

A Study on the Popularization of Buddhism in Silla Dynasty and Its Sprit

저자 (Authors)	김영태 Young Tae Kim
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by Kim, Young-Tae

One of the most important things in Buddhism in Silla dynasty must be the success in the popularization of Buddhism.

The necessity of popularization of Buddhism was conceived from the beginning of Buddhism in Silla dynasty, but it took a long time to realize it in fact.

The first king that was converted to Buddhism and allowed it to spread in Silla was the 23rd King, Beob-Heung. After his time all of the Kings of Silla dynasty were faithful Buddhists. Above all the King Chin-Heung, the next of Beob-Heung, raised Buddhism greatly to the position of a national religion.

Taking a view of the historical development of Buddhism in Silla dynasty, we can find the fact that it was an aristocratic Buddhism. It was believed by the kings first and was also developed under their leadership. It is natural that such a Buddhism as believed by the royal family should be also believed by the aristocrats, and it became an aristocratic Buddhism belonged only to the royal family and the aristocrats. Before the unification of Silla i.e. at the time of the Three Nations in old Korea, Buddhism in Silla was not so popular since it was aristocratic. After the unification of Silla, many great monks awakened to the true spirit of Buddhism appeared in Silla and they set about the popularization of Buddhism.

In the cause of national interests and the welfare of the people. Buddhism was accepted by the kings of Silla dynasty, and so it was natural for Buddhism to spread to rich and poor, noble and mean alike. It is from the historical necessity that the aristocratic Buddhism studied and believed by the kings and aristocrats first should spread to the poor and mean, too.

When they were needed, the great monks and pioneers, Hye-Sook, Hye-Gong, Dae-An, Won-Hyo etc. were born. They went from village to village to village,

from town to town spreading the Gospel of Buddha, and they succeeded in popularization of Buddhism.

Then king and begger, noble and mean, young and old are all alike awakened to the true spirit of Buddhism, and Buddhism was practiced in everyday life by all the classes of the people.

It is not too much to say that the success in popularization of Buddhism in Silla dynasty is a true realization of the spirit of Buddha, and it is really the accomplishment of the last aim of Buddhism. In this connection, by expositing the historical facts and their conceptual causes, the true spirit of Buddhism in Silla dynasty is revealed in this thesis.