記念佛敎學論叢 (A Collection of Essays in Honor of Venerable Worun’s Seventieth Birthday), edited by Worun sunim gohui ginyeom nonchong ganhaeng wiwonhoe. (Seoul: Dongguk yeokgyeongwon, 1998.), 384-395.

However, resolution should be sought not only from the doctrinal hall, but from the educational system of the whole society. Presently, only the basic educational course is mandatory in the doctrinal hall. This four year period cannot cover the whole education necessary for a member of society. Instead, it would be beneficial if progressing to the advanced course becomes compulsory. Improvement could be expected when the basic course and the advanced course share the burden of temple education. Until advanced courses become standard and in-depth education is not reached, problems of temple education will always remain. A four year basic education term is not sufficient to reach the harmony between the traditional and modern that the halls desire. It is unlikely, though, that sudden change will occur in the current system since it would generate much confusion. And even the Seon-oriented curriculum still requires more Seon subjects. Also the current situation is that Chinese scriptures are hardly excluded, despite the present Hangeul generation. Therefore, current doctrinal halls have to keep their positions as basic educational places where novices study and practice through group living, and resolution regarding the question of advanced courses will be sought. It would be more efficient if graduates from the basic doctrinal hall determine to pursue further study and deliberate in such courses in what they have learned in the doctrinal hall.

The Narrative and Oral Histories of Lineages of Nuns

There are no clear Korean historical records that indicate how a dual ordination for nuns was carried out in early Korean Buddhist history.⁵¹ However, most Korean scholars of

⁵¹ As discussed in the chapter two, Japanese records on the ordination of the first Japanese nuns in the kingdom of Baekche show that an authentic Korean bhikshuni lineage had already been established in Korea by the sixth century and that a dual ordination was practiced for nuns as well. Kim Yŏngmi believes that from the sixth century until the fourteenth century Korean nuns were ordained as bhikshunis under both sanghas.

Buddhism agree that a legitimate Korean *bhikṣunī* lineage was established in accordance with the proper procedure of a dual ordination by the sixth century in Korea. During the period of Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945), Korean nuns were ordained as *bhikṣunīs* under the *bhikṣus saṃgha* alone even though their full ordination requires a dual ordination. The historical revival of a dual ordination for Korean Buddhist nuns has been a procedure since the post-colonial period.

Through the process of revival of a dual ordination for nuns some issues arose on the observance of the ordination procedure required for nuns in the *Ssu-fen lu* (four division of rules), the Dharmaguptaka vinaya in the Korean historical and social contexts.⁵² The dual ordination process is that novices are first ordained at a separate *bhikṣunī* ordination platform by three principal and seven witness *bhikṣunīs* ordination masters, and then they proceed to the main platform to be ordained by three principal and seven witness *bhikṣus* ordination masters, which involves a total of 20 *bhikṣus* and *bhikṣunīs* of twofold community to authenticate the official ordination.⁵³

Dual ordination for nuns was initiated during the formative years of the first nuns order in India. Evidence for this can be found in the “Eight Special Rules” for nuns and the Pakittiya of the Patimokkha. Both the *Pancavarga* and *Mahasamghika Vinaya*, and the *Gotami sutta* of the *Anguttara nikaya*, state that the *śikṣamāṇā* must receive the full precepts from the twofold monastic community. A more definitive account of the ordination process

⁵² Yifa. *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China: An Annotated Translation and Study of the Chanyuan Qinggui*. Kuroda Institute Classics in East Asian Buddhism. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002.). I will discuss these two texts in chapter five.

⁵³ Daehan Bulgyo Jogyejong gyedan wiwonhoe 대한불교조계종 계단위원회, ed. *Danil gyedan isimnyeon* 單一戒壇二十年 (Twenty Years of a Unified Ordination Platform). (Seoul: Tobang, 2001.), 216.

is given in Pakittiya 139 in the *Dharmagupta vinaya*, which states that the *bhikṣunī*, once she has received the initial ordination, must go on to receive the full ordination from the *bhikṣus* on the same day. However, this dual ordination system did not exist from the outset. This is evidenced by the fact that there was no *bhikṣunīsamgha* at the time the first *bhikṣunī* in history, Mahaprajapati, entered the order. If we assume that Mahaprajapati had received and kept the Eight Special Rules, she could have become a *bhikṣunī* simply through promising to keep these rules.⁵⁴

Ordination ceremonies had been performed on an individual basis at the discretion of each temple or head monastery until 1981 when the Jogye Order mandated by law a unified platform to carry out the ordination ceremony order-wide *en masse*. Thus, a single monastery within the order is designated as the “ordination monastery,” and those who are to receive ordination in the Jogye Order are collectively ordained at this one location. The monk Jaun’s (1911-1992) famous vinaya master dedicated Buddhist monastic disciplinary texts used for tutoring Korean monks and nuns. His endeavor mainly contributed the revival of the practice of a dual ordination and the historical revival ordination for Korean nuns in October of 1982.⁵⁵

After the Korean liberation from Japanese rule, celibate monks and nuns anxiously wished to restore their earlier celibate monastic tradition, but the devastating Korean War (1950-1953) prevented immediate action. Profoundly distressed by what he considered to

⁵⁴ Jeon, Haeju 全海住. “Biguni gyodanui seongnipe daehan gochal 比丘尼 教團의 成立에 대한 考察 (A Study on the Establishment of the Order of Nuns).” *Hanguk bulgyohak* 韓國佛敎學 (Korean Buddhist Studies) 11 (1986), 311-340.

⁵⁵ Seok, Ilta 釋一陀, comp. and Seok Cheoru 釋哲牛, trans. *Samini yurui* 沙彌尼律儀 (Precepts and Decorum for Śrāmaṇerikās). (Seoul: Daehan bulgyo jogyejong gyoyugwon, 1992.), 126-128.

be the degeneration of Buddhism, the negligence of vinaya study, and the poor observance of the monastic rules, Master Jaun vowed to restore the practice of celibacy to Korean monasticism and dedicated his life to vinaya study. Many Korean monks and nuns were forced to take refuge at monasteries and nunneries in the area of Busan, the temporary wartime capital of South Korea. As a refugee, Master Jaun tutored a small group of monks and nuns at Tongdosa (通度寺) with Buddhist monastic disciplinary texts. At the height of the Korean War in 1951, three nuns, Myoeom, Myoyeong, and Myohi began to study Buddhist monastic disciplinary texts under Master Jaun.⁵⁶ He provided the copies of Buddhist monastic disciplinary texts for the three nuns and sat down cross-legged on the floor of his room before the three nuns and translated word by word each of the three-hundred-forty-eight *bhikṣunī* rules in the Pratimoksa, as well as the ten major and forty-eight minor bodhisattva precepts. The three nuns repeated verbatim the Korean translation of each precept after Master Jaun. In the face of Korean monks' declining adherence to the monastic rules even after liberation from Japanese rule, Master Jaun was determined and continuously supported the restoration of the tradition of monastic celibacy after the Korean War.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ The three nuns started with learning the precepts and regulations of the Chinese Samini yurui 사미니 율의 (Precepts and Decorums for Sramanerika) and continued to study the Bhikṣuni Pratimoksa of the 사분율 and the Fanwang Ching (법망경 Book of Brahma's Net). These Chinese monastic disciplinary texts written in literary Chinese were not yet translated into Korean, nor did the three nuns have the ability to read Chinese at the time. Although Master Jaun made great efforts to tutor the monastic disciplinary texts to the nuns, he never allowed them to perform any menial task for him such as washing and sewing his clothes, cooking, or cleaning his room. Nor did he receive any financial compensation from the nuns for his work. Ibid. 128-130.

⁵⁷ Jinmyung 진명. "Kamnosa wa Chaun taeyulsa 감로사와 자운대율사 (Sweet Dew Monastery and Great Vinaya Master Jaun)." *Bulgyo Sinmun* 佛教新聞 (April 4, 2003) (<http://www.buddhistnews.net/news/1-152/200304231051120379.asp>).

In 1981, Master Jaun appointed Myeom to lead a *bhikṣunī* committee that was geared to prepare for the revival of a dual ordination for nuns. With Master Jaun's full support, the *bhikṣunī* committee held the First Korean *Bhikṣunī* Congregation for ten days in August of 1982 at the Jingwansa (진관사) Nunnery in Seoul. The abbess of Jingwansa provided all the food and lodging for fifty *bhikṣunī* participants of the congregation. In early 1982, Jaun, who was revered by monks and nuns alike, petitioned the members of the council of the Korean Buddhist Jogye Order to reinstitute the practice of a dual ordination for nuns. In June of 1982, the members of the council of the Jogye Order restricted *bhikṣunī* ordination, proclaiming that nuns be ordained as *bhikṣunī* under both *saṃghas*.⁵⁸

Between October 15th and 20th, 1982, for the first time in modern Korean Buddhist history, the three principal and seven witnessing *bhikṣunī* masters chosen by the First Korean *Bhikṣunī* Congregation held a historic revival of a dual ordination for nuns at the Daeseongam (대성암) Nunnery near Beomeosa (범어사) in Busan. While monks held their ordination platform at Beomeosa, nuns performed their ordination ceremony separately at Daeseongam. Of the three principle *bhikṣunī* masters at this revival of a dual ordination, Jeonghaeng (1902-2000) was the master (阿闍梨, *ācāryikā*), who appears in the full ordination process only at the end of the ceremony, Myoeom was the adviser (教授師, *anusāsikā*) who investigates whether the candidate meets the conditions of the *saṃgha*, and Myeongseong was the teacher (和上尼, *upādhyāyini*) who guides the new candidate for the

⁵⁸ Daehan Bulgyo Jogyejong gyedan wiwonhoe 대한불교조계종 계단위원회, ed. *Danil gyedan isimnyeon* 單一戒壇二十年 (Twenty Years of a Unified Ordination Platform). (Seoul: Tobang, 2001.), 123.

ordination.⁵⁹ Master Jaun single-handedly provided all expenses for the revival of the dual ordination for nuns with money donated by his devotees. During the entire ordination proceedings for nuns at Daeseongam, he was present to ensure that every step of the ordination procedure for nuns was performed properly.⁶⁰

The role of the three principal and seven witness *bhikṣunīs* masters in the dual ordination process is no less important than that of their counterpart ten *bhikṣu* masters. The ordination ceremony conducted by the ten noble *bhikṣunīs* at the separate precepts platform alone confers upon the śikṣamāṇās the basic status of an ordination. The ordination is then taken to the main precepts platform to receive the full ordination, in which the three principal and seven witness *bhikṣunī* masters also take part by acting as certifiers. The ten *bhikṣunī* masters have played a critical role in ordaining numerous *bhikṣunīs* over the years. Korean *bhikṣunīs* participated in the international *bhikṣunīs* ordination ceremony held at Bodhgaya in 1996 as ordination masters, and thereby also made a valuable contribution to the development of *bhikṣunī* orders internationally.⁶¹

According to the regulation, a śrāmaṇerīk who was eighteen years old or more must be ordained as a śikṣamāṇā under the six rules by qualified *bhikṣunī* masters. A śikṣamāṇā who was twenty years old or more must be ordained as a *bhikṣunī* under ten qualified nuns

⁵⁹ Since that time, *bhikṣuni* precepts in the history of Korean Buddhism include Inhong, Gwangu, Hyeun and Taegyeong, Jiwon and Jeonghun. *Bhikṣuni* confessors, instruction acaryas and witnesses include Taegu and nearly forty other noble *bhikṣunis*.

⁶⁰ Daehan Bulgyo Jogyejong gyoyugwon 대한불교조계종 교육원, ed. *Jogyejongsa: Gunhyeondaepyeon* 曹溪宗史: 근현대편 (The History of the Jogye Order: The Modern Period). (Seoul: Daehan bulgyo jogyejong gyoyugwon, 2001.), 216-219.

⁶¹ Jung, Inyoung, (Sukdham) and Hyangsoon Yi, “Gukjehwasidae Hanguk biguniui wising kwa yeokhal 국제화시대 한국 비구니의 위상과 역할 (The Role and Status of Korean Nuns in the Age of Globalization).” In *Hanguk biguniui suhaengkwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 119.

in addition to ten qualified monks, or at least five qualified nuns in addition to five qualified monks. At the beginning of the ordination ceremony at Daeseongam, the prospective *bhikṣuṇīs* verified their physical states and spiritual capacities with the confessor, and then again with ten *bhikṣuṇī* masters. The candidates were trained intensively for six days, wherein all of the 348 precepts were covered. On the last day of the ceremony at the nunnery, the ten *bhikṣuṇī* masters and the prospective *bhikṣuṇīs* walked to Beomeosa and completed the ordination under ten *bhikṣu* and ten *bhikṣuṇīs* masters.⁶²

In the dual ordination system for *bhikṣuṇī* of the Jogye Order, the *śikṣamāṇā* is first ordained in the full precepts at a separate precepts platform, followed by full ordination at the main precepts platform. Therefore, to be eligible for the *bhikṣuṇī* ordination, one must have already been ordained in the *śikṣamāṇā* precepts. One is eligible for the *śikṣamāṇā* ordination two years after *śrāmaṇerī* ordination and after having passed the national *saṃgha* examination. Those who wish to enter the order must first undergo at least six months' apprentice training at one of the temples of the Jogye Order, then training at the temple's head monastery. Next are three weeks of apprentice education at the Jogye Order Education Center and the level five national *saṃgha* examination, the passing of which allows one to become ordained in the *śrāmaṇerī* precepts (10 precepts) and thus become a novice. Once a novice nun receives ordination in the *śrāmaṇerī* precepts, she must register with an affiliated basic education center within two years and receive four years of education.⁶³

⁶² Jaun mundohoe 慈雲門徒會, ed. *Jaun daeyulsa* 慈雲大律師 (Great Vinaya Master Jaun). (Seoul: Kasan Munhwawon, 2000.), 123-129.

⁶³ A basic education center can be any one of the following: traditional seminaries, Central Samgha University, the College of Buddhist Studies at Dongguk University, or the Gicho Seonweon (Foundational Seon meditation Center). The sramaneris receives ordination in siksamana precepts (six precepts) in the third year

At the revival of a dual ordination for Korean nuns in October of 1982, the authorities of the ordination platform had nuns ordained as both *śikṣamāṇās* and *bhikṣunīs* within one week. According to the vinaya, nuns must be ordained as *bhikṣunīs* after two years of *śikṣamāṇā* training under the six rules. Nonetheless, preparing for the revival of a dual ordination for nuns was a mind-boggling procedure for the authorities of the ordination platform. The authorities were faced with a shortage of finances as well as a lack of human resources. Other difficulties arose including finding a nunnery located near a major monastery, choosing ten qualified bhikṣunī masters, setting the dates of the ordination ceremony, and gathering ten *bhikṣu* and ten bhikṣunī masters for the fixed period of the ordination ceremony. It was practically impossible to fulfill all of the required regulations of a dual ordination for nuns as specified in the vinaya.

After carefully scrutinizing the qualifications of the prospective *bhikṣunīs*, the authorities of the ordination platform selected one-hundred-eighty-nine nuns, all of whom had spent their monastic lives as *śrāmaṇerīs* for years, to be ordained as *śikṣamāṇās* and *bhikṣunīs* within one week. The revival of a dual ordination was as if a baby had taken its first step, but it was a step with hope to work on accomplishing all of the regulations specified for nuns in the vinaya in years to come.

Once the initial ordination ceremony is concluded at the separate precepts platform, the 10 *bhikṣunī* masters take the ordinations to the main precepts platform to receive ordination again. The procedure for this ceremony is as follows: first, the intention to

of this basic training, and upon graduation, having met all the qualifications set out in the constitution, are eligible to take the level four national samgha examinations. If the siksamana passes the examination, she may receive ordination in the full bhikṣuni precepts.

request 10 master *bhikṣunīs* to confer the full precepts to the candidates is announced, and the request is made directly to the three principal and seven witness *bhikṣunī* masters and then a request is made to the Three Jewels to certify the ordination. Next, the preceptor seeks the other nine masters' consensus and asks the instruction to ask confidential questions to the candidates. Following this, the instruction takes the candidates to a private area to ask confidential questions. The request is made to the preceptor to confer the full precepts. Consequently, the confessor announces the start of the confidential interrogation process. Finally, the confessor begins interrogating the candidates on the thirteen grave offences and sixteen minor offences.⁶⁴ The procedure for the initial separate ordination and the final main ordination are very similar, except that an explanation of the “Eight Special Rules” is given in the final ordination.⁶⁵

The revival of a dual ordination for Korean nuns in October of 1982 was performed with a serious shortage of human resources in the *bhikṣunī saṃgha* and several unfulfilled tasks regarding the procedure of a dual ordination required for nuns in the vinaya. Yet, the ordination ceremony was an important event in the history of ordination for Korean nuns. Korean *bhikṣu* and *bhikṣunī saṃghas* have constantly worked together to fulfill the procedural requirements for a dual ordination for nuns as specified in the vinaya. Since the revival, the Jogye Order continuously worked to fulfill the regulations of the *bhikṣunī* ordination. In 1996, the Jogye order began to hold a separate ordination ceremony for

⁶⁴ Jaun mundohoe 慈雲門徒會, ed. *Jaun daeyulsa* 慈雲大律師 (Great Vinaya Master Jaun). (Seoul: Kasan Munhwawon, 2000.), 216.

⁶⁵ Jeon, Haeju 全海住. “Biguni gyodanui seongnipe daehan gochal 比丘尼教團의 成立에 대한 考察 (A Study on the Establishment of the Order of Nuns).” *Hanguk bulgyohak* 韓國佛敎學 (Korean Buddhist Studies) 11 (1986), 311-340.

śikṣamāṇās. *Śikṣamāṇās* must be trained in the six rules for two years prior to their *bhikṣunī* ordination. Finally, in 2007, *śrāmaṇerīs* began to be ordained as *śikṣamāṇās* under qualified *bhikṣunī* vinaya masters. In addition, faced with the persistent pressures of *bhikṣunī* masters in 2006, the current head of the Jogye order resorted to the role of *bhikṣunī* instructor during a nunnery's ordination ceremony.⁶⁶

The tradition of ordination in Korean Buddhism based on the full precepts of the *Dharmagupta vinaya*, began enforcing the unified precepts platform in 1982, thereby restoring and continuing the tradition of dual ordination that had begun from the time of the Buddha. However, the system is not without its problems.⁶⁷ Aside from the popular debate about whether the time has come for *bhikṣunīs* to perform the ordination ceremonies themselves without help from the *bhikṣu* order, there is the issue of the discriminatory nature of both the dual ordination system and the Eight Special Rules of the *bhikṣunī*, as well as the issue of a potential contradiction in simultaneously receiving ordination in both the full precepts of the *Dharmagupta vinaya*. This is not just a problem of receiving the bodhisattva precepts, but one that arises because Korean Buddhism is Mahayana Buddhism. The key to solving these problems lies in moving from a partial to a complete understanding of the precepts to include their true intent and essential meaning.

Nuns in the Jogye Order have continuously struggled to regain their right to act as *bhikṣunī* vinaya masters at the *śrāmaṇerī*, *śikṣamāṇā* and *bhikṣunī* ordination platforms of

⁶⁶ Kwon, Oyeong 권오영.. “Hanguk bulgyo yulmaek nuga inna? 한국불교 율맥 누가 잇나? (To Whom Was the Vinaya Lineage of Korean Buddhism Passed down?).” *Beopbo Sinmun* 法寶新聞 (January 10, 2007) (<http://www.beopbo.com/article/view?Hid=49833&Hcate1=3&Hcate2=229&Hcmode=view>).

⁶⁷ Yi, Jigwan 李智冠. *Hanguk bulgyo souigyeongjeon yeongu* 韓國佛教所依經典研究 (A Study of the Main Buddhist Texts in Korean Buddhism). (Seoul: Gasan munhwawon, 1993.), 216-219.

subsequent years. After almost thirteen years of effort, *bhikṣu* and *bhikṣunī saṃghas* have accomplished the observance of the procedural regulations of a dual ordination for nuns as prescribed in the vinaya. There are still many issues and controversies to be worked out regarding ordination for Korean nuns. Nuns continue to challenge the practices perpetuating gender inequality under the male-dominated monastic tradition, with the hopes of achieving equality between monks and nuns in the near future.

Social Activities within Modernity

During the Japanese colonial period the majority of the Korean monks were officially married under the influence of Japanese Buddhism, because monks in Japanese Buddhism are able to be legally married. Celibate monks were only in the minority until the mid-1950s. After liberation, Korean Buddhists had to purge themselves of the remnants of colonialism which included identifying and punishing the so-called collaborators and eliminating the Japanese product of the “temple ordinance.” In May of 1954, the celibate Buddhist clerics embarked on the “Purification Movement” to get rid of married clerics. They accused married monks of being the result of colonized Buddhism. Unlike the monks’ situation, Korean nuns have remained celibate throughout Korean history. In the beginning of the Purification Movement, celibate monks numbered from 200 to 300 and nuns around 400, while there were 7000 married monks.⁶⁸

The conflict between celibate monks and married monks dates to August of 1954 and continued to August of 1955. During this year-long fight between the two groups, nuns were active participants in the movement to assist the minority celibate monks. The monk

⁶⁸ Kim, Gwangsik, *Geunhyeondae Bulgyo ui Jaejomyeong* 근현대 불교의 재조명 (Review of Buddhism in modern and contemporary) (Seoul: Minjoksa, 2000), 419

leaders asked nuns to join the movement, and nuns came to Seoul whenever major events occurred or even stayed in Seoul as constant assistants. Whenever the celibate monks were confronted with the married monks, nuns were placed on the front line to condense the corporal fights with them. Almost all nuns, except for the elderly and sick, participated in every meeting and confrontation with the married faction, and nuns provided spiritual guidance to the movement. For instance, nuns' leaders and representatives were willing to play a tough role in informing details of the competition during the competition and in participating in a meeting of the Presidential Residence of the Republic of Korea and the Ministry of Education for the Buddhist Memorial. Nuns actively participated in the front lines: most notably in the famous protest demonstration on the presidential residence (Gyeongmudae), walking through snowy downtown Seoul on December 13th, 1954. Five or six nun leaders, including Geumgwang, Seongwoo, Yeonjin, Suok and Jaho, were in the first line, and hundreds of nuns followed. The number of nuns was double that of the number of monks in this demonstration.⁶⁹ On September 28 and 29th of that year, 30 nuns and 116 monks participated in a nationwide conference for celibate clerics.⁷⁰ On November 3, 10 nuns were added to the 50 members of the Central Council of the Samgha (Jonghoe), and on December 25, 1954, the celibates handed in their plans for the Samgha reforms with the attached signatures of 366 monks and 441 nuns. At the conference of the celibates in

⁶⁹ Buddhist nuns participated in a purification movement with Buddhist monks from the beginning (the number of assembled persons on Dec. 11th, 1954 were 211 Buddhist monks and 221 Buddhist nuns), and evidence suggests that on August 12th, 1955, the end of the Buddhist Society Purification Movement was spelled out by 430 Buddhist monks (prostration, 48 persons), 571 Buddhist nuns (prostration, 140 persons) including National Monk Competition Assembly Records attending persons' prostration. As the purification movement progressed, Buddhist nuns' efforts to participate in the movement increased. Buddhist nuns united power had come to an end to the purification movement. *Ibid.*, 392.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 393-397.

August of 1955, 423 nuns joined with 250 monks.⁷¹ The celibates managed to gather at Jogyesa in Seoul in August 1955 and passed the constitution of the Saṃgha. They elected 56 Saṃgha assembly members and filled the administrative positions with the celibate faction. The celibates then began to take over major monasteries. Due to the resistance of the married monks who operated the monasteries, the process of seizing them was difficult. With the help of police, the celibates forced the married clerics out. By October of 1955, the celibates had taken over about 450 monasteries out of 1000 from the married faction. With regard to the remaining ones, they gave only the right of operation to those married monks who agreed with the purification movement.

Although monks took leadership of the movement and received the spotlight from the media and the general public, there was a noticeable participation of nuns at the grassroots level. Nun Toksu (1922-) at Geonseongam testified that she and other nuns stayed in Seoul at Daebiwon and helped monks run errands and take care of things behind the scenes.⁷² Nun Iryeop (1896-1971) wrote several articles in major newspapers and supported the cause for the celibate camp. She contributed in April of 1955 to an article on “The Buddhist Movement for Reformation” to the Joseon Daily.⁷³ She stated that celibacy was the most decisive precept of Buddhist clerics. To be free from the cycle of birth and death, Buddhist

⁷¹ Ibid., 401.

⁷² Hwang, Ingyu 황인규. “Geunhyeondae biguniwa bulgyo jeonghwa undong 근현대 비구니와 불교정화운동 (Modern Buddhist Nuns and the Purification Movement of Korean Buddhism).” In *Bulgyo jeonghwa undongui jaejomyeong 불교정화 운동의 재조명 (Reexamination of the Purification Movement of Korean Buddhism)*, edited by Daehan Bulgyo Jogyejong bulhakyeeongu wiweonhoe. (Seoul: Jogyejong chulpansa, 2008.), 267-269.

⁷³ Joseon daily, 26 April 1955; cited in *Sinmun uro pon Hanguk Bulgyo Gunhyeondaesa* (Seoul: Seonudoryang Press, 1995.), 207-209.

clerics needed to extinguish not only the physical desires, but also the mental desires. She affirmed that being a Buddhist cleric meant that one first had to leave his or her home, then leave his or her own body and, finally, transcend the world of birth and death. Buddhist clerics needed to risk their lives on the path of attaining great freedom. Nuns' participation continued through until 1969, when the married faction formed their own sect, called Taego Order.⁷⁴

After the purification conflict concluded, a Buddhist nun had been appointed the head of the Buddhist Temple to protect the temple, love the public, and construct the Buddhist nuns' practicing seminary. As a result, a nun had been appointed the head monk of a Buddhist temple after purification, and furthermore, had been appointed the head of Donghwasa temple, one of the head temples among the 25 head temples. When Donghwasa temple was purified in 1955, nun Seongmun (1893-1974) inaugurated the first abbess of Donghwasa and achieved Buddhist seminary rituals and services. The Central Council of the Saṃgha also did not have any restrictions between monks and nuns, but its number of nuns must be 1/6 the number of monks. Numerically this cannot be seen as fully equal status, but the ratio is more than the current members of Buddhist nuns. After the purification movement there were significant increases of activities of nuns, and as a result, the role and emotional impact of Buddhist nuns increased during purification.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Hwang, Ingyu 황인규. "Geunhyeondae biguniwa bulgyo jeonghwa undong 근현대 비구니와 불교정화운동 (Modern Buddhist Nuns and the Purification Movement of Korean Buddhism)." In *Bulgyo jeonghwa undongui jaejomyeong 불교정화 운동의 재조명 (Reexamination of the Purification Movement of Korean Buddhism)*, edited by Daehan Bulgyo Jogyejong bulhakyeeongu wiweonhoe. (Seoul: Jogyejong chulpansa, 2008.), 271-275.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 276- 289.

One the other hand, after the triumph of the purification movement, celibate monks were gradually granted control of all of the major monasteries in the nation and nuns who had played such an important role in leading the purification movement to success were gradually excluded from participating in such roles. Eventually, in a land of many believers, there came to be no positions in the major monasteries for these nuns. However, they were not disappointed nor did they lose hope. Rather, they went on to establish many small and large independent temples in urban areas using their advantages as women. In spite of their tribulations with gender inequality under the monastic patriarchic hegemony, nuns have gained autonomy by changing their aims and resistance strategies. They moved forward to create their own spaces and transformed their gender identity and roles to fit the rapidly changing contemporary Korean society. As Korean society changed and lay-devotees became busier, they visited Buddhist nuns' facilities nearby and gradually came prefer them. These nuns obviously could take care of themselves well and try their best in practices. Their temples are well-maintained, clean, and provide easily accessible and peaceful places for lay-devotees to pursue religious practice and to get the advice of nuns in times of need. Nuns have become more socially active and eventually even leaders in Korean society.

Typical activities include serving in social welfare programs in which children's education⁷⁶ is managed, serving as hospital volunteers, and teaching in continuing education

⁷⁶ Daewon, "Buddhist Education for Children," in the Proceedings of the 8th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, ed., *Discipline and Practice of Buddhist Women: Present and Past*, (2004.), 64-69.

programs for secular lay devotees.⁷⁷ For instance, nuns, as the hospital preachers in the Buddha hall of hospitals, not only pray for recovery, periodically visit and counsel patients, caregivers and hospital staff, but also serve as clinical researchers and members of a brain death determination committee, as well as lecturing at medical colleges, among other activities.⁷⁸ Nuns are also involved in service for the handicapped and elderly, managing the Buddha hall of hospitals, and in community social welfare centers, serving to improve life for not only Buddhists but also for lay people based on Buddhist spiritual principles.⁷⁹ With these broad and various activities, nuns are progressively participating in important roles in

⁷⁷ Social welfare activities of the Jogye Order have dramatically increased in the last decade in terms of qualitative as well as quantitative growth. 95 welfare facilities in 1995 grew to 477 welfare facilities in 2006. The 193 children and youth's welfare facilities provide daycare centers, special education centers, children's centers for treatment and counseling, summer camp programs, etc. Lim, Haeyoung, "The Analysis of the Social Welfare Institutions" 2006, 14.

The number of Buddhist social welfare facilities

Type of facilities	1995		1999		2006	
Children	21	22.1%	135	43.3%	193	40.4%
Youth	15	15.8%	31	9.9%	31	6.5%
Elderly	11	11.6%	50	16.0%	129	27.0%
Disabled	9	9.5%	13	4.2%	45	9.4%
Women	-	-	1	0.3%	3	0.6%
Community	20	21.0%	35	11.2%	51	10.7%
Homeless	3	3.2%	11	3.5%	8	1.7%
Medical	-	-	5	1.6%	5	1.1%
Counseling	-	-	8	2.6%	5	1.1%
Volunteers	-	-	3	1.0%	2	0.4%
Others	16	16.8%	23	7.4%	5	1.1%
Total	95	100.0%	312	100.0%	477	100.0%

⁷⁸ "Buddhism and Social Welfare in Korea," in the Proceedings of the 8th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women in 2004, (Karma Lekshe Tsomo, ed., *Discipline and Practice of Buddhist Women: Present and Past*: 56-63). Gihong, "Volunteer Activities of Korean Buddhist Nuns," in the Proceedings of the 8th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women . Karma Lekshe Tsomo, ed., *Discipline and Practice of Buddhist Women: Present and Past*. (2004.), 76-80.

⁷⁹ O, Yujin 오유진 and Kim Eungyeong 김은경. "Biguni seunimdeului ttambangul bulgyo bokji gyeonincha 비구니 스님들의 땀방울 불교복지 견인차 (The Role and Sweat of Nuns in the Buddhist Social Welfare)." *Hyeondae Bulgyo Sinmun* 現代佛教新聞 (January 2, 2004) (http://news.buddhapia.com/HTML2/2004/buddha_23928.html).

society. As a result, nuns and monks are equally respected and financially supported by lay devotees. Nuns' social status in Korean society is high and they play active leadership roles in female and male lay communities. Thus, their efforts created their own contexts for living and further challenged the gender inequalities of the patriarchal Buddhist tradition.

In contrast to their changing social status and circumstantial gender inequality in the monastic community still observes even if there is no reason to discrimination between qualities and quantities of nuns' status. Nuns themselves perceived their religious roles and identities and extended their own autonomy in the monastic community. They tried to determine their own history under female leadership. Most nuns not only gathered together and organized genealogy of Buddhist Family, but they also belonged separately. The layout of the genealogy of Buddhist Family was designed on the basis of historical oral perception among nuns. This is the great contributor to establish the authority of the Korean Buddhist Jogye Order and to publish Buddhist family genealogy of Korean Buddhism.⁸⁰

In addition, their efforts to recognize their history and identity gave rise to the need of a national assembly of nuns. Leading nuns established a national nuns' association and so "Woodambara Association" was launched in 1968 and they shared a sense of historical mission.⁸¹ This association is the representative organization that symbolizes female identity and autonomy within their harmonization. This was reorganized as the National

⁸⁰ Gaimi, Byupki, Booyoon, Bongrai, Sujung, Samhyun, Yoohwa and Chunghai are well-known of family genealogy in the oral history of Korean nuns at present.

⁸¹ Udambarwahoe 우담발화회. "Hanguk bulgyo biguni udambarwahoe changnip barwonmun 한국불교 비구니 우담발화회 창립발원문 (A Declaration on the Founding of the Udumbara Korean Bhikṣuṇī Association)." *Biguni Hoebo* 比丘尼會報 (Bhikṣuṇī Newsletter) (1997).

Bhikṣuṇī Association of Korean Jogye Order at Suknamsa Temple on September 5, 1985.⁸²

Today almost all Buddhist nuns in the Jogye Order belong to this organization and the association represents their own voice, not only Korean, but of other Buddhist countries to help elevate female practitioners' circumstances. Due to growing religious diversity in contemporary Korean society, Buddhist nuns actively participate in communicating with other religions and cultures. They pursue cooperation of religions and their efforts to understand other religions, respect differences, and co-operate on certain religious and social issues and activities is a good example showing religious harmony in a multi-religious society.

One of the examples of the success of Buddhist nuns in Korea is the 8th Sakyadhita (the Daughters of the Buddha) International Conference on Buddhist Women which took place in Seoul in 2004. At this conference, Buddhist scholar Tsomo Lekshe said that there are no such organizations or national Buddhist nuns' meetings in other countries.⁸³ Even in Buddhist countries, they cannot organize unified and representative organizations due to socio-religious circumstances or personal interests. Therefore, this Korean Buddhist nun board was unique in the world. Due to poverty in Tibet and southeast Buddhist countries, there are no female religious leaders or teachers since they cannot be authorized as official nuns. In 1998, Korean nuns with Korean monks performed dual ordination to Southeastern female practitioners in India. Buddhist nuns have succeeded to raise their positions, but

⁸² Jeon, Horyeon. "Hanguk Gunhyeondae biguiui suhaenge daehan gochal" (The research of aspects on nuns practice in modern and contemporary). In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 157-158.

⁸³ Tsomo, Karma Lekshe, ed. *Buddhist Women across Cultures: Realizations*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999.), 19.

they do not have equal position as Buddhist monks on the board.⁸⁴ The Korean situation cannot be an exception from this when it comes to establishing Buddhist nuns' positions. The current Korean Buddhist nun status can be defined as the second in the Buddhist world that they follow the Taiwanese Buddhist nun board in terms of growth rate or social activities.⁸⁵ Considering the original problem in Taiwan, the positions of the Korean Buddhist nuns are at the forefront in the Buddhist world.

Major nunneries for education and Seon practice were established after the first victory of the celibates in 1955. Nuns began to rebuild them from almost nothing since they were all in terrible condition due to the Korean War. As the nunneries emerged as centers for nuns, nuns began to produce their own doctrinal teachers and Seon masters. They thus became less dependent on monks for their studies and training and finally became a self-sufficient group. Korean nuns have independently managed their own monastic communities and they have systematically established a meditation and educational system that has not just survived, but continues to flourish and develop equally with monks. As far as learning and practice, there is no discrimination against nuns.

⁸⁴ Sukdham and Hyangsoon Yi, "Gukchehwasiidae Hanguk bigunui wisanggwa yeohal (The Role and Status of Korean Nuns in the Age of Globalization)," in Jeoguk Bigunihoe, ed., *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 182-184.

⁸⁵ Statistically 80% of about 30,000 Buddhist monks and nuns are nuns and the rate of Buddhist nuns and monks are 8 to 2 in Taiwan. Western experts who study women and history of religion have even mentioned that Taiwanese Buddhist nuns write a new Buddhist history. However, there are some problems even in the thriving Taiwanese Buddhist nun board. Most Taiwanese Buddhist nuns have Buddhist monk masters and work for them. According to western scholar the Buddhist nun board thriving in Taiwan is focused on one great teacher surrounded by many Buddhist nuns like an ant colony. Nuns sacrifice themselves by taking care of the households and cooking for their teachers. In the end, Buddhist monks are above Buddhist nuns and Buddhist nuns cannot be equal to them. Ibid., 182-184.

As the Jogye Order begins to recognize the importance of nuns representing the order, it needs to involve more nuns in the central administration and operation of the head monastery districts. Nuns still do not share the privilege of voting with monks and, thus, are mostly excluded in every election of major posts and in the making of the Order's policies. Half of the Buddhists in the Jogye Order are Buddhist nuns. The Buddhist nuns' board should participate in important decision making and its operation. For this purpose, the process of decision making in the Buddhist nuns' board itself should be transparent and the administrative structure should be improved to reflect the majority voices of the board on the general affairs of the board. This is important not just for the future of the Korean board but also for the future of the Korean Buddhist world.

With equal opportunity of education and practice, nuns' boards and strong execution of internalized and the collectivity of Korean Buddhist nuns is excellent. Korean Buddhist nuns within modernization and globalization are working out their own roles and pursuing improvement in society as well as in monastic communities. This is reflected in the nuns' order's continuing growth, its social activism, and its meditation programs, making it one of the most dynamic female monastic communities in the contemporary Buddhist world. From the Buddha's life to the experience of nuns in the twenty-first century, Buddhists have attempted to embody classical Buddhist ideals within their own social contexts. Though nuns have been daunted by a male-dominated institutional hierarchy still they developed their own direction and their own voice. As a result, the status of nuns is gradually increasing not only in society but also in Buddhist communities, and they are not restricted as a result of their insistence upon equality regarding regulations.

I have briefly summarized the history of Korean Buddhist nuns with an eye for historical patterns of continuity. Even though written documentation is lacking, I have attempted to show that it is possible to deduce patterns of female religiosity by focusing on individuals. I have also explored the roots of flowering of contemporary Buddhist women's monasticism, tracing them back to the beginning of Seon meditation and doctrinal study halls. Given this research, in the next chapter I will focus on Unmunsa monastic college as an institution dedicated to the education and training of contemporary Buddhist nuns.

CHAPTER 4
UNMUNSA AS INSTITUTION

The History of Unmunsa Temple

In Unmunsa Monastic College more than two hundred nuns are presently living together, and this affiliate of the Unmunsa Temple represents the largest among five monastic colleges for nuns. It is located in the Hoguh (Tiger) Mountains,¹ and is one of the branch temples of Donghwasa Temple, the head monastery of the 9th parish of the Jogye Order. The history of the temple goes back over one thousand years.

According to the *Samgukyusa*, in the year 557, during the 18th year of the reign of King Jinheung of the Silla Dynasty, a mystical monk appeared and built a small hermitage at Geumsudong. He practiced asceticism for three years in order to achieve enlightenment. He built five temples including Daejahkgap Temple, which is located in the center and which is presently called the Unmunsa temple.² Set against the mountains into which the site is nestled, the buildings that make up the temple complex resemble a tiding of magpie birds. When the king heard that Daejahkgahp Temple was built on the land that he conquered, he designated it as the main temple.³

National Teacher Wongwang is the first historical figure mentioned, in 600, in association with Unmunsa. According to this account, he constructed the temple after coming back from China and lived in Daejahkgap for 3 years before moving to Gaseulgap

¹ The exact address is 1789 Shinwon Township, Unmun Sub-county, Cheongdoh County, North Gyeongsang Province, in South Korea.

² Gaseulgap Temple (no longer standing) to the east, Cheonmoongap Temple to the south, Daebigap Temple (presently Daebi Temple) to the west, Sobogap Temple (no longer standing) to the north, and Daejahkgap Temple (today, Unmunsa Temple) in the center.

³ *Samgukyusa* (삼국유사 三國遺事, Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms). Ilyon 일연. Translated by Lee, Byeongdo. 2 vols. Seoul: Dugyeohaksuljadan. (<http://www.khaan.net/history/samkooksagi/samkooksagi.htm>)

Temple. During this period of his ministry he taught the five precepts for the laity to his disciples, Gwisan and Chuhang, who were members of the Hwarangdo, “an elite royal Silla.” In addition, he requested the support of the Chinese army should the need arise.⁴

Monk Boyahng, as a National Teacher (寶陽國師) who helped the king build the Goryeo Dynasty while unifying the Neo Three Kingdoms, was the second person to substantially aid in founding the temple again in the year 930. When he returned from studying in China he reconstructed the diminished five temples. King Taejo of the Goryeo dynasty gifted the title “Unmumseonsa (雲門禪寺)” to Daejakgap temple along with 500 acres of land. This is the origin of the name of Unmunsa (雲門寺), which literally means “The Temple of Cloud Gate.”⁵

King Chungnyeol respectfully invited the Ilyeon, the head priest of Unmunsa at the time, to accept the status of National Teacher in the year 1277. While abbot at Unmun Temple, the Seon Master Ilyeon began writing the book *The History of the Three Kingdoms*. According to legend, the triumphal monument of Ilyeon was established at the eastern side of the temple, but no evidence of it has ever been found.⁶ The temple of Unmunsa is designated as historical site not only for its value to Korean Buddhism but also to Korea.⁷

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *Goryeosa* (고려사 高麗史, History of the Goryeo Dynasty). Jung, Inji 정인지. Translated by Gojeonyeongusil 고전 연구실. 11 vols. Seoul: Sinseowon, 2001-2002. (<http://www.krpia.co.kr/pcontent/?svcid=KR&proid=1>)

⁶ (http://www.unmunsa.or.kr/home/bbs/board.php?bo_table=01_1)

⁷ *Goryeosa* (고려사 高麗史, History of the Goryeo Dynasty). Jung, Inji 정인지. Translated by Gojeonyeongusil 고전 연구실. 11 vols. Seoul: Sinseowon, 2001-2002. (<http://www.krpia.co.kr/pcontent/?svcid=KR&proid=1>)

The Unmunsa we see today was restored by the monk Sulsong in year 1690, having been significantly damaged during the Japanese Invasion in Korea 1592. Several succeeding head monks, such as Selak, Gyengpa, and Gojun, also participated in the restoration of the temple during the pre-modern period, and the present form of the complex utilizes that temple plus thirty buildings constructed after 1970. Also, a specialized lecture hall for Buddhist nuns was established in Unmunsa in 1958, and it has been maintained until the present.⁸

After the liberation of Korea from Japan, monk Sangmyeong (常明) and married-monk Sangung (常雄) served as abbots at Unmunsa, followed by the Buddhist Purification Movement and nun Geumgryong (金龍 1892-1965), who was appointed the first abbess of Unmunsa Temple in 1955.⁹ Nuns Suin (守仁) Myoseon (妙典), Taegu, and Hyeoun (慧雲) subsequently served as abbess. Myeongseong was as the head lecturer of Unmun Monastic Seminary in 1970 and held a plural office as its abbess from 1977 to 1988.¹⁰ After that, Hyeoun served as the abbess for four years. The current abbess, Jinseong, took office in 2006.

For the last four decades, Unmunsa has gradually been promoted as a specialized educational institution for Buddhist nuns, not only in Korea but also globally. In 1999, the

⁸ Unmun Seungga Daehak ed. *Unmunsawi yeoksa* 운문사의 역사 (The history of Unmunsa) Cheongdo: Unmun Seungga Daehak Seungga Daehak chulpanbu, 1996.

⁹ Hwang, Ingyu 황인규. “Geunhyeondae biguniwa bulgyo jeonghwa undong 근현대 비구니와 불교정화운동 (Modern Buddhist Nuns and the Purification Movement of Korean Buddhism).” In *Bulgyo jeonghwa undongui jaejomyeong* 불교정화 운동의 재조명 (Reexamination of the Purification Movement of Korean Buddhism), edited by Daehan Bulgyo Jogyejong bulhakyeeongu wiweonhoe. Seoul: Jogyejong chulpansa, 2008.

¹⁰ Before 1985, the official name of Unmunsa Monastic College was Unmunsa Monastic Seminary. Jogye Order promoted the seminary designation as Monastic Collage in 1985.

temple established the first Jogye Order-specialized graduate school for Buddhist nuns in Korea, which it continues to run. It also established a temple to teach Buddhism and renew aspects of the ascetic exercises of Buddhist nuns at a location other than the university. Also, it actively participated in the founding of a reformatory religious order to regain the orthodoxy of Korean Buddhism against its suppression under the military regime of the 1980s and the tyranny of some powerful monks in 1994. In addition, it has been integrally involved in environmental issues, social welfare issues, and education issues concerning children and teenagers. It is setting an example for intervention in social issues by religion. Presently, the temple has five sub-branch temples, or hermitages.¹¹

Structure and Organization of the Monastery

Today, most Korean Buddhist temples situated deep within the mountain valleys are not only the residences for religious practitioners, but also popular tourist spots.¹² Most notable of the National Parks in Korea are those named for famous Buddhist temples on their grounds. Behind the temples are the peaks of majestic mountains, and in front of the temples are flowing rills that are traditionally rooted in the theory of divination based on topography (*pungsujili* lit. wind, water, earth, and village) as a kind of folklorism. Unmunsa

¹¹ The abbess, Myeongseong greatly expanded the size of the temple by building or renovating 30 buildings. She not only built a new Main Hall, but also built other important temple buildings, such as Cehongpoongryō and dormitories.

¹² Korean Buddhism, according to Korean Government statistics, has 27 sects because if as few as three persons decide to register their religious group with the government they can be officially accepted. The major sects of Buddhism are the Jogye, Taego, Chuntae, Jingak, etc. The Jogye Order is the largest sect and almost 85% of Buddhists (monks, nuns, and lay devotee) belong to the Jogye Order. The Jogye Order is divided into 25 head temples. Unmunsa is officially a branch temple of 9th head temple Donghwasa. Unmunsa is a temple for nuns that is the largest educational monastery. The Unmunsa principally follows the Jogye Order's doctrine and directions. Unmunsa Sa temple or Un Mun Sa nuns are exemplary representatives for the Jogye Order. Thus, the all nuns at Unmunsa are nuns of the Jogye Order.

is located between Unmun Mountain (1,195m) and Samgyeu valley.¹³ Across from the mountain are paddy fields and dry fields belonging to the temple. The parking area of Unmunsa can be arrived at after approximately a four-hour drive from Seoul, and the closer one is to the temple, the deeper the mountain valley. It is about a twenty-minute walk through the forest from the public parking lot to the gate. The scenery of the road differs vividly with the season; various beautiful flowers and warm winds in the spring, deep green forest with effulgent water in the valley in the middle of summer, an emerald sky and tinged autumnal leaves in the fall, and bare, skinny trees with snow in the winter.

My first visit to Unmunsa was in the middle of summer when I was in the seventh grade. My middle school was a Christian missionary school, but the retreats of the Assembly of Student Government in each summer vacation revolved around a famous temple because of their popularity as tourist spots. One of the scheduled events of the retreat was to hear a public lecture from a nun from Unmunsa monastery during a three days' retreat. On the second evening, after dinner, around 40 students and teachers visited Unmunsa and listened to the dharma talk for almost an hour. I do not remember everything the nun spoke about to my group of teen-age girls, but I do remember partial ignorance (*avidya*), rebirth (*samsara*), and cause and effect (*karma*). That was actually my first experience with Buddhism in terms of the core teachings, and not just praying for good fortune. My overall impression, however, was that the teachings seemed foreign; they appeared to be based upon quite a different worldview from my own.

¹³ Unmun Seungga Daehak ed. *Unmunsawi yeoksa* 운문사의 역사 (The history of Unmunsa) (Cheongdo: Unmun Seungga Daehak Seungga Daehak chulpanbu, 1996.), 21.

After that, I had several chances to visit the temple because it was a mere hour from my hometown during my high school, undergraduate, and graduate school years. Even though I studied Buddhism in the academy, the temple still remained nothing more than just a temple among several temples in Korea. Moreover, the study of ethnography was still a neglected field in the Korean Buddhist academy. So, whenever I visited it, I was merely a tourist with a little knowledge about temples and life within a temple. When I visited the temple on June 10th 2008, I was excited and a little nervous because my position was not as a visitor but as a researcher. The summer sunshine was quite warm, and the trail winds through the pine forest blew gently, and the stream ran alongside the monastery.

According to a layout of the temple, there are a total of 33 buildings.¹⁴ A two-story pavilion entrance gate greets pilgrims at the temple; this is the only two-story pavilion architecture among the buildings of Unmunsa. The first floor is actually the entrance of the temple, and this feature distinguishes it from typical Korean Buddhist temple structures. Generally, people enter the main monastery complex via the single beam gate (*iljumun*) and then immediately pass through a short entry hall, right between statues of the four –heaven-kings (*sachunwang*), who are super natural protectors and charged with protecting the monastery against invasions by malignant demons.¹⁵ Next people pass the non-dual gate (*bulleemun*), indicating the status of truth and falsehood as indistinguishable in nirvana. Then people pass beneath the Drum and Bell Tower (*Bumjongru*, 梵鍾樓), which is almost

¹⁴ The buildings are divided into two categories: those open to pilgrims or tourists and those prohibited to non-residents. Unmun Seungga Daehak ed. *Unmunsawi yeoksa* 운문사의 역사 (The history of Unmunsa) (Cheongdo: Unmun Seungga Daehak Seungga Daehak chulpanbu, 1996.), 3.

¹⁵ Unmunsa sacheonwang seokjoo (운문사 사천왕 석주) Joon-sik, Choi. *Buddhism: Religion in Korea*. (Seoul: Ewha Women University Press 2007), 163.

always located inside any temple compound, usually directly in front of the main shrine hall.¹⁶

In contrast, Unmunsa has only one entrance gate, which combines the entrance on the first story and the Drum and Bell Tower on the second. Enshrined within the Drum and Bell Tower are four types of temple instruments that are used to signal daily events in the monastic life: the Dharma drum (the *Bupgo*, 法鼓), the great bell (the *Bumjong*, 梵鐘), the wooden fish-shaped drum (the *Mokuh*, 木魚), and the cloud-shaped brass instrument (the *Woonpan*, 雲版). This ensemble of instruments is played during every morning and evening prayer chant. It is a compassionate wish for the following beings to awaken to the understanding of Dharma: the Dharma drum is beaten for animals on land, the great bell is tolled for beings in hell, the wooden fish-shaped drum is played for beings in water, and the cloud-shaped brass instrument is struck for beings in the sky. The gate of Unmunsa is not only unique in its layout, but is also more neatly maintained than those at other temples in Korea.

After passing through the gate, a remarkable tree can be observed, a drooping pine tree growing downward-facing branches without any artificial pressure. It is presumed that the tree is more than five hundred years old and it is designated as Natural Monument No.180 according to the Korean registry.¹⁷ The vivid green color of its branches are said to symbolize the severity and purity of the practitioners in Unmunsa. According to legend, when an old Seon master passed Unmunasa, he planted a withered branch which took root

¹⁶ Unmun Seungga Daehak ed. *Unmunsawi yeoksa* 운문사의 역사 (The history of Unmunsa) (Cheongdo: Unmun Seungga Daehak Seungga Daehak chulpanbu, 1996.), 4.

¹⁷ From DVD *Un Mun Sa*. Chungdo: The Unmunsa Monastic College.

and thrived. Annually, on March 3 in the lunar calendar, twelve 120-ounce supplements of a diluted rice wine drink are fed to the tree.

The Basilica of the Great Buddha (*Daewoongbojeon*, 大雄宝殿) is the Main Hall and the center of the temple in terms of architecture and ideology. It was newly opened in 1994, and there all of the nuns perform their daily morning and evening ceremonies. The Three World Buddhas (三世佛) are enshrined on the upper wooden altar in the center of the Hall and the Four Great Bodhisattvas are enshrined along with them, extending from the floor to the ceiling. The wooden cabinet of reserving sutra (The *Yoonjahngdae*) was enshrined to the left and right of the Buddhas in 2001. Gods of multicolored scroll paintings (*Taenghwa*) representing the Buddhist pantheon (called *Sinjung taenghwa*) are on the left wall, and the fifty-three features of the eminent Seon masters are painted on the right side.

The Three World Buddhas represent past, present, and future Buddhas. The current Buddha is representative of the historical Buddha Śākyamuni (释迦牟尼佛). The statue of Buddha enshrined in Unmunsa main hall features a swollen right-hand palm facing the outer world, symbolizing that after achieving enlightenment one should no longer be afraid (施无畏印). The left hand represents the hope that everyone should achieve their wishes (与愿印). In this respect, then, the historical Buddha is presently giving a dharma talk to everyone who visits the temple. The Yeondeungbul (燃灯佛) is Dīpaṃkara Buddha, who is the Buddha of the age prior to the time and cosmic age of Śākyamuni Buddha. According to the Pali Canon, he was the Buddha that predicted the future enlightenment of the bodhisattva that was to become Śākyamuni. The Buddha in Unmunsa is representative of the transmission of dharma, the left hand administering the dharma talk, with the right hand holding the edge of

the robe. He is joined by Maitreya Buddha (彌勒佛), the future Buddha of this world and successor of the historic Śākyamuni Buddha, and who in Unmunsa sits in meditation for the future. In Korean Buddhist art, Dipamkara and Maitreya are almost always depicted along with Śākyamuni Buddha. These three collectively are known as the Buddhas of the Three Times.¹⁸

Among four bodhisattvas, Mahāsthāmaprāpta (大勢至菩薩) is a bodhisattva that represents the power of wisdom and is often depicted in a trinity with Amitabha and Avalokiteśvara, especially in Pure Land Buddhism. Avalokiteśvara (lit. "Lord who looks down", *Kwasenum* 觀世音) is a bodhisattva who embodies the compassion of all Buddhas. Mañjuśrī (Munsu 文殊) is a bodhisattva associated with transcendent wisdom in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Samantabhadra (*Bohyeonbosa*, 普賢菩薩), meaning “universally worthy”, is a bodhisattva in Mahāyāna Buddhism associated with Buddhist practice and meditation.¹⁹ Throughout Korean temples, these four are widely revered bodhisattvas, each symbolizing different aspects of Buddhist belief and practice. This grouping of four is thus arbitrary; it refers simply to four of the most popular and venerated bodhisattvas in Asia.

Most large Korean temples have several satellite temples which are usually located deeper in the forests or mountains. With a long historical origin, Unmunsa is filled with innumerable stories about the temples, some of which are almost mystical if one were to judge from the narratives, and some which may not even have existed. Unmunsa temple also has affiliate hermitages. Hermitage Bukdaeam, located on the north side of the mountain

¹⁸ Diana Paul. *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in the Mahayana Tradition*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.), 156-159.

¹⁹ Kenneth Ch'en. *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), 341-343.

from Unmunsa main temple, is assumed to be the oldest, built by an anonymous mystical monk during the Silla Dynasty. The exterior features of the satellite temple resemble a cage of swallows. Sariam was established by the monk Boyang in 930. It is a famous pilgrimage destination as a place to pray for good fortune. Monk Wonung built the hermitage of Naewonam, which was restored during the middle of the Joseon dynasty. Historically, the hermitage was used as a place for young practitioners to be educated in such topics as teaching doctrinal studies, and it also provided space for public dharma lectures. The hermitage was renovated to enshrine the sariara stupa and it has come to symbolize the eternal life hall in recent times. In 1977, the nun Hynhwa built a contemporary Cheongshinam which has since been further modernized. Although physically separate from the rest of the monastery, these hermitages function as if they were actually compounds within the main monastic complex.²⁰

Unmunsa is a full monastic training temple that provides three major practical facilities: a traditional sūtra center (Monastic College, 講院), a meditation center (Seon Training Center, 禪院), and a precepts center (Vinaya College, 律院).²¹ Like Unmunsa, a combination of the three practices, textual study, practice meditation, and study precepts, is called a *chongnim* (Full Monastic Training Temple), but it is only officially called five monk monasteries up until now.²² Unmunsa recently incorporated the three area practices in all

²⁰ Unmun Seungga Daehak ed. *Unmunsawi yeoksa* 운문사의 역사 (The history of Unmunsa) (Cheongdo: Unmun Seungga Daehak Seungga Daehak chulpanbu, 1996.), 5.

²¹ The Jogye Order has five such full monastic training centers: Haein at Haeinsa Temple; Jogye at Songgwangsa Temple; Yeongchuk at Tongdosa Temple; Deoksung at Sudeoksa Temple; and Gobul at Baekyangsa Temple.

²² Chongnim literally means complete forest. The name is derived from Sanskrit “vindhyaavana” and compares to a thick forest the gathering of many monks for learning. To qualify as a Chongnim (vindhyaavana), it is

these different areas of Buddhism through the creative use of its compounds. Unmunsa is actually eligible to be called *chongnim* as the first place for nuns' practice but it is not designated as such officially. The Jogye Order is considering making an official title of *chongnim* for Unmunsa.

The most obvious feature of Unmunsa's large training monasteries is the separate compounds into which the monastic campus is divided into three different practice halls all located within one large, separate compound. These compounds are independent living and working units. Each compound is isolated from the public portions of the monastery and accentuates a sense of separateness. All practitioners in the seminary live in their own compound and do virtually everything in that particular space, from studying to eating to sleeping. In the same compound lies the library, which the study nuns may enter directly without having to pass through another compound. Meditational practitioners are living in Munsu Seonwon. There is also a small precept center; it has only a small number of nuns in residence and it is still essential that it be represented in the ecumenical combination of *chongnim*.

Meditation Center: Unmun Munsu Seonwon

The meditation center is referred to as "Unmun Munsu Seonwon." This organization opened in the summer of 2003. The desire was to set up an exercise-oriented organization for nuns who had graduated from the Unmun monastic college. Myeongseong, along with several Buddhists colleagues had devoted to opening the Seon mediation place for several years, and finally wrote Munsu's name on a hanging board. Munsu is interpreted as miracle,

required to have Meditation Center, Monastic Seminary and Precept Center. Jogye Order has five Chongnims: Haeinsa Temple (海印寺), Songgwangsa Temple(松廣寺, Tongdo Temple(通度寺), Sudeoksa Temple(修德寺), and Baekyangsa Temple (白羊寺). For more information about Chongnim, see Buswell (1992), 54-55.

and has always been expressed as a contributor of wisdom for the religious purpose. This is the place where one learns the wisdom of the Buddhist saint Munsu in order to teach fully ordained nuns.²³ The temple and Monastic College are where the doctrine of the Buddha's thoughts is taught and Munsu Seonwon is used for the exercise of understanding the Buddha's awakening.

The monastery, like all Korean temples, follows an annual schedule that is virtually identical to the temple calendar. It divides each year into four three-month periods. Summer is the middle of the fourth through the middle of the seventh lunar months, usually May through August and winter is in the middle of the tenth through the middle of the first lunar month, usually November through February. These two seasons are reserved for formal religious retreats (*kyolje*, lit. binding rule), while spring and autumn are free seasons (*haeje*, lit. slackened rule). During the retreat seasons, practitioners in the monastic units are not permitted to leave the monastery for any reason other than on temple business or the most urgent personal matters, such as illness. Most large meditation halls are open year-round and the most serious practitioners stay there and practice continuously.²⁴

After graduation from the Monastic College, a nun can choose to live her life in the meditation hall. About a quarter of those attending sutra schools go on to become meditation nuns after they graduate. Many nuns decide to live in a small temple with their teacher, become abbesses in their own temples, or take graduate courses at a secular Buddhist university. A few choose to investigate and study precepts. Also, a few pursue social work

²³ Kenneth Ch'en. *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), 286.

²⁴ Batchelor, Martine and Son'gyong Sunim. *Women in Korean Zen: Lives and Practices*. (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006.), 25-29.

or other professions, but these too need further studies at secular universities.²⁵ In the Jogye Order, there are almost thirty mediation halls for nuns. There are ten large meditation halls, each having more than fifty members and about fifteen medium-sized meditation halls having ten to thirty nuns. There are also many small gathering mediation halls with just a few nuns meditating together.²⁶

In the meditation hall, during meditation season, nuns follow a rigorous schedule in which they meditate for ten to fourteen hours a day in sitting meditation practice, and they have minimal personal time. With the large number of practitioners during the retreat period, the mediation hall is silent but busy all day long, with nuns performing their incumbent duties for supporting practitioners. Nuns in the meditation hall alternately practice fifty minutes sitting and ten minutes walking in four sessions, before dawn, in the morning, afternoon, and evening. The basic minimum rules of the meditation hall are decided at a meeting at the beginning of the retreat. In the meditation hall at this time, nuns also choose who will serve as the leader of practitioners, and they assign other duty positions in order to keep the meditation hall functioning smoothly. The nuns in the one large mediation hall sit in an order according to the number of years they have been in the monastery. The head of the meditation hall is responsible for the guidance of younger nuns. When a nun has a problem with her meditation, she goes to this instructor, who either helps her or takes her to see a master. Because the meditation hall is affiliated with a main temple, there are

²⁵ Some enter a graduate program in Buddhist studies or social work at a university. A few nuns study secular subjects to become doctors, lawyers, artists, or performers. I will discuss this matter in the end of chapter 5.

²⁶ Batchelor, Martine and Son'gyong Sunim. *Women in Korean Zen: Lives and Practices*. (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006.), 29-32.

sufficient masters who give advice. The elder nuns usually charge the responsibility of guiding the younger nuns in the meantime.²⁷

Munsu mediation hall has a certain uniformity and consistency. Of course, each nun is an individual, but they perform their duties quietly and contentedly without drawing attention to themselves. Close relationships for entering the mediation hall are not encouraged within nuns' communities. For example, if two nuns are seen together for a long period of time before joining this meditation hall, they are encouraged to separate from each other and may not be accepted in the meditation hall at the same time. The younger nuns are quickly admonished whenever they stand out and are taught how to live and practice cordially within the community. Also when a nun is sick, she can receive medical treatment and when her posture becomes painful, she can request to change her position. Usually, however, because they sit for long periods, movement within the meditation session spontaneously becomes less and less.

Each day the nuns share tea and talk together. The senior nuns talk about the masters and great nuns they knew, thus informally giving teachings and guidance on how to practice and what the life of a nun entails. Having tea together is an important part of the practice, not only for junior nuns (those who do not want to attend are reprimanded) but also for senior nuns who have a chance to reflect on their past mediation experiences. Every nun is expected to share in all activities, even social times, unless she is too old or too sick.²⁸

²⁷ Ibid., 38-42.

²⁸ Arai, Paula. *Women Living Zen: Japanese Sōtō Buddhist Nuns*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. Barnard, Alan and Jonathan Spence. ed. *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

The cushions in the hall are laid out very closely to one another, with the nuns facing the wall when meditating. They do a *hwadu* (*koan*) practice. Each one receives a *koan* from a master and works with it throughout her life. The main ideal of the *hwadu* mediation is that a practitioner's mind should not be attached to the words of *koan* but transcend it. Through mediation, a nun becomes further distanced from the secular world and closer to the Buddha's teaching. For instance, teachers give a single sentence as the *koan*, "What is it?" "Who am I?" In other words, "What is my mind?" "What is this thing we call I or me?"²⁹

With the understanding or enlightenment about each *koan*, a nun is commonly left with a puzzle or a deeper sense of doubt at the beginning stage. For the most important elements of truthful concentration, according to Nun Haeun, the head of the hall encourages nuns to follow a three-step process of mindfulness: *Balshim* is referred to as the great trust in the question for Buddhist meditation, *Boonshim* is the strong willingness to remove irritating stages, and *Euishim* is about the question for Buddhist meditation. Through these paths, and only if practice is very strong, one goes beyond the words and is living within a very curious, open, and aware sense of inquiry from moment to moment. Sometimes when an inquiry into the *koan* is not alive, the practitioner often finds herself in a dreaming, deluded, or lethargic state. Unless one is seriously interested in diligent practice, one cannot last very long in the meditation halls. Only the practitioner who has practiced a long time can arrive at the stage of the "living word" not just "dead word." The practitioner who overcomes a doubt or sensation of a curious unknowing is completely absorbed in its

²⁹ Robert Buswell, *The Zen Monastic Experience: Buddhist Practice in Contemporary Korea*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.), 168-169.

meaning at the here and now in this present moment. Serious practitioners have strengths that pervade them, and others' problems surrounding them seem to naturally dissolve in their presence. At the very least, these practitioners show one how to work through and resolve problems.³⁰

All practitioners engage in non-sleeping practice one time for a week in each season (YyongmangJungjin). During this week, every effort is exerted to sit upright and concentrate on their *koan*. A long thin bamboo stick is gently tapped on the shoulders whenever nuns are dozing, creating a cracking sound that echoes throughout the whole room. As the days and nights pass, the great effort and suffering to stay alert diminishes among the practitioners. As thoughts and dreams diminish, the practitioner's mind becomes clearer and gradually more lucid. On the last morning, the nuns go to the mountains to get some exercise before resting.³¹

The nuns attend a Dharma talk by masters once every two weeks during the meditation season. The nuns bathe and look after their personal needs the day before a lecture. They do whatever chores need to be done and sometimes relax or go for a walk in the mountains. After listening to the Dharma talk the following day, they continue with the meditation schedule. The days go by very quickly, and one finds that four or five hours of sleep are sufficient. If drowsiness occurs in meditation, one corrects her posture and continues to practice diligently. Along with meditation practice, some nuns may chant or bow in a repentance practice during break times. After practicing for three months, at the

³⁰ Batchelor, Martine and Son'gyong Sunim. *Women in Korean Zen: Lives and Practices*. (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006.), 15-16.

³¹ Ibid. 50-51.

end of the season, the nuns are free to choose their next step in whatever they want to do during free seasons.

Precepts Center: Bohyun Yulwon

Nuns' *vinaya* lineage signifies an official recognition of nuns' authorities and autonomy in regard to the nuns' ordination within the Korean Buddhist monastic community at large. The increasing awareness of the importance of *vinaya* study and the necessity of formal schools for it in Korean monasticism led to the establishment of a precepts center (Vinaya Institution, Bohyun yulwon) at Unmunsa in 2008. The Jogye Order is trying to be representative of all the existing *vinaya* institutes that met to draft legislative guidelines for establishing and maintaining a *vinaya* institute. That not only monk but also nun leaders were invited to this historic meeting attests indirectly to their distinct contribution.³²

While the nuns study at the *vinaya* institute, they also play an important role in training female postulants. The student nuns of the Institute are summoned twice a year by the authorities of the Jogye Order to teach learning decorum (*subwi* 습의), and female postulants gather at major monasteries for twenty-three days of intensive monastic training prior to the novice ordination. The main goal of this program for female postulants who are prospective members of the *bhikṣunī saṃgha* is to teach them to develop steadfast faith in Buddhism and to maintain mindfulness in all aspects of their monastic lives, such as observing the ten novice precepts, performing rituals, serving teachers, celebrating the

³² (<http://www.unmunsa.or.kr/>)

formal four-bowl meal ceremony, prostrating, walking, sleeping, clothing, sitting, fulfilling daily monastic duties, and so on³³.

The institute allows nuns to develop specialized knowledge of monastic disciplinary texts while training according to the three-hundred-forty-eight (348) precepts for the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya*. The institute is housed in a small *vinaya* hall within the monastic compound of the temple. In keeping with the restrictions of the Jogye Order, the institute only accepts a small number of student nuns, usually less than ten. Any nun who graduated from a monastic college can apply for admission to the institute.³⁴

Student nuns accepted to the institute take two years to complete its curriculum. Because the majority of the students tend to come to the Institute right after they finish their training at monastic seminaries, they are familiar with the educational method of silent reading, and develop their own interpretations of monastic disciplinary texts. In the first year, they focus on the Chinese *samini yurwi* and *Seonwon Chunggyu* (禪苑清規 Pure Rules of Chan Monastery), including some Chinese commentaries on the monastic discipline. In the second year, they study the *Pi-ch'iu-ni Ssu-fen-lu* (比丘尼四分律) and the *Fang-wang ching*, along with the history of Indian, Chinese, and Korean nuns community.

Educational System within the Jogye Order

Monastic educational systems according to the regulations of the Jogye Order are classified in several ways: basic, standard, special, extracurricular education and re-

³³ Myoeom 妙嚴. "Gyeyule daehan bareun insik 계율에 대한 바른인식 (Right Understanding of the Precepts)." *Bongnyeong* 奉寧 10 (April 2008): 4-5.

³⁴ Bongnyeongsa Seungga Daehak 奉寧寺僧加大學, ed. *Seju Myoeom jugang osimnyeonginyeom nonchong* 世主妙嚴主講五十年紀念論叢 (A Collection of Essays in Honor of Venerable Seju Myoeom's Fiftieth Anniversary of the Education of Nuns). (Suwon: Bongnyeongsa Seungga Daehak, 2007.), 217.

education, of which all are not always required. First, at the basic training level is the postulant (*hangja*) training for at least a minimum of five months. Second, in the standard educational level are the four years of training for novices undertaken at temple Monastic colleges, Dongguk University's College of Buddhism, JoongAng Monastic University, or elementary Seon meditation centers. These two training levels must be completed in accordance with all Jogye Order monastic regulations without exception.³⁵ When the basic education is completed, one can become a novice. After graduating from the standard education, monks and nuns can be ordained by receiving their full precepts: for monks two-hundred, and for nuns three-hundred-eighty rules. In this case they are eligible to take the 4th Class Examination.³⁶

In addition to the basic and standard educational program, Jogye Order provides a number of special programs non-periodically such as lectures in deeper philosophy, debates about precepts, and managing monastic systems in terms of “special education” and “extracurricular education” where a monastic can pursue specific training after receiving full monastic ordination. For the 3rd Class examination, successful candidates are entitled to be in charge of a temple. Monks and nuns can take it after they spend ten years in practice. Re-education is for monks and nuns who have been ordained 10, 20, and 25 years. This is not mandatory but it is within the education process necessary to carry out certain responsibilities as set out by the order, and to hold positions in the order, as well as train

³⁵ (<http://www.buddhism.or.kr/pMain/main.aspx>)

³⁶ Daehan Bulgyo Jogyejong gyoyugwon 대한불교조계종 교육원, ed., *Haengja gyoyug jichimseo* 行者教育指針書 (The Guidelines of the Education for Postulants). (Seoul: Daehan bulgyo jogyejong gyoyugwon, 2002.), 46.

disciples.³⁷ Before acceptance into the Unmunsa Monastic College, applicants usually spend from six months to one year at their home temple as a postulant.

Postulant Period

A person who wants to join a monastic community actively searches for a teacher or a temple. During the postulant period, a candidate is not yet a nun. Her head is either shaven or her hair cut very short. Once a postulant is accepted, her home temple has a hair cutting ceremony of the taking of the novice precepts and basic training rules, which consist of the monastic ethical standards of the individual. This formal ceremony follows a ceremonial procedure with the monastic community in attendance and is meaningful because it officially confirms the postulant as a member of the order at the time. After this ceremony, the female postulant wears orange robes while males wear the brown robes. She, however, can leave the temple at any time in this period whenever she decides to stop. The motivation of those who live in a world of renunciation is dependent on their circumstances. Their secular ages vary from high school graduates to those less than 50 years old. By the same token, once a postulant chooses a temple, she has the opportunity to choose her teacher, namely, a vocation master (恩師스님 *Unsa Sunim*) who will lead her and guide her properly as a practitioner over her entire lifetime. The vocation master must have been ordained for at least 10 years, must be over 30 years old and shall have passed the third level monastic examination. Their relationship is important not only for their beginning teachings as a practitioner, but for all their monastic lives because they mutually influence each other. For instance, Korean Buddhism is tied with “family lineages (門衆 *munjung*).” In the latter,

³⁷ (http://www.koreanbuddhism.net/jokb/content_view.asp?cat_seq=69&content_seq=203&page=1)

disciples of the same master call each other “sisters,” and the nuns who are colleagues of their teachers are called “aunts,” and so on. One nun who studied with me at the Dongguk University said, “the relationship of the teacher is a little far from that of a secular parent but it is closer than a doctoral supervisor.”³⁸

During this period, her training is not under her own teacher, but rather under those of the kitchen supervisors or other senior nuns who guide her through her training period. She usually works in the kitchen, serves the nuns in her temple, and becomes familiar with monastic life. The postulant also learns the basic chanting rule and several monastic basic demeanors. She undergoes long periods of bowing and repentance daily. The temple’s senior nuns must observe whether the postulant has what it takes to make a future nun by thoroughly considering the postulant’s motivation, training process, the goal of practice, or even secular family situations and relations.

Then, the postulant enters into the Jogye Order’s main training center, in which all postulants in the national Jogye Order temples gather to learn and test for one month. All postulants need to have a health certificate and each is checked for physical ailments. In addition, their personal history before joining the monastery is examined. The main educational courses are for postulants to firmly establish foundational knowledge included in novice vows, the “Admonitions to beginners” text, and the life of the Buddha, elementary doctrine, and Buddhist ceremonies. After the completion of the courses, by passing the fifth

³⁸ Buswell, Robert E. *The Zen Monastic Experience: Buddhist Practice in Contemporary Korea*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.) Also, (<http://www.buddhism.or.kr/pMain/main.aspx>).

level monastic examination, the postulant takes the *Sramanerika/Samini* (male as *Sramanera/Sami*) vows and becomes a novice.³⁹

Studying at Unmunsa Monastic College

During this next year, the novice can move onto standard education. She, however, usually serves her teacher and prepares for the examination to study at the temple Monastic Colleges. The nun learns the discipline of a newly ordained monastic: how to walk, act, and speak with others; the importance of respecting one's seniors and helping one's juniors; and so on. Having received the ten novice precepts, during the period of their first two years, and after becoming familiar with the basic ideals and behavioral norms, a nun can apply to Unmun Monastic College.

The prescribed formal requirements for admission include several steps: evaluation of the applicant's relevant documents, a personal interview, and a written exam; all of which serve as a screening process. The most important qualification of the applicant practitioner in the instructors' evaluation is the applicant's aspiration and resolution to the religious mind. Each year between fifty and sixty applicants are accepted to Unmunsa Monastic College. The primary purpose of the facility, the training, and the education, according to Iljin, Associate Dean, is to provide the most conducive practice environment for the generation and the development of the cultivator's awakening to the heart of wisdom. Everything that the beginner nun learns and practices in the monastery is meant to mature

³⁹ Daehan Bulgyo Jogyejong gyoyugwon 대한불교조계종 교육원, ed., *Haengja gyoyug jichimseo* 行者教育指針書 (The Guidelines of the Education for Postulants). Seoul: Daehan bulgyo jogyejong gyoyugwon, 2002. (<http://www.buddhism.or.kr/pMain/main.aspx>)

and establish her in the heart of renunciation and the spirit of inquiry.⁴⁰ This will be the most useful provision for her, and sustains and supports her throughout her entire monastic life.

The basic framework of Buddhist practice and monastic education is the three-fold training of moral virtue, meditative concentration and wisdom in the faith, and understanding practice and realization, with focus on the wholehearted endeavor and accomplishment in each category. Every present moment walking, standing, sitting, or lying down as in all aspects of daily life, in one's deportment and manners, as well as in one's attitudes and states of mind, habitual behavioral tendencies to create and proliferate karma of body, speech and mind are carefully observed and scrupulously clarified. This purification of karmas is the main objective of seminary education and training.

Moreover, the main goal is in achieving harmony between ideological understanding and the details of daily life. The relevancy of religious teachings to their modernized lives sometimes leaves them with a sense of disparity between philosophical theory and practice and doubt in how to apply the one to the other. As a place where nuns examine the teaching closely and experience it in practice in their daily lives, the monastic seminary has another important purpose in modernized society.

The curriculum of Unmunsa Monastic College is to harmonize historical tradition with the present in which all other Monastic Colleges basically share the same regulation of Jogye Order. This was decided in the 1984 Monastic College Teacher's National

⁴⁰ Interview with Iljin Summer 2008. Daehan Bulgyo Jogyejong gyoyugwon 대한불교조계종 교육원, ed., *Haengja gyoyug jichimseo* 行者教育指針書 (The Guidelines of the Education for Postulants). (Seoul: Daehan bulgyo jogyejong gyoyugwon, 2002.)

Conference. In this, Jogye Order agrees that the curriculum was devised to cultivate the basic understanding necessary for hwadu practice using traditional doctrinal education as the foundation in which the four years of curriculum is a fixed period.⁴¹ The curriculum of the College is divided into four courses: first year *Samikgwa* (沙彌科 the *Sramanera* Course), second year *Sajipgwa* (四集科 the Fourfold Collection Course), third year *Sagyogwa* (四教科 the Four Teachings Courses) and fourth year *Daegyegwa* (大教科 the Great Teaching Course).⁴²

The curriculum is split into two phases: the recitation and the advanced textual-study tracks. In the former, students study the writing of Chinese and Korean Seon masters. At this level, the nuns are required to memorize each lesson of the texts. They recite loudly in each class over and over again, rocking their bodies from side to side, which is the traditional reading mode for beginners. Memorization is an important method of disciplinary practice at the monastery and demands the utmost effort from novice students. The recitation track thus aims to inculcate in the nuns the importance of self-discipline, which is central to Korean monasticism. The main method of recitation for beginners is focused on “practice of reflective hearing” (*Banmunsuhaeng*, 反問修行) of the Buddhist

⁴¹ To supplement the Vinaya, Hinayana scriptures, and Mahayana scriptures, and to better understand the doctrine from different ideological perspectives, Hinayana Buddhism, Abhidharma, Madhyamika, Yocagara and a Buddhism Overview have been added to the curriculum. In order to see Buddhism from a historical perspective--History of Buddhist Ideology, History of the Jogye Order, History of Indian Buddhism, History of Chinese Buddhism, and History of Korean Buddhism have also been added. In addition, to strengthen an understanding of modern subjects--Humanities, Oriental Ideology, Western Philosophy, Literature, and Foreign Language have been added.

⁴² Daehan Bulgyo Jogyejong gyoyugwon bulhakgyeonguso 대한불교 조계종 교육원 불학 연구소, ed. *Hanguk geunhyeondae Bulgyosa yeonpyo* 한국근현대 불교사 연표 (A Chronology of Korean Buddhist History in the Modern Period). (Seoul: Daehan Bulgyo Jogyejong gyoyugwon bulhakgyeonguso, 2000.), 246.

teachings to penetrate one's mind. The textual-study track focuses on Buddhist scriptures.⁴³

Rather than focusing on learning through recitation, students in this track read their texts silently. By reading and questioning the content of the texts, advanced student nuns are expected to offer their own interpretations of and insights into the texts they study by articulating the Buddhist teachings in their own words. This method is designed to help them deepen their understanding of Buddhism. It takes the student nuns four years to complete the entire curriculum required by the seminary.⁴⁴

They have inherited such means of learning by reading and debating. In the department of *Sajip* and *Samini*, they memorize what they've learned that very day and in the department of *Sagyo* and *Daegyo*, they personally read out the resources prior to the debate with their classmates and they spend the time after class asking questions to the instructors. The total curriculum is as follows:⁴⁵

1st Year: Admonitions to Monks, Precept for Novice, History of Indian Buddhism, and Introduction to Buddhism. Practice of Chanting. One outside Subject.

2nd Year: Seon Texts: Platform Sutra, Entrance to Sudden Enlightenment), Selected Letters of Master Dahui, Essence of Seon, History of Chinese Buddhism, Abhidharma, Two outside Subjects.

3rd Year: "Awakening faith in the Mahayana," Shurangama Sutra, Lotus Sutra, Nirvana Sutra, History of Korean Buddhism, and Introduction to Yogācāra Buddhism, Two outside subjects.

4th Year: Avtamsaka sutra, Study of Theory in the Avtamsaka sutra, One outside Subject.

Outsider Subjects: Foreign languages (English/Chinese/Japanese), practice chanting, flower arts, Piano, calligraphy, four gracious plant painting, computer, yoga, and tea ceremony.

⁴³ Iljin 一眞. "Biguni gujokgye neun biguni jeongyesa ro buteo 比丘尼 具足戒는 比丘尼 傳戒師로부터 (Bhikṣuṇī Ordination Transmissions from Bhikṣuṇī Preceptors)." *Unmun* 雲門 (Unmun Newsletter) (November 1982).

⁴⁴ Interview with nun Iljin in Summer 2008.

⁴⁵ Daehan Bulgyo Jogyejong gyoyugwon 대한불교조계종 교육원, ed., *Haengja gyoyug jichimseo* 行者教育指針書 (The Guidelines of the Education for Postulants). Seoul: Daehan bulgyo jogyejong gyoyugwon, 2002.

Following the collective early morning chanting and repentance, nuns in their first year of studies have a period of sutra recitation in the subjects that will prepare them for their second year of study in the Four-fold Collection. Preparatory studies include the detailed instructions in behavior and deportment from the Body of the Precepts.

Since students of the current generation have been for the most part educated in the Korean native script and language, Hangul, it is difficult for those in the first year's Chi Mun Class to have to study entirely in Classical Chinese. This remains a challenge from the first through the fourth year.⁴⁶ Although there are a great number of characters to learn and it is highly time-consuming to do so, the characters are studied in order to gain a complete and firm understanding of the meaning; thus they develop solid faith, and a sound foundation for the meaning for the learning to come. In addition to the Discipline, during the first year, study of the History of Indian Buddhism and an Introduction to Buddhism as well as other similar subjects, give a definitive overall understanding of the fundamental Buddhist teachings. Other than study, the novices' principle responsibilities during this period cover cleaning and maintaining the temple buildings and grounds, setting up and arranging the food and the halls for the meal offerings as well as all other programs, and running errands within the monastery.

Next, in the second year, named the *Sajjigwa* after the Four-fold Chan collection that is studied, the recorded teachings and commentaries of many later Leading Masters are learned. Reading about their methods of realization, the trainees' time is now dedicated to gaining insight into their meaning through searching for truth in the principle of their words,

⁴⁶ Iljin 一眞. "Biguni Gangwon Gyoyougaedaehan Gochal" Review of the nuns education in Monastic College." *Unmun* 雲門 (Unmun Newsletter) (November 1982).

and entering into the true cultivation of meditative inquiry through self-reflection. During this time, the *Abhidharma* and the history of Chinese Buddhism are also studied.

The second year novices have the highly important responsibility of tending the vegetable fields. Just as rice is the staple food, caring for and cultivating the fields is an integral part of the training at Unmunsa. Through the direct experience of communally laboring in planting seeds, pulling weeds, applying fertilizer and caring for the plants as they grow, trainees cultivate the wisdom of the truth of things as they are; and through the real earth, they come to know profound gratitude for the kindness of the laity, and their obligation in returning this kindness, which is another aspect of cultivation.

The third year is named the *Sagyogwa* after the Four Mahayana Doctrines that are studied. Based upon the linguistic abilities they have developed and their background in the Leading Masters' Dharma teachings, the third year's trainees are now prepared to study in Classical Chinese directly from the sutras themselves. During this year they have quite an amount of teaching to digest successively, including; the Suragngama Sutra, the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana, the Great Transcendental Wisdom Teachings of the Mahaprajnaparmaita Sutra and the Complete Enlightenment Sutra. In addition, they also study the History of Korean Buddhism and the Teachings on Consciousness of the Vijnanavada and Cittamatra Sastras.⁴⁷

As the essential teaching is always fulfilled in practice in the curriculum, the third year students have the responsibility for preparing the community meal offerings. Day in and day out, they plan and prepare a harmonious arrangement of staple and various fresh dishes.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Considerate of nutrition, they prepare fried foods only once per week and occasionally prepare foods especially good for the health of youthful cultivators. They are faced with a responsibility requiring the utmost earnestness and sincerity of body and mind. During this period, sometimes reluctantly, they may actually spend more time and energy with the community's meals than in textual study. But in the secular world, the preparing, consuming and composting of food, like the Great Matter of Birth and Death, is endless.⁴⁸ It is of great merit to live offering such service to the community with faith and inspiration.

The fourth year and final stage of the Seminary curriculum is called the Daegyo gwa or Great Doctrine, an abbreviated name for the *Avatamsaka Sutra* (*Mahavaipulyabuddh avatamsakasutra*) in 80 volumes, as well as the Survey of the Avatamsaka. This is the final course of study crowning the Seminary training and fulfills the requirements for Monastic College graduation. It is said that the final year is the greatest and the most stable, as the trainee may appreciate the cumulative results of her past three years of hard study and training, accomplished step by step. Although each individual's experience differs according to her mind, in this final stage of the training, physically there is a little more free time, and each trainee has more freedom in managing her time.

The trainee has repeatedly experienced over the past four years, in the Great Doctrine Class as well, the ideology of the Avatamsaka and its meditations (*dhyanan sadhanas*); there

⁴⁸ The monastery still cares for the traditional ways of preserving and preparing traditional vegetarian foods, but as food culture has changed with the times, there are modern concerns for what may be dangerous, for bio-ethics, for conservation and for environmentally friendly means of disposal and recycling of food packaging. These issues merit consideration and prompt ongoing discussion and deliberation, in the ongoing effort to respond wisely in this matter. As guiding principles related to food there are the considerations of: likeness with the Dharma, purity, and suitability that a cultivator's meals should be in line with; thus, a monastic's food should be pure and without impediment, viewed with self-restraint and moderation, and be what is easily digestible.

is a pattern laid out for cultivation. Smoothly entering and generating the wide, vast mind of the Avatamsaka as it is, theory merges with practice in continuous training.

During this year, the senior has far greater responsibility in the community and manifests what she has learned in roles of leadership, including that of Master of Discipline and Overseer for the Community, Master of the Monastery Grounds, Monastery Secretary and Monastery Accountant; and in external affairs in which the monastery is related to the public, including the Cultural Affairs Department, the Department of Education and Propagation, and the Department of Managing the Website. With a sense of pride and duty, a nun may also serve as the official representative and promoter of the temple and seminary both inside and outside through appropriate service activities such as: meeting and speaking with those who come to the monastery with inquiries, giving interviews, acting as temple guide and as a ranger for the forest park surroundings. Faithful and upright, as seniors, in performing all these services as cultivation, they are prepared for graduation.⁴⁹

Education regulation of Unmunsa Monastic College is otherwise known as detailed rules for initiating school regulations. To study the scriptures and terms as a priest, and practice the doctrines, regulations are made for the character of dormitory living. This school regulation not only contains the basic terms for the ones who renounced their home but also the contents and it follows as some inconvenience may occur in group dwelling. It states ceremony participation and prayers and studying time for required subjects, mealtime, outdoor time, debating time, language walking posture, and apparel regulations. Among the school's regulations, when the curfew time is violated, the student is fined and the payment

⁴⁹ Ibid.

is used for common use; when there are more than four violations, one must engage in social work for she has disturbed the ambience of fellow colleagues.

Unmunsa Monastic College regulation is decided in consideration of the required contents of a four-year curriculum in a secular university and a traditional education institute's education policy. Even still, the curriculum attached to the district temple is not approved as a formal education institution, it is recognized as a nun educating institute. Especially, Unmunsa Monastic College mediated its policy to meet a normal university's regulations so the graduated students can enter Dongguk Buddhist University and study for Bachelor's and Master's degrees. According to Korean domestic law, it is not yet allowed for Monastic College graduated students to go to a secular graduate school, however foreign universities accept the education system of Monastic College and allows graduate school curriculums without re-completing the classes. Unmunsa Monastic College has the most students among Monastic Universities, and various activities are done by many students, allowing Unmunsa Monastic College to be known more widely and engage in active exchanges with many foreign monks and professors. Considering the fact that entering domestic graduate school is impossible, the school encourages the students by engaging with many Universities in China, Japan and Taiwan. Unmunsa Monastic College made an arrangement with Chunghwa University in China and Hanajono University in Japan for academic exchange and accepting attainments of scholarship when applying for upper academic institutions and is still undergoing brisk exchanges.

In September 2007, an exchange agreement with China's great Chunghwa University students, researchers, and professors was concluded. The agreement states that priority is given to Unmunsa Monastic College graduates (graduate school and University students)

when entering Chunghwa graduate school in China or studying Chinese Buddhist classics, meaning that the normal university graduation process is unnecessary for entering Chunghwa graduate school.⁵⁰

Hananojo University, located in Kyoto city, Japan, is established by Japanese Buddhism, ImJaejong, and is a sufficient University with Buddhism, along with a special medical university and research facilities. Prior convenience is guaranteed when exchanging academy and expert professors, or entering the graduate school of the university.

On the 15th of September, 2008, an exchange agreement was concluded with the Center of Southern Buddhism in the Taiwan Monastic College, which is known for not accepting nuns.

Representatives from Mahachulalongconlajawidallaya University in Thailand visited Unmunsa on the 8th of September, 2008, to announce an honorary Ph.D degree of philosophy to the Dean of the College. And days after, on the 15th of September, 2008, Unmunsa instructors visited the University in turn to engage in an exchange agreement after joining the IABU (The International Association of Buddhist Universities).⁵¹

Agreement of several exchange programs is not a simple qualification as an exchange student, but a complete priority as a student studying abroad by Unmunsa Monastic College curriculums and granting priority to entering Chunghwa graduate school. As Unmunsa

⁵⁰ Wonwal “The History of Unmunsa Exchange Programmes” paper presented in the conference “Research for Monastic Collage Education” in 2009 hosted by the Bureau of Monastic Training the Jogye Order.

⁵¹ Unmunsa Monastic College has focused on improving the tutor’s capacity not only in translating the scriptures, but also sufficient in social means for the upcoming generations as a common thought. Therefore as a result, tutors including nuns of the university attained Master and Bachelor’s degrees from Dongguk University, in turn inspiring the student nuns. Wonwal “The History of Unmunsa Exchange Programmes” paper presented in the conference “Research for Monastic Collage Education” in 2009 hosted by the Bureau of Monastic Training the Jogye Order.

Monastic College opens up to the world in academic terms, it is evaluated in developing students to be relevant in society, and to reanalyze in Buddhism philosophy to be a part of the society rather than to be isolated. At the same time, it is to realize traditional Korean culture and to introduce the Korean country's culture to the outside world by the nuns to embrace the opportunity of learning abroad.

Special Events in the Annual Calendar

The Jogye Order celebrates four major holidays by the lunar calendar. The Buddha's birthday is on the 8th of April in the lunar calendar and it is the highlight of the Buddhist ceremonial year and is celebrated with affluent festivals at all temples throughout the country. Each monastery usually prepares for several weeks. Most lay devotees also participate in preparing the celebration day. This holiday is distinguished for the large demonstration of paper lanterns lit by candles or electronic lamps, which are strung from shrine to shrine throughout the monastery, and hung row upon row inside the central courtyard. Lotus lanterns cover the entire temple throughout the month which is often flooded with onlookers down the street. One month before, the Buddha's Birthday devotees, mostly laywomen and monks or nuns together, gather for an entire day or sometimes over a couple of days to make the lanterns. After finishing making lanterns, the office of the monastery sells them to lay devotees. The ritual tradition is that Buddhists who want to receive merit for themselves and their families buy a lantern. Under the lantern devotees write their and their family names and pray for what they wish. Actually, this income from the sale of lanterns in most Korean monasteries is the main financial source for the year.⁵²

⁵² For more information on the origin of the sale of lanterns see, Buswell (1992) 43-44.

Along with sold lanterns, massive lanterns surround the Main hall in all shrines throughout the temples and hang row upon row inside the Main hall and they are beautifully lit every night. On the ceremonial day each year, all lay devotees go to their own temple, participate in bathing the baby Buddha, and participate in a special dharma service. The monastery serves everyone free special meals and tea to all visitors. The day is an official holiday of the Korean Government.⁵³

The Central Council of Jogye Order hosts “Lotus Lantern Festival” for non-Buddhists as well as Buddhists. Usually on the Sunday before Buddha’s Birthday, a huge cultural lantern festival is held in downtown Seoul. The festival is highlighted by the long parade in which participant hold lanterns and walk along the lined street. The colorful lanterns brighten the night streets of Seoul. This parade is the pride of Buddhists. Over 100,000 lay devotees enthusiastically participated and 300,000 people came to out to view the parade in The Lotus Lantern Festival in 2010.⁵⁴ The Buddha’s birthday for Korean Buddhists is what Christmas is to Christians.

On December 8th in the lunar calendar, Buddhists celebrate the enlightenment of the Buddha. Each temple commemorates this holy day in various ways such as: all night meditation, the 3,000 bows ritual, 100 recitations of the great *dharani*, cultural performances, and special dharma services, etc. February 8th in the lunar calendar, Korean Buddhists celebrate the Prince Siddhartha leaving his father's palace, where he once lived in

⁵³ In 1975, the Eighth Day of April in the lunar calendar was designated as a National Holiday, and on that evening in the following year Jogye Order held a miles-long parade from the vast Yeoeuido Plaza throughout the city up to Jogyesa temple. It was the first reconstruction of the historical parades in the history of Korean Buddhism.

⁵⁴ Lotus Lanterns: Korean Buddhism for International Readers Summer 2010 Vol.42, 7. Also, see , (<http://www.koreanbuddhism.net/jokb/press/>)

extreme luxury and later renounced his secular world and started his asceticism for enlightenment. In the same month, the 15th in the lunar calendar is regarded as the death of the Buddha which marks his entrance into final nirvana. The day is a time for deliberation of the Buddha's teachings. Monasteries hold meditation retreats; laypeople participate and provide donations to support monks and nuns. Unmunsa usually sets up a week-long program from Renunciation Day to *Parinirvana* Day to celebrate the Buddha's spirit in the lives of the laity and encourage practice and faith. They do the 3,000 bows ritual every night and perform together to pray, chant, recite the sutras, and meditate. The student nuns also refrain from eating after noon during this period.

Because Unmunsa is primarily an educational institution for beginners, the nunnery gives chances to student nuns to prove what they can do and what they perceive in the special ceremony related to lay devotees and within social contexts. Unmunsa Monastic Collage has a spring break for around 10 days during the week of the Buddha's Birthday. Most students go to their home temple where they help their own team and lead lay devotees to succeed in the celebration of the holy day. The first year student nuns stay at Unmunsa, and Unmunsa temple also prepares their own celebrations with the nearby lay community just as all Korean temples do.⁵⁵

Unmunsa's nuns can uniquely experience one of the Buddha's traditional performances, which is begging. The begging performance still lasts in some Southeastern Buddhist communities but it is not performed in Korean Buddhism even if it represents one

⁵⁵ Unmunsa does not have a unique feature of any celebration or ritual performance in terms of normal Korean Buddhist celebrations. Rather it seems that Unmunsa minimizes normal special celebration days. For religious education purposes nuns at Unmunsa Monastic College experience unique ritual performance.

of the most important aspects of the Buddha's ascetic life. The Jogye Order since 1964 prohibits monk and nun mendicants from going house to house or street to street begging for alms, since on past occasions, pseudo-monks and nuns have tricked anonymous donors into giving alms. Another reason for the prohibition is that modernization has transformed in economy such as that rice has given way to money as means of exchanges. Communal nuns at Unmunasa perform begging one time in the spring of every year. In the morning, nuns go to large cities nearby and beg on the streets in small groups. They ceaselessly chant and recite the name of Buddha and ask for alms from one store to another. The experience for nuns perhaps is a unique experience for their religious life in contemporary social contexts. All income from the day's begging is donated to an organization of social welfare around the area.⁵⁶

Even though Unmunsa is surrounded by mountains and is far from big cities, it holds a summer camp for Buddhist children every year. The first camp, held in the summer of 1976, was a pioneering event at that time because in the early 1970s, Korean Buddhists did not pay attention to the needs of children and their importance to society. Nuns tend to more than one hundred children from elementary school for three days at the end of July every year. Children experience actual Buddhism, learn about what Buddhists know, the Buddha, and how Buddhists can live. Moreover, the most important result is that every child learns to understand others based on the compassion of Buddhism. Similarly, the Jogye Order is recently promoting a program of Temple Stay in several temples which provides the laity

⁵⁶ Dialogue with nun Iljin in Summer, 2008.

with a chance to experience the renunciate's life at the temples.⁵⁷ From the experience, leader nuns at Unmunsa come to understand the necessity of children's education in principals of Buddhism. They opened a Kindergarten within a well-harmonized real community. In the spring of 2008, they admitted 125 children from ages 3 to 6. With a Kindergarten operating, Unmunsa provides a place for children to experience the learning process and the nuns helped to develop a training program based upon the principles of Buddhism.

Unmunsa is a religious institution, the mission of which is the education and training of religious specialists—specifically Buddhist nuns. The temple, which has a long history, operates as a female educational institute, and it has been continuously modified and expanded to meet the needs of its students. It is in many ways an exemplary institution, showcasing today's Korean nuns and determining the future of Korean women's monasticism, which will undoubtedly depend upon how nuns are trained and educated as a religious specialists there. Given this research, in the next chapter I will focus on contemporary nuns, illustrating how they live their religion at Unmunsa.

⁵⁷ For information on the Temple Stay Program for laity in the Jogye Order see, (<http://eng.templestay.com/>).

CHAPTER 5 MONASTIC LIVES OF NUNS AT UNMUNSA

To understand nuns' lives through an in-depth description of the structure of the monastery and the nuns' lifestyle, rituals, and educational requirements, it is necessary that I describe more specifically my ethnographic fieldwork, which utilized such techniques as participant observation, quantitative surveys, and qualitative interviews, including those completed with participants in various monastic lifestyles at Unmunsa Monastic College. There I surveyed over one hundred informants, and also observed events such as the routines of nuns' everyday lives, including meditation, classes, special ceremonies, and temple activities. By focusing on my participant observation, I specifically illustrate how a nun lives and cultivates her religiosity through the everyday activities within the community. My participant observation and personal interviews also show how tension within communal life arises and how they resolve it for the purpose of maintaining harmony within the institution.

I carefully analyze my fieldwork data and construct a general profile of Unmunsa Monastic College based on my survey research. It seeks to elucidate the nuns' visions of and views on monastic life in contemporary Korean society. I formulate a critical review of the textual sources, illustrating how the images of nuns' lives as presented in texts are quite different from the lives and experiences of individual nuns with whom I interacted. In most of the survey's responses, and in the personal communications and interviews conducted, there has been a strong suggestion that the nuns believe their status in the monastic institution is still lower than that of monks, but they do not have any difficulties pursuing their religious lives because they can live, study, and practice independently from the

monks. In conjunction with the results of my fieldwork, the ethnographic survey data supports this contention as far as the experiences of women at Unmunsa Monastic College are concerned.

Daily Life inside the Community

When I arrived at Unmunsa it was a hot summer day in the middle of the afternoon. Upon entering the One Pillar Gate I proceeded directly to the main Buddha hall. It is common etiquette that whenever one visits a temple for any purpose, one should first go to the main hall of the temple and make vows to the Buddha. Having done this, I stopped at the office and the secretary nun introduced me to the associate dean nun, Iljin. I took three bows and introduced myself and my topic. Though I arrived a few hours late due to transportation complications and a traffic jam, the nun still greeted me warmly.

We made ourselves comfortable on the floor. Iljin wore a bright gray garment constructed of the finest cotton. A security guard brought us a cold green tea, and she took a more formal tone, asking me how I had become interested in this topic. Responding to the seriousness in her demeanor, which to me suggested that whatever occurred there must be profound, I answered that I was motivated by a respect for the renunciate lifestyle and a concern for the advancement of women, and also by a desire to introduce Korean Buddhism more fully into western academia. This satisfied her and I went on to ask a few questions of interest to me. Iljin stated, "So now aside from me, you are involved in the monastic life. We are all going on paths involving very different types of nuns, so you can see the different aspects each must face and at the same time you can see similar features of nuns who aspire

to the same goal for their lives.”¹ I was a little excited and embarrassed. She observed that while I could become familiar with the monastic atmosphere and environment and have some modicum of knowledge about their lives, “to truly understand seminary life” it would be necessary to “live with us day in and day out. You can stay within our nunnery for a while if you want to.”² I was delighted, since prior to her invitation I was hesitant to make such a request. Before this invitation, knowing that no outsider could live at the nunnery, I had planned to stay off campus and commute every morning. I had never known of anyone who was unaffiliated with the organization staying at the nunnery, and in fact, people who came from the seminary to meet them or to watch morning ceremony stayed at a hotel or elsewhere off campus.

I was escorted to a small, completely empty room, and she brought in a small table, a pillow, and two blankets from a closet. The room was equipped with two sets of doors—one set with a full screen that led to the nunnery and the other, a back door that led outside to the small river and mountains. The back door was usually left open and a cool breeze drifted in from the direction of the small river. I heard the sound of the wind and the beautiful songs of birds. Even though it was the middle of summer, no artificial air-conditioning was needed for comfort.

After putting down my suitcases, Iljin accompanied me through the area near several facilities and led me on uneven terrain to a tea house. After my somewhat awkward participation in the evening ceremony, I excused myself and prepared to go to bed. Despite

¹ Conversation with nun Iljin July 2008.

² Conversation with nun Iljin July 2008.

my initial fear of having to wake up very early at 3:00 AM, I could not fall asleep for a while. Eventually, as darkness quickly ascended and the world became silent, the gentle wind lulled me to sleep. My first morning at the nunnery was a bit more comfortable than the previous afternoon, and I followed the daily schedule with little trouble.

The nuns attend a morning, midday, and evening ritual in the main Buddha Hall. Engaging in a variety of communal activities, they learn to be mindful through ritual performance, study of doctrine, and practice of a communal life that helps to calm and deepen the mind. Within the community, they live a very circumspect existence. The daily schedule is composed of religious ceremonies, meal times, study, and communal work, as follows:

- 3:00 am Wake-up and wash
- 3:30 am Morning ritual
- 4:30 am Early morning study session
- 5:10 am The end of early morning study session
- 5:30 am Breakfast
- 6:00 am Cleaning and sweeping
- 6:30 am Morning class
- 8:30 am The end of morning class and free time
- 10:00 am Midday ritual
- 11:30 am Lunch
- 1:00 pm Midday study session or communal work
- 4:00 pm The end of midday study session
- 4:10 pm The entire assembly does chores
- 5:30 pm Dinner
- 6:30 pm Evening ritual
- 7:00 pm Evening study session (debate)
- 8:30 pm The end of evening study session
- 9:00 pm Bedtime

Acting Ritual

“Tak...Tak... Tak...” a wooden gong’s sound spreads through the temple valley. With the turning on of the lights, a nun struck a wooden-bell to wake up the nuns at 3 AM. All nuns are awakened by the sound of a stick being tapped rhythmically on a wooden gourd.

Long before dawn, in preparation for the morning ritual, all the nuns wake up, go to the restroom, wash, and walk around. Over two hundred nuns, sans verbal communication, prepare for the daily rotational schedule. The only sounds are the songs of various birds and the breeze.

In the pavilion, four instrumental musical pieces are performed by two nuns. The instruments summon the suffering souls of the universe through their chorus of drum, bell, and gong, and during this music, every nun exited the communal room, lining up and walking toward the main Buddha hall in a v-formation like a flock of geese. The large and beautifully constructed main hall quickly fills with over two hundred nuns. By the time the large temple bell has finished tolling, all of the nuns in the monastery have assumed their spots in the hall. Teacher nuns occupy cushions at the very back of the hall. The cushions in the hall are laid out very close to one another. I quietly enter the temple through a side door and take my place on a floor cushion. At the very front of the hall sit the laypeople. Once everyone is settled a nun in the congregation strikes three rounds on the large gong inside the hall to signal the beginning of the ritual. The verger strikes the wooden gong once to signal all the nuns to begin the ritual, and they rise from their seated positions and are then led in three full prostrations. Everyone at the temple is expected to attend the service, except those who prepare the morning meal, though the proctor and others with pressing office duties are given much leeway in participating. All the participants bow together toward the altar and the nuns' melodic chanting provides an inspiring calm rhythm. The hall shudders with energy as the sisterhood release their humble inhibitions via song.

During my first full day, as the sutra swept through the hall I looked up at the Buddha statues and got caught up in a mixture of chanting. It was an amazing experience to witness

an assembly of over 200 nuns gathering to sing sutra. I relaxed and the nuns began their chant. The demonstration by more than 200 nuns gathered, chanting in one voice, is pure grandeur which, to anyone witnessing the event, seems to purify the mind and body. In veneration of the three jewels of Buddhism, the sutra-chanting nuns cultivate a correct means of transforming their negative tendencies.

At the end of the morning ritual Unmunsa has a unique ceremony. Nuns perform the traditional 108 bows, executed with head fully to the floor, every morning as a part of the ritual. These bows are called “the repentance and reformation (*chamhwe* 懺悔)” ritual at Unmunsa and the gesture has special significance. The meaning of *cham hwe* is literally; “to be aware of and feel remorse for what one has done to cause suffering” and “to turn those causes and conditions around.” Even though there are various methods of repentance and reformation, and each individual can practice in different and personal ways according to their heart, Unmunsa is a communal monastic institution. Nuns formally declare their repentance by collectively performing the 108 ritual prostrations as they chant the Great Repentance and Reformation Text directly. The symbolic meaning of both bowing and prostrating is to honor and yield to the true nature of reality and to overcome and eliminate defilements and ignorance.

The ritual breaks the morning silence with a sacred sound, and the ritual itself is a kind of heritage of Korean Buddhism. The morning ceremony is highly regarded as a pilgrimage draw not only for lay Buddhists, but for domestic and foreign tourists alike. In fact, the morning ceremony is the subject of an application to UNESCO for international human

cultural heritage status.³ During my stay, I often saw people come merely to watch the ritual in the dawning hours of the morning. Korean reporters sometimes shoot photographs and videos of the unusual visitors, wending their way through the rows with extension cords.

In monastic life eating is also a highly important religious ritual. What nuns eat, and how they eat it, is very significant. They approach mealtime with a serious and sincere attitude. At most Korean temples, the monks and nuns follow a special diet. They do not eat any meat or fish in the temples since they are considered to be intoxicants – the only animal product considered acceptable is milk. In addition, despite their popularity in Koreans' diets nuns do not eat five specific vegetables that are considered 'hot or spicy' in flavor: green onions, onions, garlic, leeks, and shallots.⁴ Nuns in the monastery often say "food is

³ Visiting famous temples is one of the most popular forms of tourism in Korea, even for Christians because most historic temples are famous national or locally treasures and are located by famous picturesque mountains and valleys. For example, when I first visited Unmunsa during my middle school years the school in which I was enrolled was a Christian missionary school but the school managed a summer camp near Unmunsa that provided for students to visit the temple and to attend a lecture on Buddhism by the nuns of Unmunsa. Today, the ticket to enter Unmunsa is ₩2000 (almost \$2) per person, the proceeds from which are divided between the Government Culture and Tourist Administration of the Korean Government, and the Jogye Order, and Unmunsa.

According to the Jogye Order's report, 60% of Korea's national treasures are Buddhist religious cultural properties. Among those, five treasures are included in the UNESCO Cultural Heritage: the Seokguram Grotto, Jikji (Oldest Extant Book Printed from Movable Metal Type), Gyeongju Historical Area, Haeinsa's Repository of Tripitaka Koreana, and Bulguksa Temple. For the more information of Buddhist holy relics in the UNESCO Cultural Heritage catalogue see *Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism*. Ed by Headquarters of the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism. (Seoul: Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism. 2010) 35-37.

⁴ One of the main emphases among the Buddha's precepts is the avoidance of killing. During the Buddha's life, Jainism strongly advocated vegetarianism in order to protect the life-principle or soul (jiva). The Jogye Order accounts for its ban on eating meat based upon two textual sources. *The Mahaparnirvana Sutra* suggests that the eating of meat and fish cuts the seed of compassion and *the Lankavatara Sutra* explains that animals might be the reincarnation of our parents, siblings, and friends from previous lives. Prohibiting using vegetables of the onion family, the Jogye Order says that "consuming cooked food of the onion family will increase lust while eating raw food will increase anger." In addition, in *the Surangama Sutra* it is said that these five 'hot' flavored vegetables, when fresh, affect our thinking and lead us to obscene thoughts, and when cooked they stimulate our anger. Also these 'intoxicants' disturb our senses and so do not help us on the path to wisdom, resulting in wrong actions and many mistakes. These are the main reasons for the prohibitions. All of these are obstacles that deter us from practice. This defined food characteristic is embodied to improve the spirit of meditation and the principle of compassionate interdependence.

medicine.” For those in the monastery food is not taken for the pleasure of the taste or the desire to eat, but for sustaining the body with the necessary yet minimal nutrition and quantity in order to gain the best results in practice. Thus, each meal is a nourishing opportunity for expanding and deepening their awareness, as a type of discipline in and of itself. Each mealtime provides an opportunity to nourish the body properly so that development of the mind can continue to progress smoothly.

“*Balugongyang*” is designated as the traditional and formal communal meal practice in Korean temples.⁵ *Balu* literally means the four bowls for including food and *Gongyang* means the serving of food to the monastery.⁶ It is composed of four matching bowls with a spoon, a pair of chopsticks, a place mat, a dishcloth, and a wrapping cloth to cover it all. The bowls and tools are usually made out of a polished hardwood with lovely natural grain patterns in it. The four bowls are of different sizes and can nestle into one another, with the

According to scholarly research, however, extended interpretation or reinterpretations of the vinaya rules in order to adapt them to Mahayana Buddhism are quite frequent, especially regarding precepts involving food habits. Hinayana vinayas reveal that alcohol and garlic are forbidden in all vinayas, but this is not so for meat, onions, or leeks. Only the Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya tradition forbids the consumption of onions and leeks. The ban against meat, as well as against strong-smelling vegetables, is strongly advanced only in later Mahayana texts, such as the *Surangama* and the *Lankāvatārasūtra*. *Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism*. Ed by Headquarters of the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism. (Seoul: Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism. 2010) 44-45. J. Kieschnick, "Buddhist Vegetarianism in China," in *Of Tripod and Palate: Food, Politics, and Religion in Traditional China*, ed. R. Sterckx (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 186-212. A. Heirman, "Offenders, Sinners and Criminals: The Consumption of Forbidden Food," *Acta Orientalia* 59.1 (2006) 57-83. A. Heirman, "Indian Disciplinary Rules and Their Early Chinese Adepts: A Buddhist Reality," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 128.2 (2008) 257-272.

⁵ Most monasteries do not eat this way at every meal, as some eat more informally, but generally practice it in special ceremonies or during some intensive meditation in seasonal.

⁶ This tradition is based on a myth that states that after the Buddha attained enlightenment, the Four Heavenly Guardian Kings offered a meal to him in stone bowls. According to that myth just following the Buddha's enlightenment, at the appearance of the morning star, the Four Heavenly Kings approached the Buddha make a meal offering to him. He did not have a bowl so each king offered him a bowl made of stone. He overlapped the bowls one on top of another and ate from them. This, according to Jogye Order account, is the legendary beginning of the formal four-bowl meal of *Barugongyang*. Hyechong. *What is Korean Buddhism?* (Seoul: Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, 2007), 74-75.

entire set having a cover. From largest to smallest, they are bowls for rice, soup, side dishes and water.

Only vegetarian foods are served, within natural and nutritious parameters. They only take into their bowls as much of each food as they can eat within the time allowed; at the same time, they have to concern themselves with the notion that everyone present at the meal is offered an equal share. It is actually important to accurately judge how much each one can and wants to eat.

This meal begins as nuns quietly gather in the dining room, take their *balu* kits from the cupboard, and sit on cushions in rows. They perform a pre-meal sacred chant which emphasizes their consciousness of living together harmoniously. Then, nuns bow in the seated position and reflect upon where this food came from and how much effort was spent to produce this meal. They further contemplate on whether their own practice has been worthy of this offering and how the energy they gain from this meal may be used to improve their conscious minds and to reduce their craving and suffering. They also hope to advance upon the religious life toward following the Buddha.

The officiating nun clacks a “*jukbi*” bamboo instrument at various times to signal to the nuns to begin each stage of the eating process. Water, rice, soup, and side dishes are served in orderly fashion and are consumed in sequence. When they finish, not even a grain of rice or scrap of vegetable should remain in their bowls. Following the meal hot water, which is made by the remaining rice-cooker, is served up in their empty rice bowls. They use it to clean out each bowl in turn while using one piece of kimchi specifically saved for the cleaning. When all bowls are spotless, they drink the water and eat the kimchi. The water received at the beginning and kept in the smallest bowl is used to give a final cleaning

to the three food bowls. Then a big bucket is passed around into which nuns pour in the water from their cleaning bowls. The water in the bucket must be absolutely clean. If even a tiny bit of food remains in the water on the bottom of that smallest bowl, nuns equally share and drink it. The cleaned bowls and utensils are dried, bound, and returned to the cupboards.⁷

Its key values of consumption are spiritual practice; thriftiness out of respect for the gifts we receive from nature, and practicing in silence so as to promote self-reflection, which have meant a lot to me. This strict practice clearly reflects deep Buddhist ecological and austerity values. The famous primatologist and anthropologist Jane Goodall participated in a *balugongyang* of Korean Buddhist temple cuisine after a speech, and declared afterward that it was a very moving experience.⁸ She said, “*balugongyang* treats all life as precious and requires participants to slowly chew their food while thinking about where it came from. This process allows us to treasure our food with a spirit of gratitude.”⁹ She also stated that, “the Buddhist philosophy of respect for all life has a lot to do with the ‘Harvest for

⁷ The first time that I participated in a *balugongyang* ritual meal it was a spiritual revelation. It was many years ago when I was a freshman at a University, and I had never before experienced such a religious, ritualized way of eating. Ever since then I have had a much deeper appreciation for the spiritual factors inherent in accepting energy in the form of food into my body, and I subsequently eat with a sense of gratitude, austerity, and togetherness with all beings.

⁸ The world-renowned chimpanzee researcher and environmentalist Jane Goodall visited Korea in November, 2006, and presented a special lecture on the “Harvest for Hope” campaign at the Hwagyesa temple in Seoul. She spoke about her “Roots and Shoots” that emphasizes education of children on the importance of eating organic foods in long-term sustainable amounts, environmental conservation and ecology-conscious lifestyles. She said that “Clean Plate campaign” in the Jogye Order “is similar in that it seeks to engage children and students to change their thinking” *Buddhism and Culture* (October 2009 Korea Buddhism Promotion Foundation). vol. 3. 46-47.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

Hope' campaign."¹⁰ She said that she had never before eaten a meal in such a profoundly ceremonial fashion. It is easily recognizable that the *balugongyang* practices are viewed as a tangible treasure of cultural heritage, raising our consciousness of what and how we eat in temples. They serve as a good example for all humankind of how to nourish ourselves in harmony with nature and each other, frugally avoiding all needless waste while practicing the mindfulness we sorely need. Out of respect and gratitude for the food that comes to us from the earth's biosphere through the hard labor of farmers, the generosity of donors, and the diligent skill of the cooks and other staff, nothing at all should be wasted or discarded. This is a profound attitude of austerity, frugality, appreciation, and environmental concern that is prominent throughout the Buddhist philosophies. Nuns at Unmunsa have ritual proceedings for every meal that they eat for the four years that they attend training.¹¹

Doing religious rituals is very important to the process of becoming a nun. Ritual performance and ritualized activities in the everyday life provide a pedagogical aid for the training of student nuns. Worshipping the Buddha three times a day influences the way what nuns think. By repeatedly doing worshipping, formal mealtime activities, nuns begin to think differently. According to professors, learning about monastic life is intimately related to how one behaves in the secular world. By providing ritual activities, students nuns become

¹⁰ Ibid., 46.

¹¹ Catherine Bell observed that participant agents in well-structured rituals inter-relate between mind and body. "The molding of the body within a highly structured environment does not simply express inner states. Rather, it primarily acts to restructure bodies in the very doing of the acts themselves... What we see in ritualization is not the mere display of subjective states or corporate values. Rather, we see an act of production –the production of a ritualized agent. Hence, ritualization, as the production of a ritualized agent via the interaction of a body within a structured and structuring environment, always takes place within a larger and very immediate socio-cultural situation." Bell, Catherine. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 99-100.

acclimated to monastic life, developing their faith and acquiring greater sensitivity to and understanding of Buddhist principles, eventually leading them to act as Buddhist nuns.

Class and Communal Work

After breakfast, the nuns have regular class. As the light flows out from the main Buddha hall along with the sound of the chanting of the morning service, the Buddha's teachings cut through the darkness. Taking classes and learning the doctrinal teachings of the Buddha is the main mission for student nuns at Unmunsa during their four years of training. The pedagogical doctrinal study can provide and reinforce for them the foundations of Buddhist practice and belief: why they should want to be a nun and how they can persevere and maintain their religiosity in the here and now and in the future. They sit at their assigned spots on the floor and bring a small desk to the room for each class. The main texts are in Classical Chinese characters, which for the current generation of nuns is very difficult, so each class primarily involves the nuns' learning to read the Sino-Korean logographs used in the texts. The characters are read and simultaneously translated into Korean. A student from the class is chosen by lottery from a bamboo container to serve as the commentator (*balgi*) to each character. The commentator opens her text and explains the character meaning word by word, while all the others sit silently following along in their own books. The commentator's explanations are based upon a translation of a Korean book or main commentary to whatever text they are studying. Also, if there is a disagreement with the commentator's interpretation, any student can propose her own interpretation. Then, these different interpretations are discussed and the instructor gives a probable solution.

While the students apparently learn and memorize a number of the texts from their textbooks, a closer examination of the process of understanding and of the reflections of doctrines reveals that they have difficulty with the texts themselves, which do not form a key ingredient of their doctrinal understanding. One reason is that in their pedagogical training the very doctrinal texts which ostensibly provide this basis are actually inaccessible to many novices. Indeed, the language in which the texts appear in the each class is classical Chinese. Moreover, conversations with novices about the texts themselves suggest that most if not all of the students are unaware of the meaning of the, despite the fact that the nuns can recite the texts from memory.

The instructor supervises whether a response is right or wrong and corrects them, then explains through the outlines and elucidates their general meanings. After that she gives an extemporaneous account of the significance of these doctrinal teachings. The instructor lectures on the exact interpretation and provides its historical context in the development of Korean Buddhism, and any material offered to the students is used to help them understand the antecedents of their own tradition in India and China. After completion of the lecture, the students all rise and bow once, and file out of the hall.

For the rest of the day until late into the evening, the students review what they learned in class. Students in the textual study track of the third and four years read silently. After the noon meal, the entire class will gather in the seminary for more silent study unless they are assigned communal work. Students in the recitation track of the first and second years receive instruction in class of memorization of one section of the text they are studying. The texts are memorized as much as possible, regardless of whether their meanings are understood.

“Religious reading” primarily deals “with the establishment of certain relations between readers and the things they read, relations that are at once attitudinal, cognitive, and moral, and that therefore imply an ontology, an epistemology, and an ethic.”¹² Students at Unmunsa are religious learners, not academic ones. They read “what is there to be read, and what is there to be read always precedes, exceeds, and in the end supersedes its readers.”¹³ A religious reader treats “what they read with reverence.” So, reading is “an object of overpowering delight and great beauty. It can never be discarded because it can never be exhausted. It can only be reread, with reverence and ecstasy.”¹⁴ Thus, their reading is an endlessly repeated process, never a final one.

After repeatedly reading, re-reading and orally reciting a text many times, students naturally formulate mnemonic techniques. Through such rote memorization, the students learn to pronounce and parse phrases of literary Chinese as well as gain some basic knowledge about monastic discipline. Then each of nuns recites their part to the teacher in the next class. At a certain stage, they have group recitation time (독성). When the evening ritual is over, the entire class gathers together in the hall for debate sessions which serves as part of their preparation for the next day’s class. During the remaining hours of the night, they study individually until the lights go out and they go to bed at 9:00 PM.

Nuns in the last year of study must have presented one entire lecture in front of all the nuns. It is “the presentation of a passage by one of the student nuns (論講)”. The student is

¹² Griffiths, Paul. *Religious Reading; The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.), 41.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

required to give her own lecture on the same or a related passage. For that she decides which topic of their text to lecture on to the public and prepares how to explain the connection between Buddha's teaching and monastic life. The purpose of this ceremony is not only to inculcate the students, but to prepare them to serve as potential teachers at seminary or dharma talk themselves in the future. They take exams at the end of each semester and are graded. Each hour of class is calculated as one credit for each semester. To graduate from the seminary each nun has to take a total of 120 credits during her eight semesters, in which they take exams at the end of each semester and get a grades from A to E, just as one does at a secular university. Studying in the seminary for four years prior to full ordination is necessary for novice nuns to provide them with a foundation for their monastic life and it serves to give them an understanding of Buddhist doctrines.

Persevering communal life necessarily requires a great deal of effort, just as it does in secular life. They have to clean their space every day, do laundry, cook and perform communal work. With the modernization of Korean society most temples are not involved in agricultural projects. However, Unmunsa still possesses a huge tract of land—almost 2.3 hectares that mostly provides for their vegetable sources for self-sufficiency. Previously, student nuns farmed rice for a while but secular farmers now take care of farming rice. Unmunsa Monastic College has a nickname: “the college of agriculture for the monastery.” The nickname was derived from the necessity of farming to provide enough food for the monastery prior to 1980. According to Myeongseong reflection, nuns at Unmunsa lacked food and they had to cultivate plants for self-support. So, they focused on agriculture work rather than studying until the mid-1980s. Agricultural work, while no longer necessary for

the nuns' self-sufficiency, is in keeping with the process of pedagogical training by reinforcing the student nuns' respect for other beings, and co-habitation with nature.

Currently, they grow vegetables and this means that student nuns have to be faithful to their work practices. Almost every day, they go out to the field with hoe and plow in tow. This exercise is the origin of the famous phrase in the Seon tradition: "Each and every day--no work, no eating."¹⁵ In the Unmunsa, following the tradition, it is still common to have a farm. During the busy farming period, every person in the temple must contribute. The sound of the wooden gong, gathers everyone for work. All the nuns in their rooms studying must stop what they are doing and meet together. This communal work is called "*ulyeok*." Farming is not the only *ulyeok*. In fact, there is never a month free of work to do. There is constantly work to be done from spring to fall, and in the fall, making kimchi in the end of November is no small task. During this time, everyone in the temple must come together to help in this work.

After lunch, what work to do is announced to student nuns. The communal work is done under the hot sun of summer in their traditional straw hats. They often sweat because the work is physically difficult. Most young Koreans are not familiar with working on a farm. In personal conversation nuns complain about its difficulty. Some point out, "I left my family to become a nun precisely to avoid just these sorts of tasks." "I am from a rich

¹⁵ Baizhang was considered the first person to initiate Chan independence from the other Buddhist schools. He wrote the "*Pure Rules* (Baizhang qinggui)" temple regulations for Chan monastic orders that emphasized work as a monk's religious duty. His principle on manual work is one of the defining characteristics of Buddhism in China and Korea. This is what is meant by communal work. When Buddhism first entered China, the royal court and aristocrats gave it financial support. The state built temples and the royal family and nobles donated great amounts of land property so that monks did not have to make alms rounds. This Seon tradition similarly rejected the tradition of going for alms. Master Pai Chang was a good example of this. However, many scholars doubt the existence of the rule. See: Yifa. *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China: An Annotated Translation and Study of the Chanyuan qinggui*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii press. 2002), xxi.

family,” one nun noted, “and I had never experienced physical labor even though just kitchen work is physical work and is another challenge in the monastic life.”¹⁶ Nevertheless, almost everyone seems to enjoy the kitchen work because it provides a break from the rigors of the daily schedule and an opportunity to snack between the regular meals; usually sweet potatoes, fruit, cookies, or rice cakes, and cool water or ice tea is brought from the kitchen. The frequent snacks and the lively camaraderie among the students make the atmosphere more enjoyable than is usually found in the monastery.

At least once during the summer all the fields will be weeded—a tedious job that usually continues for three to four days. Any other weeding that is later necessary will usually be done on a day-to-day basis as needed. One day while weeding the red pepper patches a teacher nun said that “this extremely simple and physical labor is to cultivate unrestrained behavior (*muae haeng*) practice just as a long period of Seon-meditation can. To cultivate mindfulness is not limited in the usual schedule under monastic discipline and decorum.”¹⁷ Another student nun said “when I work in the farm there is not even one second to think of anything else. Physically this labor is extremely demanding, but at some point I feel that I have become lean and fit, and have begun to adopt a correct posture.”¹⁸ It is also a practice in which nuns can feel a fresh sense of satisfaction. There is also the satisfaction of sweating from hard work while smelling the soil. They experience the grace of the earth as the crop is grown and appreciate what hard work the Buddhist patrons must go through to make donations to the temple.

¹⁶ Dialogue with a first year student in July 2008.

¹⁷ Dialogue with a teacher nun in July 2008.

¹⁸ Dialogue with a four year student in July 2008.

Internal Conflicts and Harmonization

Unmunsa is clean and silent and all nuns look calm and humble. Overall their life seems to be in perfect harmony with the beautiful natural surroundings of the temple. However, just as a closer look at the nature surrounding the temple will reveal among the flora and fauna a day-to-day conflict—the struggle to survive their environment and against competitors in that environment—conflicts among the human inhabitants is inevitable. More than two hundred people inhabit the monastery, living together in relatively close quarters, 24 hours a day, and seven days a week. Unmunsa is a place for pursuing spirituality, but at the same time it is a large-scale domicile.

Monastic life is communal at Unmunsa. They eat, sleep, study, and practice together in one room with everyone else. Over one hundred first- and second-year nuns live together in a single room, while the nearly fifty third- year nuns have their own single room and fourth-year nuns live together in a separate room. Each living arrangement presents a proximity dynamic with potential interpersonal conflicts of its own. To live so closely together with many people means that one's actions, moods and energy affect everyone in the whole group. A teacher nun says, "By living in a communal environment without privacy, students learn how to practice and control their minds and bodies out of necessity. Only when you can naturally control yourself, even when no one is around, you are allowed to have a room of your own. This is why one must be alert 24 hours a day, seven days a week."¹⁹ According to Myeongseong and Iljin, to lead an exemplary Buddhist life in the monastic

¹⁹ Dialogue with Myeongseong August 2008.

community in the future it is more important for young nuns to focus on harmonious living than to concentrate on their studies.

Ideally, every nun has to learn to act in harmony with the community as much as possible and to let go of one's opinions and selfish desires. Anything a nun does that negatively affects others becomes immediately apparent, and everyone has to work to correct it. This, however, is very difficult. It is actually a very deep training in mindfulness, and so also needs to be practiced over and over. More individualistic young females must adapt to communal life, and the task is a challenging one. When I talked with individual nuns they said that interpersonal relations are one of the most difficult matters with which they had to contend. One day after breakfast one fourth-year nun and I walked outside the monastery to get coffee from a vending machine. She told me,

When I was a first year [nun], I was surprised to learn how much of my way of thinking was intimately tied to my previous life. The way of expressing oneself, mannerisms, expressions are all different. I sometimes felt completely exhausted from having to concentrate all the time, trying to be mindful of my words and actions. These aspects of discipline were simply lacking in my personality before, and I needed to practice and to modify myself in order to be able to live harmoniously with others.²⁰

While nuns described to me this tension within communal life in official or written surveys, I was primarily able to witness it firsthand through participant-observation and to hear about it through personal conversations. Also, it is obvious how much the teachers endeavored to overcome these tensions smoothly and decisively, in terms of religious practice and actual necessity.

²⁰ Dialogue with a four year student nun in July 2008

In addition to the official monastic code Unmunsa Monastic Collage also has many monastic regulations of its own. The regulations are specifically formulated to address life's conveniences, such as forbidding leaving clothes on the clotheslines after sunset. They prohibit anyone from leaving the seminary without permission. Also, shoes must be kept precisely on the doorstep and cannot be stacked one upon another. All students must arrive on time for all study sessions and no one can be absent for any reason without advanced permission. All scheduled monastic communal activities such as mealtime, ritual performance, and communal work sessions must be attended unless a nun is seriously ill. All mail for the student nuns is taken to the office, where one of the office staff opens the envelopes and reads each letter before handing them out. If one violates a regulation, the punishment affects all. For instance, if a student nun is too preoccupied with her studies and forgets to remove her clothing from the clothesline before sunset, her first violation is secretly pardoned by the leader of the seminary hall. When a student repeatedly violates seminary regulations, she and her all classmates are punished as equally. As punishment, she and her classmates have to perform menial tasks for consecutive days.²¹

The most interesting regulation is that whenever nuns have interpersonal conflicts they are assigned work with the person or persons with whom they have the conflict until they can reach any agreement and live harmoniously. Myeongseong says the reason for this is that “they are going to identify their problem by themselves whenever an uncomfortable

²¹ In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault argues that disciplinary punishment gives authorities power over those whom they control by instilling in the subjects the authorities' normative judgments through regimentation that the subjects internalize and perform, regardless of whether the subjects accept them as just or not. Thus, disciplinary punishment leads individuals to self-police on a communal basis, as opposed to responding to monarchical authority. ‘Gentle’ but repetitive penance and performance of punishment, in Foucault’s sense, may contribute to individual nuns’ norms and facilitate their control by the community. Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1977).

thing occurs. No one can help. It is the first step and the last step they need to perceive in order to live a religious life.”²² It is well-known that the monastic code is derived from the necessity of the monks and nuns’ life. When the Buddha formulated each code the intention was to resolve actual matters. Based upon the principles upon which the original monastic code of the nuns was based, Unmunsa formulates regulations in order to improve the efficiency of the community.

All of the daily routines at Unmunsa during the four-year curriculum are disciplinary practices which instill in student nuns Buddhist norms.²³ Individual nuns articulate effects of daily training under formulated disciplinary regulations.²⁴ Thus, “monastic technologies of the self were self-applied strategies to re-order the soul, to refine and sharpen the body’s emotional capacities ... the construction of an authorized and authoritative religious self through the training of bodies.”²⁵ Through communal life student nuns learn to consider others first, putting the needs of the community before their own personal needs. Student nuns live under numerous strict monastic regulations that effectively control their collective social life, and eventually those monastic regulations lead them to be successful in their

²² Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 26.

²³ Talal Asad explores disciplinary practice in medieval Christian monastic roles, which he suggests spurred monks to formulate (new) Christian ethics. This disciplinary practice encourages the desire to be virtuous so as to be united with the sacred. Asad, Talal. *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), cited from Vasquez, Manuel. *More Than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 141-142.

²⁴ Foucault says of the modern soul: “This real, non-corporal soul is not a substance; it is the element in which are articulated effects of a certain type of power and the reference of a certain type of knowledge... On this reality-reference, various concepts have been constructed and domains of analysis carved out: psych, subjectivity, personality, consciousness, etc.: on it have been built scientific techniques and discourses and the moral claims of humanism.” Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1977), 29-30.

²⁵ Vasquez, Manuel. *More Than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 141.

renounced life. The harmonious relations between senior and junior students can create a productive environment for focused study and pursuit of religious life.

Individual Nuns at the Community

The survey that I conducted during my field research provide more rigorous quantitative data on student nuns at Unmunsa, while qualitative and quantitative analysis read together provide more particular information on individual nuns. Before going to Korea I formulated a series of questions that would help tease out a broader and deeper understanding of the various aspects of a nun's life—questions that were then reviewed and approved by my supervising professor, the religion department chair, and the University of Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB). Associate Dean Iljin carefully reviewed the questions and then slightly polished them such as adding respective prefixes and suffixes of terms because the Korean language is distinguished by formal and informal modes of speech, and the Korean language does not distinguish the terms between monks and nuns so that the same term 'sunim' indicates both monks and nuns. Only after having received her approval and permission did I hand surveys to nuns all over the monastery.

I distributed the survey paper on July 17, 2008, and they picked it up and returned it in the same location. I got 119 responses in all: 38 first year, 20 second year, 39 third year, 19 fourth year, and three who did not specify their year. Almost half of them wrote lengthy and detailed responses. Some questionnaires contained only partially filled out responses or skipped questions. One response, from an America nun in the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, was in English. Most respondents expressed gratitude for a meaningful life as nun. Although I clearly explained in a cover letter, in Korean, the academic intention of the survey and my purpose in conducting ethnographic study, in personal conversations some

nuns expressed the hope that I might still consider becoming a nun. In addition to survey responses, hours of intensive interviews and conversations with student nuns provided me with a better understanding of the motivations of women who choose to entrust their lives to training at the monastery. Moreover, the conversations and interviews with the teaching nuns at Unmunsa, and several nuns outside Unmunsa, aided me a great deal in gaining a fuller comprehension of nuns' historical and contemporary experiences.

The material I am dealing with in this part is based primarily on their construction of their personal views. Although this data reflects the subjective experience of nuns, my inquiry seeks to develop an interpretive analysis of nuns with respect to their personal backgrounds, motivations and values vis-à-vis religious life, attitudes towards monks, perceptions of the society's views of them, and thoughts on their social responsibilities as nuns. Presentation and analysis of their reflections on religious life as a nun can deepen our understanding of various aspects of the lives and attitudes of nuns. The numerous quotes from interviews and survey responses of nuns remain anonymous. The only real names used are those of the teachers.

Lacking previous knowledge of Unmunsa and its mission as a nuns' education temple, one might from a distance fail to recognize that the people walking around, studying, and praying on the temple grounds are women. Indeed, their outward appearances and most of their practices mirror their male counterparts. Similar to monks, the nuns are shaven-headed, and wear the same color and cut of clothing—even the shoes are the same. Moreover, they wear the same traditional hats during the summer. Likewise, it is also difficult to distinguish the age of the nuns. Monks and nuns are equally addressed “sunim”—the Korean title of respect for both nuns and monks roughly meaning

“venerable.” During the summer of 2008, 201 student nuns were living at the Unmunsa Monastic College: 41 first year, 58 second year, 50 third year, and 52 fourth year students.²⁶ Nine teachers were living together with the students and the dean of Myeongseong has divided her time between the campus and Seoul, where she serves the role of the president of the Korean Nuns Association.

The average age of student nuns (34years old) is lower than the average of age of nuns and they as novices have joined Buddhist community recently. Technically, first year students have just joined the monastic life within the year while nuns have been with the order for at least one year. The oldest nun joined her home temple in 1999 when she was sixteen, and she was ordained as a novice in 2002.²⁷ Another nun entered the monastic life in 1999 and has been fully ordained.²⁸ Of the total responses the two youngest nuns are 21 years old, born in 1987, and the two oldest nuns are 52 years old, born in 1956. The community admits the largest range of ages, from 22 to 52 years of age.²⁹ According to the regulations of the Jogye Order, only women and men between the ages of 18 and 50 are eligible to join the monastery. But as is illustrated by the respondents’ answers in which one nun was admitted into the monastic under the age of 18 and two nuns were admitted over the age of 50, this rule is not kept strictly although highly recommended. Master nuns or

²⁶ Totals for the other four monastic colleges for novice nuns are during that same year were: 88 novice nuns at Donghaksa Monastic College, 56 at Bongnyeongsa Monastic College, 69 at Cheongamsa Monastic College, and 10 novices at the Samseong Monastic College. There are 13 monastic colleges in the Jogye Order but their total number of students, 323, is fewer than that of the five nuns’ colleges.

²⁷ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 79 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung.

²⁸ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 103 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung.

²⁹ Among 117 respondents, four nuns were born in the 1950s, twenty five were born in the 1960s, fifty four were born in the 1970s, and thirty two were born in the 1980s. Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey. Response document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung.

monks can allow their disciples to join the monastery under flexible consideration, just as one reason is that everyone who wants to join a monastery and has valid reasons for doing so, should be allowed to under the compassion of Buddhist doctrine.

Secular calendars are not used in the seminary or the community of Buddhism. The renounced year (dharma age) is used. For instance, renunciation is for most a 180-degree transformation from their previous lifestyles. At Unmunsa, basically the year of a nun's class is the principal criteria upon which they deal each other. All assignments or responsibilities are assigned based upon class year. It is often said that the difference from one year to the next is as great as the breadth of the sky. A teacher told me that "even if a member of one's senior class is younger than one's youngest child, one must pay respect to her with correct manners. On the other hand, members of the same class become close friends and equals regardless of their previous background. This is a basic attitude with regard to interpersonal communications."³⁰

Reflecting the rapidly changing social structure and cultural values in Korea, nuns come from more diverse backgrounds and experiences than ever before. A general family background, education, and formal jobs fill out the picture of who monastic seminary women's experiences prior to joining the order. The nuns have to at least have completed high school in secular academia by the regulations of the Jogye Order. With the exception of one nun who only finished elementary school, all others have graduated high school at least, and often have higher levels of secular education. Half hold a bachelor's degree from either a college (17, or 14.2 %) or university (42, or 35%) levels. Seven nuns (5.9%) have studied

³⁰ Dialogue with Iljin July 2008.

at graduate school and/or hold a graduate degree.³¹ The level of education of nuns also seems to correspond to their parents' education and occupation, or is slightly higher in terms of prestige or—at least prior to renunciation—salary. An overwhelming majority of the nuns are the high-qualified education which would be guessed that they had a successful job in secular world.

Previous secular occupations of the nuns vary from teachers to students. Respondents reported having worked as teachers, nurses, artists, electrical engineers, clerks/office workers, and even one had been a social activist prior to her association with the order. One nun reported that “because I was a highest-ranked woman at my company I really wanted to be successful, and I did achieve certain level of success.”³² Relatively younger nuns are often students, or of undergraduate age when they join the monastery. One interesting story I was told during a personal conversation was as follows:

When I was a senior at a university, I prepared to go into the job market. I thought about what kind of job would make me happy for whole my life. I did not want to get job only to make money. I recalled meeting a monk when I was a child. Without hesitating, I simply decided to go to a monastery figuring that if I am not satisfied with that life I could give it up whenever I wished. As my colleagues and friends were preparing for their jobs I prepared to go a monastery for one year. So, I took a train in the early morning the day after of graduate commencement.³³

She still claims that she chose wisely. The nuns' education is eventually extended beyond their previous academic and professorial levels of training as they will need further training in order to perform their religious activities not only in the monastery but in their

³¹ See Table 5-1.

³² Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No. 38 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung. All survey responses were translated into English by Chungwhan Sung.

³³ Dialogue with a fourth year student nun in August 2008.

dealings with secular world. At present in the Jogye Order twenty five nuns serve as president of various social welfare centers. At least thirty-seven nuns teach at secular universities. Roughly a dozen nuns work at broadcasting stations in Korea.³⁴ Women who choose to become a nun today are predominantly those who were already successful professionals in their previous lives. Their decision to become nuns is best understood as an extension of the depth of their religious/spiritual values rather than as a default plan in the face of failure in the secular business world. Their dedication to living in accord with the Buddha's teachings can be said to be another genuinely deep decision for succeeding with their life.

Korean society is multi-religious today and half of Koreans respond that they have their own religion. Several statistical studies show that Christianity and Buddhism are nearly equal in terms of support within the populations.³⁵ Moreover, often followers of different religions co-exist in a family. Generally, in contemporary Korea it is more common for Buddhists to convert to Protestantism than vice-versa. To the question, "Before entering the nunnery did you have a religion?" 73% of nuns (88) answered that had a religion prior to their entry, but not all of them were Buddhists. While 65% of nuns (78) responded that they were Buddhists, nine responded they were Christians previously—five were Protestant and four were Catholic.³⁶ Two respondents asserted that they changed their

³⁴ Nun, Bungak's speech at Mindfulness Day Colloquium held by the Buddhist Council of Greater St. Louis on November 4, 2006.

³⁵ The Ministry of Culture and Information summarized what each religion annually reported to the government. Religious Population is 53.1 % non-religious population is 46.9%. See Table 5-2.

³⁶ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No,103 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung.

religions—one from Protestant to Catholic and then finally converting to Buddhism—before becoming a nun. Their lay religious activities indicate that Korea is multi-religious society.³⁷

One of my former university colleagues is a nun who entered the Buddhist monastery almost ten years ago. She was born in a Catholic family, and was a Catholic herself, but she decided to enter a Buddhist temple over a Catholic one. Her rationale was that she investigated female religious activities before renouncing, deciding that the Buddhist community is more independent, its members more autonomous, and less controlled by men. “I want to be more in my regular life as well as in my spiritual life. But Korean Catholicism is extremely hierarchical.”³⁸ Her mother was extremely disappointed not only that her daughter had renounced this world but that in doing so she chose a Buddhist instead of Catholic monastery. Her mother still attends Catholic mass every Sunday morning. Her mother still wishes she had become Catholic nun instead.

³⁷ In addition these statistics, Jaeryong Shim argues that Korea has three major premodern periods related to the rise of shamanism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. In the contemporary era, the majority religion of democratic Korea is Christianity, although new Korean religions such as Cheondogyo have also gained some prominence. Shamanism is not typically listed as a world religion and certainly not as an organized, institution religion but it is nonetheless very widespread in Korea, where it functions even if shamanism appears in the any religious population rapid social changes and the growth of various religious organizations institution challenge for shamans. Confucianism suffers from similar categorical ambiguity. While fewer Koreans claim to be Confucian on religious surveys –certainly fewer than claim Christianity and Buddhism as their religion—its impact is still strongly felt. Societal norm are based on Confucian values and a majority Koreans continue to practice ancestral rites that come from Confucianism. Yeeheum Yoon argues that to ask Koreans, “What is your religion?” may garner misleading responses as Confucianism or Shamanism are typically thought of as systems of social ethics or culture and not as religions per se. Thus, the question forces Koreans to think in terms of westernized concepts, which is not easy to figure out in the Asian setting. Yoon, Yeeheum “Contemporary Religious Situation in Korea.” 2-5. Shim, Jaeryong “Buddhist Responses to the Modern Transformation of Society in Korea” 75-76.

³⁸ While provocative, this expression is quoted directly from the source. Her observation may raise the question of whether her opinion accurately reflects the social realities to the two nuns’ orders in Korea, and exactly how hierarchal Catholic nuns’ orders are in comparison with those of Buddhist orders, but the answer to these questions is beyond the scope of this dissertation. In this context it is sufficient to observe that the nun appears to have honestly and openly expressed her own impressions.

Regarding the question, “Do you have any blood-relatives who are members of a monastic order?” it is clear that some of nuns are from large families that had a close relationship with a temple. Twenty-three nuns (19.2%) responded that this was true of their cases. One student nun said that her father is a monk³⁹ and six maintained that they had siblings who are either nuns or monks.⁴⁰ Two responded that their grandfathers were monks.⁴¹ Others cited uncles, aunts, and cousins who were in an order. One nun, who had grown up at the temple, noted that the entirety of her family is comprised of monks and nuns. This person is also a “*dongjin* renouncer (童眞出家)” —that is someone who, as a child usually around ten years of age, is declared renounced on the word of an adult. She explained “I am a *dongjin*, but when I graduated high school I decided to renounce on my own.”⁴² When she prayed intensely at a temple with her sister both of them decided to renounce. However, none of the respondents claimed that having a blood-relative who is a monk or nun was a decisive factor in their decision to pursue monastic life. Some claim that they have been more influenced by their familiarity with Buddhism and the Buddhist lifestyle. Previous religious activities and family-tides could be necessary to influence for nuns who decided to renounce this world but it is not always the case. Their renounced life reflects that many first established their independence from their parents before considering the monastic life. The majority of women have had their own careers. Most of the women

³⁹ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response no. 93 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung.

⁴⁰ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response no. 4, 9, 35, 40, 53, and 87 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung.

⁴¹ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response no. 40 and 43 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung.

⁴² Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response no. 93 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung. All survey responses were translated into English by Chungwhan Sung.

do not come from a family with relations to Buddhism. Nuns decided to follow the religious life within Buddhism not because they had grown up in Buddhist family or because they were Buddhist but because they genuinely wished to pursue a more meaningful life within the Buddhist community.

It is common etiquette in Korean culture that no one asks a monk or nun why they chose to renounce. Therefore, I was a little hesitant to inquire “Why did you become a renunciant/nun? Who or what most effected your decision?” However, this inquiry is to provide some clues to allow us to grasp what reasons, and what aspects of Buddhism, attracted them. Fortunately, they did not seem to be offended by the question and earnestly and carefully provided responses. Their motivations to renounce life are various but broadly speaking, their intentions are remarkably similar. I have observed four types of motivations.

The first grouping is of women for whom coming to grips with the concept of death is primary factor in their decision to become nuns. Three nuns in particular said that when they encountered the deaths of their father and mother, they struggled about life and death.⁴³ A nun who worked at the social welfare center and took care of older people thought about what there is after death.⁴⁴ Another nun had a job as a nurse at a big hospital. Dealing with the physical suffering of patients, she was overloaded with the emotional and physical fatigue that often accompanies hospital work. She did not want that her values in life be limited to typical secular concerns, although either career is considered both worthy and respectable in secular framework. She perceived that success at the end of the life is not

⁴³ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 41, 43 and 79 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung. All survey responses were translated into English by Chungwhan Sung.

⁴⁴ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 42 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung. All survey responses were translated into English by Chungwhan Sung.

what a person had achieved but how a person has lived. She wanted to administer to people more fundamentally and she decided to renounce.⁴⁵ Also, the volunteer work at a hospice provided for a young woman to experience watching people dying and led to her becoming a nun.⁴⁶ Almost ten renunciates designated “death” as being the primary motivation for becoming a nun.⁴⁷ More specifically, one thought, “‘what am I after my death?’ and so I decided this path.”⁴⁸ Similarly, several answers described that they felt “impermanent phenomena” or “the suffering of my unlimited desire, although desire is not all that there is.”⁴⁹

Regarding their expressed answers on open-ended questions, it seems clear to me that their monastic training has been effective. They have learned doctrinal teachings and they perform that what they have learned. For example, one of the main Buddhist term “impermanence” commonly appeared in responses of fourth-year students, while first-year nuns answered with non-Buddhist terms: “I struggled with the meeting, breaking, and collapsing of feelings.”⁵⁰ It seems that the more years of study a renunciate had, the more their answers reflected the archetype of Buddhist doctrine. These women typically had no

⁴⁵ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 105 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung. All survey responses were translated into English by Chungwhan Sung.

⁴⁶ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 41, 43 and 79 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung. All survey responses were translated into English by Chungwhan Sung.

⁴⁷ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No 2, 7, 20, 41, 42, 43, 53, 59, 79, and 105 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung. All survey responses were translated into English by Chungwhan Sung.

⁴⁸ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 53 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung. All survey responses were translated into English by Chungwhan Sung.

⁴⁹ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 88, 96, 100, and 101 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung. All survey responses were translated into English by Chungwhan Sung.

⁵⁰ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 1 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung. All survey responses were translated into English by Chungwhan Sung.

direct connection with a religious person or institution, yet they are searching for deeper meaning in their lives. They speculated about past lives, rethought the present, and then decided to prepare for their future.

The second group answered that their religious activities as a lay devotees led them to pursue the seeking of the Buddha path within only religious realms. Some of them said that when they listened to dharma talks from eminent monks or nuns they were extremely impressed by the teachings of the Buddha. Some of them decided on a nun's life during their intensive sessions of prayer at a temple.⁵¹ One happy renunciate had the chance to experience temple life as a devotee.⁵² Three nuns responded they periodically went to a temple from their childhoods.⁵³ One was a president of a Buddhist Student Association at a University who wanted to pursue the religious life more enthusiastically.⁵⁴ Almost twelve nuns communicated that monks or nuns served as their mentor in their secular life. As devotees, they consulted monks or nuns to assess the effect of the mentors' consultation on their issues, dilemmas, and daily lives. Five nuns had a communication with their own master as a mentor before they joined the monastery.⁵⁵ When they were school-age, they periodically visited and participated in religious events for youth groups, and this resulted in

⁵¹ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 40 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung. All survey responses were translated into English by Chungwhan Sung.

⁵² Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 22 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung. All survey responses were translated into English by Chungwhan Sung.

⁵³ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 34, 70 and 104 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung. All survey responses were translated into English by Chungwhan Sung.

⁵⁴ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 104 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung. All survey responses were translated into English by Chungwhan Sung.

⁵⁵ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 34, 70, 93, 98 and 102 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung. All survey responses were translated into English by Chungwhan Sung.

meetings with their masters regarding renunciation. One specifically described that she periodically sent a letter to her master from high school and got advice that eventually led to her to becoming a nun. They all had excellent mentors in their secular life who were good role models. This indicates that religious leadership is necessary in providing people with good advice regarding their spiritual path.

The third group learned of the meaningful spiritual life through numerous books and then decided to become renunciates; they did not engage in religious activities, but through the enjoyment of reading written material they thought about what are the most meaningful activities in this life.⁵⁶ Some were motivated by non-religious experience, not having had notable affiliation with temple life before pursuing the monastic path. Their exposure to Buddhism or Buddhist monastic life was through books, one specifically said, “I liked to read eminent people’s biographies and autobiographies. I read the biography of Jesus Christi, Gandhi, and Socrates and so on. The life of the Buddha is the most fascinating for me than the others. So, I decided to follow his way.”⁵⁷ When a nun was returning from a business trip, she was in a bookstore looking for a book to read while riding the bullet train home and her eye caught the title *Non-possession*.⁵⁸ The book was a bestselling long-format essay written by the famous monk Beopjeong. The main idea is that the more possessions we own, the more suffering we will be forced to endure because we naturally cultivate

⁵⁶ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 8, 16, 28, 37, 38, 44, 45, 47 49,, 77, 86, 89, 92, 106 and 112 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung. All survey responses were translated into English by Chungwhan Sung.

⁵⁷ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 77 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung. All survey responses were translated into English by Chungwhan Sung.

⁵⁸ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 28 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung. All survey responses were translated into English by Chungwhan Sung.

attachments to the things we possess. Another said that “My friend loaned me a book on the Buddha and as I read it, I simply knew that I was a Buddhist. After that I read books that described monks and nuns who excelled at meditation and dharma talk and eventually I decided.”⁵⁹ Some read Buddhist scriptures such as the Diamond Sutra. Korean Buddhism is dominated by Seon mediation, which emphasizes that people who know Buddhism through texts do not know the real truth. It indicates that any monk or nun who thinks that the monastic life is meaningful, then they also need to announce their satisfaction through whatever possible methods. Moreover, the monastic life emphasizes that intensive mediation is a prerequisite to knowing the Buddha’s teachings and what Buddhism is.

Perhaps ironically, the motivation for renunciation is often not derived from primarily from altruistic social goals but rather from a desire to pursue more personal goals such as making a more meaningful life for themselves.⁶⁰ Even if a nun was engaged in social activities to reform or improve society, her individual motivation may not have been to improve society.⁶¹ Only two respondents claimed that they engage in these activities in order

⁵⁹ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 16 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung. All survey responses were translated into English by Chungwhan Sung.

⁶⁰ This is a non-translated answer from non-Korean nun at Unmunsa first year. Her motivation is very clear which I did not figure out in the Korean nuns’ written. I think it is the difference of between Westerner and Easterner. For instance, for Korean people euphemism or humble expression is still the one of the most ethical behavior. “I really wanted to help and improve the world when I was younger but I came to realize eventually that only material aide was not addressing the deep social and spiritual problem that underlay all other problems. When I began practicing Buddhism and studying the Buddha’s teachings, I felt very deeply this was the path to alleviated suffering for all beings. I wanted to ordain because becoming a nun would let me devote my life energy to practice which is the same as helping all beings attain freedom from suffering.” Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 36 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung.

⁶¹ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 90 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung. All survey responses were translated into English by Chungwhan Sung.

to have a more meaningful life.⁶² In the Mahayana tradition, saving people from suffering in life is the great goal for monks and nuns, though their individual motives may differ. Typically, monastic life has reinforced in them the idea of the importance of contributing to people's mindfulness.

The fourth group renounced because of their philosophical interests. Their answers seem to be very intentional, yet they expressed that their motivation seemed to be incidental. "When I was traveling I heard 'you are the Buddha',"⁶³ one respondent wrote. She clarified that she wanted freedom and wanted to be mindful and that when she decided to study in the department of philosophy, she wanted to learn the ultimate truth. Some of them suggested that they decided to renounce because they have philosophical interests. "'Who made the world?' 'What is the ultimate foundation of the world?' These questions served to foster my interest in religion. So I redirected my inquisitiveness in a more "acceptable" direction and studied, eventually majoring in philosophy."⁶⁴ One nun said that everyone is considered to be equally spiritually advanced, capable of perceiving and being undistracted by their outer physical and social characteristics.⁶⁵ To find this path, she is pursuing the life in the monastery. She negated the difference of class, gender values, and hierarchy. She asks its

⁶² Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 5 and 114 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung. All survey responses were translated into English by Chungwhan Sung.

⁶³ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 23 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung. All survey responses were translated into English by Chungwhan Sung.

⁶⁴ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 116 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung. All survey responses were translated into English by Chungwhan Sung.

⁶⁵ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 116 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung. All survey responses were translated into English by Chungwhan Sung.

initiates to transcend social distinctions and the privileges they entail. Through this, she knows egoism is the final hurdle in the search for liberation.

The key philosophy of Buddhism is self-consciously expressed in the everyday behavior and speech of contemporary. They want to embrace the idea of impermanence and the ephemeral nature of reality. As one informant says, “Just as other people, I think of myself as respectable. During my whole lifetime I will change or not change. No one, however, knows when it will end. I want to live life to the fullest and live without regrets.”⁶⁶ Most of their responses centered on securing self-realization and a better method for mental activity, more vital than that of the secular circle. They were animated solely by the desire for a real exploration of enlightenment. Thus, it was the religious life as such that they recognized to be their authentic work. This way is not an escape from an existence that they could no longer endure but the life they preferred above all others. So, they considered their motivation a privilege in terms of freedom, insight, and mindfulness. Young women who decided to become renunciates and who train at Unmunsa Monastic College are dedicated to being enthusiastic students. Nuns do not abandon the world; rather they clearly recognize this world with respect; it is not the casting off of this world but understanding unequivocally the true meaning of this world. In so doing, the truth will emerge accompanied by the Buddha’s teaching. Their every step is taken toward a more meaningful and fulfilling life based on the foundational values of Buddhism.

⁶⁶ Conversation with third year nun at Unmunsa August 2008.

Nuns' Views on Monastic Life

Women who leave home for homelessness in the Doctrine and Discipline taught by the Tathagata are capable of reaching the (four) stages on the Path of Liberation. (Vin II 254) ⁶⁷

Monks, the aim of the religious life is not to gain material profit, nor to win veneration, nor to reach the highest morality, nor to be capable of the highest mental concentration. Monks, the ultimate end of the religious life is the unshakeable liberation of the mind. This is the essence. This is the goal. (M 1 192-197) ⁶⁸

Monastic life is usually regarded as having a higher level of virtue than a secular life, from when the Buddha approved monks and nuns, and layman and laywomen for the social unit of Buddhism.⁶⁹ The attachment and confusion that secular lifestyles tend to breed must be overcome to achieve spiritual liberation. The secular lifestyle is less conducive to the final goal of nirvana, and is, therefore, an unsuitable lifestyle for someone seeking to achieve enlightenment as a final goal. Individuals in the monastic community share a life under the guidance of dharma and a monastic code that leads nuns into renunciation of their involvement in normal worldly activities this renunciation should ultimately lead to humility. Renunciates' vigor could be used more fruitfully for spiritual practice rather than for general family life responsibilities. It is an effect of cultivating the spiritual path. Keeping with monasticism as a superior way of life and, ideally, Buddhists should respect and aspire to join in this life or some future life.

Under the guidelines of the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, the lives of nuns at the Unmunsa are controlled by two main texts. The *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya* elucidates 348 rules

⁶⁷ Wijayaratna, Mohan. *Buddhist Monastic Life : According to the Texts of the Theravada Tradition*. Translated by Claude Grangier and Steven Collins. (New York: Cambridge University Press. 1990.), 156.

⁶⁸ Wijayaratna, Mohan. *Buddhist Monastic Life : According to the Texts of the Theravada Tradition*. Translated by Claude Grangier and Steven Collins. (New York: Cambridge University Press. 1990.), 158.

⁶⁹ For example, Harvey says the saṅga is the best field of karmic fruitfulness. Peter Harvey *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues*. (New York: Cambridge University Press. 2007), 21-23, 89.

for nuns while maintaining 250 rules for monks.⁷⁰ *The Rules of Purity for the Chan Monastery* is guidelines for life in Seon practice.⁷¹ However, keeping the monastic code is the most important value, but this rule is provocative in some parts particularly with regard to the status of women. I queried respondents and intended to analyze their interpretation of the meaning of practice and monastic life. The first inquiry is that of how nuns stand on the issue of precepts. Do they try to live according to *vinaya* texts? What do they think practice means? Perhaps the better question to ask is: what does their religious life tell us about how they interpret Buddha's teachings? How has this shaped their activities and involvement with society?

The results to the survey question, "Do you think that maintaining the precepts in contemporary society is still useful or meaningful?" indicate how nuns maintain meaningful

⁷⁰ Vinaya literally means 'leading out', 'education', and 'discipline' and interpretively means that one led out (from suffering)." Vinaya is the disciplinary text that is composed of the chapters for monks and nuns (bhikṣuvibhaṅga bhikṣunivibhaṅga) and the procedures (explained in detail in the skandhakas). In addition, the term vinayas can be broadly used for all texts related to monastic discipline and the set of rules taken from them. Sometime different schools can interpret the same rule differently. For example, all schools agree that 'a wrong woman must not be ordained' but do not agree who is 'wrong woman' is. *The Dharmaguptakavinaya* (四分律 vinaya in Four Parts) was transmitted into China by Buddhayasas between 410-412 C.E. Buddhayasas memorized the text by reciting it. Zhu Fornian translated it into Chinese. Four schools of vinayas were transmitted into China and Buddhist communities but were gradually centralized into one vinaya. As a result, the Dharmaguptakavinaya has been the sole source of vinaya. Heirman, Ann. "Vinaya: from India to China" in *The Spread of Buddhism*. ed. Heirman, Ann and Bumvacher, (Peter Stephan. Boston: Brill: 2007) 167-176.

⁷¹ *Chanyuan qinggui* (Rules of Purity for the Chan Monastery) is the earliest extant Chan monastic code which was compiled in 1130 C.E. by the monk Changlu Zongze (?-1107). Immediately after its compilation, this text became extremely influential. It includes a preface and ten fascicles. The preface is a statement of Zongze's purpose for compiling such a text. Fascicle 1, which is the longest of the ten, stipulates the ritual protocols of everyday monastic life, such as taking precepts and attending meals and tea ceremonies. Fascicle 2 details proper procedures for offering sermons and chanting sessions and for organizing summer retreats. Fascicles 3 and 4 discuss the roles of monastic officials in detail. Fascicle 5 contains a lengthy description of how tea ceremonies are to be performed. Fascicle 6 details ritual procedures for burning incense, reading sutras, and delivering letters. Fascicle 7 sets forth rules and etiquette for abbots, who hold the most important official post in the monastery. The rest of the texts are appendices. Yifa. *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China: An Annotated Translation and Study of the Chanyuan qinggui*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii press. 2002), xix-xxi.

lives of abiding by the monastic code. Among 118 respondents, only one answered “no,”⁷² and four circled both “yes and no” at the same time.⁷³ The remainder circled “yes.” It seems to me that the nuns did not hesitate to answer whether or not it is important to maintain the meaning of their vows as a renunciate under the Buddha’s teachings.

The survey results showed that the majority of nuns considered that abiding by the precepts is still foundational and meaningful in contemporary society. It reflects that the obvious majority of nuns take Buddha’s guidelines of religious life to heart, for their founder held that keeping the precepts and devotion to the way are inseparable within the monastery. Others reasoned that “if I do not follow the precepts, then there is no value in being a nun. Especially if I am not intent on maintaining the principle of the rule, I cannot do anything for the next step, such as studying the Buddha’s teaching and practice of meditation. Moreover, it is impossible to save people headed toward confusion in contemporary society. Keeping the monastic code is more important than my life”⁷⁴ is a compelling justification for maintaining the precepts; it is not simply a matter of following traditional wisdom. It is a decision to lead a meaningful and effective monastic life. The monastic code is for nuns the foundation of the monastic life. Myeongseong emphasizes that “Everyone in monasticism must perceive the principal intentions of regulations before you can understand them. For what reason and what purpose did the Buddha regulate each one;

⁷² Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 36 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung.

⁷³ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 7, 22, 102, and 114 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung.

⁷⁴ Interview nun Jigong an alumni Unmunsa Monastic College and the Monastic Code institution (Bohyeon Yulwon). Busan Daily newspaper. January 30, 2010. (<http://news20.busan.com/news/newsController.jsp?subSectionId=1010090200&newsId=20100129000184>)

one has to search one's conscience and consciousness even though the monastic code was formulated before the Common Era. Why is it still meaningful and important in the monastery? It is also important to see how other people applied the regulations. Only then might you be able to discern where some regulations might be inappropriate and modified by yourself."⁷⁵ Monastic code provides a valid means of avoiding the sensual attachments that can be a very real distraction to religious life. Nuns must be acutely aware that any unsuitable relational ties are an intensely emotional attachment and therefore a distraction and they must intentionally in each and every activity treat all life with respect.

The monastic code is used to purify the mind of illusions, desire, and dislike. The ideal behind this method is to impart an internalized mode of living, rather than an external set of regulations to be obeyed. The present moment in the here and now is strongly emphasized in their lives. Every single moment is considered practice in the monastery. Practice is not the type of activity, but it is what is done with the heart. Nuns say that in the present is the only time when something can be done. "Do what is necessary at this time, and then all necessary things will be done. No 'maybe' or 'later'."⁷⁶ From their viewpoint of the religious life my inquiry seems to be pointless, "Which of the following items in everyday life do you consider a Buddhist practice? Tea Ceremony, Flower Arranging, Calligraphy, Cooking, Clearing, All of them." Most answered "all of them" and several respondents additionally described that everything is practice.

There is not even one second to think of anything else. We do not know what day it is or whether the season has passed. Physically, the life at Unmunsa monastic college

⁷⁵ Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong 16-18.

⁷⁶ Dialogue with a student in July 2008.

is extremely demanding. At some point one realizes that one has become lean and fit, and one has begun to adopt a correct posture. To put it simply, it would be correct to think that the system is rigorous because it delves into every detail of the students' lives. Until the day one leaves, one is not released.⁷⁷

Thus, purity and cleanliness in not only inner but outer aspects are core concerns in many dimensions of monastic life. There is no dichotomy between the body and mind. For example, while a nun cleans the floor, the heart is also being polished. Cleaning seems to be merely an act, but it serves total cleanliness, spiritual as well as physical. From this perspective the inquiry “What practice is most important to maintaining the stature of nuns among doctrinal study, meditation, keeping the monastic code?” gathered clear answers. Even though I asked for them, following “the most important element in their monastic lives” all responded that not just one of them is important for nuns. Monastic codes lead to the promotion of a favorable environment for the religious life. The rules are necessary to insure the continued existence of individual nuns both for their inner progress and for harmonization within the community. This is an essential foundation that makes it possible to pursue doctrinal study and the practice of meditation. According to the Buddha’s basic teaching, monastic codes lead nuns to appropriate behavior, the ethical conduction (*sila*) that is the foundation for mental practice (*samadhi*), and mental practice is to reach the highest wisdom (*prajna*). Performing these three simultaneously, this eventually leads the individual nuns to be free from all attachments or obstacles and to reach the apex of religious life.⁷⁸

That the renunciates describe their training and practice in such positive terms obviously impressed me regarding the meaningfulness they experience in their religious

⁷⁷ Dialogue with a student in July 2008.

⁷⁸Peter Harvey *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues*. (New York: Cambridge University Press. 2007), 122.

lives. So, it is naturally expected that the responses do not show the negative perspectives of daily life at the Monastic College. Their everyday life over the years reveals a sustained dedication to simplicity, along with hard work and caring for others. On the whole, their reflections upon their lives as nuns are positive and suggest that it is their religious identity that is the momentous and fulfilling aspects of their lives. Since the majority of nuns expressed such positive views, the responses to the interviews and survey questions about what constitutes the ideal life and the ideal nun are quite similar, even though their methods of expression in Korean are also rich with diversity with regard to their background, motivation, personality, age, and notions of Buddhist practice.

The Buddhist path is diverse. However, the common denominator is awareness of the here and now, which if applied and cultivated helps nuns to see clearly, transforming the way they are and how they live. This suggests these nuns are trying to live according to Buddhist teachings. The opinion that they invoke most frequently is, “suffering is diminished and mindfulness is increased when each moment is regarded as an opportunity to practice.” Their everyday practical values are based on the moral principles of Buddhism; that is, they live and move toward overcoming greed, hatred, and delusion. These three are the roots of unwholesome actions and the cause of suffering. They are training to overcome greed by increasing their generosity and sharing through self-control from attachment. Hatred is diminished by the communal life they live, wherein their self-restraint from behavior that might harm another and cultivation of compassion is conspicuous. They are awakened and cultivate the mental clarity inherent in living life in the “here and now” by overcoming delusion. This is the entire Buddhist path. It is not only the individual practitioner’s path, but is characteristic of all social relationships and ethics. A nun says,

“We are Buddha and the only way to live is to display the compassion and wisdom of a Buddha; no need to wait for another time, another retreat, another life.”⁷⁹

When I asked them, “What features are embodied in the ideal nuns?” their responses were clearly simple, even though their background stories and comments animated the rich and colorful details of their individual lives. Their expression of what is the ideal nun and religious life could be summarized in a single sentence: “While keeping one’s own motivation to live an endless life by following the Buddha’s life; one acts to preserve the monastic code, study the Buddha’s teaching, and meditate.” They frequently quoted for me Myeongseong’s instruction, “Mediation is the Buddha’s mind and his teaching is the scripture. The doctrinal study is not possibly existent outside the Buddha’s mind.”⁸⁰ They posit that meditation and study are not opposed. In everyday life there is nothing but mediation.

The only one distinction of the ideal monastic life regards the inquiry, “Who is the most respected nun in the modern and contemporary nuns’ community?” Among eighty four respondents, more than twenty cited “anonymous nuns” who dedicated themselves to their religious pursuits no matter how difficult and poor their conditions. Five nuns told me that their master is their most respected role model without specifying the name of their master. Twenty five among fifty seven nuns named Myeongseong; their reason is that she has been providing an equal opportunity for education and even surpassed the equality by

⁷⁹ Dialogue with a student nun in summer 2008.

⁸⁰ Dialogue with several student nuns in summer 2008.

expertly managing and leading Unmunsa Monastic College.⁸¹ Their great dedication probably comes from knowing that educational equality eventually can be a catalyst to reducing any discrimination and extending their spiritual paths. They well perceive that Buddhist nuns in the Jogye Order of Korea have a lineage which could be possible due to systemized asceticism and education. They also know that several factors actually helped the survival of their authority, pointing out the nuns' cohesiveness, their efficient use and management of temples during economically difficult times, and also their open minded approach toward the public. With the equality of educational possibilities, there is also a well-known sense in Korean Buddhism that nuns tend to work harder than the monks and, among themselves, set higher standards of behavior as well.⁸² For example, I talked with a monk who served as a lecturer at a monk's monastic seminary at the Beopjusa for four years. He explained that if a monk doesn't like a seminary, he can usually just leave and go to another one. If a nun leaves, she must have an incredibly good reason for doing so if she wants to continue at another seminary or institution. The total number of nuns studying at the monastic seminary is higher than the total number of monks, even though the total population of monks and nuns is almost even.⁸³

⁸¹ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 5, 8, 12, 15, 36, 42, 45, 46, 49, 67,70, 71, 72, 74,77, 78, 83, 85, 94, 95, 106, 112, 113, 115, and 119 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung. The other nuns were Ilyeop, who was respected by ten respondants, and Beophui, who was respected by eight. Daehang, Sooyok, Jeonghaeng, Hyebye, and Myeom were mentioned as respected nuns, also.

⁸² Throughout my field work, this sentiment was expressed to me on several occasions by not only student nuns but teacher monks and nuns alike.

⁸³ According to the Jogye Order statistics, the total of student nuns among the five monastic colleges is 425 while the total of student monks among thirteen monastic colleges is 366 in 2008.

Nuns seem to have attained their rightful position in the Buddhist community and although some may argue that they deserve more equal treatment, it is quite easy to see that they have created their culture and a system of their own. The Korean nuns' community is an exemplar in terms of gender equality of religious community.⁸⁴ Despite this fact, though Korean nuns are treated relatively equally to monks compared to other countries, do they still face some obstacles? I asked to know more about their actual lives than their ideas. How do they live day to day as Buddhists? What does it mean for them at an experiential level to be a Buddhist woman practitioner? The responses to the open question, "Is there any difference between monks and nuns as practitioners in the monastic community?" illustrate how these women, as Buddhist nuns, see themselves. Among eighty five respondents, seventeen answered with a firm "no,"⁸⁵ and eighteen, conflating sex and gender, said "gender is just a biological difference."⁸⁶ Twelve said that the environment and conditions at monks' monasteries seem to be substantially different than those at nunneries.⁸⁷ This differentiation is derived from the lay devotee's inclination toward donating more funds to monk's temples than nun's temples. Nine nuns answered that monks are usually focused on obtaining actual political power, but nuns used their efforts to pursue religious goals. Monks

⁸⁴ Martine Batchelor, based on her journey, illustrated about the status of female practitioners in Buddhism in contemporary Asia. In her opinion, Korean nun practitioners are ninety percent equal to monks. Batchelor also wrote that Taiwanese nuns are eighty five percent equal, Japanese practitioners are sixty percent equal, Tibetan practitioners are forty-five percent equal and Thai practitioners are fifteen percent equal. Batchelor, Martine. *Women on the Buddhist Path*. (London: Thorsons, 2002), xiii.

⁸⁵ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 4, 6, 9, 10, 12, 44, 45, 47, 61, 65, 66, 104, 105, 108, 109, 110, and 112 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung.

⁸⁶ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 5, 7, 22, 27, 30, 34, 38, 39, 46, 48, 51, 67, 69, 75, 77, 94, 95, 105, document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung.

⁸⁷ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 8, 13, 14, 17, 20, 52, 64, 76, 98, 99, 106, and 114 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung.

have said that the lifestyle of a nun is more fulfilling, and for nuns, their habits and attitudes are the most expedient way to their goals.⁸⁸

A majority of nuns said there is no difference between monks and nuns beyond biological differences. This indicates that by wearing robes they are viewed as remaining celibate and thus, the perception of nuns as sexual objects is ultimately rejected. They undoubtedly identify that Buddhism is egalitarian and gender-neutral at the very least. The specific kind of differentiation between men and women is at the physical, not mental, level. Being male or female is only a matter of appearance and the proliferation of this distinction is useless. The aspects of phenomenological experience as either male or female are nonexistent in the ultimate truth of Buddhist thought. Maleness and femaleness are not essential ingredients of humans, but labels denoting relative and conditioned states. Since Buddhist exegesis has been used to assert that these teachings are those of the Buddha himself, it seems reasonable to conclude that there is no reason to discriminate against women.

According to Alan Sponberg, the Buddha's perspective is one of "soteriological inclusiveness,"⁸⁹ a most basic and a most distinctively Buddhist attitude regarding the status of women. In this view, the difference of sexuality, like that of the caste system, is rejected by the Buddha, and presents no barrier to attaining the Buddhist final goal. Sponberg argues that inclusive attitudes toward women are addressed under the same philosophical principles with which the Buddha also addressed his rejection of caste distinction. It is an attempt to

⁸⁸ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 23, 28, 42, 49, 56, 58, 90, 93, and 117 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung.

⁸⁹ Sponberg, Alan. "Attitudes toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism." In *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezón. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.), 8.

locate virtue and spiritual potential beyond conventional social and gender distinctions. He argues that even this attitude is probably “the most basic and also the most distinctively Buddhist attitude regarding the status of women”⁹⁰ throughout Buddhist textual sources, “inclusiveness” asserts neither sameness nor a lack of hierarchical differentiation. Thus, women have equal access to the Dharma on the one hand, yet on the other are still considered both socially and spiritually inferior to the male sex among contemporary Asian Buddhists.

This attitude represents socially constructed gender roles, as opposed to biologically innate sexual differences. Like Sponberg, many Western scholars argue whether or not Buddhism or the Buddha is equally accessible to women.⁹¹ However, nuns in Korea intrinsically think of themselves as having no gender differences from monks. They understand biological differences but the differentiation is applied as a basis for a set of expectations and characterizations of their religious activities. Just as age is also not recognized as multifarious in the actual monastery, gender differentiation is not important because what matters most is the “maturity of one's soul.”

Physical differences in women's bodies are negated by the more technical matters of Buddhism, such as in the garments they wear and the number of precepts learned. They do

⁹⁰ Sponberg, Alan. "Attitudes toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism." In *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezón. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.), 8-13.

⁹¹ Rhys David, Mabel Bode, and Isabelle Horner argue that Buddhism is liberating for women by providing the opportunity of renunciation. The Buddha provided that women could become rational beings beyond sexuality and recognized their intellectual equality, suggesting that they can reach the highest spiritual state just as men can. Second generation scholars Dianna Paul and Karen Lang criticized the view. They argue that women are subordinated to men, and by men, in texts that represent the androcentric perspective. Wilson, Liz. *Charming Cadavers: Horrific Figurations of the Feminine in Indian Buddhist Hagiographic Literature*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.), 137.

follow some additional rules: in daily life, nuns abide by nearly 100 more monastic codes than monks, who follow around 250,⁹² and nuns also wear five articles of clothing, while the men wear three. Traditionally, a monk wears three articles of clothing, thus minimizing the hassle, distraction and costs of his outfit, but nuns must don five pieces of clothing, including a vest that is worn tightly to press down her breasts.⁹³ Iljin explained, “A woman’s physical body is more complex than a man’s. But there is nothing we cannot do as female practitioners.”⁹⁴ This differentiation in daily life does not influence the nuns, nor are there discrepancies in the religious symbolic or hierarchal structure. The formal robe system in the Jogye Order incorporates no symbols that indicate differences in gender. The Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism revised the formal robe system in 2007. The formal robe has lines, both vertical and horizontal that symbolize the nun’s rank; more vertical lines indicate

⁹² While developed in a patriarchal context, the additional rules are more aimed at provide more suitable circumstances for women’s practice than at discriminating against nuns. Heirman says that when female practitioners were allowed to join monastic communities as fully ordained *nuns*, rules had to be made for the newly created *nuns’ monastic community*. On the one hand, *nuns* identified themselves as full members of the *monastic community*, and adopted the rules of *monks*. They abandoned their family life and embraced an ascetic alternative. On the other hand, female practitioners were, at least physically, different from males. Their daily lives could not be an exact duplicate of the way of life in monks’ monastic communities. Therefore, “additions to or adaptations of the rules” were necessarily required. A main point in this process was “how to avoid opposition to the presence of women in the Buddhist community.” Heirman Ann, “Yijing’s View on the *Bhikṣunīs’* Standard Robes.” *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal*. (Taipei: Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2008), 147.

⁹³ All vinaya texts specify that nuns must have five robes as a standard set. They are required to have the robes for their ordination ceremony. The robes mark their nun identity, and thereby they acquire a high symbolic meaning. Monks have to wear a standard set of three robes: inner robe (*antarvāsaka*), upper robe (*uttarāsaṅga*), and outer cloak (*saṃghāṭī*). For nuns, all vinaya require two more robes in order to make a set of five, but these two robes are not the same in all vinaya traditions. The *Dharmaguptakavinaya vinaya* requires two additional robes that cover the shoulder, and a bathing cloth. Heirman Ann, “Yijing’s View on the *Bhikṣunīs’* Standard Robes.” *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal*. (Taipei: Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2008), 154-156.

⁹⁴ Dialogue with Iljin summer in 2008.

a higher position. Monks and nuns wear the same kind of garment in the formal robe system.⁹⁵

Other gender-specific laws found in Buddhism to compensate for the physical differences involve the number of levels taken to complete ordination. While monks only have two steps, nuns must undertake a total of three to be ordained.⁹⁶ To overcome historical discontinuity and get authenticable accounts, Korean nuns have continuously worked to fulfill the procedural requirements for dual ordination as specified in the vinaya. This is derived from the specific episode, “according to the *vinaya*, there was a particular case of a married woman who asked for ordination without knowing that she was pregnant. Her pregnancy came to light only after ordination. Hence a rule was laid down and women have to go through probationary training for two years.”⁹⁷ Upholding the rule that a probationer (式叉摩那 *śikṣamāṇā*) must be a part of the six rules for two years prior to their full ordination, the Jogye Order began to hold a separate ordination ceremony for them. Student nuns at

⁹⁵ During the process of revision, some monks, such as Jongsan Jongsan 宗山 one of the elder monks of the Jogye Order, publically objected that monks cannot wear the same vertical lines as nuns. The Jogye Order accepted the nuns’ requests of deleting the gender discrimination by incorporating identical vertical lines in the robe system. Kwon, Oyeong “Eojji biguniwa gateun gasa ipgenna? 어찌 비구니와 같은 가사 입겠나? (How Do Monks and Nuns Wear the Same Number of Strips on Their Kasas?).” *Beopbo Sinmun* 法寶新聞 (November 29, 2007) (<http://www.beopbo.com/article/view.php?Hid=54141&Hcate1=1&Hcate2=7&Hcmode=view>).

⁹⁶ The *Dharmaguptaka vinaya* describes three steps that lead to the full ordination: the stage of novice (*śrāmaṇerī*, *shamini* 沙彌尼), of probationer (*shichamona* 式叉摩那 *śikṣamāṇā*), and the fully ordained nun (*bhikṣuṇī*). The *Dharmaguptaka vinaya* states that the probationer has to study the precepts for two years. This is one of the eight ‘special rules’ (*gurudharma*) said to have been accepted by Mahāprajāpatī as a condition for the creation of the nuns’ monastic community. As for the reason why a woman, unlike a man, has to go through an additional stage, the *vinayas* have very different opinions. The Pāli *Vinaya*, the *Mahīśāsaka vinaya*, and the *Dharmaguptaka vinaya* explain that the probationary period is necessarily required to learn about right and wrong. The *Mahāsāṃghika vinaya* states that this period is merely to determinate the right age of the candidate. What this period exactly implies is still unclear. Heirman Ann, “Becoming a Nun in the Dharmaguptaka Tradition” *Buddhist Studies Review*.(25, 2. 2008), 180–182.

⁹⁷ Dialogue with Iljin summer in 2008.

Unmunsa are ordained in the centralized ceremony of the Jogye Order as probationers under qualified vinaya master nuns at the end of the second year. Compared to monks, nuns are required to follow more detailed additional rules in order to follow the monastic life, but these do not substantially limit access to any possibility for spiritual advancement in real-world circumstances.⁹⁸ Student nuns think that there is the less discrepancy between the religious ideal and women's activities for spiritual advancement. As Hongryong, a teacher nun at Unmunsa, says, “the spiritual ideal is that women are as capable as men of attaining full enlightenment.”⁹⁹ Korean nuns think they have both the same spiritual limitations and the same spiritual powers as men because the Buddha prescribed the same teachings to both males and females equally.

Even if the majority of student nuns think there is no reason for the discrimination against their gender, their pursuit of the religious life is sometimes fraught with unfair situations in cultural aspects and institutional subordination. Their answers of the different circumstances and the monks’ inclination to political power are at the root of the distinction. Nuns also point out that, in general, the scale of monks’ monasteries is larger than that of nunneries. Traditionally, all twenty-five Jogye order head temples have monks as abbots. Monks’ financial situation is much more abundant than nuns. This is a result of monks dominating centralized political power. Thus, they live in comfortable or more luxurious environments. This aspect is also revealed as a consequence of gender inequality. As secular

⁹⁸ In this ceremony the candidate receives the six rules based on the *Dharmaguptakavinaya*, that is, the vow not to engage in: (1) sexual intercourse, (2) stealing, (3) killing a human, (4) lying about one’s spiritual achievements, (5) eating at an improper time—that is, after noon, and (6) consumption of alcohol. These vows are virtually identical to the ones undertaken to enter the novice period. Heirman Ann, “Becoming a Nun in the Dharmaguptaka Tradition” *Buddhist Studies Review*.(25, 2. 2008), 184.

⁹⁹ Dialogue with Hongryong summer in 2008.

general laws and rights dictate in Korea, males and females are nearly equal, even though this is not actually fact or true within Korean society. By the same token, monks and nuns are not equal in matters of political status/influence.

Statistical study shows that nuns perceive themselves as discriminated against in lived religious contexts. More than half (62.1%) agreed there is still discrimination against them in the Buddhist monastery. Thirty three of eighty seven (37.9%) said that there is no discrimination based on gender-differentiation.¹⁰⁰ I further asked the open-ended question that “if you think nuns are discriminated from monks would you explain the specific discrimination?”

Thirty one of fifty eight nuns responded that they are discriminated from monks, and gave detailed reasons why they believe this is so. I divide their areas of exclusion based upon three criteria: discrimination based upon exegesis of monastic code texts, exclusion from the political power within the Order, and gender discrimination based upon individual monks’ attitudes and behavior. These are not necessarily exclusive categories and, indeed, one response indicated that both power in the Order and social awareness were at fault for inequality.¹⁰¹

Nine of thirty three nuns pointed out that nuns are excluded from the actual political power within the Jogye Order (9 of 31 respondents).¹⁰² Eleven nuns specified that discrimination of nuns is merely a reflection of male privilege in patriarchal society (11 of

¹⁰⁰ See Table 5-3.

¹⁰¹ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 8 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung.

¹⁰² Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 23, 27, 45, 49, 52, 56, 88, 100, and 101 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung.

31 respondents).¹⁰³ Nine nuns expressed that nuns should show formal homage to monks based on the Vinaya accounts (9 of 31 respondents).¹⁰⁴ This account is derived from “the eight rules” (*gurudharma*).¹⁰⁵

Five years after the Buddha’s attainment of enlightenment, his aunt and foster mother Mahāprajāpatī Gotami asked that women also be allowed to “go forth from the home to the homeless life” and be ordained as Buddhist nuns—to shave their heads, to put on monastic robes, and to join the monastic community. At first the request was refused but eventually the institution of the nuns’ order was permitted.¹⁰⁶ However, the nuns were required to accept eight special rules as a precondition for their admission to the order. The Buddha granted Mahāprajāpatī’s request to join the order, purportedly on the condition that she agree to accept the eight special rules.¹⁰⁷ The first special rule that ‘A nun has been

¹⁰³ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 1, 3, 7, 8, 38, 42, 43, 58, 75, 76, 90, 105, and 116 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung.

¹⁰⁴ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 8, 12, 18, 20, 22, 34, 53, 92, and 119 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung.

¹⁰⁵ Pali vinaya text, the *Cullavagga*, provides crucial sources for nuns when they are first ordained from the Buddha. This is related to their status in Buddhism and the text has been one of the most frequently quoted and referenced textual sources with regard to gender issues in the study of Buddhism by Western scholars.

¹⁰⁶ Following Mahāprajāpatī’s ordination, thousands of women became nuns. Among these early nuns, many were renowned for their extraordinary attainments such as Khema for wisdom, Dhammadinna for teaching, Pacacara for monastic discipline, Kisa Gautami for asceticism, Nanda for meditation, Bhadda for past-life recall, and Uppalavanna for supernatural powers. Ohnuma, Reiko. “Debt to the Mother: A Neglected Aspect of the Founding of the Buddhist Nuns’ Order.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. 74. 4. 2006, 861-901.

¹⁰⁷ (1) A nun has been ordained even one hundred years must rise up and salute with joined hands do homage to a monk even if he was ordained that very day.

(2) Nuns must not hold their rains-retreat in a place where there is no monk.

(3) Nuns must request instruction from the monks twice each month.

(4) Monks must declare the faults they have seen, heard, and suspected before the order of monks at the conclusion of the rains-retreat.

(5) Suspended nuns must be reinstated before a quorum of twenty monks and twenty nuns.

(6) The full ordination of nuns must be conducted by both orders; first by ten nuns and then by ten monks.

(7) Nuns must not revile monks.

ordained even one hundred years must rise up and salute with joined hands do homage to a monk even if he was ordained that very day' is still provocative and arguably controversial in the monastery as well as in scholarship in Buddhism. These rules appear to relegate nuns to a position of abject inferiority in relation to the monks, and generally male monastic institutions were put in control of monastic women. But from a positive perspective, these rules, while representing institutional subordination, do not represent inherent barriers to women's spiritual development or spiritual subordination. However they are frequently cited as the source of the unequal status of nuns and monks in Buddhist societies. More broadly, the rules are seen as symbolically revealing the subordinated status of women in Buddhism.

Nuns at Unmunsa know that "this is unfair and old-fashioned. As secular age at the monastery is not important it does not need to be respected for monks simply because they are male. The only important thing is how much monks or nuns are genuinely executing their religious life and how long they are doing should be only the criteria for homage."¹⁰⁸ Interestingly, but not surprisingly, no one pointed out the other rules specifically. Even though they specified the eight special rules, they are complaining about only the first one. Rather, as Korean Buddhist nuns, they practice rule six, dual ordination. As I explored in chapter four, nuns regard their dual ordination as proud evidence of their religious authority. Several nuns stated that Korean Buddhism is almost unique in their preservation of the Buddha's principle in the teaching and acting.

(8) Nuns must not admonish monks, although monks may admonish nuns. Heirman, Ann. "Vinaya: from India to China" in *The Spread of Buddhism* (ed.) Heirman, Ann and Bumvacher, Peter Stephan (Boston: Brill, 2007), 167-202.

¹⁰⁸ Dialogue with a student nun. July 2008.

Scholars' argument about the eight special rules should be categorized into two camps: that these rules are not formulated by the Buddha but must have been added later,¹⁰⁹ or scholars advocate that the rules should be understood in the Buddha's contemporary social context. At that time, women could not make their independent decision and so they have to be guided and protected.¹¹⁰ Moreover, independent nuns separated from monks would be vulnerable in actual life and impractical in the religious practice. Therefore, the Buddha allowed that nuns have to get advice or knowledge from monks. Peter Harvey points out that the first rule also appeared in Jain nuns' orders.¹¹¹ Thus, he argued "this rule arose mainly as a wish not to go too much against the grain of the current views of the relationship between men and women."¹¹²

No matter which stance, according to Alan Sponberg, it shows "institutional androcentrism" in Buddhism.¹¹³ Women can pursue a full-time religious career, but only within a carefully regulated institutional structure that preserves and reinforces the

¹⁰⁹ Akira Hirakawa argues that according to the text of the Bhikkunikkhandaka "when the Buddha, in response to Mahāprajāpatī Gotami's request, allowed women to become nuns, he also set forth the eight gurudharmas. However, their contents indicate that they were actually formulated later." Hirakawa Akira. *Monastic Discipline for the Buddhist Nuns*. (Patna: K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute 1982), 37. Based on Hirakawa's textual research, Tsomo, Wilson, and Inyoung etc. agreed this view. Tsomo, "The Bhiksuni Issue" in *Sakyadhita: Daughters of the Buddha*. (New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1988.) edited by Karma Lekshe Tsomo. 215-224. Wilson, Liz. *Charming Cadavers: Horrific Figurations of the Feminine in Indian Buddhist Hagiographic Literature*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.) Chung, In Young. "A Buddhist View of Women: A Comparative Study of the Rules for Bhikṣunīs and Bhikṣus based on the Chinese Prātimokṣa," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 6 (1999): 29–105.

¹¹⁰ Tsedroen, Jampa. *A Record of the First International Conference of Buddhist Nuns*. (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1988), 47-48.

¹¹¹ Peter Harvey. *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 388.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 388.

¹¹³ Sponberg, Alan. "Attitudes toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism." *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezón. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 13-18.

conventionally accepted social standards under male authority and female subordination. This attitude is focused not on women themselves, but on a perceived threat to the integrity of the monastic institution as it existed within the broader social community.¹¹⁴ Therefore, “for all its commitment to inclusiveness at the doctrinal level, institutional Buddhism was not able to or saw no reason to challenge prevailing attitudes about gender roles in society.”¹¹⁵

Overall, nuns, according to the eight special rules, always have to show respect formally to monks and are dependent on them for ceremonies and are under their protection. Sometimes, this rule is invoked indicating that the status of nuns is inferior. For example, as I previously mentioned, when Jongsan was against the same formal robe system in the Jogye Order, his claims were based on these rules. He stated that according to the eight special rules, nuns must observe these rules because they are written down in the text. Nevertheless, the Jogye Order formulated the same formal robe system by eliminating the representations of gender discrimination. They respected nuns’ requests for the additional ordination step in order to establish their religious authority. Apparently, the Jogye Order neither imposes officially that nuns must obey monks, nor do the rules have to be preserved in any circumstance. As Alan Sponberg pointed out, the Buddhist community has a certain characteristic of “institutional androcentrism” and the eight special rules can be used to

¹¹⁴ Alan Sponberg says that in formulating a monastic community there is depended on social acceptability. Material support of lay devotees is the main point for formatting the monastic community. If this social acceptability is sufficient there is no reason that monks and nuns cannot be separated. If nuns can be separate, then they became a totally autonomous group which is uncontrolled by some male authority. However, the total society cannot accept this. By the same token fully ordained monks, not a nun or lay devotee, can only split a monastic community.

¹¹⁵ Sponberg, Alan. "Attitudes toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism." *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezón. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 18.

subordinate nuns to monks. The Korean Buddhist community, however, shows how mutual understanding on matters of gender equality can overcome those problems. For the elimination of any inequality of gender, the right perception of male hegemony and subsequent action is also essential within institutions. It is a good example of how skillful means can be applied in actual communities, which is an idea emphasized by the Buddha for helping beings whenever it is needed.

Individual nuns would still be expected to follow the rule of obedience of the eight special rules in actual life. For instance, many monks could hold the view that nuns are subordinate to all monks based on the rules. At the same time, many nuns could simply ignore the requisites that nuns must follow the rules no matter how vehemently many monks impose those prescriptions. Also, some open-minded and educated monks and nuns could reach an agreement to disregard these rules. Upon encountering this prickly subject, how do actual nuns understand and act upon these rules? In conversation with student nuns and teacher nuns I gathered that nuns found alternative strategies in order to overcome the predicaments. This is not necessarily a proper reaction, but a practical and skillful means of improving and harmonizing among groups that must live together and meet the needs of this and future communities.

A student nun says, “I do not care to pay formal homage to monks. Because I am young and so I can show formal respect to all monks, but I am not happy if elder nuns have to do so. At this point it does not matter for my religious life and goals.”¹¹⁶ Another student heard the conversation with me and another nun, says “It is very simple. If a monk

¹¹⁶ Dialogue with a student nun. July 2008.

arrogantly demands formal respect and not mutual respect, I address him more respectfully. It is good for me to cultivate a humble mind and compassion. It is bad for the monk. If he believes it is the Buddha's teaching he would not be a disciple of the Buddha."¹¹⁷ The nun believes in the cause and effect in the Buddhist doctrine and is trying to apply it in actual life.

Action (karma) entails groups of causes in the chain of cause and effect. Action is seed that will sprout into the appropriate result when met with suitable conditions. Action directly links the difference of motivations between good and bad. The result of action will manifest in the motivation behind action, not the action itself. What action is positive is dependent on an endless process, and good motivation to act directly affects the effect in terms of causing suffering or cultivating spiritual development (Nirvana). So, any negative action, from this perspective, creates suffering, and results in ramifications for the agent of the action. Therefore, the nun's action for respecting the monk strengthens her possibilities to achieve a positive result of action; nevertheless, nuns in general seem to necessarily show deference to monks at any level. This historical and cultural interpretation of the Buddha's teaching forces inflections in the experiences of each agent's individual actions. Subjects' self-discipline means that they are solely responsible for their own action, and the result of their action has repercussions on their spiritual wellbeing. Only through compassion and loving other individuals does good motivation develop, and good action results in positive consequences in this interdependent reality. In contrast to this notion, a teacher nun says,

As a Buddhist practitioner I have to be always awakened. That means my mind and physical behavior have to be always the same. As the Buddha' taught, every being,

¹¹⁷ Dialogue with a student nun. August, 2008.

not just humans, should be respected in any circumstance. I have to practice these teachings in actual life. I do not talk down even to a baby. I am always using honorific words. And exchanging bows is also basic etiquette whenever we meet each other in the Buddhist community. From a personal viewpoint, I do not have any difficulty. As I am old, I do not experience that situation and believe individual monks also recognize the Buddha's principle.¹¹⁸

Even if the scriptural account of the Buddha's supposed attitudes toward gender equality involves 'soteriological inclusiveness,' this is a skillful mean and a good strategy for nuns in real life. As B. Horner illustrates, nuns at Unmunsa believe, and the Buddha concedes, that for the sake of enlightenment all people are the same, and so he taught dharma for all four social units: monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen. Based on this the teaching nuns at Unmunsa are trying to practice the teaching in the everyday life. In other words, every sentient being possesses with 'Buddha nature,' which is potentially latent, all people, irrespective of being male or female. Those who understand Buddha nature have to perceive and cultivate humble and respectful mindfulness to all sentient beings, relevant to whatever they are. For the truth remains, "it does not matter whether one is male or female, noble or base. One moment of insight and one is shoulder to shoulder with the Buddha."¹¹⁹ If someone understands the truth beyond all phenomena, it is a fact that distinctions of sex or discrimination of other beings for any reason has no relevance to the Buddhist path.

Overall, the eight rules illustrate that the nuns always have to demonstrate formal respect to the monks. Perhaps the most ideal method of recognizing the relationship between monks and nuns is a greeting of mutual respect through formal bowing, or they simply respect each other according to the age and religious experience of the monk or nun in the

¹¹⁸ Dialogue with Iljin. July, 2008.

¹¹⁹ Tahui Tsungkao's (1089-1163) letter. Translated by Levering (1992:139). Recited from Peter Harvey, 366.

Buddhist community. Therefore, the overcoming of any unfairness begins in an individual's decision to lift the veils of ignorance that keep one from achieving Enlightenment for both individual benefit and for the sake of others as well. By seeing sentient beings as equals, individuals who are compassionate in their religious identity will create truthful institutions and act in an ethical manner in order to contribute to a better society as well as a more egalitarian monastery. This chain of ethical development shows how the interdependence of causes and conditions can lead to religious goals, cultivating compassion and loving-kindness. By treating the Buddhist path with sincerity, and by perceiving the obstacles and challenges that surround nuns' religious life, they carry out practical actions in real life. Under the monastic hegemony of monks in the past, Korean nuns have constantly struggled to invent their identity and determine their religious authority. Sometimes using their capacity to speak out together—and sometimes loudly—against the present culture of religious institutions could be a pragmatic tactic. But individual behavior in every single moment leads to changed in an unjust culture, both gradually and broadly. Nuns I met at Unmunsa are moving in the direction of the latter. They know their individuality is also a part of the history to preserve their identity, and to succeed in their authority.

Nuns as Religious Leaders within Society

Nine nuns out of thirty one pointed out those nuns are excluded from the actual political power within the Jogye Order (11 of 33 respondents). They specified that no nun serves at the head of any of the twenty-five head temples. This is the reason that the president who oversees administration of the order can only be a monk, and this is regulated

by the law of the Jogye Order.¹²⁰ From that, a president never appointed a nun as an abbess of the 25 head temples. Another stumbling block is the gender ratio of the Central Council. The Central Council is made up of eighty-one members, but only ten nuns are allowed in the Council. Those responding insist upon the need for a more practical and fair system for nuns' autonomy to carry out duties in an improved way. However, regarding equality issues, the nuns also point out that female political rights in the Buddhist circle or the progress of bringing gender equality to the Council is tantamount to social equality.

Interestingly, three of the respondents suggested that they preferred males as heads of temples, opining that “nuns do not care about political power.”¹²¹ This appears to indicate that, for some, monopolized political power by monks seems to be beneficial for nuns. With no hope of attaining status and power in the centralized institution, nuns are free to practice sincerely and without involvement in political maneuvering. At the same time, by monopolizing central political power in the Council it can also be said that monks often take up monastic life as a career path and become more concerned about their prestige and position than about their practice and attainment, which distorts the purpose of Buddhist study and practice. They know about gender neutrality and gender freedom in the Buddha's teaching, but in the field, the Buddha's disciples are not wont to engage in such Buddhist

¹²⁰ The administrative organization of the Jogye Order includes a Supreme Patriarch (the highest authority in transmitting the order's traditions); and President who oversees administration of the order. Under the president there is a Central Directorate for Religious Affairs comprised of an Administrative Headquarters, a Bureau of Education, and a Bureau of Missionary Activities; a Central Council, the legislative organ, and a Board of Adjudication, the legal organ.

¹²¹ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 11, 98, and 115 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung.

practices and institutions. The nun Haeju, an alumna of Unmunsa Monastic College and a professor at Dongguk University explained,

I served twice as a member of the Council. I did not truly want to undertake the responsibility but I did it sincerely. I argued with the elder monks sometimes on several aspects such as on the matter of the eight special rules. Still I advocate increasing the number of nuns in the Council. But that is not religious life but actually a political power matter. As a religious practitioner I cannot find fault with anything about gender discrimination because I do not feel it. For the holistic community and future generations, however, I know what I have to argue and what I have to do for better monastic communities and society. But at the same time, I must know that harmonization of the community itself is the way to practice the Buddha's teaching. With improved social perceptions of women within the community of Buddhism, my conviction is that there will gradually be better circumstances for all nuns. For that I will continue on my course of duty.¹²²

As a religious leader and practitioner, she clearly understands what are the important individual and holistic aspects confronting members and how they can be resolved. That all nuns encounter a patriarchal and male-dominated hierarchy within Buddhist leadership, it still has not limited their opportunities for monasticism and spiritual authority within their communities. Despite having endured hardships due to unfair regulations, as Haeju pointed out, student nuns at Unmunsa say this discrimination is not only because of the hegemony of males in the Jogye Order or Korean Buddhism, but because of Korean society and social culture in general.

The most commonly cited reason specified by nuns for the existence of discrimination is the influence a male-dominated secular society has on the order (11 of 31 respondents). The statistical result clearly shows how student nuns perceive the relationship between social culture and monastic circumstances. When I asked, "because you are nuns, and not monks, do you think you are discriminated against or less respected by lay devotees? "

¹²² Dialogue with nun Haeju summer 2008.

Sixty-four nuns out of ninety-two said “Yes.” This ratio (69.9%) is slightly higher than the ratio of the discrimination from monks (62.1%).¹²³ It indicates that they feel the monastic community is a little more liberal to women. In contrast to the common prejudice that monks and nuns are not favored in the secular world, their perception shows that religion (or the religious community) is not separate from the larger society, even if they are renunciates. Two answers included a sub-explanation, “there is still discrimination but it is getting better,”¹²⁴ and “the gender-equality or the status of nuns is commensurate with their social status.”¹²⁵ The vast majority of nuns I interviewed and surveyed suggested that their main concern is in pursuing life meaningfully, and they decided the monastery is the best place to fulfill their goals.

The nuns do not interpret hindrances such as unfair treatment as a poor reflection on themselves. Rather, the discriminatory treatment is invariably seen as a reciprocal reserve from society and the monastic community that affords them the opportunity to contribute more generously to their articulated religious activities and goals of living compassionately and gratefully. They seem to have a keen awareness that their fundamental duty in doing such is reifying the relationship between monks and society and themselves. So, to the nuns the unfair discrimination and the actions of any person who might have treated them unfairly is a reminder that the nuns themselves need to contribute to a better society. One relatively old student nun who came from a farming family in the country said,

¹²³ See Table 5-4.

¹²⁴ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 96 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung.

¹²⁵ Summer 2008 Unmunsa Nun Survey Response No, 37 document in the collection of Chungwhan Sung.

When I was child I listened to talk that a woman must be obey her father, and with marriage a wife must be obey her husband, and when a woman is old she must be follow her elder son. I thought I had to do this, but when I grew up with a school education I realized that this is not reasonable. I clearly perceived that I am the only one who can control and make decision in my life. Now, no parents teach their daughters as I was taught from my parents. Holistically, the consciousness about woman is taking a total turn, yet it is still an ongoing process in the past few decades. I believe a better society would make for a better monastic community and vice-versa.¹²⁶

As the nun's statement implies, with dramatic modernization and the development of political economics, the status of woman in Korean society also has been dramatically improved. No one denies that social change is also influencing the Buddhist monastic community to eliminate gender inequality. However, a patriarchal and male-dominated society and culture still covertly and overtly exists. Religions generally hope to change and influence society and the individuals who comprise it, and society exerts its own variety of influences on religions.

Religion is generally associated with the transcendent, and because of this we often believe the religious themselves are transcendent from society. But religions are nothing but the people who create them, who maintain them, who practice them, and products of the milieu in which they evolved. The members of religious communities are from society and they must be influenced by social values and a type of social consciousness. Student nuns at

¹²⁶ Dialogue with a student nun July, 2008.

In Korea the proximate source for the idea of women's dependence on men is Confucian ideology. However, the same idea is also existed in the Hindu tradition. Orthodox Hindu tradition does not concede independence for women except in special cases, such as widowhood. Patrick Olivelle illustrates: "An adult woman has a single theological identity: she is wife-mother. Her identity and selfhood are thus derived from her relationships to males; husband and sons. Marriage, therefore, is the only institution that adult women are not only entitled but definitely obliged to assume." So, the idea that a female must be subordinated under male hegemony all of her life broadly pervaded Asian culture before modern era. Olivelle, Patrick. *The Asrama System: The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious Institution*. (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt.Ltd., 2004.), 186.

Unmunsa know they will be necessarily engaged in and influenced by their religious activities in the whole society.

The nuns also responded to several open questions about what they think of the relationship between lay devotees and society and their roles as members of a religion. Even though they are relatively discriminated against by society compared to the respect afforded monks, they know that they are greatly respected by society, and at the same time they know that their religious activities have contributed to an improved society.¹²⁷ In the statistical analysis, 84.2% of respondents reported that they are respected by other members of society. Only four students among one hundred eleven respondents (3.5%) think they are not.

Their description of the ideal relationship with lay devotees is one of mutual respect. A frequent term that appeared in the written survey to describe this relationship was *Doban* (道伴) which means ‘a person who is going to same way with me.’ It is my opinion the term is usually used to indicate the relationship between colleague monks or nuns in Korean Buddhism. They used this term concerning lay people in that they do not think the Buddhist community is separated from society. It indicates that nuns are perceive and keeping with the concept that all Buddhists are the disciples of the Buddha. In other words, nuns perceive the full Buddhist community composes four communities, monks, nuns, male and female lay devotee. The difference between Buddhist renunciates and lay devotees is in how they live, but lay devotees should genuinely try to manage domestic life as gracefully as possible and follow the Buddha’s teachings for lay women and lay men. Currently, even though

¹²⁷ See Table 5-5.

Korea still remains in a somewhat patriarchal and androcentric culture, members of society know that well-educated nuns have enough opportunities to execute Buddhist doctrine based on the harmonization of their religious and meaningful goals and for the benefit of social need.

Alumnae: Beyond Unmunsa

Upon graduation from Unmunsa Monastic College, which is usually held in the spring of each year, the student nuns will be fully ordained and have received the 348 precepts from the Jogye Order. After receiving the full ordination ceremony, the nuns themselves are almost independent and choose their ways for meaningful life. Up until 2010, the total alumnae of Unmunsa Monastic College were almost 1700 students, which is nearly a quarter of the total nuns' population. When I hesitantly asked what they thought about as their next step, most students did not have a specific plan. In Unmunsa, the most importantly phase is the "here and now. Do your best sincerely." A fourth year student and I walked outside the monastery and took a cup of coffee from the vending machine. She said, "Next spring? I do not know. Four years is not a short period of time. Probably I am going to my home monastery and I want to help my master. My temple, in which only two nuns reside, is in Seoul and very small. My master is always busy serving lay devotees. She needs my helping hands. While assisting her I think I would like to study more Buddhism at a University and explore Seon meditation. I do not know yet."¹²⁸ Like her, some nuns may choose to live in a small temple with their teacher, or become the abbess in their own temple and take courses at a major Buddhist university. Some choose for their lives futures in the

¹²⁸ Dialogue with a student nun. July, 2008.

meditation hall. They will complete the intense summer and winter retreat practice over and over. After the completion of the meditation retreat some will teach Buddhism and counsel lay people. Some move to a big city where they open meditation centers for the public. Some choose social work or other professional areas. For that, they will prepare if their chosen profession requires further study at a university, and therefore become better trained for their positions. They go everywhere and extend their hands. Even if they sometimes find themselves facing discrimination or limitations that keep them from positions of responsibility, they still have obligations to their practice and to the community.

It is difficult to ascertain the exact statistical data of what and where the alumnae of Unmunsa Monastic College will go on to pursue religious life and practices, however, some have the wherewithal to explore and extend their activities in society at large. I will briefly illustrate some of their activities. Jinmyung was a famous host of a Korean radio program. She directly joined Unmunsa Temple in 1983. After spending postulant periods for six months at Unmunsa temple she studied at Unmunsa Monastic College and continually studied and practiced Seon. The Buddhist Broadcasting System opened in May, 1990 under the slogan of “Sound of Enlightenment and Sharing Pleasure” and is basically geared toward the specific lay Buddhist listener based on religious faith. She had been in charge of a music program “Melody with a Cup of Tea” at the radio station for seven years (1998-2004).¹²⁹ She contributed to the program that was well known for embracing other religious people without any prejudice. Listeners of the program need to have the deep understanding

¹²⁹ “Jinmeyong” Chosun Daily newspaper February 12, 2004.
(http://news.chosun.com/svc/content_view/content_view.html?contid=2004021270324)

of western classical music. The program used the peaceful classical music to spread the Buddha' teaching by naturally impregnating the heart of listeners.

It is noteworthy that there is a nun combining Buddhism and western classical music. But with her excellent ability, this program provided a new harmonized environment for listeners every morning. She was a good listener for audiences and counseled them on topics such as compassion. She provided advice to her audience so they could overcome a sense of despair and deprivation in daily life and she imparted to them the path to a peaceful mind. When she listened to the stories of her audience, she tried not to lay blame, but rather find a solution that would lead to the listener's peaceful and comfortable mind. The obvious satisfaction of her audience had been growing, and as a result the increase in ratings was unusually high. Her reputation was spread by word of mouth. She later resigned the position but is still known in society as "The nun from Melody with a Cup of Tea."

Seogwang is the abbess of the Seounsa temple in Boston, Massachusetts in the United States. She graduated from a Women's Catholic University in which her major was physiology in Korea. After joining the Buddhist community, she studied at Unmunsa Monastic College. After that, she studied continuously in a secular university in which she tried to research the comparative study of Buddhism and psychology. Then, she came to Boston, Massachusetts in 1993, and continued her studies and established a temple. She provided the temple service for a Korean immigration community in which she offers a Sunday ceremony, and a camp focusing on studies in Buddhism, meditation class, and social meeting.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ "Seogwang's interview" Buddhapia Weekly Buddhist newspaper. April 13, 2004. (<http://news.buddhapia.com/news/BNC000/BNC0004007.html>)

In addition, she accepted and taught one Korean-America female as her disciple who became the first Korean-American person to live abroad and become a nun in the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism. Also, she is trying to propagate Korean Buddhism in the United States. Additionally, she is famous as an accomplished counselor for parents. She gave a lecture on how parents can take care of their children and why they must pay attention to their child's voices. She as an educated counselor who administers to those suffering from depression and teaches them to open up and help themselves. She also periodically writes about the subject of depression in national newspapers and other magazines. She has often appeared on national television in Korea. I have never met her, but I know of her social activities through various mass communication outlets whether she is in Korea or America at the time.

The nun Dogwang is an alumna of Unmunsa Monastic College and an oriental medical doctor in Seoul.¹³¹ Her method for treating patients is almost the same as other oriental doctors in Korea. She used acupuncture needles and moxibustion. She places needles into her patients and wipes the moxa off into the patient's body according to different diagnoses. In addition, she as a Buddhist nun gives an added advantage to patients: according to their

¹³¹ She was my former college colleague when I was a graduate student in Korea. When I met her she already had a small hospital practice in oriental medicine. She was simultaneously challenging herself to study early Buddhism in the University. She worked three days at the hospital and went to school two days per week. I did not know she graduated Unmunsa Monastic College at the time. I merely thought she was a special and enthusiastic nun. When I talked with Myeongseong in 2008, I noticed that Dongwang studied at Unmunsa. Then I discovered her brief biography in the book, *Women's Buddhism Buddhism's Women*.

After graduating from Unmunsa Monastic College she intended to practice Seon meditation in a meditation hall, but she fell seriously ill. During her recovery, she became interested in human disease. She was curious about what is the fundamental cause of physical illness in humans and decided to research that area. She devoted herself to studying oriental medicine at a secular university for six years. She then opened a small oriental hospital in Seoul. Tokwang Sunim: "A Korean Nun as Medical Practitioner" in the *Women's Buddhism Buddhism's Women: Tradition, Revision, Renewal*. ed. by Ellison Banks Findly (Boston: Wisdom Publication. 2000.), 403-404.

different symptoms, and she offers advice on the ways that patients can practice procedures in everyday life to better their overall health in less time. For example, a patient's symptom might be anxiety due to excessive mental stress, and by introducing a brief meditation method she helps the person recover quickly and prevent a recurrence of the problem. She introduces several methods: chanting sutra, praying, and so on. Sometimes she specifically indicates several Buddhist texts for her patients to read. "I treat women and men without discrimination. Although I am a nun and should not touch men, I have no problem treating men because I do it with the mind of doctor who sees only a patient in pain. I do it out of compassion. ... I do a lot of praying and chanting myself, and try to be very sincere and wholehearted when I do my job."¹³² She also knows how she can practice Buddhism in her everyday life; by healing people's illnesses she practices Buddhism and pursues her religious life.

Through monastic training student nuns at Unmunsa learn doctrinal teachings and monastic behaviors, and they actually perform that what they learned. Being approached as a means to acquire an understanding of doctrine, behavior and practice, the texts are apprehended as something to be understood from a doctrinal perspective and to be performed in a variety of rituals. How the nuns learn about their roles for their four initial years of training, and what constitutes normative monastic behavior during that period, is that monastic education for nuns at Unmunsa has to do with learning the content of texts and more to do with doing, performing, and speaking in terms of communal life. The meaning and role of pedagogy in the monastic training of students, encompasses engagement of such

¹³² Tokwang Sunim: "A Korean Nun as Medical Practitioner" in the *Women's Buddhism Buddhism's Women: Tradition, Revision, Renewal*. ed. by Ellison Banks Findly (Boston: Wisdom Publication. 2000.), 403.

activities as studying, eating, walking, and chanting, etc., and these activities act as ritualized monastic agents, permeating the actors with an understanding of what it means to be a nun and how a nun should act—they are technologies meant to discipline, to use the language of Foucault. Learning about doctrine and practices is not only the results of studying what texts actually mean but also in acquiring the actual pedagogical system of learning that is centered on studying, doing, performing, and speaking. The pedagogical function of the monastic college has more to do with their understanding of performance than it does with studying their contents. Those who engage in temple activities correctly are following the precepts well. By worshiping the Buddha they develop their faith, and that helps them acquire a deeper and more intuitive understanding of monastic experience. The most important aspect of their training is to put them into a communal group. By being in a group they spontaneously learn what to do and what not to do. They do it themselves. By doing daily activities over and over, nuns engage in body disciplines that inscribe into their minds and bodies an immediate and visceral connection between *doxa* and *praxis*. Unmunsa provides nuns a timetable and that too helps them think about how to pursue religious life together, how to work harmoniously without disturbing others, and how to prepare for their entire life in the future.

Nuns from Unmunsa are aware of who they are what they have to do. They have a keen sense of individual authority, self-confidence, and social responsibility. They reject the prejudiced conception that nuns are the imminent, undefined, and potentially impotent 'self' often assigned to nuns in Buddhist cultures. As religious practitioners, they themselves are pursuing their goals with the solid faith of teaching and the life of the Buddha. As leaders of religion they are well prepared to accomplish what they do for whoever needs their help.

Well-trained and well-educated nuns can cultivate themselves and thrive in their meaningful religious life and contribute to a more productive and content society. Peter Harvey's criteria for the status of women and gender equality in religion are close to defining the current situation of contemporary Buddhist nuns in Korea.¹³³ The only important attitude nuns must foster is one of acting under the principles of the Buddha. Needless to say, the main contribution to improve the nuns' religious autonomy and activities is due to the equal opportunity of education in the Buddhist community. Myeongseong has been at the forefront in the process of nuns' education. From her religious life we can track how nuns have struggled and achieved educational equality and even surpassed the quantity and quality of monks' education.

¹³³ According to Peter Harvey, the criteria for gender equality for women's status in religion are divided into the following categories: "Access to religious teachings and practices, and encouragement to follow them; Images of men and women's spiritual potential; Opportunity with regard to special religious roles, and status within them; Status, authority and respect within the family; Equality of legal status with regard to such matters as inheritance and divorce; Access to educational and other resources, and encouragement to use them; Opportunity with regard to work and earnings; Opportunity with regard to political power and rights; The actual achievement of equality as allowed/facilitated by a religion or culture." Peter Harvey. *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 353.

Table 5-1. Education-Level

Elementary	1
High	41
College	17
University	42
Graduate/others	7
Total	108

Table 5-2. Religious Population in Korea

Total Population: 47,041,000

	Religious Population	Percentage
Buddhism	10,726,000	22.8
Protestant	8,616,000	18.3
Catholic	5,146,000	10.9
Confucian	105,000	0.2
WonBuddhism	103,000	0.3
Others	247,000	0.5

Ministry of Culture and Information, "The Total-Residents Survey of the Nation for the Detection of Religious Population" (Dec.2005) (Survey date: Oct.1, 2005)

Table 5-3. Nuns Discrimination from Monks

	Frequency	Valid Percent
No	33	37.9
Yes	54	62.1
Total	87	100.0

Table 5-4. Social Discrimination Compare to Monks

	Frequency	Percent
No	28	30.4
Yes	64	69.6
Total	92	100.0

Table 5-5. Nuns/Monks Respect from Society

	Frequency	Percent	PercentCumulative
Highly Respected	3	2.6	2.6
Very Respected	31	27.2	29.8
Respected	62	54.4	84.2
Not Very Respected	14	12.3	96.5
Not at all Respected	4	3.5	100.0
Total	114		100.0

CHAPTER 6

ABBESS MYEONGSEONG: FEMALE RELIGIOUS LEADER

In this chapter, I will focus on the life of the nun Myeongseong in order to represent Buddhist nuns in the rapidly changing social culture. My biography of this abbess will concentrate on her female religious experiences after joining the monastic life, including her monastic training and practice. I will point out that Myeongseong's charismatic religious leadership was constructed on three levels: her strong Buddhist family background, her eminent intellectual ability in the doctrinal studying and teaching of Buddhism, and her pioneering spirit with regard to gender equality. Myeongseong's father was an eminent monk who greatly influenced her, and partly for that reason she was able to study Buddhist doctrines. With her monastic educational history, Myeongseong helped elevate Korean nuns' status and dramatically changed not only the monastic life of nuns, but also their social circumstances. On the one hand, she as an educational specialist struggles to improve the educational conditions for nuns; on the other hand, as religious leader of the Korean Nuns Association, she endeavors to improve their social standing and ability to engage in activities outside the monastery. It is clear that Myeongseong's religious life itself indicates that nuns are struggling to improve their religious autonomy and social status. By focusing on the significance of a religious specialist's history, I demonstrate how female religious leadership can contribute to broader issues of gender equality and thus recover historical authority for Korean nuns.

Before Joining the Monastery

“If this life style is not good why do I encourage you?”

“... ..”

“Um Yup... it is not meaningful he has no reason to encourage me to do so.”

These are words exchanged between a monk and a young lady. She neither confirms nor denies anything at that moment. However, this scene is the cornerstone which helped lay the foundation for a nun who has endeavored to create a new history of Korean nuns in terms of education and gender-equality in Buddhist monastic life for the last four decades.

In this dialogue the lady is Myeongseong and the monk is Myeongseong’s father.

Myeonseong was born in the middle of the Japanese colonial era and grew up during the end of the colonial era (1910-1945), thus experiencing the liberation of Korea. She witnessed the Korean War, and then a dramatically modernized Korean society. Her life, as well as many of her contemporaries whose lives are chronicled in her biography, serve as testimony to the turbulent era of modern Korean history.

Myeonseong was born on November 15, 1931, the eldest girl to Jaeyoung Jeon, her father, and Ojong Jeong, her mother, in Sangjoo Gyeongsang Province. Her given name was Imho Jeon and the origin of the family name is Okcheon. Her given name means “be pleased pregnancy” in that “Im (妊)” means “pregnancy” and “Ho (鎬)” indicates “be pleased” in Chinese. During her childhood, she disliked her given name but would overcome the bias after knowing that both a king’s mother and Saimdang—a figure representing the ideal woman in Korean history—had the same given name. Looking back, she had more than likely gained valuable friends thanks to her given name. Now she says,

“because of my given name’s meaning I could have educated a lot of women as nun students and disciples.”¹

Her hometown was in the country, but the town’s neighborhoods had some intellectual and aristocratic qualities and boasted highly respected Confucian values, according to Myeonseong’s remembrance.² In this rural area, a learned village elder was responsible for giving instruction to children. Most village men studied at the local traditional Confucian Academy in which people learned not only classical Confucian texts but also Confucian values and social norms, such as the Three Bonds and the Five Relationships (Samgang Oryun 三綱五倫) as well as filial duty.³ However, most women were excluded from academy education; they could only receive in-home tutoring. The head of the family was responsible for teaching the women and girls the principles of proper conduct. The illiteracy rate was quite high in Korea in 1930, particularly among women. Most women could not read elementary Chinese letters or even the Korean alphabet, Hangeul.⁴ Illiteracy was regarded as disgraceful for men, but not so for women, who were expected to stay in the inner house and were strongly discouraged from even going outside the house by the Confucian moral norm. At that time, the scope of Korean women’s education was still limited to the

¹ Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 3

² Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 11.

³ Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 3.

⁴ Isabella Bishop, a western woman, traveled to Korea the end of nineteenth century and wrote that only two in one thousand women could read Korean language (Hangeul) while most men could read it. Enuyoung Noh, “Modern Transformation of Korean Women; The Yi Dynasty—the Colonial Period,” M.A. These. Southern Oregon State College, 1981, 19.

cultivation of “female virtues,” including obedience, chastity, and selfless service.⁵ In contrast to wider social circumstances, most of the men in Myeongseong’s hometown could read not only Korean but also classical Chinese.⁶ Before Myeongseong started to receive a formal school education, she had the chance to learn classical Chinese from the *Thousand-Character Text*; (a primer of Chinese characters). She remembers, “I was excellent in memorizing the text. When I learned the meaning of each character, I was reluctant to like the letter ‘pregnancy.’”⁷

When she entered elementary school she crossed over three small mountains to go to the school every day, walking about 2.5 miles. After transferring two times to other schools, she graduated elementary school. She subsequently attended classes in the modern educational system at middle and high schools. Most of her educational period was spent in the Gangwon Province in mid-east Korea. As a student at Gangneung Girls’ High School, Myeongseong lived in the dormitory, which had modernized facilities. Educated women appeared with short hair, Western-style shoes, and school uniforms and participated in the public social activities as students. Perhaps the most innovative aspect of modern Korean

⁵ The first public school for girls was established in 1908, and a college program for women was added in 1910. Meanwhile, the modern education system in colonial period continued to expand in the 1930s. By 1933, 20 percent of elementary school-age children attended a modern elementary education. Among the school-age girls in the countryside only about 7.5 percent attended school. C. Sarah Soh, *The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 5-7.

⁶ Hangeul was invented to facilitate mass literacy for women and male commoners and promulgated under the reign of King Sejong. The men received education beyond the local village school, called seodang, where they learned the Chinese classics. The schools were technically open to all classes but were attended mostly by boys of the upper class. However, until the twentieth century women were not taught at any public educational institution. Only one book was written in Hangeul by a woman of Joseon: the memoir of Lady Hyegyong (1735-1815).

⁷ Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 12.

women she encountered and benefited from in the early twentieth century was the official opening of the public education system to young girls and women.⁸ As one of the leading institutions of modern society, formal education for girls and public education for women helped bring about women's self-awakening and subsequent efforts to shake loose from the bondage of patriarchy. Myeongseong's experiences and work have helped to promote these modernized benefits for women.

After she graduated from Gangneung Girls' High School in 1948, she became a teacher there. During this period, a teacher meant "highly educated woman." Through the fruits of modern education, she could perform in the public sphere as a professional. Her teaching at the elementary school would be a strong foundation for her later role as a religious educator. When the Korean War broke out in 1950, she took refuge in Busan in the south of the Korean Peninsula, which was temporarily the capital of South Korea. During the dangerous journey to Busan she traveled with the eminent scholastic monk Tanheo, even though she was not yet initiated into formal religious service.⁹ The monk guided and protected her and her family. This aid could be attributed to the fact that he was a colleague of her father's in the pursuit of the Buddhist way. After returning home, she continued to teach at the Jangseong elementary school. At the same time, she thought seriously about why so many people go back and forth in a bustle, and, rather than being envious of owning a great mansion ornamented with expensive possessions, she thought of

⁸ C. Sarah Soh, *The Comfort Women: Sexual Violence and Postcolonial Memory in Korea and Japan*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 5-7.

⁹ Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 25.

it only as absurd. Not attracted by mundane values, she a sense of emptiness that prompted her to decide to leave home and enter the Buddhist priesthood.

This decision was also influenced by her father's periodic suggestions that she join the monastic community. When she was around twenty two years old, her father said, "if this lifestyle is not good why do I encourage you?" Myeongseong writes that she never said "Dad" to her father during her lifetime. When she was born, her father was already a monk. Generally speaking, one tradition of Korean Buddhism is the celibacy of monks and nuns. In addition, according to vinaya rules, monks and nuns must maintain this celibacy.¹⁰ Her father, Gwaneung, was offended by these rules. However, in keeping with the contemporary circumstances at the end of the Japanese colonial era, Korean Buddhism was strongly influenced by Japanese Buddhist culture. During the Japanese colonial period, the lifestyle of the Japanese married monks was being widely adopted by Korean Buddhist monks. The number of celibate monks engaged in traditional Korean Buddhist practice at the monastic in Korea dwindled rapidly. The Japanese supported the married Korean monks in an effort to "Japan-ize" Korean Buddhism.¹¹ They encouraged celibate Korean

¹⁰ Daehan Bulgyo Jogyejong gyoyugwon 대한불교조계종 교육원, ed., *Jogyejongsa: Gunhyeondaepyeon* 曹溪宗史: 근현대편 (The History of the Jogye Order: The Modern Period). Seoul: Daehan bulgyo jogyejong gyoyugwon, 2001.), 160-163.

¹¹In the 1930s Korea was not allowed to use the Korean Language and all schools and formal offices used Japanese. She was born in the end of colonial period (1910-1945) that period Korea was undeveloped and economically destitute is throughout the country. From the late 1930s until 1945, the colonial government pursued a policy of assimilation whose primary goal was to force the Koreans to speak Japanese and to consider themselves Japanese subjects. In 1937 the Japanese governor general ordered that all instruction in Korean schools be in Japanese and that students not be allowed to speak Korean either inside or outside of school. Japanese rule not ended in 1945, the fate of indigenous Korean language, culture, and religious practices would have been extremely uncertain. Worship at Shinto shrines became mandatory, and every attempt at preserving Korean identity was discouraged. Under Japanese rule, intellectual influences different from traditional Buddhist, Confucianist, and shamanistic beliefs flooded the country. Jogyejong gyoyugwon Buhakyeonguso 조계종교육원 불학연구소, ed. *Bongamsagyeolsawa hyeondae hanguk bulgyo* 봉암사 결사와

monks to ignore the monastic precepts that prohibited taking wives, drinking alcohol, eating meat, and engaging in sexual misconduct. In the 1930s, the majority of Korean monks neither studied the textual scriptures, nor kept the monastic precepts. Under the influence of Japanese Buddhism, the majority of Korean monks were married in the 1930s.¹² This tendency was gradually changed after the Purification Movement (1954) in which the Jogye Order officially proclaimed the monks and nuns must be celibate.¹³ Within the social-monastic contexts in 1930, it is probable that the dominant lifestyles of married Korean monks under Japanese colonial rule might have influenced her father, who entered a monastery after marriage.

This marriage took place when Gwaneung was 15 years old. In 1929, when he was 20 years old, he entered the temple Beopjusa (法住寺). His Buddhist name was Gwaneung (관응 1910-2004) and he was a one of most influential monks in modern Korean Buddhism in terms of doctrinal study as well as meditation practice. Gwaneung spent many years studying Buddhist doctrine at both Dongguk University in Korea and Ryukoku University in Japan, and he practiced Mumuwon Seon for six years.¹⁴

Even though her father renounced the secular world, he still had indirect or sometimes direct affiliation with his family. For instance, when Myeongseong was seven years old she

현대 한국 불교 (The Retreat Society at Bongamsa and Modern Korean Buddhism). (Seoul: Jogyejong chulpansa, 2008.), 123-131.

¹² The number of total monks in 1934, according to monk Mangong, was seven thousand and the celibate monks were only three hundred out of them. Daehan Bulgyo Jogyejong gyoyugwon 대한불교조계종 교육원, ed. *Jogyejongsa: Gunhyeondaepyeon* 曹溪宗史: 근현대편 (The History of the Jogye Order: The Modern Period). (Seoul: Daehan Bulgyo Jogyejong gyoyugwon, 2001.), 192.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 194.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 239.

traveled to the largest city of Seoul with her mother. There, her father gave an award to his secular wife, who cared for his children without a husband present. Though Myeongseong was very young, this trip to the city to see her father was something she would always remember: she had a chance to drink milk at a coffee shop and eat bananas. Another romantic memory for Myeongseong is that once, after Gwaneung studied in Japan, he presented a boom boo snake to his young daughter. During her schooling, Gwaneung visited Myeongseong's school and consulted with her teachers about her school performance. Interestingly, one day when her father visited the school for parent counseling, he heard of her proclivity to not speak on her own volition, but rather speak only when responding to questions. Myeongseong remembers herself as an introverted but independent personality when she was a child.¹⁵ Perhaps it was these qualities, among others, that encouraged Gwaneung to suggest monastic life for his daughter.

It is clear that Myeongseong showed certain qualities early on that demonstrate a compatibility with religious study. Because of the influence of her Buddhist family background, she was trained to be forbearing in her relationships with others. Whenever she experienced troubles and conflicts with her friends in her elementary school, she thought of the compassion of bodhisattvas, and asked herself how mercifully bodhisattvas would react in those situations. She always got positive answers from this self-reflection and practiced the answers, a course of thinking and action that kept her from dwelling on trivial things. Likewise, she was open-minded and distinctive from the other children. This is because she yearned for the way of life of great historic persons, including Buddhist scholars. What

¹⁵ Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 16.

motivated her to put the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy deeply in her mind was when, during her middle and high school years, she encountered Buddhist textbooks. At that time, she read and analyzed one of the Buddhist principal Sutras, and then became excited about it. She became so fond of all the phrases therein, that she found it hard to pick out the single phrase she most liked.¹⁶

These experiences, combined with her father's strong encouragement, seem to have motivated her to renounce secular life. The conversation that actually transpired between father and daughter regarding Myeongseong's renunciation is not completely known; her father did, however know this decision would bring her merit and satisfaction. He perceived that his daughter showed a particular affinity for the monastic life, and as she seemed undecided about a career, he persuaded her to try the monastic life for a while and see if she found it to her liking. This circumstance is unusual in Korean society, since most Korean families look upon a life of renunciation as a decidedly inferior calling for their sons and are adamantly opposed to their children's ordination. Occasionally, parents will be found traveling around the monasteries looking for their children.

In addition to her father's influence and her early fondness for Buddhist scripture, Myeongseong also had a philosophical interest in living beings. During her school period, Myeongseong spent her summer and winter vacation at small hermitage temples. She devoured various books in Korean and Japanese and also had the opportunity to speculate on what she read in the tranquil and silent atmospheres. She particularly liked to read biographies and dreamed of being a great person such as Jesus Christ, Socrates, and

¹⁶ Hanguk biguni yeonguso 韓國比丘尼研究所, comp. *Hanguk biguni suhaeng damnok* 韓國比丘尼修行談錄 1-3 (Stories about the Practices of Korean Bhikṣuṇīs, 3 vols.). (Seoul: Tteuran, 2007.), 36-38.

Buddha. One of her favorite books is a huge volume entitled *Phase of Life Minoru* (生命의 實相) which was composed of twenty one books about the Japanese novelist and new-religious founder Tanikuti Masaharu (谷口雅春, 1893-1985).¹⁷ She read the volumes in their entirety twice. In her words, the books are about “the reality of life...The root of the universe is the manifestation of life. Life would be regarded as the truth. So, everything having life is equal...Everything is a phenomenon that emerged from those imagined in your mind and so, the human reality of the truth and realization of truth depends on what you think and what you want.”¹⁸ To Myeongseong’s mind, these philosophical interests led to interest in learning Buddhist doctrine and practicing meditation. Most religious biographies describe holy persons’ extraordinary experiences or motivations to renounce the secular world. Half of Myeongseong’s motivation stems from her father’s will, but it was her final determination about what was meaningful in life that led her to renunciation.

Myeongseong as a Novice Nun

After her decision was made to leave the secular world, Myeongseong arrived at Gukilam (國一庵), one of the hermitages of Haeinsa (海印寺) temple in South Gyeongsang Province on April 16, 1952. When she entered monastic life she was twenty-three years old. Myeongseong was about to receive ordination as a novice nun (沙彌尼) from monk Dongsan (東山 1890-1965) at Haeinsa.¹⁹ It took only eight days after she entered the monastery; on April 24 she was ordained a novice. Today, before a nun receives a novice

¹⁷ Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 11-16.

¹⁸ Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 17.

¹⁹ Hanguk biguni yeonguso 韓國比丘尼研究所, comp. *Hanguk biguni suhaeng damnok* 韓國比丘尼修行談錄 1-3 (Stories about the Practices of Korean Bhikṣuṇīs, 3 vols.). Seoul: Tteuran, 2007. For more information of Master Dongsan, see Buswell, *The Zen Monastic Experience*. 32-33.

ordination, a postulant period of six months is a pre-requisite for completing monastic training. In Myeongseong's case, this process was not followed. Because the Jogye order had not yet centralized institutional restrictions regarding ordination for novice monks and nuns, a monk master in the 1950s could hold their own ordination ceremonies for monks and nuns whenever they wished. Before the Jogye order institutionalized a unified ordination platform (單一戒壇) as an annual ordination platform in 1981; there were no restrictions for ordination ceremonies. In October 1982, the Jogye order allowed nuns to hold probationary ordination platforms and established a dual ordination for nuns under new strict regulations.²⁰

During the time of Myeonseong's ordination, Korean Buddhism was not institutionally systematized, even though giving dharma talks and steadily studying doctrinal texts was reserved for a select few eminent monks. Nuns very rarely gave dharma talks or performed large scale rituals in the strictly limited circumstances for supporting monks. The majority of nuns had no Buddhist training and education, nor did they have access to the study of Buddhist scriptures. Gender discrimination based on the Eight Special Rules broadly prevailed in the Buddhist community. The highest role that Korean nuns could play as ritual specialists was to assist monks in small ritual performances.

Despite the educational inequalities, Myeongseong knew that the training she sought could be found in monastic life. Motivated by her desire to learn, Myeonseong was willing to take up the monastic life at twenty-three years old. Although she had been sent to the temple by her father, she herself ultimately made the decision to take up the monastic life.

²⁰ Daehan Bulgyo Jogyejong gyedan wiwonhoe 대한불교조계종 계단위원회, ed. *Danil gyedan isimnyeon* 單一戒壇二十年 (Twenty Years of a Unified Ordination Platform). (Seoul: Tobang, 2001.), 216.

Before having her head shaved, Myeongseong chose her own teacher (恩師), Seonghang. Normally, a nun with ten years of seniority is allowed to serve as an unsa. Each novice nun and probationary nun must be trained and disciplined under her unsa. Monks are not allowed to have a female disciple and vice versa. Seonhang was the eldest disciple of Bongong (본공 1907-1965). Bongong was a pioneer nun in the 1950s and made major contributions to the education of nuns, despite society's customary belief in their inferiority and a general disregard for nuns.²¹ According to Myeongseong, her father originally intended his daughter to be a disciple of Suok. As mentioned previously, nun Suok was one of the three great masters in the Japanese colonial period and she was a close colleague of her father. Both of them studied at the same university in Japan. Despite this, Myeongseong chose her own master.²² The close relationship between the teacher and disciple usually lasts for life and is compared to that of mother and daughter. A teacher should look after her disciple as if she were her own daughter, and a disciple should look after her teacher as if she were her own mother. A disciple should be submissive and obedient to her teacher.²³ In the postulancy period the teacher evaluates whether or not the postulant is ready to receive the novice ordination. In the period of the preliminary monastic training a postulant is also judged, through observance by the senior nuns at the nunnery, whether she should be

²¹ Jingwang. "Bongongdang Gyemyeong seonsawa biguni seungga samwa suhang. 본공당 계명 선사의 삶과 수행 (Seon Master Bongongdang Gyemyeong life and practice)." In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 295-299.

²² A postulant (haenja 행사) can choose her own unsa, or senior nuns can select an unsa. The teacher is responsible for administering the preliminary training of the postulant for the novice nun ordination and probationary nun training and the full ordination.

²³ The close filial bonds that tie an unsa and disciple to one another provide a new disciple with assurance and a sense of belonging to the monastic family.

admitted into the assembly of nuns. Though the period usually lasts more than six months, Myeongseong spent only eight days at the hermitage for her postulancy before her novice ordination.

After receiving this ordination, Myeongseong actually trained to be a postulant. The Korean War was still in progress in 1952, and the difficulties of everyday life were obviously present. Food was extremely scarce and armed communist guerillas made frequent appearances in the area of the mountain. The most important purpose of novice training in various monastic tasks was actually to prepare for self-sufficient living. Myeongseong's first duty at the Gukilam was as a kitchen supporter (供養主), just as most monks and nuns in Korea are typically started as helpers in the kitchen. Though kitchen work seems trivial, the work was not without its stresses and trials. The temple kitchen's old cooking fireplace was made of clay, and it was prone to breaking. One day, she accidentally dropped a picture of a great ancient preserved in an upper place in the kitchen. Miraculously, its glass was not broken. She became concerned about being scolded by her senior priest, so she took the dropped picture to the strawberry field, re-organized it and put it back in the right place.²⁴ When she was staying at Gukilam she had to pound rice in a mortar every morning, put not yet dried pine twigs in the fireplace, and make porridge. Although it was more difficult to pound unhusked rice in a mortar, it was carefully made and the flavor of newly ground fresh grains was unparalleled to anything else. "When I served this carefully boiled porridge to the nun Bongong," Myeongseong recalled, "she said it was delicious and liked it so very much that she ate more than a bowl and a half that I had

²⁴ Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 33.

cooked.”²⁵ In the winter whenever she made a fire with not yet dried pine twigs that working people had collected from the mountains, her tears fell down her face because of the smoke, even though she did not want this to happen. Before joining the monastic community, Myeongseong was not accustomed any housework as she was well-cared for by her mother. Sometimes she felt, “is the reason I renounced to do this harsh and unimportant work?”²⁶

During the daytime, she performed her duty at the Gukilam; after finishing this schedule, she went to Haeinsa Temple. There she learned the *Admonitions to the Monks* (Chimun gyeongjun 緇門經訓), a collection of eminent monks’ admonitions to help novice monks and nuns develop faith in Buddhism as well as teach the discipline to become monastic members. Every day she reviewed and memorized the lesson of the previous evening. She memorized both the Chinese sentences in Sino-Korean pronunciation as well as the Korean translation. Myeongseong’s devotion to study and ascetic practices was a clear priority, even though she was commuting from Gukilam to Haeinsa. During this period she remembers that she prayed, “I wish I had more time to study rather than have to walk to these temples.”²⁷

Myeongseong’s desire for learning was supported by influential women at the temple. Although nun Bongong did not have much education, she emphasized that nuns had to learn as much as possible, and she had a strong conviction to encourage Myeongseong’s study. She always prayed for Myeongseong to study scripture and to be a good teacher in the

²⁵ Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 33.

²⁶ Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 34.

²⁷ Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 28.

monastic community for nuns. Her wish came to fruition with Seonhang's help. Seonhang, unlike the other senior nuns during that time who did not like to read the Buddhist scriptures, had encouraged the study of doctrinal scripture and calmly emphasized about how to act as a nun.²⁸ With only a word she could teach about a Buddhist attitude and behavior in simple everyday life. Under these favorable circumstances, Myeongseong received various kinds of education related to the texts. Her relationship with the senior nuns was a benefit to her even from her novitiate.

There was one person in Myeongseong's life that did not approve of her transition into monastic life, however. Not long into her novitiate, she moved to Mireukam, the hermitage of Dasolsa, to escape meeting her mother. In contrast to her father, her mother disliked Myeongseong's decision to join the monastic community. Her mother visited the hermitage to persuade Myeongseong to give up her renunciation and go back to a school as a teacher in secular society. Obviously, she wanted her daughter to live as an intelligent elite woman that performed in a professional career in society. In addition, Myeongseong's decision to leave society was a reminder of the father's similar act, an act that prevented a harmonious relationship between husband and wife. Myeongseong says that "the wives of notable persons in history are akin to Xanthippe. As I know Dostoevsky's wife and Tolstoy's wife are this kind of person. For my parents, the harmonization between husband and wife was so difficult."²⁹ The strain was apparently exacerbated by her mother's blunt, cold

²⁸ Jingwang. "Bongongdang Gyemyeong seonsawa biguni seungga samwa suhang. 본공당 계명 선사의 삶과 수행 (Seon Master Bongongdang Gyemyeong life and practice)." In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.),306..

²⁹ Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 17.

personality and the fact that her father, while well known as a kind of incarnation of compassion as a monk, was not as nice to his secular family in Myeongseong's retrospection.

Despite this tension, Myeongseong continued to pursue her original decision. At the hermitage, she still supported the kitchen staff. Gathering firewood in the mountains was part of her daily schedule, as was cooking the rice with wet pine branches and shedding tears while inhaling the acrid smoke. One day, her father visited the hermitage; apparently, “the monk could be worried or curious how I was living as a novice nun.” During his stay, her father taught Myeongseong *The Chobalsimja Scripture* (初發心自警文).³⁰ She says that “he recommended that I read it ten thousand times, but I couldn't complete it because I could read it only whenever I had the time as a person who gave alms to a Buddhist temple.” However, she remembers that she succeeded in reading it three thousand times, an effort that helped her to understand the style of Buddhist classical Chinese. Myeongseong learned *The Chobalsimja Scripture* at Mireukam and studied Chimun at Haeinsa. Her father stayed at Haeinsa, and Myeongseong had to come and go between the two temples, serving as a novice nun at the hermitage and pursuing study and practice at Haeinsa. When she finished studying *The Chobalsimja Scripture*, her father left, and she remembers crying for while upon seeing her father's back as he left the temple. Afterward, she devoted herself to harder study, praying that she could find a way to study forever. During this time of increased

³⁰ It is composed of three basic texts, Jinul's 誠初心學人文, Wonhyeo's 發心修行章, and Yaun's 野雲比丘自警文.

effort, she was offered the opportunity to study further at Yeonhwasa, Jinju, where her father had stayed.³¹

In 1955, when she was almost completed with her studies, her father gave her a letter of recommendation to go Tongdosa temple, where the eminent monk Unheo was teaching monks and nuns. At that time, monks and nuns studied at different places, but her colleagues and exceptional Buddhist masters Wolun and Gigwan had successfully pursued their studies there from Unheo. Myeongseong also studied the *Surangama sutra* (楞嚴經 Śūraṅgama Sūtra) with three nuns, Myeom, Myoheui, and Myeong.³² Monk Unheo strongly emphasized the significance of education for nuns as well as monks in both word and deed; he instructed the monks in the morning after breakfast, and taught nuns after lunch. During Myeongseong's study of Buddhist texts under Unheo, she lived completely separate from the monks. Monks always lived with Unheo at the monastery, where the monastic seminary was, whereas nuns always stayed at Botaam and commuted on foot to Tongdosa. There, together with her colleague Myeom, Myeongseong applied herself to studying Gisin theory as well as the *Awakening of Faith in Mahayana* (大乘起信論), an extremely succinct text in both style and content. The text is a comprehensive abstract of doctrinal principles and explains essential practical methods of Mahayana Buddhism.³³

³¹ Hanguk biguni yeonguso 韓國比丘尼研究所, comp. *Hanguk biguni suhaeng damnok* 韓國比丘尼修行談錄 1-3 (Stories about the Practices of Korean Bhikṣuṅīs, 3 vols.). (Seoul: Tteuran, 2007.), 36.

³² The complete Chinese title is 大佛頂如來密因修證了義諸菩薩萬行首楞嚴經 which may be translated as "The Summit of the Great Buddha, The Final Meaning of Verification through Cultivation of the Secret Cause of the Tathagata, and Shurangama of All Bodhisattvas' Ten Thousand Practices Sutra."

³³ Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 33-38.

When she almost finished this text, the events of the Buddhist purification movement began at Seonhakwon in Seoul. Though Myeongseong participated in the movement, she did not abandon her study of important texts. She learned *The Diamond Sutra* (金剛經 *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*) from monk Myeongbong at the Gaeunsa temple, as well as *The Sutra of the Lotus* from the three senior nuns who had learned it.³⁴ Sometimes she commuted and studied alone, while at others she worked with her colleagues Ilyeop and Wolsong.³⁵

Myeongseong's appetite for Buddhist texts coincided with the efforts of Gyeongbong, abbess of Donghaksa, to open a formal seminary for nuns focusing on the study of these texts. After the Purification Movement, Myeongseong went to Donghaksa to study *The Perfect Enlightenment Sutra* (원각경). The abbess Gyeongbong of Donghaksa prepared to open a formal seminary for nuns and focused on lecturing Buddhist textual scripts for nuns. At that time, Donghaksa was the first and only official monastic seminary for nuns after the liberation and housed 10 nuns. The abbess strongly favored Myeongseong because of her keen intellectual reputation. Myeongseong recalls, "I was the apple of the master's eye. Whenever I read and recited the scripture clearly and loudly, Gyeongbong told me, 'you should save your voice and yourself for a future monastic community. Your body is not only yours' ... and then he prepared for me to be a lecturer at the Donghaksa."³⁶ The master nominated Myeongseong as a candidate to be his dharma disciple. When she finished

³⁴ The original Sanskrit title of the *Diamond Sūtra* is the 金剛般若波羅蜜經 *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* which may be translated as the *Diamond Cutter Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra*.

³⁵ Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 39.

³⁶ Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 40.

studying the text, however, her master informed her that there was a good chance to learn *The Flower Garland Sutra* at Seonamsa temple. Despite this, she wanted to learn another text at another temple. “I am insensible of kindness,” Myeongseong remembers. “I did not consider what the master intended for me. I only thought I had to learn the text. So I left Donghaksa one day in the early morning without a farewell. I was on my way to Seonamsa when I realized my small Buddhist dictionary was still at Donghaksa. So I returned to Donghaksa and picked up the dictionary. Then I had several things in my mind. Thoughts of the master still trouble my conscience. I am a person who immediately puts into action if necessary.”³⁷

At the beginning of her work at Seonmsa, Myeongseong learned *The Flower Garland Sutra* (華嚴經 Avatamsaka Sūtra) under the married monk Manwoo, then later under the monk Seonneung. The text is regarded as one of the most influential Mahayana Sutras of East Asian Buddhism; it describes a cosmos of infinite realms upon realms, mutually containing one other. The vision expressed in this work is characterized by a philosophy of interpenetration and is considered the apex of Buddhist doctrinal study.

Finally, Myeongseong received the transmission of authorization to teach Buddhist texts (傳講, transmission of teaching ability) from the monk Seonneung.³⁸ It was the morning of April 15, 1958; Seonneung awarded her his cushion without any explanation and said, “have a seat, here.” Myeongseong sat down there and performed the lecture of the

³⁷ Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 39-40.

³⁸ Sugyeong 수경. “Hanguk biguni gangwon baldalsa 한국 비구니강원 발달사 (The History of the Development of the Monastic Seminary for Korean Nuns).” In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 38.

day's class.³⁹ There was no symbolic ceremony. He neither gave a ceremonial cape nor robes nor wooden bowls, traditional representations of the transmission of Buddha's teaching by the master to disciple. By conveying his cushion, Seonneung officially proclaimed that Myeongseong had been transmitted the authority to extol the teachings of the Buddha. If someone inherits the cushion of the master it means that the person supersedes the master's place and status. This indicated that she could take her teacher's place without the slightest hesitation. Myeongseong experienced an indescribable feeling and gleaned an important lesson from this simple moment. According to Myeongseong, it was a solemn and holy event conveying an important lesson through only the teacher's word. In this unadorned simplicity was contained the teacher's love for his disciple. In addition, it was an obvious recognition of her talent to teach younger students to carry on the future of Buddhism.

Although three eminent nuns, Keumryong, Hyeok, and Suok were famous as dharma talkers and students of Buddhist texts, there was no evident record that their masters formally conferred the status of Buddhist teachers upon them. Myeongseong was the fourth nun who received transmission of teaching ability from master monks after nuns Myeom, Taegyeong, and Jihyeon.⁴⁰

Clearly, Myeongseong's journey from renunciation to acceptance as a teacher was a unique one due to her circumstances and abilities; however, her early life also serves as a

³⁹ Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 25.

⁴⁰ Myeom received the transmission from monk Geyongbong in 1956, while in 1957 nun Taegyeong received it from master Manwoo, and Jihyeon received it from master Daeu. Sugyeong 수경. "Hanguk biguni gangwon baldalsa 한국 비구니강원 발달사 (The History of the Development of the Monastic Seminary for Korean Nuns)." In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 28.

key to understanding the experiences of modern Buddhist nuns in general. The fact that she was able to succeed in a patriarchal community is significant in itself. Before the Purification Movement, the status of nuns in Korean Buddhism was much lower than that of monks and their activities were extremely restricted. There were no female teachers for nuns. Nuns were not allowed to sit on a high dais to give dharma talks, were not usually appointed as abbesses, and were often limited to assistant ritual specialist positions.⁴¹ Furthermore, many nuns joined the community at a very young age and without much education. Most eminent monks who had been married before the Purification Movement encouraged their daughters to be nuns but did not perceive the importance of a secular education. So, it was not uncommon for girls as young as 10 years old to join the monastic community without previous education. This proved to be quite a disadvantage for these women coupled with the fact that opportunities for them to study were more limited than that of their male counterparts. Nun masters were few, monks only taught nuns in special cases, and the community in general discouraged female study of Buddhist texts.

Analysis of Myeongseong's life reveals several factors contributing to her achievement in the face of these obstacles. Though her father was a married monk, he showed a progressive view toward his daughter. Gwaneung allowed Myeonseong to graduate high school and secure a professional teaching job in the secular world, then advised her daughter to join a monastic community. Thus she was able to draw upon a

⁴¹ Hwang, Ingyu 황인규. "Geunhyeondae biguniwa bulgyo jeonghwa undong 근현대 비구니와 불교정화운동 (Modern Buddhist Nuns and the Purification Movement of Korean Buddhism)." In *Bulgyo jeonghwa undongui jaejomyeong 불교정화 운동의 재조명 (Reexamination of the Purification Movement of Korean Buddhism)*, edited by Daehan Bulgyo Jogyejong bulhakyeeongu wiweonhoe. (Seoul: Jogyejong chulpansa, 2008.), 230.

strong academic foundation when she began her religious studies. In addition, Myeongseong persisted in progressive doctrinal study for an extended period. In order to find opportunities for guidance as she studied, she and other nuns frequently traveled to study in multiple places. Whenever Myeongseong needed to study a specific text, she sought out a suitable master and moved near to the place that the masters lived and taught. Her acceptance by these masters was most likely secured by not only her own talents, but also by a burgeoning awareness of the need for female education on the part of the monks, and through the support of eminent nuns. In her training period, Myeongseong benefited from several monk masters who contributed extraordinarily to her efforts in textual study. Their acceptance helped not only Myeongseong, but worked to usher in a new era with regard to female renunciation and the roles of nuns in the community. However, this acceptance would not have been possible without the support of Myeongseong's unsa Seonhang and Seonhang's unsa Bongong. Both women continually encouraged her study of Buddhist textual scriptures and both of them expected Myeongseong to be a great Buddhist teacher and master of dharma talk. Regardless of social standards, Seonhang and Bongong perceived that there was no reason for nuns to be less educated than monks, and they aided their career without acknowledging that a female identity could be a barrier to act as an agent in the future Buddhist monastic community. In their perception, Myeongseong could be a leader of great importance in the definition of nuns' roles. Therefore, it is clear that the achievement of Myeongseong's education is the result of a mixture of efforts between pioneering nuns and changes in some monks' views about female monastic education. Advances in gender equality in this situation were brought about through the agreement and support of both female and male leaders. Myeongseong's success demonstrated to her

future student nuns that their roles as nuns could be greatly extended in Buddhist communities.

Myeongseong as a Teacher at Unmunsa

After receiving her transmission, Myeongseong taught at Seonamsa continually. However, in 1961, nuns were required to leave Seonamsa temple because the court judged the ownership of the temple was not the Jogye Order's, but rather another order which was made up of married monks. Myeongseong therefore went to Cheongyongsa, Seoul, where almost twenty nuns resided. There she taught student nuns at the seminary while taking classes at the secular Dongguk University, where she earned a Bachelor and Master's Degree from the department of Buddhist studies in 1970. During her ten years in Seoul, she was a successful instructor for student nuns, an exemplary student at the university, and a quality dharma talker for lay devotees. Hyeun, who was a student nun of Myeongseong at the Cheongryongsa, recalled her teacher during that era of her life:

Myeongseong, who was studying at Dongguk University at the mundane age of 33, also carried out lectures at Cheongryongsa. She also learned English and Calligraphy by tutorials. Myeongseong spent her time wisely according to the schedule for each day in each moment. Even if she has a visitor, she tried to spend the time wisely by carrying out the conversation and practicing writing the Calligraphy at the same time. If she was interrupted by noises when she practiced, she would retire to a quiet place to finish her practice. Myeongseong has been successful in achieving her goals for Buddhism, because she has tried her best to maintain a consistent life.⁴²

When Myeongseong received a Master's Degree in September of 1970, her supervisor recommended that she study for a Ph.D. and teach at a university. At the same time, she applied to Unmunsa monastic seminary to come and teach student nuns. At the time, there was no Buddhist teacher for nuns because Myojeon, the abbesses of Unmunsa and Myeom,

⁴² Hanguk biguni yeonguso 韓國比丘尼研究所, comp. *Hanguk biguni suhaeng damnok* 韓國比丘尼修行談錄 1-3 (Stories about the Practices of Korean Bhikṣuṇīs, 3 vols.). (Seoul: Tteuran, 2007.), 382.

a lecturer, had to leave Unmunsa. The student nuns of Unmunsa knew if they also left, the seminary could be closed. In order to avoid this, they assembled for a discussion and visited several nuns' temples to ask the senior nuns what the best solution might be, who would be the most suitable teacher and how should she be invited to teach. As a result, they came to the conclusion that it would be best to bring Myeongseong. Eight senior nuns of the Jogye order assisted and went to Seoul to request that Myeongseong be their teacher.⁴³ However, the abbess of Cheongryongsa was strongly against the decision and said, "it won't happen until I am dead and buried and there is soil over my eyes."⁴⁴ They did not reach any agreement and that meeting. The elder nuns returned and initiated another discussion, but the result was the same. Finally, they submitted their request again and explained to the abbess that a compromise decision concerning Myeongseong was essential for the further education of other young nuns. As a result, Myeongseong decided to go to Unmunsa with her students accompanying her.⁴⁵

On November 15, 1970, she arrived at Unmunsa. Over the past four decades, she has played a crucial role in the Unmunsa Monastic College, and extended the largest and the most qualitative educational institution for nuns; she is still an influential spiritual leader in Korean Buddhism in general and considered an ideal teacher for nun students. During the past 40 years, 1687 nuns graduated from the seminary, comprising one in of three in the total nun's population of the current Jogye Order.⁴⁶ The alumnae are progressively

⁴³ Ibid., 383-384.

⁴⁴ Interview with nun Jingwang in summer 2008.

⁴⁵ Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 27.

⁴⁶ Unpublished Document from Unmunsa Monastic College.

participating in improving the education of nuns and lay devotees, the study of doctrine, the practice of meditation, the management of several temples, and the propagation of social-welfare, among other efforts. Today, Unmunsa Monastic College remains a significant educational institution in the Jogye Order. Each year, Unmunsa cannot accept all applicants who apply for admission through the exam. Among the several reasons why Unmunsa Monastic Seminary is the best option for novice nuns who want to study Buddhist doctrine, the most compelling are derived from Myeongseong's pedagogical techniques and charismatic spiritual leadership.

The basic curriculum and texts at Unmunsa Monastic College are almost the same as those of other monastic seminaries. Though the materials are the same, the teaching method and pedagogical approach of Myeongseong is different and revolutionary. In a traditional seminary experience, student nuns study only Chinese Buddhist texts and nuns are required to memorize each lesson of the texts. They recite each lesson loudly in unison over and over again, rocking their bodies from side to side, reflecting the traditional reading mode for beginners in Korean Buddhist monastic seminaries. Memorization is an important method of disciplinary practice in most monasteries and demands the utmost effort from novice students. Traditionally, students recite the memorized scriptures of the Chinese texts, then the instructor interprets the meaning in Korean and moves on. If nuns do not memorize the assigned amount the instructor usually does not start the class. Via this process, there is no room for students to practice self-interpretation or analysis. Nun Jingwang, who studied under Myeongseong in 1970, recalls that

When I learned Chimun I had to memorize three or five lines of classical Chinese texts for each class even if I did not know the meaning. Myeongseong, however, was not forced to memorize scriptural verses. The first focus of study was to understand and correctly

interpret the meaning. Moreover, she allowed autonomous interpretation in the class even if it was not correct. Spontaneously, the mechanism and atmosphere of passive learning was transformed into an active class environment. Each student was able to make her opinions known and Myeongseong's inclusion of voluntary self-activity for students lead to each student's enjoyment of her classes.⁴⁷

Myeongseong also confronted the issue of inconsistent prior education among her students. During the 1970s, the average ages of the students ranged from the early teens to early twenties. A few nuns had high school diplomas; however, the majority of them had not been exposed to education at an ordinary school and had not graduated from elementary, middle, or high school. For those pupils, Myeongseong introduced an innovative program in which highly-educated student nuns taught classes for the lesser-educated ones. By carefully observing each student's study ability, Myeongseong was able to distinguish her better-educated students, and tasked them with teaching the less-educated students secular subjects. One nun taught Korean Language and Mathematics, while others taught the sciences.⁴⁸ As a result, the student nuns at Unmunsa currently study these as well as several subjects outside the regular curriculum, such as calligraphy, the tea ceremony, flower arrangement, and piano, among others. The source of Myeongseong's success as a teacher is obvious: whenever the students needed something, Myeongseong devoted her time to insuring that these needs were met.

By adapting a modern academic approach to traditional methods, Myeongseong has been a leader in influencing productive results in pedagogical study for nuns who are awakened to the necessity of studying textual doctrine for their spiritual life. An academic approach enables nuns to learn about critical viewpoints and the need to engage in dialogue

⁴⁷ Interview with nun Jingwang in summer 2008.

⁴⁸ Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 27.

or stay in communication with society. They also gain the skills to be leaders in their own right by being able to address these topics in the future. It is interesting to note that when Myeongseong decided to join the monastery, she did not intend to teach students. However, she was in the education milieu before leaving home and received an intensive textual education that only deepened her ties to academia. Despite her original intention, her experiences uniquely prepared her for teaching nuns at a time when female monastic education could become a reality.

In 1985, Myeongseong held the ceremony of transmission of teaching authority to her two nuns Iljin and Hongryong.⁴⁹ At this point, the nuns had already served as Buddhist teachers at the seminary for several years. It was not only an integral and graceful move on Myeongseong's part for the whole of Korean nuns' community, but also a great achievement and an extremely significant historical moment: it was the first transmission from a female teacher to female nuns in the history of Korean Buddhism. For the ceremony, several nuns, monk leaders, and lay devotees gathered at Unmunsa in celebration of the nun teachers. In the process of authorizing her students to teach Buddhist scriptures at the ceremony, Myeongseong gave each of them a certificate and symbolic symbols: a ceremonial robe, a bamboo clapper and a text, among other items. Since that ceremony, other eminent nuns in the Jogye Order could grant authority to their students to teach. This ceremony stands as a symbol of 27 years of devotion on Myeongseong's part. Her work helped open a new

⁴⁹ Sugyeong 수경. "Hanguk biguni gangwon baldalsa 한국 비구니강원 발달사 (The History of the Development of the Monastic Seminary for Korean Nuns)." In *Hanguk biguniui suhaenggwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 36-37.

chapter for nuns and teachers in the history of Korean Buddhism, a chapter which she continues to influence.

In Myeongseong's experience, there is a grave shortage of teachers compared to the number of disciples; accordingly, teachers bear a great burden. She believes that educators should have both the time for lecture and the time for personal study. She hopes that she will be able to build a system that will produce many instructors with time for both lecturing and contemplation. She observes that

there are a number of graduates here, but there is a rarity of nuns who set their mind to contributing to the future generations. This is not just a matter for Unmunsa Monastic College and it remains the problem that most of educational institutions have in common. If an instructor becomes an abbess of a temple, there are rare cases that she comes back and becomes an instructor again. This is disorderly for the development of Buddhism. Now my biggest task is to produce as many instructors to teach future learners. If we produce high-quality instructor nuns to widely spread the teachings of Buddha, the Buddhism of Korea will develop, and that much further can they lead World Buddhism.⁵⁰

From her first transmission ceremony to the present time, 33 official nun teachers in the Jogye Order and 13 nuns among them have received the authority from Myeongseong to teach nun students in various institutions, not only at Unmunsa Monastic College but elsewhere throughout Korea. With the conviction that well-educated nuns can contribute more to the body of nuns and Korean Buddhism, Myeongseong emphasizes that nuns should enjoy roles with their own voices not only in the monastic community but modernized society as well. From the first ceremony of teaching transmission, her efforts toward nuns' educations indicate that nuns in Korean Buddhism successfully extended their autonomy and accomplished equal opportunities with regard to monastic education. It is an

⁵⁰ Hanguk biguni yeonguso 韓國比丘尼研究所, comp. *Hanguk biguni suhaeng damnok* 韓國比丘尼修行談錄 1-3 (Stories about the Practices of Korean Bhikṣuṇīs, 3 vols.). (Seoul: Tteuran, 2007.), 384-385.

unblemished accomplishment how her activities in monastic education has made the most important advancement in the progress of improving the status of nuns in Korean Buddhist history. She began the tradition of passing down the lineage of Buddhist leadership from nun to nun. It is one of the main factors that have elevated the status of nuns in Korean society. Regardless of Korean monks' monastic hegemony in the male-dominated Buddhist community, the equal opportunities given to monks and nuns in monastic education allows nuns to participate as equal partners in any conference concerning monastic educational agendas. The educational equality between monks and nuns has enabled Korean nuns to rise above the social and monastic obstacles of women and to create new roles for themselves.

Of course, educational success does not depend solely on academic pursuits but also on interpersonal relationships, especially since the monastic community is just that: a community. Myeongseong's pedagogical principles reflect her knowledge of human nature in such a community. It is a well known proverb in Korean monasteries that "three small containers of bedbugs can be handled, but three monks or nuns cannot harmonize at once to control them." More than two hundred nuns live at Unmunsa, the majority of which is made up of younger, novice nuns. As in every community situation, nuns at Unmunsa experience the tensions and conflicts that arise in all human societies. One of Myeongseong's primary goals is to teach nuns how to live harmoniously within their community and how to concede to differences among themselves. Sometimes, the individuality of the young nuns can contribute to their disregard for strict regulations or the teacher's instructions. As monastic communities grow, it becomes difficult for a few teachers to control large numbers of students. When students at Unmunsa sometimes demonstrated against the abbess and teachers, Myeongseong, along with other teachers arbitrated, giving advice and strength to

all parties concerned. If some issues occurred and disciples asked the advice of Myeongseong, she did not decide by herself; rather she assembled a meeting once a week to solve the issue. This anti-authoritarian approach has become the operational method of Unmunsa. The college endeavors to realize a true democracy in gathering public opinion about both minor and significant issues.⁵¹ This demonstrates that at Unmunsa, the spirit of Buddhism is alive and enables community life based on a popular unity.

It is clear that Myeongseong is able to perceive and manage the natural strengths and weaknesses of her colleagues and students. In a large monastic community, it is vital that the various personalities and beliefs of the individuals coexist harmoniously. Harmonious relationships between the senior and junior nuns and among students create a productive environment for focused study. Although the student nuns live under numerous strict monastic regulations which govern their collective social life, they cannot escape various matters, which under normal circumstances might not arise. Under Myeongseong's leadership, student nuns are required to be committed to their religious life and studies. Myeongseong emphasizes that the first principle to be taught to students is forgiveness: "give in to forgiveness and tolerance even if a student transgresses. In teaching her, I have to support her to be a good nun, and dissuade her from using it as a crutch."⁵² In order to facilitate understanding of the students' experiences, she compares nuns at Unmunsa to Buddha. There are three kind of Buddha: the Buddha already enlightened, the Buddha in

⁵¹ Hanguk biguni yeonguso 韓國比丘尼研究所, comp. *Sinmungisaro bon Hanguk geunhyeondae biguni jaryojip vols.7-8*. 신문기사로 본 한국 근현대 비구니 자료집 (Collected Korean Newspaper Articles on Buddhist Nuns in the Modern Period, vols. 7-8). (Seoul: Tteuran, 2007.), 352-353.

⁵² Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 29.

transition to enlightenment, and the Buddha not yet enlightened. So, she emphasizes this to every nun, even if some of them have trouble and are unwilling to study or engage in harmonious conduct in the communal life.⁵³ She believes that those involved in misconduct should have multiple chances until they can recognize what behavior is the best for themselves and for the community.

Therefore, the path toward maturity for a student begins with forgiveness and involves the student's realization of what is wrong or right, accompanied by the appropriate action. Compassion is the guide to tolerance, patience and gratitude. As these traits grow, students recognize the importance of sharing with others, a process that gradually molds them into responsible and caring individuals. When a student carelessly violates seminary regulations, Myeongseong first listens to her situation and then the student shares the problem with her classmates and they try to solve it together. Punishment in the monastic setting is used only as a last resort, and if possible it is avoided. Under Myeongseong's leadership, most student nuns at the Unmunsa Monastic College for nuns value the spirit of the monastic regulations, which lead them to be successful in their studies. Myeongseong hopes sincerely that her precious nuns will thrive as great Buddhists in each of their locations and often reminds them that

The robe does not make you a great nun. You need to have right thinking suitable for the gray robe. You must be a nun to succeed in the Buddha's will seriously. It is quite different between a person who just follows their neighbors and a person who has lists of what to buy. In the same context, if you cut your hair and wear a gray robe, you have to consciously try to be a monk or nun similar to the Buddha. You should not live a life without a sense of purpose. As a practitioner, you should have firmly established Buddhism. You have to know the reason why we should bow to

⁵³ Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 29-30.

the Buddha before you become a Buddhist monk or nun. There is no meaning to just bow to the Buddha without acknowledgement.⁵⁴

In her interactions with the students, Myeongseong constantly reinforces that the primary reason for taking vows to the Buddha as a nun is a means to dedicate themselves to the practice of the Buddha's teaching. So, all individual nuns try to build mental peace and happiness within themselves and act responsibly and benevolently toward others, and they must have positive influence in their community. As long as all are equally capable, nuns have an equal responsibility to do this. Myeongseong, as a matter of principle, drives students to "always be true to whatever you work at (즉사이진)" and stresses that her disciples behave based on the Buddhist truth whether it is a big issue or a small one.⁵⁵

Myeongseong as the Abbess at Unmunsa

When Myeongseong arrived at Unmunsa forty years ago, the temple was extremely impoverished. Although the temple had a great deal of land, most of which is forested and has been a principle source of income for the monastery, everyone still needed to work at the temple every day simply to have enough to eat and share the few clothes they had. Needless to say, it was difficult to acquire the living expenses necessary for the student nuns' stays. In 1977, Myeongseong became both the abbess of Unmunsa and the dean of Unmunsa Monastic Seminary. Some opposed to the idea of her carrying out both duties at the same time but she insisted on holding both jobs to make the whole system more

⁵⁴ Jeon, Myeongseong 全明星, *Beopgye Myeongseong hwagap ginyeom Bulgyohak nonmunjip* 法界明星華甲紀念論文集 (A Collection of Essays in Honor of Venerable Beopkye Myeongseong's Sixtieth Birthday). (Cheongdo: Unmun Seungga Daehak chulpanbu, 1991.), 8.

⁵⁵ Hanguk biguni yeonguso 韓國比丘尼研究所, comp. *Hanguk biguni suhaeng damnok* 韓國比丘尼修行談錄 1-3 (Stories about the Practices of Korean Bhikṣuṇīs, 3 vols.). (Seoul: Tteuran, 2007.), 343.

effective. Myeongseong believed that her dual service to the temple would help consolidate both the financial stability of the temple and create an atmosphere conducive to academic pursuits. She was successful in this effort and now other temples are operated based on such a system of unified roles.⁵⁶

In the autumn of 1977, Myeongseong appointed Hyeun as the head of the Sariam (邪離庵) hermitage, which is one of the most famous sacred places for pilgrims to perform intensive chanting and attend prayer retreats. The hermitage was originally operated separately from the main temple. All of Sariam's income was derived from the private property of a nun who was the head of the hermitage. The head nun at the hermitage was in charge of all money donated by lay devotees. She could spend it for the main temple and it could be used for renovating the temple or for educating nuns. When Myeongseong assumed leadership, she and other senior nuns introduced a system for managing the subsidiary temples under the auspices of the main temple.⁵⁷ All of the hermitage's income became the primary capital for the student nuns at the seminary. However, the amount was not sufficient to support the students of the seminary. For instance, the condition of hermitage was poor, a situation which did not help attract as many visitors as it potentially could. It even had a lack of drinking water. With the donation from one of the Buddhist devotees in Busan, Myeongseong and Hyeun decided to stay at the hermitage to operate it. They personally made a contribution to the construction of an office, and then solved the problems related to water and electricity. As a result, the number of pilgrims gradually

⁵⁶ Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 43.

⁵⁷ Hanguk biguni yeonguso 韓國比丘尼研究所, comp. *Hanguk biguni suhaeng damnok* 韓國比丘尼修行談錄 1-3 (Stories about the Practices of Korean Bhikṣuṇīs, 3 vols.). (Seoul: Tteuran, 2007.), 373.

increased every year. The hermitage has been rewarded with increased income from lay devotees as a gift for its merit. After that time, Myeongseong and Hyeun were able to improve the conditions continuously every year.⁵⁸

More importantly, Myeongseong conducted her financial affairs in a transparent manner. No elder nuns, including Myeongseong participate in the management of the budget; therefore, nobody can use the budget for her own purposes. Such a clean and strict system for the management of the budget is very useful for the administration of the temple. For instance, Myeongseong bestowed the three main duties (samjil) for managing the temple to student nuns. Those duties include the prior (chongmu), treasurer (jaemu), and catechist (gyomu).⁵⁹ The selected students serve in their positions for four years, accumulating donations and supervising how and for what purpose the money was used. Periodically, all nuns including the abbess, the teacher nuns and the nun representatives participate in meetings to carry out discussions and suggestions for each day, exchanging various proposals. Also, for the administration of the temple, such things as independence and democracy are respected and accepted, making the whole system more straightforward. All nuns try their best to provide for quality educational circumstances for the devotees with all the benefits afforded them. At the end of each year, the abbess and the students review the account book. Since 1977, even if the number of students gradually increased, the difficulty of affording monastic living has decreased because the donations made by pilgrims at the hermitages are spent on only nuns' educations. Such a system of temple management is

⁵⁸ Ibid., 373-375.

⁵⁹ For more information of the three offices see, Buswell (1992), 113-115.

quite innovative: Unmunsa is the only temple in the Korean Buddhist community in which all financial affairs are open to public scrutiny.

As previously mentioned, one of Myeongseong's priorities as abbess was to prevent the students from going hungry. In the 1970s, food shortages were widespread among Koreans, especially in rural areas. She was successful in providing the student nuns with enough food for main meals and snacks. The food was scant and although the students did not go hungry, their meals were monotonous. The initial state of the temple also meant that students had to be involved in manual labor. As abbess, Myeongseong oversaw heavy physical work around the monastery, including large renovations, construction projects, farming, and logging.⁶⁰ The main monastic communal work of the students included repairing the walls of rooms in the monastery residence halls and tending the monastic vegetable gardens.

As the financial situation gradually stabilized, Myeongseong undertook a major reconstruction project to transform Unmunsa into a large-scale monastic educational facility for nuns. She initiated the repair and remodeling of 35 buildings that belonged to Unmunsa, reconstructed destroyed buildings, and celebrated the topping out of 39 buildings such as the main Buddha Hall and the student nuns' residence. When she moved to Unmunsa the central areas of the temple had completely fallen into ruins. The monastery itself had only shabby buildings and the shrines were almost crumbling. Before beginning this reconstruction,

⁶⁰ Korean temple work practice comes from this tradition of Seon Buddhism. Southern and southeastern Buddhist countries resolved the problem of hunger by performing alms rounds in warmer weather. When Buddhism was transmitted into the northern countries of Asia, especially in China, the self-sufficient farming and work principles were newly created. In criticism of luxurious lifestyles in monastic community at the time, Seon tradition advocated the simple and frugal life in which everyone works everyday. This is still one of the principles of Korean Buddhism and a reason why Seon tradition has through modern times.

Myeongseong visited all the major monasteries in Korea in order to select a model monastic compound for Unmunsa. She hired an elderly monk supervisor and his skilled lay workers who had worked on the restoration of many monastic compounds. The design of every main supporting column is composed in this manner in the residence hall at Unmunsa. Such large projects required that Myeongseong keep the work of the monastery flowing smoothly and foster relations between the monastery and outside authorities in business, economics, and government. She asked for cooperation from the Gyeongbuk governor when she was building the pavilion and Manseru and made a tour across the country to receive alms.⁶¹

Myeongseong's success in transforming the temple into a large-scale traditional monastic educational facility while still managing to provide all the living expenses of the assembly of nuns at the seminary is notable. She contends that this, along with all of her other projects, was focused on the education of nuns. These halls and shrines were built out of necessity and served as educational facilities for students. Whenever she was compelled to build a new hall for students, the funds for her construction projects were raised solely by lay devotees. Adhering to her principles of clear financial management, she gathered money from devotees who realized that the education of nuns in the monastic community was truly meaningful for Korean Buddhism. Her lay devotees had come to respect her high level of discipline and intellectual leadership. With their donations, she was able to supervise the construction of several new monastic residence halls and a main Buddha Hall.⁶²

⁶¹ Hanguk biguni yeonguso 韓國比丘尼研究所, comp. *Hanguk biguni suhaeng damnok* 韓國比丘尼修行談錄 1-3 (Stories about the Practices of Korean Bhikṣuṇīs, 3 vols.). (Seoul: Tteuran, 2007.), 384.

⁶² Kwon, Oyeong 권오영. "Unmunsa Monastic College" *Beopbo Sinmun* 法寶新聞 (November 29, 2007).

The reason she was able to do whatever she deemed necessary for her students, from making a single desk to constructing great halls, was because her positions as instructor, administrator, and head priest demonstrated that her actions were always designed to promote the convenience of learners. Myeongseong was able to be effective since there was great respect for her and a loyalty among her colleagues that ensured she had administrative control over the entire monastery. Since her appointment as the abbess of the monastery in 1977, she has served as its head and continues construction projects on the monastery. She resigned as head priest of Unmunsa on October 8, 1988, after 20 years of service there.

Myeongseong and the Nun Association within the Jogye Order

Through her leadership of Unmunsa Monastic College, Myeongseong gave nuns an equal opportunity in monastic life compared to monks. The more educated the nuns became, the more they were needed to represent female voices. Myeongseong was elected as an Assembly Member of the Central Council for the Jogye Order 3rd Assembly on September 13, 1970. Since then, she has been a consecutive member of the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 8th, and 9th Assemblies of the Council.⁶³ As a member of the Council, she represented the nun's voice and roles and endeavored to extend the female renunciate's autonomy and independence within harmonized communities.

In August of 2003, Myeongseong was elected unanimously as president of the 7th National Buddhist Nun Association. From that time on, she, along with other nun leaders, stand for female renunciates' sovereignty and rights in public terms and political realms. The history of the National Buddhist Nun Association in the Jogye Order of Korean

⁶³ Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 43.

Buddhist dates back to 1968 when the Udambara Association for Korean Buddhist Nuns formed. Myeongseong and another nun named Gwangwoo both were involved in instituting this association while both of them were studying Buddhism in a secular university. The two women were inspired by the Buddhist scholar and professor Donghwa Kim, who explained the status of Korean nuns in terms of other religious women in the world. He concluded that since Korean Buddhism has a large amount of female renunciates with relatively poor education, it is vital for the nuns to lobby for collective power for monasticism in society.⁶⁴ With his encouragement, they visited elder nuns for several months and explained the necessity of unified nuns' voices and activities. Almost 50 promoters gathered and in November of 1967 the first organizational meeting of the association was held. The association itself met in the spring of the next year and was the first appearance of nuns featuring an independent and unified organization in society. The main purpose of the association was to modernize Buddhism for nuns and propagate their ideas in society. Their activities were based on three major platforms: Construction of a Buddhist Nun Education Center, Rationalization of Missionary Work for the Popularization of Buddhism, and Construction of Welfare Society for Regeneration System.⁶⁵

The first president, Eunyeong, brought nuns into a national association and then the nuns together tried to establish the overall educational center for nuns, *chonim* (studying doctrine and precepts and meditation). The nuns, however, did manage to put together a

⁶⁴ Interview with Gawngwoo.

⁶⁵ Udambarwahoe 우담발화회. "Hanguk bulgyo biguni udambarwahoe changnip barwonmun 한국불교 비구니 우담발화회 창립발원문 (A Declaration on the Founding of the Udumbara Korean Bhikṣuṇī Association)." *Biguni Hoebo* 比丘尼會報 (Bhikṣuṇī Newsletter) (1997).

group involved with social activities such as adult education and Buddhist propagation. Their ambition and long cherished desire was apparent but unfavorable conditions for nuns were still present within the Jogye Order. For two years, albeit unsuccessfully, they continuously advocated the establishment of a total education center for nuns. The establishment of the center was obstructed at the time, and the activities of the association subsided until after the mid-1970s. In 1980, nun leaders again gathered and tried to recapture their frustrated aims. They elected a third president while changing the name of their organization to the National Nuns Association. They independently developed their own total educational system, and established the Buddhist Nun College in 1981. The more the female voices and activities increased, the more hindrances of the Jogye Order were present. In 1982, the college was integrated with the Jung Ang Monastic College. Nevertheless, they did not stop performing their own services and changed their name to the National Buddhist Nun Association in the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism on September 5, 1985.⁶⁶

When Gwangwoo took over the office of president with Myeongseong as vice-president, they aggressively carried out their own plans. They reorganized as the National Bhiksuni Association of Korean Jogye Order in the Suknam Temple on September 5, 1985. Since then, Myeongseong has been involved in various positions and responsibilities. They strengthened the nuns' solidarity by formulating a national network and developed a plan for building an independent center in Seoul. With the help of the previous president,

⁶⁶ Udambarwahoe 우담발화회. "Hanguk bulgyo biguni udambarwahoe changnip barwonmun 한국불교 비구니 우담발화회 창립발원문 (A Declaration on the Founding of the Udumbara Korean Bhikṣuṇī Association)." *Biguni Hoebo* 比丘尼會報 (Bhikṣuṇī Newsletter) (1997).

Gwangwoo, Myeongseong was responsible for opening the National Buddhist Nun Association general center, comprised of 7,000 Buddhist nuns from across the country, at Suseodong Gangnamgu, Seoul in July of 2003. As a result of this effort, the association possessed independent space in which they autonomously performed several undertakings.⁶⁷

Through both administrative and personal means, Myeongseong encouraged nuns to have a collective and cohesive voice by discovering nuns' religious tradition and lineage and encouraging nuns' social participation in greater society. The association held several conferences to promote the practice and life for nuns and championing female religious traditions. For example, many nuns gathered together and organized the genealogy of Buddhist families to which they separately belonged. The layout of the genealogy of Buddhist families was designed on the basis of historical perception among nuns. Since Buddhist nuns did not usually write books and their disciples did not write about the behaviors and lessons of teachers as analects, the lives and accomplishments of predecessor Buddhist nuns are passed on only through oral tradition. The Association is now trying to gather written documents, recorded data and related literature on the order of transmission of nuns' stories. Through the course of several conferences, they have gathered some worthwhile information on Buddhist nuns who have lived and passed away. Through this process, Korean nuns are trying to trace their history, a history which was disregarded in male-dominated Buddhism. Myeongseong looks forward to these works helping the performance and Buddhahood of nuns, and thus allow them to become a stepping stone of

⁶⁷ Kwon, Oyeong 권오영. "Unmunsa Monastic College" *Beopbo Sinmun* 法寶新聞 (November 29, 2007).

Buddhist nuns' study in the future. She advocates for the need to gather more research and documentation about Buddhist women's achievements in their long history.

Another key issue for Buddhist nuns is monastic codes. Although some nuns studied monastic codes extensively, they had not yet made an institution for the concentrated study of monastic codes as the monks have. Since this contributes to the inequality between monks and nuns, establishing an institution necessarily requires that the nuns improve their monastic code education. Myeongseong and some elder nuns consistently tried to gain approval to open such institutions. Finally, they were able to open the Diamond Vinaya Institute at Bongyeonsa temple in 2004, and then the Boheyn Yurweon at Unmunsa in 2008. The establishment of such institutions is a sign of an official recognition of nuns' authority and autonomy with regard to the full ordination of nuns within the Korean Buddhist monastic community at large. The increasing awareness of the importance of investment in monastic code study and the necessity of formal institutions for it in Korean monasticism is clearly evidenced by the fact that representatives of all the existing institutes met to draft legislative guidelines for establishing and maintaining a monastic code institute in the Jogye Order. That not only monks but also nun leaders were invited to this historic meeting attests to the institutes' distinct contribution to Korean Buddhism.

Within male-dominated conditions, nuns still hold no major positions in the headquarters of the Jogye Order and are unable to lecture there as they were in the past. They rely on good relations with senior monks for their voice to be heard. Myeongseong herself is one of the few nun masters who are entitled to ascend to the Lion Seat to give sermons to assemblies of both monks and nuns in large monasteries. For instance, if a nun were to give a dharma talk to audiences that included lay-devotees and monks, it would be

regarded as inappropriate until recently. Moreover, most nuns did not have many chances to give dharma talks in public spaces. To help overcome this unequal situation, Myeongseong hosted a significant dharma talk conference at the center building in 2006. She hosted 32 eminent nuns who enthusiastically showed their intellectual and religious achievements. Not only was the Buddhist audience excited, but secular mass media reported on its historical meaning and the positive reaction of the audience. As a result, the event itself demonstrated the revolutionary nature of nuns, at least in the Jogye Order, and proved that they had no inferior abilities in all aspects of Buddhist activities; it showed that gender inequality is limited to the consequences of a patriarchal system.

The most important outcome from the conferences is an ever-increasing awareness of Buddhist women's struggles and of their unique ability to benefit society. During the conferences, nuns were encouraged to develop their potential to learn, practice, and teach Buddhism and they were inspired to initiate various projects: schools, retreat centers, women's shelters, research, translation, publications, and so on. The nuns perceived their activities in public as a necessity in order to disseminate Buddhism and propagate knowledge and welfare activities. Everyday Buddhist prayer ritual in the morning has been made public as a means of engendering general public enlightenment, and the nuns' children's charities, nursing home management, and other welfare organizations are open to the public. The nuns' aspirations to aid society practically helped accelerate public awareness of Buddhism. Through changing social circumstances, nuns recognize that they must have the proper knowledge to help cultivate specific aspects of Korean society. By participating in public spaces, they contribute both to social harmony and to their own autonomy. The days of nuns living secluded lives on mountains are gone. To overcome the

wall of gender discrimination and establish an atmosphere to realize their extraordinary aims, they have taken responsibility to awaken their minds about the realities of society rather than rely on external help. All of these changes are possible through improved education and self-created independent roles, as well as a strong collective spirit among Buddhist nuns. Myeongseong's leading role in encouraging these developments is undeniable.

Myeongseong and Korean Nuns within Globalization

As Myeongseong has increased her leadership status in the Korean nuns' community she has gained international support of other female renouncers. In 1993, she took part in the Parliament of World Religions held at Chicago. In 1995, she visited Thailand and Cambodia in order to help international refugees.⁶⁸ She served as keynote speaker at the United Nation's Vesak Day International Buddhist Conference in 2006, the 9th Shakyadhita International Conference in 2006, and the 1st International Congress on Buddhist Women's Role in the Sangha in 2007. Through these international organizations, she is able to initiate activities aimed toward outreach to international nuns. One is a counter-exchange program for international scholarship of Buddhist nuns from Korea and other countries, while another is a cooperative program aimed at increasing women's participation in religious activities.

One of the remarkable international scholarship exchange events among Buddhist women is the Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women, which was held in

⁶⁸ In 1991, she collected all theses and as a celebration of her sixtieth birthday published "A Collection of the Study of Buddhism." In 1998 she received a doctoral degree in philosophy at the Graduate School of Buddhism, Dongguk University. On Oct. 8th of the same year she resigned as head of Unmunsa and now solely devotes herself to the education of younger students.

Seoul in 2004. There, 1,000 Buddhist practitioners and scholars from 45 countries participated and discussed Buddhist nuns' education and practice.⁶⁹ In the academic discourse, there were 58 foreign and domestic Buddhist scholars speaking, and discussing Buddhist women's roles in world religions. They discussed the healing the suffering of humanity through Buddhism and attracted a lot of interest. As a co-president, Myeongseong expressed her feeling that Korea's Buddhist nuns had made some remarkable achievements in every aspect of practice and social volunteer work over the past ten years. This event served as a venue in which nuns can let the world know the traditions and culture of Korean Buddhism and can discuss the current issues affecting their Buddhist network. As events such as this demonstrate, Buddhist women have made commendable progress in worldwide networking, and so have a platform to voice their concerns.⁷⁰ With this in mind, Myeongseong emphasizes that "nuns should be in leading positions alongside monks and not just remain as assistants in the spiritual as well as social dimensions of Buddhist life. Nuns and monks are like two wings of a bird."⁷¹

⁶⁹ The conference consisted of a main event and temple tour. The main event was primarily an academic statement from June 27th to July 2nd. The temple tour started on July 3rd and lasted for two night and three days. Especially on the morning of June 28th, intensive activities of South Korea's Buddhist Nuns Group and Priests and Disciples took place, and in the afternoon of that day the World's Buddhist Women's Activity was presented. The temple tour included stops at Haeinsa, Bulguksa, Unmunsa, Bongnyeongsa, and Seoknamsa. Attendees could visit Korea's historic sites and familiarize themselves with the education of Korean Buddhism and practices and traditions. Every night during the conference there were various performances and exhibitions on outdoor stages at Jungang Buddhist University. Members of Samsa Association, the Gathering of Won Buddhism, Catholics, and Buddhist Nuns performed prayer songs, Samseon Buddhism University Priest's Sign Language, Dongheui Priest's Beompae Performance. In addition to that, there were Jjokmul Exhibition, Lyrics, Korean Paper Arts, and Study Exhibition, among other events. Hanguk biguni yeonguso 韓國比丘尼研究所, comp. *Hanguk biguni suhaeng damnok* 韓國比丘尼修行談錄 1-3 (Stories about the Practices of Korean Bhikṣuṇīs, 3 vols.). (Seoul: Tteuran, 2007.), 376-378.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 378.

⁷¹ Manuscript of Dialogue with Myeongseong, 26.

Myeongseong's goals do not end with gender equality, however. She believes that "to envision an appropriate model for the Buddhist nuns of this century, we initially need to diagnose the unique challenges facing us all. These problems may be local and personal in origin, but their consequences are often global and collective."⁷² She insists that it is necessary to develop broader perspectives with respect to understanding the needs of the suffering masses all over the world. From the Buddhist perspective, the global community suffers from the consequences of selfish pursuit of material wealth and comfort. Belated though it is, nuns must try to find solutions to the problems caused by our short-sightedness in the past. This effort should not be limited to the domestic arena but should be extended to the international sphere. As female Buddhists, nuns can readily participate in relief programs for hunger, abortions, and infant mortality. To these programs nuns can bring diverse forms of treatment of psychological disorders plaguing children across social classes. Emulating the path of Mahapajapati, nuns seek to pay warm motherly attention to children stricken by diseases caused by the invasive materialistic culture that has estranged us from spiritual values.

Nuns also attempt to unite to tackle the above issues by forming a world-wide nuns' network. For nuns to be fully committed to compassionate work for the suffering masses, however, Myeongseong notes, they should make efforts to eliminate internal systemic problems first. Aspects of their own institutions that restrict their capacity as monastic practitioners should be reviewed and reformed. For that, nuns need the full support and cooperation of the monks' community. Myeongseong believes that this is what the Buddha

⁷² Hanguk biguni yeonguso 韓國比丘尼研究所, comp. *Hanguk biguni suhaeng damnok* 韓國比丘尼修行談錄 1-3 (Stories about the Practices of Korean Bhikṣuṇīs, 3 vols.). (Seoul: Tteuran, 2007.), 379.

wanted to see when he established both monastic communities. Whether monks want it or not, nuns have become part of the intricate information network. Myeongseong says that secluded individual practice cannot be praised as an exclusive ideal for a monastic member anymore; social service is an equally significant form of practice. Nuns should be prepared to be anywhere that they are needed.

Based upon this emphasis on international network for nuns, Myeongseong has mainly involved herself in helping to revive the nuns' full ordination in Buddhist countries. For instance, Kusuma Devendra is the first nun in Sri Lanka after a lapse of nearly a millennium.⁷³ She and nine others received higher ordination in 1996 from the Korean Samgha of the Jogye Order. They were ordained in Sarnath, India under the auspices of the Indian Mahabodhi Society, in the place where the Buddha gave his first sermon. Sri Lankan nuns who attended the ceremony in India in 1996 were presented with the Sri Lankan bowl and robes in recognition of their status as fully ordained nuns. Three months before their ordination, Devendra was sent to Bomyunsa temple in Seoul, Korea to study monastic precepts with Ven Bang Joo Suk, the chief abbot of the temple who organized the ordination. She studied the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya* ordination procedure, which is virtually identical to the *Pali Vinaya* ordination procedure—the only difference being that the former

⁷³ The Buddhist nuns' lineage disappeared in Sri Lanka by the 11st century. There are about 3,000 *Dasasilmatas* (mothers following the ten precepts) currently in Sri Lanka who have cut their hair and live in celibacy. *Dasasilmatas* are female Buddhist devotees who lack official sanction and are not sponsored by any local body of Buddhist nuns. They are from poor rural or urban areas and, as they are not recognized or respected by Sinhalese believers, they receive no financial support. Despite these obstacles, a few *Dasasilmatas* and other female Buddhist devotees have tried their best to revive the Buddhist nun lineage in Sri Lanka. Jung, Inyoung, and Hyangsoon Yi, "Gukjehwasidae Hanguk biguniui wising kwa yeokhal 국제화시대 한국 비구니의 위상과 역할 (The Role and Status of Korean Nuns in the Age of Globalization)." In *Hanguk biguniui suhaengkwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 176-177.

is in Korean language, necessitating the aid of a translator. While in Korea, she translated the procedure into Sinhala from English used by other Sinhala nuns obtaining ordination. Thus, the Sri Lankan nuns were familiar with the Pali as well as the Dharmagupta ordaining procedure before they went for ordination. Today there are over 500 nuns in Sri Lanka who have obtained ordination subsequent to that ceremony.

Furthermore, in 2006 Myeongseong was asked to ordain the renounced Thai Buddhist female “Maejis,” who are banned from receiving official ordination of nuns in Thailand.⁷⁴ The ordination service was held to ordain around 10 Maejis, Korean monks and nuns taking part as precept witness venerable. Before the ceremony, Myeongseong met with the representatives of the National Nuns Association visiting in Thailand to discuss the ordination process with the Supreme Patriarch of Thai Buddhism. During that visit, Myeongseong Sunim along with Undal, Gwangok and Seongjeong said that “the Jogye Order has a solemn tradition to ordain precepts by both monks and nuns and so sending three monks teaching as responsible for service of rites, rules, and disciple in a monastic community and seven precept witness teachers there, Korean Buddhism made an epoch of staying in existence within Southern Buddhism.” It was more than significant to transmit Korean Buddhism to Thailand; it was considered international support of the project on the

⁷⁴ Even though Thailand has the majority of Buddhist believers in the world, there have been no Buddhist nuns in their history as well. Female Buddhists who cut their hair, wear Buddhist clothes and follow the 10, 8 or 5 precepts are called Maeji or Machi. There are about 10,000 Maejis currently in Thailand and most are followers who are from poor rural or urban areas and no family or relatives to support them. Maejis do not receive any financial support or respect from Buddhist learners. Buddhist learners in Thailand believe that if they give money to Maejis, they cannot get rewarded. Most maejis live in temples with the chief approval and receive a little money by preparing for food, doing laundry or cleaning. However, most beg for survival as well. A very few Maejis operate orphanages or schools or volunteer in welfare organizations. Naturally, the life of Maeji cannot be attractive for women who are from urban areas with high education. Jung, Inyoung, and Hyangsoon Yi, “Gukjehwasidae Hanguk biguniui wising kwa yeokhal 국제화시대 한국 비구니의 위상과 역할 (The Role and Status of Korean Nuns in the Age of Globalization).” In *Hanguk biguniui suhaengkwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 177-179.

Order's basis. The Thailand visit was arranged when the president of Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University issued an official invitation to the thirteen members of the National Nuns Association, including president Myeongseong and its staff, as a delegation to the 60th enthronement anniversary of the Thai king.⁷⁵

Myeongseong's religious life is itself exemplary in the history of nuns in contemporary Buddhism in Korea. Under male-dominated hegemony, she was unusually well-educated in Buddhist doctrinal study. In her excellent intellectual and sincere endeavors she has been an eminent educator for nuns. By transmitting her doctrinal authority to her disciples she opened up female religious autonomy in education. Her efforts are a turning point for nuns' status not only in the monastic community but in society as well. Through her leadership in higher education nuns have dramatically improved their religious identity and authority.

As a leader of the female monastic community she has congealed female cooperative power to improve nuns' religious authority in the predominantly male-dominated Buddhist community and advanced their activities into society. She consistently shows how Korean nuns can cooperate to improve female practitioner's religious identity and authority in other cultures within globalization. Her past represents historical continuity for nuns and her current life exemplifies the future of contemporary nuns.

⁷⁵ Meanwhile, the Sangha Council, the Buddhist Supreme Committee in Thailand, has prohibited females from receiving novice precepts since 1928 and the Buddhist priest law enacted in 1992 has officially denied females to become nuns. Jung, Inyoung, and Hyangsoon Yi, "Gukjehwasidae Hanguk biguniui wising kwa yeokhal 국제화시대 한국 비구니의 위상과 역할 (The Role and Status of Korean Nuns in the Age of Globalization)." In *Hanguk biguniui suhaengkwa sam*, edited by Jeonguk bigunihoe. (Seoul: Yemunseowon, 2007.), 178.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

Discussion

In this dissertation, I have explored how nuns' religious identity and authority in Korean Buddhism can be established and extended in an historical and ongoing manner. Throughout Korean Buddhist history, nuns have been obstructed in their religious efforts to actualize the fullness of their spiritual lives. Relative to monks, they face more obstacles and have fewer opportunities to cultivate advanced practice, and they receive diminished recognition for their spiritual accomplishments. Nuns, nevertheless, have always managed to sustain a vital place for themselves within the tradition and continue to bring about change in the forms, practices, and institutions of Buddhism. In this dissertation ranging from the history to the ethnography, I have argued that nuns in Korean Buddhism have significantly shaped Buddhism to meet their own needs and the demands of contemporary life. While maintaining a balanced blend of historical studies with contemporary nuns' contributions to the management of their religiosity I argue that nuns' religious identity and historical continuity can be justified through a rich mix of long diverse traditions of Buddhist practice with a long tradition of identifying meaning in their lives.

With the limited historical records and biographical excerpts of Buddhist nuns throughout history, I illustrated that nuns have continued their religious identity and have been maintained a tradition of religious practice, and they have developed their own approaches to that practice, despite the common prejudice that Korean Buddhist history is the history of men and monks alone. My research of textual materials focused on individual nuns; I explained who the first nuns were and how their religious identity can be discerned

under a male-dominated social culture. I also illustrated the conditions that individual nuns in their own way encountered in each different social and monastic circumstance. Thus, though there was not a single clear framework for continuity and lineage in the history of Korean Buddhism, I provided the possibility that individual nuns' religious activities can be clear evidence of continuity for current nuns' religious identity and authority. Using important Korean textual sources, I attempted to show how Korean Buddhist nuns are presented as continuously accomplished and reserved in their religious activities and show why those nuns' roles still have a significant presence in Korean society today. This dissertation elucidated the activities of the nuns fighting for their autonomy and gaining opportunities for leadership, literacy, and spiritual growth.

By critically analyzing textual sources and by integrating historical, textual, and ethnographic analysis, this dissertation contributes to closer collaboration and cooperation among scholars of Korean Buddhism in Korea and abroad, particularly in western academia. By providing substantial evidence, not only historical but specifically on current nuns I illustrate that features of actual nuns in Korean Buddhism are neither romantic nor negative. In their roles as female religious specialists and leaders they are sincerely learning and practicing and giving moment by moment. They exemplify the religious meaning and interpret in their own way the teaching and heritage of the Buddha. Also, they clearly understand their relationship to society.

I have shown that nuns' religiosity and activities at Unmunsa Monastic College are meaningful and valid. Through field research at Unmunsa I have described how nuns practice their religion, historically and in the present, and I focused on changes in Korean religiosity as Korea rapidly moves from a traditional society with a rich cultural heritage to

an affluent, modernized society. I have analyzed developments in terms of the features that are unique to monastic women and attempt to present the nuns' perspectives on the history, the practices, and their interpretation of their lives. By specifically illustrating how actual nuns live and cultivate their religiosity in everyday activities within the community, I carefully highlighted the nuns' visions and views about monastic life in contemporary socio-cultural circumstances.

I formulated a critical review of how the textual sources are different from the lives and experiences of individual nuns in the actual religious world. I argued that actual nuns' responses were different from textual accounts or scholars' viewpoints. They do not feel discrimination in their individual religious lives and social activities. Rather, they recognize discrimination in the institutional hierarchy system in the Jogye Order. I have shown how nuns understand and accept specific doctrines or rules despite academic criticism of those doctrines and rules. I analyzed developments in terms of their perspectives, which are unique to nuns in the Korean Buddhism framework. I presented the nuns' perspectives on their history, their practices, and their interpretation of their lives.

By focusing on Myeongseong's religious life, I investigated, along with rapidly changing Korean society, how a pioneer religious specialist could extend female religious identity and autonomy and improved authority in society as well as in the Buddhist community. By pioneering educational quality and equality, Myeongseong not only expanded nuns' religious identity, she also is the first person to strongly contribute to the cultivation of nuns' identity and autonomy. By transmitting her doctrinal authority to her disciples she opened up female religious autonomy in education. For the last five decades she has been the main contributor to nuns, assisting them in justifying their religious

autonomy and authority. In addition, Myeongseong's lifestyle also demonstrates her involvement in current activities within society, and shows that globalization should be a feature of contemporary nuns' futures.

By obtaining historical consistency and by being well-educated at Unmunsa, nuns identify themselves and justify their religious lives and activities to a more meaningful and substantial level. Thus, they are not isolated from the Buddhist community and society even on a historical level. They manage their religiosity in their own way and participate more fully in society and culture. Nuns in Korean Buddhism are no longer secondary, but equal partners with monks in the Buddhist monastic community, uniting with each other as two wings of a bird synchronize and cause it to fly. Nuns have been central agents in the promotion of Buddhism from the beginning and still are acting as participants today. They are also leaders of social culture. Their religious activities are an ongoing process.

Ongoing Study of Nuns in Korean Buddhism

In this dissertation I provided ground breaking information for the study of Korean nuns. It lays the foundation for future studies of Buddhist nuns in Korea in western academia. My research responds to the relative dearth of existing English-language knowledge of nuns in Korean Buddhism and serves to correlate factual data with a qualitative study of nuns' lives and practice from an insider's perspective. This work fills a gap between the study of Korean Buddhism and other Buddhist traditions. This dissertation, though, is just one initial step in the study of nuns in Korean Buddhism. Finally, I would point out some direction or suggestions for the further study of nuns in Korean Buddhism.

The majority of studies on Korean Buddhism so far have focused primarily on textual sources, while both Korean and western scholars have neglected the study of Korean

nuns. One of the reasons why nuns largely have been ignored by scholarship on Korean Buddhism is the predictable but significant fact that the history of Korean Buddhism itself has been composed and developed in an androcentric society, and academic inquiry often has followed suit. Gender studies have become a significant category only recently in the field of Buddhist studies—not only in Korean Buddhism, but in Buddhist studies in general. Because women's or nuns' activities and contributions rarely appear in the texts that have attracted the attention of scholars, their persevering engagement in the historical tradition has been neglected.

Buddhist studies in Korean academia have focused primarily on doctrinal analysis based on texts in which gender issues are de-emphasized, if not completely absent. The virtual invisibility of women and nuns in these texts is politely dismissed by Buddhologists as an extension of Buddhism's purported androgynous nature. Western studies of Korean Buddhist philosophy and history have followed suit, in part due to the dominance of male voices in the translation of Korean materials, especially since most famous Korean Buddhist philosophical scholars are monks. As a result, scholars' approaches toward Korean Buddhism do not pay much attention to the monastic lives and religious activities of nuns and other women.

First, it is an urgent necessity that scholars pay attention and change their attitude toward the study of nuns in Korean Buddhism, though a small group of contemporary Korean nuns have begun to take heed of their monastic history up till now. There are several possible approaches to the study of Korean nuns. Scholarly attitudes on the textual sources need to be extended. Although the details of the early history of Korean nuns may never be fully known, scholars can variously interpret limited sources with contemporary social

perspectives. I also suggest that there may be many areas where scholars can work on tracing back the salient and resilient features of the lives of contemporary nuns. One optimal source is the study of the history of nuns' family lineage. Despite several publications of the records of family lineages of Korean nuns, there is no scholarly research on this topic. These records contain various fluent sources about nuns' religious life such as particular historical traditions and practices; each family possesses unique characteristics that encompass the different lifestyles of nuns, whether the nuns were devoted to meditation and nuns or were engaged in administering nunneries, and so on. Through research of those written materials, scholars can trace back and re-build the history of nuns in Korean Buddhism and can also discern the clear continuity of contemporary nuns, particularly regarding the vitality of Korean nuns in recent years.

Second, not only is further study of nuns in Korean Buddhism needed, but there is also an acute need for a new methodological approach that can address more fully those areas in which scholarship is lacking. Only then can a more comprehensive understanding of Korean Buddhism emerge. In order to embark in new directions, researchers focusing on Korean Buddhism should recognize the limits of a narrow approach based solely on the interpretation of texts. This narrow approach is similar to Christian Biblical hermeneutics, with respect to dealing with various historical principles that can be applied to the study of Buddhist doctrine in the tradition of explication of the text, or exegesis. Neither Korean nor foreign scholars have paid attention to actual nuns in the here and now. A methodological innovation is needed for the study of Korean nuns, one that is already applied to several fields of academia yet generally ignored by Buddhologists and scholars in the study of Korean Buddhism. As yet, there is no scholarly ethnography of Korean Buddhism, in either

English or Korean. As more field work is done, the vivid features of nuns in Korean Buddhism will be revealed. After having visited and completed my research as a participant observer in a Korean Buddhist nunnery, I attempted to present a scholarly examination of the insider perspectives of monastic nuns in terms of educational training. There is, however, room for the exploration of alternative issues regarding nuns' religious activities, such as the nuns' meditative and social activities. Currently, there is no scholarly research centered on and emphasizing the long historical tradition of Seon meditation in Korean Buddhist nuns' communities. There is an urgent need to study the lives of nuns who have practiced Seon meditation for long periods of time.

Third, scholars who are interested in Korean nuns need to focus on the lives of individual eminent nuns, both in the past and present, as there are no autobiographies of Korean Buddhist nuns. Scholars can investigate the lives of eminent nuns through interviews and narrative sources, and they can look forward to hearing nuns' inner voices via their oral accounts of their religious lives. As I have shown, the development of equal opportunities in Buddhist education that has recently been provided to Korean monks and nuns is one of the key factors behind the flourishing of the order of nuns in contemporary Korea. Myeongseong's educational history has played a pivotal role in the revitalization of the order of nuns in Korean society. By focusing on the lives of individual nuns, scholars can describe not only religious female's voices as an example of a discourse on dominance, self-reflection, self-identification, and agency for themselves but also logically prove that narrative sources can legitimate historical continuity. Therefore, scholars can show that the paucity of literary evidence on nuns does not necessarily mean a lack of historical agency.

Additionally, another important possible research area is nuns' religious activities related to other religions. Korea is a multi-religious society. Nuns as female religious specialists must exist harmoniously within multi-religious circumstances. Buddhist nuns and Catholic nuns mutually communicate and respect each other while cooperating in religious social activities. To my knowledge, some nuns are members of *Samsöheo* (Three Smiles)¹ which is composed of Catholic, Won-Buddhist and Buddhist nuns. Together they visit Buddhist pilgrimage sites in India and also engage in Catholic pilgrimages to Rome, and they have had opportunities to understand and respect other religions. They celebrate both the Buddha's birthday and Christmas, and both of which are official holidays in Korea. Scholarly research is needed to examine how these nuns differ from each other, how they perceive and understand each other, and how their religious activities can be meaningfully harmonized in contemporary society.

Finally, it is important to note that almost all shamans, called *mudang*, in Korea today are female.² When they are initiated they are also called Bodhisattvas, or lay devotees who are pursuing enlightenment while assisting others in their quest for enlightenment. In the Korean sense, shamans are regarded as quasi- or pseudo-Buddhist nuns. Moreover, lay Buddhist devotees commonly visit a shaman shrine and make donations for a shaman to

¹ The association of the Samsöheo is a leading group of nuns from multiple religions: Catholicism, Won Buddhism, and Buddhism. The word "three" refers to the number of different religions and "smiles" represents the members' wish for the harmonization and cooperation of these different religions. The association started in 1988. Jinmyung, an alumna of Unmunsa monastic college, is one its leader. Currently, their projects include improving the lives of children in Ethiopia. For further information see. (<http://photo.media.daum.net/culture/view.html?cateid=1003&newsid=20100210205904502&p=segye>)

² For information on Korean Shamanism see: Kendall, Laurel. *The Life and Hard Times of a Korean Shaman: of Tales and the Telling of Tales*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988.). Guisso, Richard W.L. and Chai-shin Yu. ed. *Shamanism: the Spirit World of Korea*. (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1988.). Bruno, Antonetta Lucia. *The Gate of Words: Language in the Rituals of Korean Shamans*. (The Netherland Research School of Asian, African, and Amerindian Studies, Universiteit Leiden, 2002.).

perform rituals for their merits. Through field research, scholars should pay attention to how the shamans recognize their identities and how they understand the relationship between Buddhism and indigenous religions.

A systematic inter-disciplinary study about nuns in Korean Buddhism can be achieved only through a comprehensive perspective that looks beyond limited doctrinal or philosophical interpretations and strives to overcome the disciplinary constraints of Buddhology. Indeed, research on Buddhism needs to continue to adapt to and integrate the insights offered by disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and women's studies to move analysis beyond those traditionally employed by specialists in Buddhist literature. Thus, the appropriate study of Korean nuns in Buddhism requires a broad vision, an inter-disciplinary perspective, and collaborative research work.

APPENDIX A
SUMMER 2008 SURVEY OF UNMUNSA NUNS

1. Year of Birth____

2. Home town____

3. Highest Education level: (Please check one of the following.)

Elementary__

Middle School-__

High School__

College__

University__

Graduate__

Other__

4. Parents' employment and education:

Father: employment____ Highest Education Level ____

Mother: employment____ Highest Education Level____

5. Before entry the nunnery did you have a religion?

Yes__

No__

If yes what kind of religion?

Buddhism__

Protestant Christian__

Catholic Christian__

Other (Explain specific religion) _____

6. What was your occupation when you were a layperson?

7. Do you have any blood-relatives who are members of a monastic order?

Yes__

No__

If yes, what is their relation to you? _____

8. Why did you become a renunciant/nun? Who or what most effected your decision?

10. Entry into the nunnery:

a) Name of the nunnery and the location :_____

b) Entry year:_____

- c) With how many other people did you enter monastic training during your first six months with the order? _____
Of that number, how many left before completion? _____

11. Current Religious Rank:

12. Ordination:

- a) Year__
b) Teacher: Nun__ Monk__
c) Location of Ordination__

13. Current Study Rank

1st year__

2nd year__

3rd year__

4th year__

14. Do you think that maintaining the precepts in contemporary society is useful or meaningful?

Yes__

No__

I do not know__

Explain your answer _____

15. What practice is most important to maintaining the stature of nuns?

Doctrinal study_____

Mediation_____

Keeping the precepts_____

Other_____

16. Which of the following items in everyday life do you consider a Buddhist practice?

Tea Ceremony__

Flower Arranging__

Calligraphy__

Cooking__

Clearing__

All of them__

Other__

17. What kind of social respect do you think nuns have today?

Greatly respected__

Respected__

Not very respected__

Not at all respected__
Other__

18. What is the main difference between laypeople and monks/nuns?

19. What is the main difference between monks and nuns?

20. Do you think nuns are discriminated against?

Yes__

No__

If yes please explain and provide examples_____

21. What kind of social responsibilities do nuns have?

22. If you are asked “who is the most famous and important nun in Korean Buddhist History?” how would you respond? (Please give a specific name and the reason for your reply.)

23. What is main problem in Korean Buddhism? What might be the most effective solution in your opinion?

24. Briefly explain the Korean Jogye Order

25. Describe the ideal nun.

26. Describe the ideal layperson.

27. Describe the ideal relationship between laypeople and monks/nuns.

28. Describe the ideal relationship between Buddhism and other religions.

APPENDIX B
FIGURES OF NUNS



Figure 1) The Landscape of Unmunsa Temple. Photo by Jigwon Ha.

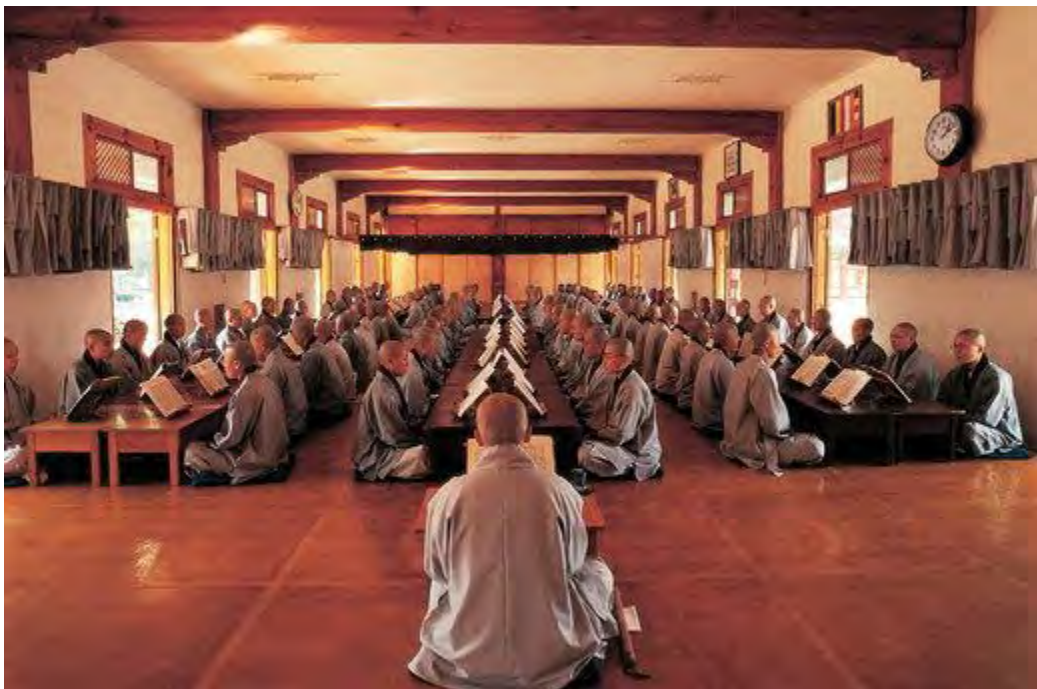


Figure 2) Students Nuns in Classes at Unmunsa Monastic College. Photo by Jigwon Ha.



Figure 3) Students Nuns in Classes at Unmunsa Monastic College. Photo by Jigwon Ha



Figure 4) Nuns at the Morning Ritual at Unmunsa. Photo by Jigwon Ha.

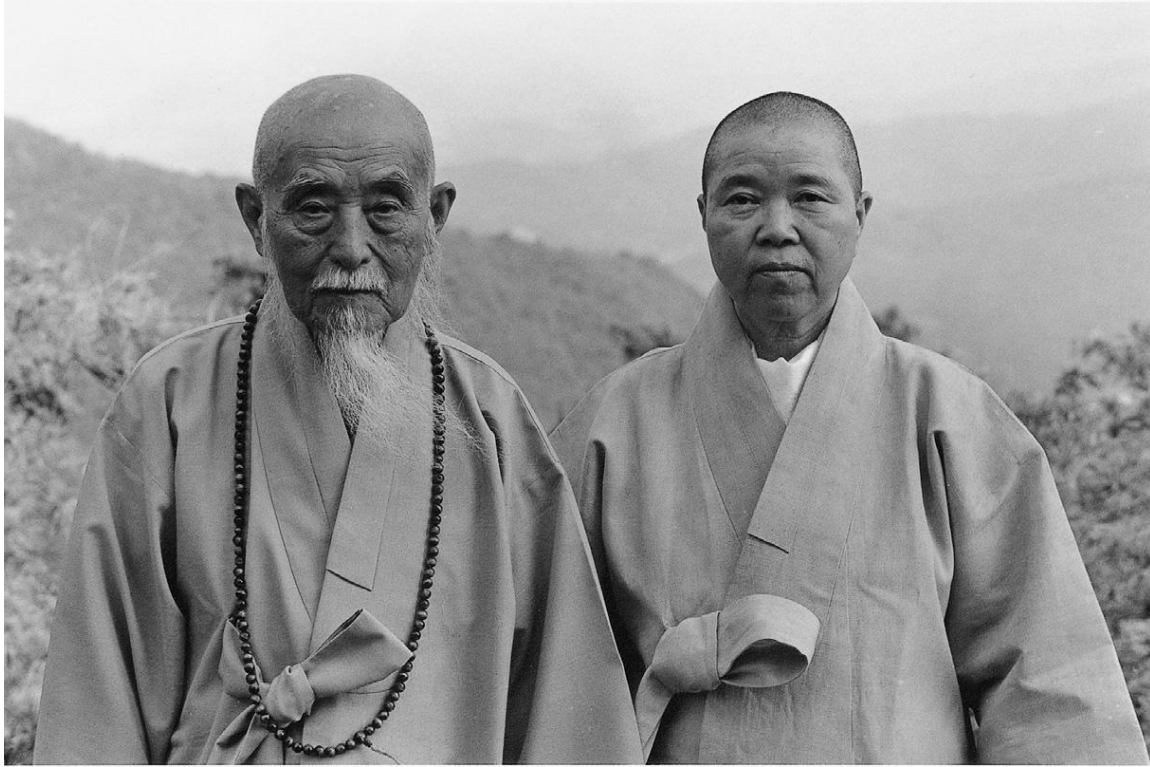


Figure 5) Venerable Nun Myeongseong with her Father Monk Gwaneung Photo provided by Myeongseong.



Figure 6) Myeongseong with Catholic Nuns and Foreign Visitors to Unmunsa Photo provided by Myeongseong.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Chungwhan Sung received her undergraduate degree in the Department of Indian Philosophy and a Master of Liberal Arts concentrating on Buddhism from Dongguk University in Seoul, South Korea. Throughout her academic career she has investigated the intersection of the texts, history and anthropological cultures in relation to issues of Buddhism. In addition, she works on issues relating to women in religion and Buddhism in globalization.