



## Fusion and Creation

### The Characteristics of Korean Buddhism in the Chinese Perspective

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# Fusion and Creation: The Characteristics of Korean Buddhism in the Chinese Perspective

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## Abstract

*Korean Buddhism in Chinese history is known as “Haidong Buddhism,” which means Buddhism [from the country] East of the Yellow Sea, and now has become a unique Buddhist tradition. Since the second half of fourth century when Buddhism spread from northern China to Goguryeo, Buddhist exchanges between China and Korea were quite frequent. Many Korean monks lived in China, and they not only brought Indian Buddhist scriptures and introduced the schools of Chinese Buddhism to Korea, but also made important contributions to the development of Chinese Buddhism. For example, Goguryeo monk Seungnang (Ch. Senglang, fl. ca. 490) in the Northern and Southern Dynasties period promoted the formation of the Three Treatises school, and Uitong (Ch. Yitong, 927–988) and Jegwan (Ch. Diguan, d. ca. 971) made great efforts in the revival of Tiantai Buddhism in the early Northern Song dynasty. In brief, Korean Buddhism shared the similar teaching with Chinese Buddhism, and was in the same community of Chinese Buddhism in ancient time. On the other hand, Korean Buddhism highlighted the mainstream of Chinese Buddhism, especially the ideas found in the Treatise on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna, and various eminent monks in the Korean Hwaeom 華嚴, Cheontae 天台, Seon 禪 and Consciousness-only schools, such as Wonhyo (617–686), Uicheon (1055–1101), and Jinul (1158–1210).*

*There is a Buddhist restoration in modern Korea after the decline suffered in the Joseon period (1392–1910). Advances have been made in the fields of Buddhist ceremony, organizational system, and the explanation of doctrines. The reforms and innovations appear to be full of vitality, and are worth being learned by contemporary Chinese Buddhist communities.*

**Key words:** Korean Buddhism, Chinese tradition, Korean style,  
Buddhist Transmission, Religious Consilience

There are four famous Buddhist mountains in China, Mt. Wutai, Mt. Putuo, Mt. Emei and Mt. Jiuhua, where Chinese Buddhist followers pay great homage to buddhas and bodhisattvas. The last one, Mt. Jiuhua, is recognized as a sacred place because of a Korean prince, a member of royal family of the Silla kingdom whose name was Gim Gyogak (Ch. Jin Qiaoju) 金喬覺. In 803, during the Tang dynasty, he passed away there and was finally regarded as an incarnation of the Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha. Just this case provides insights into the close relationship between Chinese Buddhism and Korean Buddhism over the past 1,000 years. In this paper I will describe this relationship in general and discuss the characteristics of Korean Buddhism from a Chinese view.

Korean Buddhism originated in China, beginning in the first half of fourth century. The pilgrimages of clerical and secular Buddhists, who both sought and transmitted the dharma and transmitting between the two countries, constituted an important part of Sino-Korean cultural exchange until the late fourteenth century. However, many of the Chinese and Korean historical literatures and records are not consistent with each other, and scholars from China, South Korea and Japan have researched them quite extensively. Korean Buddhism is dependent on Chinese Buddhist tradition in general; nevertheless, it possesses many of its own characteristics and appearances.

Since the 1980s, Chinese scholars have focused mainly on the activities Korean monks in medieval China, and their research resulted in some monographs and treatises. In November 1986, a conference on Buddhism during the Sui and Tang dynasties was held in Xi'an city, which, as the old capital Chang'an, was the most important Buddhist center in medieval China. Huang Xinchuan, a senior Chinese Buddhist scholar, read a paper titled, "Buddhist Exchanges between China and Korea in the Sui and Tang Dynasties: Research on Buddhist Monks from Silla to China," which was later published in *Proceedings of a Conference on Sui and Tang Buddhist Studies* (1990). This essay constitutes groundbreaking research in this area, and it inspired two Chinese scholars, Huang Youfu and Chen Jingfu. Both of them committed themselves to the study on Buddhist exchange between China and Korea in medieval times, and published a monograph, *Biographies of Eminent Monks from Korea who entered China in Search of the Dharma* (Haidong ru Hua qiu fa gaoseng zhuan 海東入華求法高僧傳, 1994).<sup>1</sup> During the past decade, He Jingsong made a further comprehensive study that eventually resulted in his book *A History of Korean Buddhism* (2008).

According to their research, from the Eastern Jin period (317–420) to the late Yuan (1271–1368) and early Ming period (1368–1644) in Chinese history, during this thousand years more than 270 monks and laymen entered China to study and learn Buddhism who were recorded in historical literature and inscriptions (cf. Chen 1999, 22; He 2002). In particular, in the Silla period (ca. 300–935) of Korean history, its domestic Buddhism flourished and seeking the dharma in China became very popular. Korean monks even went from China into India seeking the dharma and bringing back scriptures. The history of Korean monks in China can be divided into three periods:

1. The rising stage (317–589). There are only 16 people in these 300 years, and they were mainly concentrated in the later 90 years after 502, which accounts for 14 people.
2. The flourishing stage (590–907). In these 300 years, 185 monks and laymen are mentioned in China in historical records.
3. The early tenth century and until the end of eleventh century. By the middle of the Northern Song dynasty, the activities of monks seeking the dharma almost came to an end. In these 180 years, only 39 Korean Buddhist monks and laymen went to China. From then on, Korean monks who went to China were mostly for preaching the dharma and raising funds—not seeking the dharma. The evidence suggests that there were still 36 Korean monks in China from the Yuan to the early Ming period (cf. Chen 1999, 22–25; He 2008, 101).

My paper discusses Korean Buddhism mainly based on the materials of those Korean Buddhist monks and laymen visiting China, but also include important figures that never went to China and still made outstanding contributions to Korean Buddhism. I would like to focus on the relationship between Chinese and Korean Buddhism, and the characteristics of Korean Buddhism in the eyes of Chinese scholar.

## **Buddhism Beyond the Chinese Tribute System**

In the summer of 372, the second year of the reign of King Sosurim 小獸林 (r. 371–384), Buddhism was introduced from north China to Goguryeo 高句麗.

At that time, China was divided between the North and the South, and Buddhism in China went into the early stage of its fast development with more and more Chinese followers, unlike before the early fourth century when there were primarily foreign practitioners.

After 317, northern China was under the control of non-Chinese regimes ruled by minority peoples. Fu Jian (r. 357–385), the emperor of Former Qin, expanded its territory to today's western Liaoning Province after his conquest of Former Yan (337–370), and the condition of maintaining a good relationship with Goguryeo was an important political strategy in order to fight against their common enemy, the Tuoba branch of the Xianbei nationality. The emperor of Qin sent to Goguryeo the three treasures of Buddhism, Buddhist statues, scriptures and a monk, whose dharma name was Shundao. The monk's life experiences are far from clear, and it is unknown whether he was from northern China, or the southern Chinese Eastern Jin regime. The Korean hagiographical text *Biographies of Eminent Korean Monks* (*Haedong goseungjeon*) preserved these two different traditional narratives.<sup>2</sup> Several years later, in 384, the ninth year of the Taiyuan reign period of Eastern Jin emperor Xiaowu (r. 372–396), the Indian monk Marananta 摩羅難陀 (Skt. Malanada) was dispatched from southern China to spread Buddhism to the kingdom of southwestern kingdom of Baekje. Slightly later, Buddhism was spread into Silla via Goguryeo.

Because only Chinese regimes could be considered as legitimate in early and medieval China, Chinese historical books say that Buddhism was introduced into Korea by the monk Tanshi (fl. 381–451) of the Eastern Jin dynasty, who was from Guanzhong located in today Shanxi Province. The *Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Gaoseng zhuan*) written in Liang dynasty claimed that by the end of Taiyuan period of Xiaowu emperor in Eastern Jin, Tanshi brought dozens of Buddhist scriptures to Goguryeo. Furthermore, *Biographies of Eminent Korean Monks* says that this happened in 396, the fifth year of Goguryeo king Gwanggaeto 廣開土 (r. 391–413).

Chang'an and Jiankang were the two major political centers in China at that time. They also functioned as two major Buddhist centers in East Asia, representing the Northern and Southern traditions of Chinese Buddhism. Korean Buddhists adopted elements and characteristics from both of these two traditions. Due to the ignorance of "nation-state identity" in ancient and medieval East Asian society, Buddhism played a synthetic function in resolving

ethnic conflict. In the Western Jin (265–316), the Chinese regime that retreated south from northern China, Buddhism, a foreign religion that advocated the equality of the various sentient beings, was warmly welcomed both by the ruling non-Chinese peoples and the ruled Chinese common people. This quality of the religion was a key link in the spread of Buddhism in China, and it also laid a solid foundation for the great fusion of the Chinese nationality and the development of new Chinese culture (Li 2009). Similarly, Buddhism imported from China could narrow the psychological distance between the two nations in Korean history. Although Korea submitted to Chinese dominance in the ancient tributary system, the spread of Buddhism, and the travels of monks between the two countries, objectively helped to alleviate political inequality. Both Chinese and Korean monks shared the same idea of transmitting dharma as well as the relationship of equal coexistence. As a result, Korean Buddhism could be regarded as a part of Chinese Buddhism in medieval times.

The earliest extant Korean historical record, *Historical Records of the Three Kingdoms* (*Samguk sagi* 三國史記), says that Former Qin emperor Fu Jian sent envoys and Buddhist presents to Goguryeo, and that King Sosurim paid tribute to the Former Qin emperor. In the first year of Baekje king Chimnyu 枕流 (r. 384–385), after ascending the throne, the king sent envoys into Eastern Jin for offer tribute. Subsequently a Serindian (Hu 胡) monk came to Baekje from the Eastern Jin dynasty in southern China. The king of Baekje received the foreign monk in the suburb of the capital, invited him to the palace with great worship, and learned the Buddhist teaching from him. In the tributary system at that time, Buddhism was often regarded as a gift by the emperor of China to Korean royal courts. For example, in the tenth year of Silla king Jinheung 眞興 (r. 540–576), Emperor Wu sent envoys with monks and relics of Buddha to Silla. In his twenty-sixth year (566), Chen emperor Wendi (r. 559–566) donated more over 2,100 scrolls of Buddhist sutras in Chinese, so that the condition of lacking Buddhist scriptures and Buddha images was completely changed.

The tributary system in the Silla period became very obvious. It is said that between 621 and 688, Silla sent tribute to Tang China twenty-one times, and in 648 Silla changed its political system and court dress style to follow the Chinese system and style. In return, Tang supported Silla in its efforts to unify the Korean Peninsula. During this period, Korean monks traveled to China to

seek the dharma very frequently. There were lots of Silla villages in China then, and many Korean monks lived there. In his *Notes of Pilgrimage in Tang Dynasty* (*Nittō gubō junrei kōki* 入唐求法巡禮行記), the Japanese monk Ennin 圓仁 (794–864) reported that in a village named Chishan in Shandong Province there was a religious cloister called Fahuayuan 法華院 where at least thirty Silla monks stayed transmitting the teachings of Tiantai Buddhism. All the monks in the temple were from Silla (He 2008, 103–105).

In the name of the “Buddhadharma,” which could transcend the narrowness of nationalism, Chinese Buddhism and Korean Buddhism were almost united together as one. *Biographies of Eminent Korean Monks* was compiled in 1215, and its standard of including leading monks clearly broke through the boundaries of the nation, because Korean, Chinese, Indian monks were included. Since the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* emphasized the contribution to transmission of Buddhism, most of the biographies circulated among Korea, China and India, and both of the two extant volumes have the title word “circulation” (*liutong* 流通), which means to transmit dharma. It was unnecessary to translate Buddhist scriptures in ancient Korean Buddhism because Koreans used Chinese characters directly then; so there was no need for a section on monks who translated the Buddhist canon, as in found in the *Biographies of Eminent Monks* collections in China (Jian 2010). *Biographies of Eminent Korean Monks* indeed continued the tradition of the various *Biographies of Eminent Monks* by focusing on Buddhism that transcended national boundaries and that did not differentiate by nationalities of monks, whether they were Chinese, Korean or Indian.

In Confucian culture, there is the problem of the relationship between Chinese and the non-Chinese barbarians (*yi-hua* 夷夏). The place where Chinese nation stayed, the land of Han (*Handi* 漢地), is regarded as “central country,” which means the land full of elegant manners and suitable rituals. Meanwhile all around nations were seen as barbarians, and their lands were regarded as a frontier wilds and uncivilized lands. The Sinocentric tributary system in ancient and medieval times was actually based on this inherent cultural idea. Thus, the theory of the relationship between the Chinese and non-Chinese peoples is full of Chinese ethnocentrism. The introduction of Buddhism broke this theory rooted in Confucian culture. In the eyes of monks, China was a frontier land (*bianguo* 邊國), and India was the center of the world, a sacred place for all Buddhists. Affected by this idea, Korean monks in history sometimes



moved to India via China to seek the Buddhist dharma.

However, in general China was considered the center of Buddhism in the mind of ancient Korean monks, and their own motherland was a frontier land; therefore, they went to China for Buddhism. The purposes of their pilgrimages were first for seeking the dharma and disseminating Chinese Buddhism, especially the teachings of Huayan, Tiantai, Chan and other traditions. Second, they enriched and developed methods of practice in various Chinese Buddhist schools and their doctrines, and in the process preserved a large amount of Chinese Buddhist literature.

### Seeking the Dharma in China

The activities in which Korean monks sought the dharma in China lasted about one thousand years. After they returned home, those monks spread what they learned about Buddhism in China. Some of them decided to stay in China further, and were quite familiar with Buddhist literature in Chinese, including both the Indian Buddhist canon in its Chinese edition as well as Buddhist writings by Chinese monks. Some Korean monks finally even recognized as being patriarchs of certain Chinese Buddhist schools, because they participated in establishing the Buddhist school in China, or made a great contribution to maintain and develop the teaching of the Chinese Buddhist school. In my opinion, what they did in history could be not only the content of Korean Buddhism, but also an important part of Chinese Buddhism.

A goodly amount of materials records the activities and contributions of Korean monks in China in Chinese Buddhist historical literature. For example, *Biographies of Eminent Monks* written in Liang dynasty recorded that the Goguryeo monk Seungnang (Ch. Senglang) 僧朗 (fl. ca. 490) went to south China in the latter half of the fifth century. Being an expert of “Three Treatises” translated by Kumārajīva (334–413), Seungnang became one of most famous monks in Jiankang (present-day Nanjing in Jiangsu Province), which soon thereafter became the capital of the Liang dynasty (502–587). Eventually, the Three Treatises school was organized by his followers.

Hyeon'gwang (Ch. Xuanguang) 玄光 (fl. sixth century) is another important Korean monk in the early stage of Korean monks making pilgrimages to China. Several Chinese historical records mentioned him; his description in

*Biographies of Eminent Monks Compiled in the Song Dynasty* (*Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳) is the most detailed. Hyeon'gwang was a monk from Baekje, although Chinese historical records often put him as Silla monk. In the Chen dynasty (557–589) in the Northern and Southern Dynasties period of China, he went to China to practice meditation, and met the third patriarch of Tiantai Buddhism Huisi 慧思 (515–577). The latter privately taught him the four practices of peace and bliss (*anle xing* 安樂行) from the *Lotus Sutra*, and when he returned to his homeland, he preached the teaching of his Chinese mentor in Baekje, gradually being a pioneer of Tiantai Buddhism and an early proponent of the *Lotus Sutra* in Korea. In the history of Chinese Buddhism, Hyeon'gwang is listed among the twenty-eight disciples of Huisi, and there was an image of him in the patriarch's hall in Tiantai temples, because the Korean monk was a dharma brother of Zhiyi 智顗 (538–597), the actual founder of Tiantai Buddhism. Another Korean monk named Paya 波若 (fl. 596–613) was a disciple of Master Zhiyi in China, and later two other Korean monks came to China and made great contributions to Tiantai Buddhism. The first is Uitong (Ch. Yitong) 義通 (927–988), who originally studied the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, and afterwards preached the Tiantai teaching for twenty years in China, finally being regarded as sixteenth patriarch of Tiantai Buddhism. The second is Master Jegwan (Ch. Diguan) 諦觀 (d. 970), who escorted Tiantai sacred literature preserved in Korea to southern China under orders from the king of Goryeo, and wrote *On the Four Classifications of Tiantai Buddhism* (*Tiantai sijiao yi* [Kor. *Cheontae sagyo ui*] 天台四教儀) when he stayed in China. This treatise has long been most famous text used in China as an introduction to Tiantai Buddhism.

Gim Musang 無相 (Ch. Wuxiang, ca. 684–762), whose name means “formlessness,” better known as “Reverend Gim” (Gim hwasang [Ch. Jin heshang] 金和尚), the founder of Jingquan Baotang branch of Chan Buddhism, was very famous in the history of Chinese Buddhism. *Dharma Treasure through the Ages* (*Lidai fabao ji* 歷代法寶記) is a famous historical record of Chan Buddhism. Chinese historical literature suggests that Musang hailed from the Silla royalty. Su Xing Jin claims that Musang was a member of Silla royal family surnamed Gim before being a monk, after he got ordained, the Korean monk arrived in Sichuan in southwestern China in order to look for Bodhi (enlightenment), and finally received transmission in the dharma with a dharma clothing from his teacher, Master Chuji 處寂 (ca. 684–734), whose name means “keeping in silence or extinction.” Gim Jijang (Ch. Jin Dizang) 金地藏 (ca. 705–803), mentioned

as Gim Gyogak at the beginning of this paper, arrived in China during the Tang dynasty. According to folk legend, he was also a member of the Silla royal family, and happened to go to a mountain in China's present-day Anhui Province. It is said that this Korean monk practiced a unified method of Chan meditation and Buddha-recitation; however, his image finally was changed into an incarnation of the Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha (Dizang 地藏) in Chinese folk society.

Won'gwang (Ch. Yuanguang) 圓光 (ca. 540–640), a Silla monk, stayed in China mostly in the turn of Chen and Sui dynasties, when the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, *Lotus Sutra*, *Nirvana Sutra*, and *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* (*She dasheng lun* 攝大乘論) were very popular, could be regarded as a master of Northern and Southern Buddhism that inherited the doctrinal learning of all Buddhist traditions in China in that age. Jajang (Ch. Cizang) 慈藏 (fl. 636–650) was a Silla monk who went to China following royal orders. His biography in *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms* (*Samguk yusa* 三國遺事) says that he “sighed to be born in a frontier land, and wanted to travel westward for great teaching.” He later visited Mt. Wutai in present-day Shanxi Province, and he also went to Chang'an and the nearby Mt. Zhongnan. Both of these Korean monks have records in *Biographies of Eminent Monks* written in Tang dynasty. It is also said that some Korean monks participated in the activities of Xuanzang's 玄奘 (602–664) translation team and were responsible for revisions of Chinese translations of sutra material. Among the disciples of following Master Xuanzang at that time, there were dozens of Silla monks involved in the scripture translation, Woncheuk (Ch. Yuance) 圓測 (613–696), Sinbang (Ch. Shenfang) 神昉, Ji'in (Ch. Zhiren) 智仁, Hyeonbeom 玄範 (Ch. Huanfan), Uijeok 義寂 (Ch. Yiji), Doryun (Ch. Daolun) 道倫 (also known as Dullyun [Ch. Dunlin] 遁倫), Seungjang (Ch. Shengzhuang) 勝莊, Sin'gwak (Ch. Shenkuo) 神廓, and others were quite well-known. In particular, Woncheuk was eponymous with Xuanzang's Chinese heir Kuiji 窺基 (632–682), and was regarded as a representative of the Korean Consciousness-only school. That is to say, the Silla monks were an important reason why the Consciousness-only school was able to be very popular in China during the Tang dynasty.

Whether Wonhyo 元曉 (617–686) actually went in China, historians have no shared opinion. However, the biography of his colleague Uisang 義湘 (625–702) is relatively clear that when he was in China Uisang studied under Zhiyan 智儼 (602–668), a patriarch of the Huayan school. Uisang preached the

Huayan teaching after he returned to Silla, and meanwhile he maintained correspondence with Fazang 法藏 (643–712), and finally became a great master of Korea's Huayan (Hwaeom) school.

Therefore, almost all the schools of Chinese Buddhism enjoyed the participation of Korean monks in China. Their arrival, mainly for the sake of the dharma and to preach the Buddhist truth, but objectively, they participated in the breeding of new ideas in the Chinese Buddhist tradition.

### Preaching and Developing in Korea

The Korean monks who stayed in China until the end of their lives were mainly a part of Chinese Buddhism and were not very important in the development of Korean Buddhism. They just acted as models for other Korean followers. In comparison, those Korean Buddhist monks who returned from China and those monks from China, India, or the Western regions who arrived in Korea played great and important roles in the development of Korean Buddhism. Gakhun (Ch. Juexun) 覺訓 (fl. 1215), the author of *Biographies of Eminent Korean Monks* said, “Westward into China, they returned with complete enlightenment, and continued to replant.”<sup>3</sup> This kind of Buddhism originated in China and should unite the Chinese Buddhist tradition with Korean local society, in particular with Korean native religions and folk beliefs.

### Combination with Korean Tradition of Native Religious Culture

Just after Buddhism was introduced to Korea, it had distinctive national characteristics, displaying magical powers and looking eagerly for good fortune. *Biographies of Eminent Korean Monks* reports that Shundao, the first monk to preach the dharma in Goguryeo, “showed cause and effect, preaching in terms of disaster and fortune.” This saying reveals the characteristics of Korean Buddhism in the early stage. When Buddhism was initially introduced to Silla, miracles were used to convince the king of Silla. According to *Historical Records of the Three Kingdoms*, Ichadon 異次頓 (d. 528) argued against various objections at the risk of losing his life, and said, “I would like to be killed for the Buddhadharma. If Buddha has supernatural power, there must be miracles after my death.” Blood gushed out after his head was chopped off; however the

color of his blood was white as milk. In Chinese Buddhist historical materials, for example, the “Account of Goguryeo” in the *History of Northern Dynasties* (*Beishi* 北史) reports that people in Goguryeo “believe in Buddha and the dharma, pay homage to ghosts and gods, and had multiple excessive temples.” In Korean historical records, *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms* also says that Buddhism at that time was characterized by “believing piously in Buddhism for good fortune.”

The result of this trend was that Buddhism was penetrated into folk society. The way of the *hwarang* (花郎道) appeared in the reign of Silla king Jinheung. This folk religion is a compound of Confucianism, Buddhism and native beliefs in local society. Its leader was called a “state immortal” (*gukseon* 國仙), who was considered to be an incarnation of Maitreya the future buddha, so followers of the way of the *hwarang* are also known as Maitreya believers. Although Chinese scholars have heard of this folk religion, they did not have too much personal experience with similar traditions in China. The practice of Buddhism in Korean folk society is worthy of being introduced to scholars and the Buddhist community in China.

Korean Buddhism also has its own national characteristics when it interprets Buddhist doctrines. For example, Korean Buddhism suggests “secular five precepts,” and explains that “first, serve the king with loyalty; second, care for parents with filial piety; third, treat friends with trust; fourth, fight enemies without retreating; fifth, be selective when taking life.” Such an explanation seems different than Chinese Buddhism, but it has more Confucian influence with a Korean style. That is to say, the idea of protecting the country has become the fundamental spirit of Korean Buddhism, and both loyalty and filial piety act as ethical guidelines for Buddhist followers.

## Formation of Korean Buddhism in Transplanting Chinese Buddhist Schools

Corresponding to the “golden age” of Chinese Buddhism, the Sui and Tang dynasties, Silla Buddhism flourished on the Korean Peninsula. Many eminent monks emerged, such as Won'gwang, Anham (Ch. Anhan) 安含 (ca. 579–640), Jajang, Wonhyo, Uisang, Myeongnang (Ch. Minglang) 明朗 (fl. 632–679), Hyetong (Ch. Huitong) 慧通 (fl. 661–681), Sun'gyeong (Ch. Shunjing) 順璟 (fl. 666–667), Daehyeon (Ch. Daxian) 大賢 (fl. 742–765) and so on. These

famous monks spread Buddhism from China to Korea, transplanting Chinese Buddhist doctrinal schools of that time. For example, Won'gwang and Jajang symbolized of Silla spirit before the unification of the Three Kingdoms. They propagated Buddhism from China after returning to their motherland, and earned very high prestige. Won'gwang primarily preached the meaning of the Tathāgatagarbha, and the king of Silla and his officials recognized him as a saint. Jajang formally transplanted Buddhist precepts into Silla, and in the name of religious autonomy he deified the Silla regime, and eventually made Silla the Buddhist center of the Three Kingdoms.

The most successful case of transplantation in Silla is Huayan Buddhism, represented by the monk Wonhyo. He executed painstaking research on the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*, and he advocated the theory of dependent origination based on the doctrine of the Tathāgatagarbha, unlike Xuanzang claimed based on the *ālayavijñāna* (storehouse consciousness). In his eyes, the *Treatise on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna* (*Dasheng qixin lun* 大乘起信論) was a perfect treatise, “not only embodying wisdom, but also being full of compassion.” He also was very diligent in interpreting Buddhist scriptures and wrote many commentaries of Buddhist scriptures. Wonhyo was asked by the Silla king to write a commentary on *Vajrasamūdhī Sūtra*, and when delivering lectures after its completion, “both the king and his officials, both the sacred and the secular, gathered like clouds in the dharma hall to listen to him.” Wonhyo's commentary was transmitted to China, and received such high respect that it was retitled *Treatise on the Vajrasamūdhī Sūtra* (*Geumgang sammaegyeong non* 金剛三昧經論), and was regarded as treatise treasure, just like treatises translated by Indian masters (Kim 2007). Moreover, his commentaries on the *Awakening of Faith*, the *Amitābha Sūtra*, and so forth, are referred to as the “Korean commentaries” (*haidongshu* 海東疏). Wonhyo then is called the “Korean Master” (Haidongshi 海東師). Finally, Wonhyo was regarded as the first patriarch of the so-called “Korean school” (Haidongzong 海東宗).<sup>4</sup>

Wonhyo viewed the *Awakening of Faith* as being of seminal importance, and adhered to the theory of original enlightenment (*benjue* 本覺) and the doctrine of the Tathāgatagarbha. What Wonhyo did also constitutes an important feature of Korean Buddhist thought, and Silla monks gradually formed their own theory on how to grasp the main points of Buddhism. A similar example is the Consciousness-only school of Silla. Du Jiwen 杜繼文, a famous Chinese Buddhist scholar argued that Woncheuk was in conflict



with Kuiji regarding Buddhist thought, not because Woncheuk respected the old translation of Consciousness-only by Paramārtha (Zhendi 真諦, 499–569), but because of the issue on the “five castes.” Woncheuk argued practice in this world also had an important role, and then caste could be changed (Du 1995). In general, Chinese scholars of the Consciousness-only school in Korea, such as the senior scholars Meng Wentong 蒙文通 and Du Jiwen, as well as the young scholar Zhang Zhiqiang 張志強, have published relevant articles on this topic, but there still has been no systematic study of this issue. Furthermore, some relevant materials are difficult to find in China. If further detailed studies are made, Yogācāra Buddhism in the Tang dynasty will be better understood, and the role of Silla Buddhism in East Asia also could be better understood.

Many monks before their arrival in China had lots of quite difficult and tangled problems regarding Buddhist doctrine. When they transplanted Chinese Buddhism in Korea, some innovations were necessary to solve those problems. Uicheon 義天 (1055–1101) in the period of Goryeo had a lot of doubts about Korean Buddhism in his time before he went to China, and studied the teaching of Tiantai Buddhism under the guidance of Qiantang Cibian 錢塘慈辯 (1035–1109). After returning, he built a temple Gukcheongsa 國淸寺, and founded Korean Cheontae school with the help of his illustrious family background. Eventually he was regarded as “the first patriarch of the Korean Cheontae, State Preceptor Daegak.” In the process of transplanting Buddhism, Korean monks sometimes had a tendency to get the dharma orthodoxy from the tradition of Chinese Buddhism. As is well known, Guoqing Temple 國淸寺 is an ancestral temple of Chinese Tiantai Buddhism, and then Uicheon also set up a temple with the same name. More typical example in this regard, is the legend that a Silla monk stole the head of Sixth Patriarch, “for the lasting fortune of Silla for all ages.” The flesh body of Sixth Patriarch is still in Nanhua Temple 南華寺 in Guangdong Province, China. The story of stealing the head just manifests the desire of Silla Buddhists to possess a degree of orthodoxy.

In the history of Chinese Chan, there were many Korean monks who went to China following Chinese Chan masters in addition to Gim Musang mentioned above. Most of them acquired insight into Buddhist teachings and meditation, and when they returned Seon Buddhism became the most important school in Korea. In the late Silla and early Goryeo period, “the nine mountains of Seon” gradually appeared: Gajisan 迦智山, Silsangsan 實相山,

Huiyangsan 曦陽山, Dongnisan 桐裡山, Bongnimsan 鳳林山, Seongjusan 聖住山, Sagulsan 閣嶺山, Sajasan 師子山, and Sumisan 須彌山. Later in the Goryeo period, from the Jogye Order 曹溪宗 of Korean Seon emerged one of the most famous masters in the history of Korean Buddhism, Bojo Jinul 普照知訥 (1158–1210). He was appointed as a state preceptor, and severely criticized those Seon masters who did not learn Buddhist scriptures, and said if one is “not relying on the meaning of scriptures in characters,” practice is “just learning to sit when sleeping.” In his most famous saying, Jinul advocated the method of sudden enlightenment and gradual practice. This theory is quite different than the dominant tradition of Chinese Chan Buddhism, which advocates “sudden enlightenment and sudden practice, not relying on characters,” but it can correct some practical mistakes made by Chan followers who have not learned the doctrinal basics of Buddhism.

It is impossible to provide a comprehensive overview of Korean Buddhist thought in such a short space. However, from the foregoing brief narrative, we can find several features of Korean Buddhism in its process of development: on the one hand, due to the heavy influence of Chinese Buddhism, Korean Buddhism is indeed closely associated with Chinese Buddhism; on the other hand, because it has combined with its own national culture, Korean Buddhism has its own emphasis on the Buddhist teaching, and its own characteristics of Buddhist practice. For example, the mainstream in Chinese Buddhism, such as the doctrine of the Tathāgatagarbha and the *Awakening of Faith*, was emphasized more in Korea than in China. The method of Buddhist practice looks more simplified than in China, and the idea of gradual practice is received more positively by followers.

## Brief Conclusion

There are many similarities between Chinese and Korean Buddhism, and Korean Buddhism has its own style in the tradition of Chinese Buddhism. However, nowadays the differences between the two become more and more obvious. Since the Joseon dynasty (1392–1910) in Korea esteemed Confucianism and suppressed Buddhism, Korean Buddhism gradually declined. After that came Japanese colonization (1910–1945), and Korean Buddhism was forced to have some Japanese colors. Both of these historical



factors could promote differences between Chinese and Korean Buddhism. Buddhism in modern Korea is enjoying a period of great revival, and especially in recent decades the characteristics of Korean Buddhism are manifested in more distinctive ways.

Due to the stimulation of Western culture and Christianity, the general idea of a Buddhist revival in Asia is to make Buddhism serve for “real life.” Master Taixu 太虛 (1890–1947) advocated the idea of “Humanistic Buddhism” (*renjian Fojiao* 人間佛教) in China, and in Japan Buddhists were encouraged to serve the community or society (Huang 2000). Korean Buddhism carried out a movement called the “three changes” to: (1) fulfill the well-being of humans, (2) make Buddhism alive in life, and (3) make a Buddhist country into a Pure Land. In the process of this Buddhist revival, lots of Buddhist communities have emerged and several Buddhist universities were established, such as Dongguk University, Geumgang University and Wonkwang University.

In comparison to the current state of Buddhism on the Chinese mainland, many aspects of Korean Buddhism, such as social engagement, charity, and education, as well as dharma ceremonies and organizational systems, which appear more suitable to modern-day society, are worth learning and emulating by Chinese Buddhist communities.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> These two scholars have another book *Zhong-Chao Fojiao wenhua jiaoliu shi* 中朝佛教文化交流史 (1993); Chen Jingfu has published other similar book *Zhong-Han Fojiao guanxi yiqiannian* 中韓佛教關係一千年 (1999).
- <sup>2</sup> In the earlier historical documents, *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms* (*Samguk yusa* 三國遺事) took the argument of *Historical Records of the Three Kingdoms* (*Samguk sagi* 三國史記), and said Shundao came from the northern China.
- <sup>3</sup> *Biographies of Eminent Korean Monks* 2.
- <sup>4</sup> *Biographies of Eminent Monks Compiled in the Song Dynasty* 4.

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