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The Study of Korean Esoteric Buddhism by Western Scholars (summary)

Prof. Dr. Pol Vanden Broucke
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Dear Prof. Dr. Mok Jeong Bae, I feel very honoured by your invitation to give a lecture here today. At the same time, I regret that I cannot deliver my lecture in the Korean language.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Prof. Dr. Suh Yoon Kil for allowing me to conduct research on Milgyo at Dongguk University. I heartily appreciate the warm hospitality and the scholarly stimulating atmosphere here.

Today I shall devote my paper to the state of affairs concerning the study of Korean esoteric Buddhism by non-Korean scholars. I must admit that Korean esoteric Buddhism is a new field for me. For the last ten years I have been mainly doing research on Sino-Japanese esoteric Buddhism, more in particular Japanese esoteric Buddhism of the Shingon tradition. Maybe it is useful to give a short survey of the research I have done up to now in this field. In 1990 I took my doctor's degree in Japanese studies at Ghent National University (Belgium) on the Kongōburōkakuissaiyugayugikyō or Yugikyō (T. XVIII no. 867). Although the Yugikyō is one of the five basic texts of the Japanese Shingon and Tendai, this scripture has hardly been studied in Japan. For my research on the Yugikyō I studied with a Japan Foundation Dissertation Fellowship in 1989 under the guidance of Prof. Dr. Matsunaga Yūkei of Kōyasan University. The results of my research on the title and the translatorship of this text have been published in 1994 in the Kōyasan Daigaku mikkyō bunka kenkyūjo kiyō¹⁾. In 1992 I published an annotated translation of the Hōkyōshō (T. LXXVII no. 2456), an anti-Tachikawa treatise written by the Shingon monk Yūkai (1345-1416)²⁾. In 1993 I received a Japan Foundation Professional Fellowship to study the symbolism of the Yugitō, a stūpa

1) See Pol Vanden Broucke, "On the Title and the Translator of the Yugikyō (T.XVIII n°867)", in Kōyasan Daigaku mikkyō bunka kenkyūjo kiyō 7 (1994), pp. 184-212.

2) Pol Vanden Broucke, Hōkyōshō: 'The Compendium of the Precious Mirror' of the Monk Yūkai. Ghent: Ghent National University, 1992, 150 pp.

located behind the Ryūkōin on Mt. Kōya. The results of this research will be published this year in the journal *Oriens Extremus* of Hamburg University (Germany). At present I am focussing my research on the monk Dōhan (1178-1252), in particularly on his *Shōsoku Ajikan*³⁾ and *Nankai Ruryōki*⁴⁾. Since the study of Japanese esoteric Buddhism has a long and rich tradition in Japan, the number of Japanese publications in this field of East Asian Buddhism is immense. Nevertheless only few Western scholars have focussed their research on this topic. In recent years, however, more and more excellent scholarly works have been published by European and American specialists.

After this introduction we have come to the topic of today, that is the study of Korean esoteric Buddhism by Western scholars. I first learned about the existence of esoteric Buddhism in Korea in Chou Yi-Liang's "Tantrism in China"⁵⁾. This article consists of a translation of the biographies of Śubhākarasiṃha (637-735), Vajrabodhi (671-741) and Amoghavajra (705-774) included in Tsan-ning's *Sung kao-seng chuan* (T. Vol. 50 no. 2061). Here I read that these masters also had Korean disciples, for example Hyech'o⁶⁾. At that time, I had my hands full with the study of Japanese esoteric Buddhism for my Ph.D. and I could not pay much attention to this. Later on I visited Dongguk University and I had the privilege of meeting Prof. Dr. Suh Yoon Kil. He kindly gave me a copy of the *Han'guk milgyo sasang yōn'gu*⁷⁾. This book arouse my interest in Korean esoteric Buddhism. In preparation of my present fellowship of the Korea Foundation I started collecting publications in the field of Korean esoteric Buddhism written in Western languages and in Japanese. But soon I found that this field of Korean Buddhist studies has hardly been touched by specialists outside Korea. Today, I would like to give an overview of the publications written in a European language which contain information on esoteric Buddhism in Korea. I hope that I have not overlooked any publication.

A very useful work to start the study of Korean religions is *Die Religionen Koreas* published by the Dutch scholar Frits Vos in 1977⁸⁾. This work is still a must for studying religions in Korea. It also contains a massive bibliography in Korean, Japanese, Chinese and European languages⁹⁾. In Chapter IV the author provides a history of Buddhism in Korea¹⁰⁾. He briefly mentions the introduction of esoteric Buddhism in the

3) See *Nihon koten bungaku taikai*, Vol. 83, *Kana hōgoshū*, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1964.

4) In *Kokubun tōhō bukkyō sōsho*, Vol. 7, *Kikōbu*.

5) See Chou Yi-Liang, "Tantrism in China", in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* Vol. 8 (1945), pp. 241-332.

6) *Ibid.*, p. 329.

7) *Pulgyo Munhwa Yōn'gu Wōn ed.*, *Han'guk milgyo sasang yōn'gu*, Seoul: Dongguk University Press, 1986.

8) Frits Vos, *Die Religionen Koreas*, Stuttgart/Berlin/Köln/Mainz: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1977.

9) *Ibid.*, pp. 227-253.

10) *Ibid.*, pp. 133-155.

Silla period¹¹⁾. In a footnote he states that the terminology of Korean shamanism has strongly been influenced by esoteric Buddhism since the Silla period¹²⁾. He also mentions the introduction of Lamaism in Korea during the Mongol occupation, referring to the article by Yi Yong-bōm on this interesting topic.¹³⁾

More references to Milgyo are found in James Huntley Grayson's work on the history of the Korean religions, *Korea: A Religious History*, published in 1989¹⁴⁾. His work has also been translated in Korean in 1995¹⁵⁾. Here we read that the studies written on the Silla monk Chajang often overlook his interest in esoteric Buddhism, especially in the cult of Mañjuśrī¹⁶⁾. He also deals in short with the activities of the early esoteric masters Myōngnang, Hyet'ong, Milbon and Myōnghyo¹⁷⁾. In his chapter on the Silla period he describes the contributions of Chinpyo, Hyech'o, Tosōn and Wōnp'yo¹⁸⁾. He emphasizes the growth of esoteric Buddhism in Silla and ascribes its ready acceptance to its 'outward similarity to concepts of practices of the primal religion'.¹⁹⁾

The same author has devoted a paper to the relationship between esoteric Buddhism and Korean primeval religion in the Silla period²⁰⁾. Here he links the official acceptance of Buddhism in Silla to the appeal of the occult practices within Buddhism²¹⁾. He also surveys the activities of the esoteric masters such as Myōngnang, Milbon, Hyet'ong, Myōnghyo and Hyech'o. Here again he mentions that Chajang's interest in the occult practices of esoteric Buddhism is often overlooked²²⁾. In his paper he also discusses the Sōkkuram Grotto. He claims that this construction is a giant maṇḍala and that the central figure represents the Buddha Vairocana²³⁾. In his concluding remarks he considers esoteric Buddhism the dominant mode of Buddhism in Silla and attributes its appeal to its similarity to the primeval religion of Korea.

11) See *Ibid.*, p.141: 'Neben den schon erwähnten Schulen wurden die Ch'ongji-jong (Dhāraṇi-Sekte) und die Sin'in-jong (*Devamudrā-Sekte) der Milgyo (Geheimlehre, Tantrismus) in Silla eingeführt. ...'.

12) *Ibid.*, p. 141 note 47: 'Seit der Silla-Zeit ist die Terminologie des koreanischen Schamanismus stark von der Milgyo beeinflusst worden.'

13) See *Ibid.*, p.148 note 77. Yi Yong-bōm, "Wōndae lamagyō-ōi koryōchōllae", in *Pulgyo hakpo* 2 (1964), pp. 161-220.

14) James Huntley Grayson, *Korea: A Religious History*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.

15) Han'guk chongyosa, Seoul: Minjuksa, 1989.

16) See Grayson, *Korea. A Religious History*, p. 54.

17) *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

18) *Ibid.*, pp. 80-83.

19) *Ibid.*, p. 81.

20) James Huntley Grayson, "Religious Syncretism in the Shilla Period: The Relationship between Esoteric Buddhism and Korean Primeval Religion", in *Asian Folklore Studies* Vol. 43 (1984), pp. 185-198.

21) *Ibid.*, p. 190.

22) *Ibid.*, p. 192.

23) *Ibid.*, pp. 194-197.

In the series *Studies in Korean Religions and Culture* edited by Lewis R. Lancaster and Chai-shin Yu, two volumes have been published on Buddhism in Korea²⁴⁾. These two works are a collection of English translations of major contributions by Korean and Japanese specialists. The *Introduction of Buddhism to Korea: New Cultural Patterns* contains scarce information on esoteric Buddhism. The only contribution which provides information on esoteric Buddhism in this volume is Inoue Hideo's "Reception of Buddhism in Korea". Here he gives an analyses of the legends of the esoteric masters Hyet'ong and Milbon included in the *Samguk Yusa*²⁵⁾. He shows the interaction that occurred between Buddhism and indigenous Silla religion, and the relationship between the local spirits and Buddhist monks. The *Assimilation of Buddhism in Korea: Religious Maturity and Innovation in the Silla Dynasty* contains only three pages of information on esoteric Buddhism²⁶⁾. These are found in the contribution by An KyeHyön, titled "Buddhism in the Unified Silla Period". In his brief sketch of esoteric buddhism in Silla he mentions Milbon, Hyet'ong, Myö ngnang, Pulgasäui, Hyech'o, Ojin and Hyeil. He also concludes that esoteric Buddhism gained popularity because of its similarity to local custom.

The most comprehensive English-language study of Korean esoteric Buddhism I have come across is Henrik H. Sørensen's "Esoteric Buddhism in Korea" published in 1993²⁷⁾. In his introduction he remarks among other things that 'the study of esoteric Buddhism has lagged behind the study of other aspects of Korean Buddhism'²⁸⁾. On the other hand he also sees considerable increase in the number of studies in the field of Milgyo. Here he mentions the symposium "Milgyo sasang üi Han'guk chök chöngae" organised at Dongguk University in Seoul in 1986, and the publication of the *Han'guk milgyo sasang yön'gu*. Sørensen also discusses the problems in the study of Milgyo, namely the lack of historical sources²⁹⁾. In five chapters he surveys the history and development of esoteric Buddhism in Korea, referring to numerous modern Korean publications. His article is structured as follows:

1. Early Esoteric Buddhism on the Korean Peninsula
2. The Transmission of the Zhenyan School to Korea
3. Esoteric Buddhism under the Koryö
4. Esoteric Buddhism during the Chosön Dynasty
5. Esoteric Buddhism in Korea Today

24) Lewis R. Lancaster & C. S. Yu (ed.), *Introduction of Buddhism to Korea: New Cultural Patterns*, Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1989. Lewis R. Lancaster & C. S. Yu (ed.), *Assimilation of Buddhism in Korea: Religious Maturity and Innovation in the Silla Dynasty*, Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1991.

25) See Lancaster & Yu, *Introduction of ...*, pp. 63-68.

26) See Lancaster & Yu, *Assimilation ...*, pp. 18-20.

27) Henrik H. Sørensen, "Esoteric Buddhism in Korea", *The Esoteric Buddhist tradition*, ed. H. H. Sørensen, SBS Monographs II (Copenhagen, 1993), pp. 73-96.

28) *Ibid.*, p. 73.

29) *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

In his conclusion he states that:

It should be clear that with the exception of a very brief period during the 8-9th centuries when Korean monks connected to the orthodox Zhenyan School in Tang China taught in Silla, esoteric Buddhism did not exist as a distinct sectarian movement. On the contrary, esoteric Buddhism, which may have been present since very early on the Peninsula, has been a steady and persistent undercurrent Korean and has occasionally surfaced to take on a leading or influential role within the various aspects of Korean Buddhism.³⁰⁾

At the end of his article he indicates a few directions which future research on esoteric Buddhism in Korea could take³¹⁾. For example the historical study of the early esoteric Buddhist tradition in Korea including Unified Silla, the study of esoteric rituals during the Koryŏ Dynasty and the Chosŏn Period.

Sørensen has also published a valuable contribution in the Korea Journal on Lamaism in Korea during the late Koryŏ Dynasty, probably the only non-Korean study of this topic³²⁾. For his study he relies on historical records such as the Koryŏsa. Apart from this article, no other contributions by Western scholars on Milgyo are included in the Korea Journal. This journal includes one article written by the Korean scholar Ch'ŏn Hye-Bong: "Dharani-sutra of early Koryŏ"³³⁾, and some contributions by Korean specialists on Hyech'o³⁴⁾. The Silla monk Hyech'o is the only Korean esoteric master who has captured interest in the West. He is well-known for his Hyech'o wang o Ch'ŏnch'uk kuk chŏn. This text is also available in an annotated English translation.³⁵⁾

From the above survey we can see that only few attention has been paid to Korean esoteric Buddhism by Western scholars. The same is true for the Japanese Buddhist scholarship on Korean esoteric Buddhism³⁶⁾. Also in

30) Ibid., pp. 95-96.

31) Ibid., p. 96.

32) Henrik H. Sørensen, "Lamaism in Korea during the Late Koryŏ Dynasty", Korea Journal, vol. 33 no. 3 (1993), pp. 67-81.

33) Ch'ŏn Hye-bong, "Dharani-sutra of Early Koryŏ", in Korea Journal, vol. 12 no. 6 (1972), pp. 4-12.

34) See Jan Yun-hua, "On Hyech'o: The Korean Record on Varanasi and Sarnath", Korea Journal vol. 10 no. 9, pp. 28-31; Yang Han-sung, "Eight Century Asia and Hyech'o's Travel Account", Korea Journal, vol. 9 no. 9, pp. 35-39; Yang Han-sung, "New Facts about Hyech'o's Travels", Korea Journal, vol. 9 no. 12, pp. 10-13; Yang Han-sung, "Hyech'o's Travels Account: Soviet and Chinese Turkestan in the 8th Century", vol. 10 no. 1, pp. 13-16.

35) Translation, text and editing by Yang Han-Sung, Jan Yün-hua, Iida Shotaro and Laurence W. Preston, *The Hye Ch'o Diary: Memoir of the Pilgrimage to the Five Regions of India*, Seoul: Asian Humanities Press Po Chin Chai Ltd., 1984.

36) Only 27 contributions on Korean esoteric Buddhism are included among the 9,657 titles contained in the Mikkyōkankei bunken mokuroku, the most comprehensive Japanese bibliography of esoteric Buddhism. See Shuchiin Daigaku MikkyōGakkai (comp.), *Mikkyōkankei bunken mokuroku*, Kyōto: Dōhōsha Shuppan, 1986, pp. 87-88.

Korea this topic seems to be less studied in comparison with other areas of Korean Buddhism. However, from the publications I have collected during my fellowship here at Dongguk University I see that the majority has been published during the 1980s and 1990s. This is an important indication of an increased interest by Korean scholars in esoteric Buddhism. Today there is even English material available on esoteric Buddhism in Korea. Namely the very informative history of Korean esoteric Buddhism written by Prof. Suh Yoon Kil of Dongguk University.³⁷⁾

37) Sŏ Yun'gil, "Esoteric Buddhism", in The Korean Buddhist Research Institute ed., *Buddhist Thought in Korea*. Seoul: Dongguk University Press, 1994, pp. 259-306.

**THE STUDY OF KOREAN ESOTERIC BUDDHISM BY WESTERN SCHOLARS
(summary)**

Hitherto only few attention has been paid to Korean esoteric Buddhism outside Korea. Also in Korea, Milgyo has been less studied in comparison with other areas of Korean Buddhism. However, from the publications I have collected during my Korea Foundation fellowship at Dongguk University I see that the majority is published in the 1980s and 1990s. This is an indication of an increased interest by Korean scholars in Milgyo. It is important that these scholarly attributions of Korean Buddhist scholarship also deserve attention outside Korea. In this lecture I would like to introduce the publications I have come across written in a European language and containing information on esoteric Buddhism in Korea. Secondly I will indicate the difficulties I experience in studying Korean Milgyo and the necessity of doing research of this interesting field of East Asian esoteric Buddhism.

Short Personnel History

Prof. Dr. Pol VANDEN BROUCKE. Born in 1957 in Diksmuide (Belgium).

Studied Classical Chinese, Sanskrit and Japanese at Ghent National University. Conducted research at Koyasan University on Japanese esoteric Buddhism.

Earned his PhD in Oriental Philology at Ghent National University in 1990 with an annotated translation of the Yugikyo.

Since 1995 Professor at the Department Cultures and Languages of South and East Asia (Indology, Sinology and Japanology). Since 1997 chairman of the department. Main publications in the field of Japanese esoteric Buddhism. Currently doing research on the transmission of Milgyo during the Shilla period.