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The Making of Wŏnhyo: Religious Modernization in Early Modern Korea

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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This study looks to reevaluate the reasons that Wŏnhyo (617-686), a Buddhist monk and doctrinal commentator, became an extremely important figure in early modern and modern Korean Buddhism. While studies of Wŏnhyo have mostly been occupied with his doctrinal philosophy, this study will trace the historical developments in pre-modern and early modern Korea that helped to shape his image as a pivotal figure in the history of Korean Buddhism in the first place. Through the lens of religious modernization, mainly initiated by Korean and Japanese Buddhists and Christians in early 20th century Korea, I will critique the way in which Wŏnhyo was characterized by colonial Korean Buddhist scholars and reformers. I will argue that Wŏnhyo was appropriated by Korean Buddhist modernists to represent the idea of religious modernization. Religious modernization, as part of the larger modernization project that was started in late 19th and early 20th century Japan and Korea proclaimed that a religion should be socially viable and aid in the revival of the national polity.

Acknowledgment

I'd like to acknowledge Dr. Tao Jiang for his guidance and inspiration.

Dedication

Dedicated to my parents.

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Introduction

During the period of Japanese colonialism in Korea (1910-1945), a key figure, often bolstered as portraying the essence of Korean Buddhism, was Wŏnhyo (617-686). His recognition in Korea, as well as in China and Japan, as a vastly influential monk and scholar, made him a perfect candidate for the figurehead of a newly defined Korean Buddhism. Crucial to Wŏnhyo's significance in East Asian Buddhism was his self-proclaimed *hwajaeng* commentarial style, in which he sought to reconcile possibly conflicting ideas in various Buddhist doctrines. Furthermore, *t'ongbulgyo* is the term used for the type of Buddhism that Wŏnhyo promoted; a Buddhism that reflected his commentarial style, and attempted to follow the original essence of the Buddha's teachings. This "syncretism" is a form of doctrinal commentary which seeks to reconcile seemingly conflicting concepts. By finding the essence of a concept, the commenter is able to substantiate their claims by tracing it back to an essential teaching of the Buddha. Furthermore, Wŏnhyo's supposed "syncretism" promotes practice over doctrine, following the reasoning that the insufficiency of words creates apparent discord, whereas practice leads to experiences that are untampered by words. This interpretation is most clearly seen in Wŏnhyo's commentary on the *Vajrasamadhi Sutra*. It is this pivotal work that was often cited by 20th century scholars as presenting Wŏnhyo's uniquely Korean "syncretic" discourse. These two doctrinal ideas are often seen by modern scholars as the foundation on which Wŏnhyo was promoted as the epitome of an exclusively Korean form of Buddhism during the colonial period.

However, it is dubious that Wŏnhyo saw himself as being a “Korean” Buddhist. Wŏnhyo’s interest was not in advancing “Korean” Buddhism, but rather in adding to the great East Asian Buddhist tradition. Furthermore, the rhetoric found in his commentary is deeply rooted in precursory East Asian Buddhist texts, and cannot be solely attributed to Wŏnhyo. Figures such as Zhiyi and Fazang played important roles in developing the commentarial tradition of what 20th century scholars would call “syncretic.” Therefore, it was completely a creation of early 20th century scholarship which gave Wŏnhyo the definition of typifying Korean Buddhism.

How did Wŏnhyo and “syncretism” come to define Korean Buddhism for Korean Buddhists and Buddhist scholars during the Japanese colonial period? I argue that the answer lies in the “dilemma,” as Sungtaek Cho calls it, in which Korean Buddhism found itself under the Japanese colonial rule: the issue of religious modernization. In chapter 2, I will make the argument that religious modernization during pre-modern and early modern Korea can be defined in two facets: a religion’s social viability, with social engagement emphasized over doctrine, and a religion’s contribution to national polity.

The Korean Buddhist community at the time, made up mostly of monks and religious scholars, was concerned with revitalizing the image of Buddhism in Korea. During the Chosŏn period (1332-1910), with some periods of exception, Buddhism was heavily persecuted by the Neo-Confucian government. Buddhists were forced into seclusion mostly in the mountains and rural areas, and were banned from entering the capital city. It was Japanese imperial influence, following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, that forced the Korean government to end persecution of Buddhism and to allow monks into the capital in 1895. The reputation of Buddhists, which became increasingly negative

during the previous five hundred years, would be extremely difficult to resurrect. In the early colonial period, this now became the task at hand for the monks and scholars who believed in the importance of Korean Buddhism.

Because Buddhism in Japan had a much higher social standing, and, through Japan's own modern construction was often considered (tentatively) a national religion of Japan, Korean Buddhists turned to Japan as a model for revamping their Buddhist order. However, this was not the only factor which prompted Korean Buddhists to strive for reformation; the increasing influence of Christianity in Korea and the proselytization techniques used by its missionaries also played a major role. While Christian groups were aggressively propagating Christianity among the common people of Korea through educational organizations, publications, and missionary work, Buddhists were still very much confined to their mountain temples, unable to increase their influence beyond their monastics. At the same time, Christians, mainly Protestants, were increasingly linked to Korean nationalism, a relationship that was both embraced and rejected by different Christian groups. Nonetheless, this inspired many supporters of Buddhism to establish modernization strategies which mimicked the Christians. Eventually, Buddhism would become a tool for nationalism and modernization.

At the forefront of these strategies was connecting with the laity. Buddhists were struggling to grow their community, while the number of Christians in Korea was growing exponentially by the year. Under such pressure, Buddhists organizations began to establish schools in major cities, publish texts in *hangul*, Korea's native alphabet, rather than classical Chinese, and create newspapers and journals propagating Buddhism. These programs not only burgeoned the religion's influence with the laity, they also had a

direct connection to Korean nationalism. Christianity was often the alternative to Japanese education, and, in using the native Korean alphabet, Christianity also began to take on a distinctly Korean flavor.

One of the most famous treatises on the modernization of Korean Buddhism was written by Han Yongun (1879-1944), in which he highlighted engaging with the common people of Korea as one of the most important issues facing Korean Buddhism. Inspired by Western religious and philosophical works, Han's works in the early 20th century became highly influential in the Korean Buddhist community. While often viewed as radically progressive, Han's views caught on in the scholarly community. Additionally, he found common ground with Christian groups, trading influence for the benefit of the Korean nationalist movement.

Yi Nūnghwa (1869-1943), and Kwōn Sangno (1879-1965), as editors and writers of Korea's foremost Buddhist newspapers, also worked to establish better propagation methods for Korean Buddhists. Yi and Kwōn pioneered the strategic use of print media to spread Buddhism to the Korean people while inserting their own progressive ideas of reformation. In the end, however, many of their strategies fell short, and the talk of propagation was insulated to the monastic and scholarly community, never completely affecting the laity. It was in the face of this dilemma that led Buddhist reformers to highlighting Wōnhyo as the key figure in the history of Korean Buddhism. While Wōnhyo was a great commentator and monk, according to his hagiographies, he also gave up monastic life to spread Buddhism to the laity. He is often remembered for his ability to proselytize Buddhism, connect to those outside of the monastic community, and work with the government.

It is in Wŏnhyo's hagiographies, written centuries after his life, that Wŏnhyo's persona came to be defined. While not historically verifiable, his hagiographies held great weight in his appropriation in early modern Korea. In them, it is stated that Wŏnhyo lived a life among the upper and lower echelons of Korean society, being both an advisor to the royal court, and preaching on the streets to the common people. He lived in a pivotal period of Korean Buddhism in which Buddhism began to escape the formal confines of the privileged officials, and become popular to the commoners. Wŏnhyo was very much at the center of this transition, and is a reformer in regards to his ability to propagate Buddhism to those who never had access to it. His extant hagiographies highlight his uncanny ability to connect to both the dignified religious scholars, as well as novice Buddhists in order to spread the teachings of the Buddha.

Therefore, I argue that the reason why Wŏnhyo's "syncretic" style came to be a defining factor in Korean Buddhism does not lie in doctrinal or philosophical dissection, as has been argued by many scholars; instead it lies in how his style was used to connect with the laity, gain government support, and increase the national influence of Buddhism. It has been shown by scholars that Wŏnhyo's "syncretic" commentarial style was similarly used by other precursory commenters, and how it was not referenced specifically by future Korean Buddhists for centuries. This, however, does not change the great influence that his style had in propagation. By syncretizing doctrine, he was able to make concepts more accessible to new Buddhists. Whether or not he created a new form of doctrinal commentary does not change the fact that he succeeded in greatly advancing Buddhism's influence in Korea.

It was specifically Ch'oe Namsŏn (1890-1957), with his so-called nationalist discourse, who prompted Buddhist scholars, beginning in the 1980's, to vehemently dissect the definition of a Korean Buddhism. It was also Ch'oe who specifically promoted Wŏnhyo as the exemplar of Korean Buddhism. In his 1989 article "Is Korean Buddhism Syncretic?" Shim Jae-Ryong identifies Ch'oe Namsŏn as the first to typify Korean Buddhism as being "syncretic" in his 1930 article "Korean Buddhism-its place in Eastern Thought." In this article, Ch'oe attempts to distinguish Korean Buddhism from all other forms of East Asian Buddhism by arguing its "syncretic" or "reconciliatory" uniqueness, headed by none other than Wŏnhyo. He credits Wŏnhyo as being the progenitor to this entire trend in Korean Buddhism. This "syncretic" idea is a concept most often attached to Wŏnhyo as being unique to his scholarship due to the previously mentioned ideas of "*hwajaeng*" and "*tongbulgyo*." Shim believes that this has led to an unfair and singular view on the characteristics of Korean Buddhism in scholarship. However, I believe that we cannot understand Ch'oe's view as being strictly on Wŏnhyo's philosophical approach. While Ch'oe does make strong, sweeping comments on how Wŏnhyo's style is the greatest culmination of East Asian Buddhism, the most suggestive and forthcoming aspect of his discussion of Wŏnhyo comes on the topic of his propagation:

It was his [Wŏnhyo's] special duty to relieve people, and do away with the distinctions of class and the standing long evils of the original Buddhism. A new spirit of Buddhism was created and propagated by him, and the Korean people were touched with its new spirit in their daily lives (Ch'oe 1930: 10).

The way in which Wŏnhyo brought Buddhism from a time of “long standing evils” into a period of great change and positive connection with people, mimics the mission that Korean Buddhists were faced with during the Japanese colonial period.

As we look deeper into the legacy of Wŏnhyo, it becomes obvious that Wŏnhyo could be a great figurehead for Korean Buddhism under Japanese colonial rule when Korean Buddhists were forced to reform and modernize their proselytization methods after centuries of degradation and persecution. I agree with the argument that scholars such as Shim Jae-Ryong and Robert Buswell have made showing the falsity in “syncretic” doctrinal philosophy being uniquely Wŏnhyo’s. However, I do not think that this discounts Wŏnhyo’s true significance in the development of Korean Buddhism during the colonial period. Buddhist reformers and scholars were inspired by Wŏnhyo for how Buddhists should modernize in terms of social engagement and nationalist support. In the face of Japanese persecution and Christian encroachment, Korean Buddhists needed an historically influential figure who best represented the goals they were trying to reach, and Wŏnhyo was touted as such a figure.

I believe that my approach will shed new light on an often overlooked aspect of Wŏnhyo’s importance during the colonial period. Because of how contemporary Korean Buddhist scholars during the later colonial period (1930’s-1940’s) were aggressively arguing for Wŏnhyo’s doctrinal significance in creating a unique form of “Korean” Buddhism, later religion, philosophy, and history scholars sought to discredit the strong nationalistic tendencies of the colonial-era scholars. Because those like Ch’oe Namsŏn were so unambiguously aiming to establish Korean Buddhism’s uniqueness, later scholars on the period could not help but dissect such a bias. However, when scholars

engaged in a rigorous historical and doctrinal debate on the uniqueness of Wŏnhyo's doctrinal philosophy, they were missing a key point on how Wŏnhyo truly functioned as a figurehead for Korean Buddhism during the colonial period. Scholars have, very convincingly, proven that Wŏnhyo's doctrine was influenced by previous Buddhist commentators and can be seen as a further development of the greater East Asian Buddhist tradition, rather than as a uniquely Korean form of Buddhism. This is not to say that Wŏnhyo was not syncretic, but rather that he was not *uniquely* syncretic. When this conclusion was made by scholars, I believe that Wŏnhyo's significance during the colonial period was greatly misunderstood, and hence diminished. Because he was no longer seen as providing evidence for a separate Korean form of Buddhism dating back to the 7th century, the weight of his influence was somewhat discredited.

This study will show that Wŏnhyo played a different kind of role to the modernizers of Korean Buddhism than is often discussed in scholarship: that of a figurehead for socially and nationally engaged Buddhism. In being so quick to discount Wŏnhyo because he did not fit the previously maintained notion of being a uniquely syncretic philosopher, modern scholars have missed the way his legacy was appropriated by Buddhist reformers of the colonial period.

Similarly, my argument that Wŏnhyo was an icon of religious modernization will help to advance the discourse on the Japanese colonial period in Korea. Much of the contemporary discourse has portrayed important figures during this period as being either a pro-Korean nationalist or a pro-Japanese sympathizer. This binary picture stems from the colonial period and has greatly influenced the way in which scholarship on the period is approached. The criticism often commenced as such: first it would try to identify

whether a certain figure was a nationalist or a sympathizer to the Japanese colonialists, and then attempt to conduct a scholarly study on the said person by dissecting what was understood to be their bias. While this approach has helped to flesh out some of the issues of objectivity and subjectivity during the period, it has often missed issues that stood outside of this strict binary framework. By looking at the colonial period in Korea only through the lens of nationalism or anti-nationalism, the ambitions of many important figures are reduced to simply how they affected the nationalist project. This ignores the personal or organizational goals that people or groups were trying to achieve. In the case of Buddhism in the period, the goal of many important monks and scholars was to devise a way to modernize Korean Buddhism through any means necessary. This meant that we often see collaboration on both sides of the traditional scholarly argument; people or groups would side with whomever helped them achieve their ambitions, whether they be staunchly pro-Korean, pro-Japanese, or anywhere between in the spectrum. Hwansoo Kim, in his book *Empire of the Dharma* makes various compelling arguments which challenge how various figures were traditionally viewed as strictly being on one side or the other of the political argument (Kim 2012: 7).

What comes to light in discussions such as those done by Hwansoo Kim is the diverse goals and motivations many figures had. Therefore, this is how I will attempt to approach the characterization of Wŏnhyo that was made by Buddhist monks and scholars during the colonial period. While more recent scholarship has often approached the opinions of these colonial-era monks and scholars by looking at how their nationalist bias influenced their writings, I will look at the way in which Wŏnhyo's characterization as one of the most important figures in Korean Buddhism helped to advance Buddhists'

cause to modernize and reform colonial Korean Buddhism. Specifically, this meant creating a new kind of Buddhism that would expand the religion to the laity, aid in the Korean nationalist effort, and reestablish a positive reputation of the religion in Korea.

Chapter 1: Wŏnhyo's Doctrinal 'Syncretism'

Beginning in the 1930's, the idea that Wŏnhyo invented a uniquely syncretic philosophy for Korean Buddhism became a baseline for much of the scholarship on the nature of Korean Buddhism. Occasionally, some went so far as to define the so-called "Korean mind" as being syncretic (Shim 1989: 154). It is the reaction to this type of scholarship, beginning in the 1980's, that would question such intense generalizations about the features of a religion or culture. Shim Jae-Ryong identified Ch'oe Namsŏn as "inventing" the use of the word "syncretic (*hoit'ong*)" to describe the defining characteristics of a uniquely "Korean" Buddhism. And, it was also Ch'oe Namsŏn who ascribed the beginning of Korean syncretism to Wŏnhyo. Vladimir Tikhonov notes that the way in which Namsŏn appropriated Wŏnhyo for nationalism, by taking him out of historical context and emphasizing his uniqueness and influence, has been used heavily in post-colonial, South Korean nationalist discourse (Tikhonov 2010: 184-185). Therefore, Wŏnhyo became a key figure in approaching the issue of whether Korean Buddhism was exclusively syncretic. If one could discount Wŏnhyo's uniqueness, then the foundation of the argument would be severely weakened. This is not to say that scholarship on this issue had some sort of vindictive tone, looking to disprove those who believed in Wŏnhyo's importance. It was quite the opposite: those who questioned Wŏnhyo's uniqueness saw the issue as being ignorant and one-sided, disallowing Korean Buddhist scholarship to expand itself outside its self-imposed rhetoric. Kim Sang-hyon, in his work *The Identity of Korean Buddhism within the Context of East Asian Buddhism* properly abridges this attitude:

In its long history Korean Buddhism assumed diverse forms in different periods and underwent immense changes. Therefore, romanticization or idealization of Buddhism of any particular period or generalizing the thought of a particular Buddhist thinker as a representative thought of Korean Buddhism all through history is neither congruous with historical realities or does it accord with sound historical practice (Kim Sang-hyon 2007: 16-17).

In other words, if Korean Buddhism, and even the Korean mind, could be glossed over as being on-the-whole “syncretic,” then where does that leave Korean Buddhist history that obviously stands outside of this discourse? Therefore, the goal of scholars in the 1980’s became to identify the roots of why such a generalization about Korean Buddhism would be made, and why Wŏnhyo was at the center of the argument.

The interplay between Japanese colonialism and Korean Buddhism was of integral importance to Wŏnhyo’s historical description. In the pre-modern and into the modern period, Korean Buddhism was in a state of great turmoil, especially following the intensification of Japanese colonial rule beginning in the late 1910’s. Korean Buddhists saw themselves greatly losing any sense of significance in the face of Japanese Buddhism, the Japanese colonial government, and Christianity. While the period from the late 1870’s to the early 1910’s saw great improvement in Korean Buddhism in comparison to its previous state, the declaration of Korea as a Japanese colony in 1910, and the subsequent 1911 Temple Ordinance enacted by the Japanese colonial government saw much of Korean Buddhism’s progress stifled.

Due to these consequences, many Korean Buddhist monks and scholars began to develop various ways to help revive Korean Buddhism. This is the period in which later scholars would identify the development of a Korean nationalist discourse within the Buddhist community. Furthermore, this identification became the basis for criticism, by

later scholars, of the characterization of Korean Buddhism as being uniquely syncretic that began during this time. This became one approach to discredit Wŏnhyo's unique syncretism. If the reverence for Wŏnhyo could be reduced to a product of biased, nationalistic rhetoric, then it could be shown that his syncretism was not unique.

However, while nationalist bias is indeed something to be highly skeptical of, it is also important not to simply characterize nationalist rhetoric as a one-dimensional view, influenced only by the political climate of the time. The so-called nationalists had diverse motivations, and there is no doubt that one of those motivations was to improve Korean Buddhism. Nevertheless, these so-called nationalists were not as discriminatory as is often described. They often collaborated with Japanese Buddhists and the colonial government, as opposed to being adamantly against anything that could be deemed pro-Japanese. Similarly, diversity within the Buddhist tradition and among scholars led to experimenting with various ideas to solve problems, such as adopting Christian methods in social programs and political activism. Shim Jae-Ryong occasionally makes the mistake of compartmentalizing the nationalist discourse as a general, one-dimensional rhetoric:

During the Japanese colonial period and after the liberation of Korea right up to this time of contemporary ideological warfare, everyone felt the need to stick together as one nation and one people. After such a long period of war and hardship, there has been naturally a disdain for societal discord. During such time, the vague characterization of Korean Buddhism as 'syncretic' and/or harmonious/conciliatory was bound to have an enormous emotional appeal (Shim 1989: 153).

The logic that Shim is using, to say that everyone "felt the need to stick together" is ignoring the diverse motivations of Korean Buddhist monks and scholars during the

colonial period. Similarly, Robert Buswell, in his article “Imagining Korean Buddhism” points to Korean Buddhism’s characterization as also being a reaction to Takahashi Toru’s imperialist narrative in Toru’s 1928 book *Richo Bukkyo* (Buswell 1998: 103). Buswell points out that Takahashi Toru was the first to make the argument that East Asian Buddhism is a culmination of Buddhism. However, Takahashi Toru points to Japan as being the epitome of this culmination, while dismissing Korea as having adhered to Chinese Buddhism and having no unique independent Buddhist philosophy (Buswell 1998: 103). The staunch imperialism that is inherent within Takahashi Toru’s opinion became an antithesis to the Korean Buddhists’ new idea of what is original Korean Buddhism. Again, while the identification of Takahashi Toru’s argument is of importance, the scholarly appropriation of the argument once again reinforces the scholarly discourse of pro-Japanese against anti-Japanese and may ignore some variance.

There were various Buddhist groups with widely differing intentions that helped to define Korean Buddhism during this time; therefore, it is insufficient to say that they would all ignore their differences to come together and define Korean Buddhism. For example, some Buddhists were in favor of uniting under Japanese Buddhism, as it gave them the most political power; others rejected the traditional Buddhist institution and created new, modern sects such as Won Buddhism, while others advocated for complete autonomy with a more traditional Korean Buddhism. Nevertheless, even if it were the case that they came together to define Korean Buddhism, what did Korean Buddhists who were engaged in modernization and reform truly gain from such a definition?

This issue comes to the forefront more frequently when considering Korean Buddhist doctrine. During the colonial period, Korean Buddhism turned to its rich, yet

fluid, historical Buddhist canon. By defining doctrine which was uniquely Korean, Buddhists could substantiate their claim to a wholly Korean Buddhist tradition.

Wŏnhyo, who spent his entire life in Korea as a Buddhist monk, doctrinal commentator, and Buddhist layman, became an object of study for those looking at Korean Buddhist doctrine. So, what in Wŏnhyo's writings hints at his philosophy being originally Korean and/or syncretic? Again, it was Ch'oe Namsŏn who began this discussion:

When I say that Wŏnhyo is the one who completed Buddhism in its final form, I mean that Wŏnhyo has much to contribute...to a much greater creation of true Buddhist worldview. That is to say, we must not neglect the fact that Saint Wŏnhyo's Buddhism was not only a true realization of Buddhist salvation, but also a completion of *t'ong pulgyo* (syncretic Buddhism) (Ch'oe 1930: 9).

The use of the term *t'ong pulgyo* denotes the use of doctrinal Buddhist concepts to substantiate Wŏnhyo's uniqueness. Ch'oe Namsŏn, in his speech "Korean Buddhism and Her Place in the Cultural History of the Orient" goes on to mention various other ways in which Wŏnhyo's commentarial philosophy defined an essential Korean Buddhism. Therefore, it became the object of later scholars, in the 1980's, to dissect the doctrinal and philosophical evidence of Wŏnhyo's syncretism in order to reveal if it was truly original, or simply a later misappropriation by colonial-era Korean nationalists.

This intensely detailed philosophical and historical study was chiefly undertaken by Robert Buswell in his 1989 work "The Formation of Ch'an Ideology in China and Korea." By using the *Vajrasamadhi Sutra* as a case study, Buswell investigates the relationship between Wŏnhyo and his precursory and contemporary East Asian Buddhist scholars in order to show the premise of Wŏnhyo's philosophy.

Wŏnhyo's Doctrinal Exegesis in its Historical and Philosophical Context

By looking at the doctrinal teachings in the *Vajrasamadhi Sutra* as well as Wŏnhyo's commentary on the text, Buswell points out the key ideas that were propounded, and how they were couched in Buddhist ideas that had arose in contemporary East Asia. By the sixth and seventh centuries, Chinese Buddhists had begun developing hermeneutical strategies, named *p'an-chiao* (K. *pan'gyo*), that sought to analyze seemingly conflicting materials and reconcile them into a common goal of enlightenment (Buswell 1989: 75). These techniques, which were often solely attached to Wŏnhyo by colonial era Korean scholars, ran much deeper in Buddhist scholarship in the centuries prior to Wŏnhyo's works. It is not sufficient to conclude, however, that there were simply these "techniques" employed by Wŏnhyo and various others; there are specific doctrinal teachings which exemplify such commentary. It was at this time that Chan Buddhism (K. *Son*), through East Asian scholar-monks, began to formulate its defining characteristics. This strand of Buddhism became the dominant "Korean" form of Buddhism; therefore, this period of history is very important for substantiating the doctrinal claims that were made by later Buddhists. Wŏnhyo, in adding to this early Chan commentarial tradition, came to be known as a proto-*Son* master (Seong 1991: 35). Buswell focuses on key hermeneutical concepts which were used in a reconciliatory manner and helped define early Chan, as well as all of East Asian Buddhism.

Much of the development of early Chan thought, as well as East Asian Buddhist thought, can be attributed to the *Awakening of Faith* (Buswell 1989: 76). This text, said to have been composed in India, but most likely a Chinese apocryphal text, provides one of the most conclusive treatises on the concept of original enlightenment. This text, and

specifically this concept, came to be a defining characteristic of Chan Buddhism, and was expounded by many scholar-monks, including Wŏnhyo. In Wŏnhyo's commentary on the *Vajrasamadhi Sutra*, he specifically cites the *Awakening of Faith* to substantiate many of his philosophical claims. As for the importance of original enlightenment, this concept affirms an inherency of enlightenment within all beings. According to the *Awakening of Faith*, enlightenment, or realization of one's true nature, is not something that comes from external teachings or external realization; every being is already enlightened, they simply must realize it for themselves. Such a concept radically redefined what it meant to become enlightened. While many pervasive theories in early Buddhism posited enlightenment as being something only achievable after eons of practice, original enlightenment simplified the concept; now, enlightenment could be reached just as soon as a practitioner could realize his or her own true nature (Buswell 1989: 79).

Original enlightenment is closely tied with the concept of *tathagatagarbha*, or, Buddha-Nature. This concept contends that every sentient being is already a Buddha, but has not fully realized it yet. In one sense this implies that all are enlightened like the Buddha (original enlightenment), but it also implied that we are all teachers like the Buddha. In other words, we are not only inherently enlightened, we are also inherently driven to help others realize their own enlightenment. Based on these ideas, it becomes clear that Buddhism, in this sense, is more universalistic, in that it claims everyone can equally reach enlightenment. While it is debatable how true this was in practice, doctrinally such an equation was revolutionary and laid the foundation for subsequent religious commentary in East Asian Buddhism. Such a redirection was attractive to East Asian Buddhists looking to make Buddhism more practical.

As for synthesis or reconciliation, the *Awakening of Faith* heavily deals with the relationship between *tathagatagarbha* and *alayavijnana*. *Alayavijnana* is a concept which attempts to explain why we are in this current, supposed state of non-enlightenment or ignorance. This concept explains the origin of ignorance, that enlightenment is extrinsic, the mind is innately impure, and that defilements are intrinsic (Buswell 1989: 80). This seems to be the exact opposite of the *tathagatagarbha* teachings, yet, due to their prevalence in canonical texts, both seemingly conflicting concepts had to be reconciled. As Buswell notes, many unsatisfactory attempts at reconciling the two were made by early Indian Buddhists. It was not until the East Asian Buddhists took on the task that the greatest development was made. And, these attempts came to epitomize the syncretic nature of East Asian Buddhist commentary.

It was specifically the *Awakening of Faith* which had the most lasting impact on the discussion of *tathagatagarbha* and *alayavijnana*. The text reconciles the two by claiming that the bifurcation of the mind into these two concepts is useful for pedagogical purposes, but does not represent the true nature of the mind. In reality, the two are not different, and represent the two simultaneous, non-different aspects of the One Mind.

This philosophical framework was “extremely influential” in the *Vajrasamadhi Sutra* and the subsequent commentary by Wōnhyo (Buswell 1989: 84). Many of Wōnhyo’s explanations on the topics of *tathagatagarbha*, *alayavijnana*, and the One Mind are substantiated by references to the *Awakening of Faith* (Buswell 1989: 86-88).

It is important to highlight the syncretic ideology on these concepts found in the *Awakening of Faith* because they became the most integral facts of Chan Buddhist thought. Also, they came to be concepts which Wōnhyo was remembered for, and he was

often posited as their originator. However, it is quite obvious that he was drawing heavily from the *Awakening of Faith*, a text which predated him and is often seen as the original source of the reconciliation of the One Mind concept.

It is not only this which disproves Wŏnhyo's "original syncretism"; there are other key concepts which show up in Wŏnhyo's work as further developments on existing techniques rather than completely new. The *amalavijnana*, or the immaculate consciousness, deals with the modes of consciousness produced by the mind that influence one's view of the world. The debate on this concept was centered around trying to determine whether the immaculate consciousness was truly beyond the world of sensual experience or not. Scholar-monks had issue with the plausibility of consciousness moving beyond the mundane world of sensual experience, and Chinese Yogacara schools determined that the immaculate consciousness is originally corrupt (Buswell 1989: 94). Paramartha, often cited as the originator of *amalavijnana* thought, contended that consciousness is innately pure, thus, the immaculate consciousness is not different from any consciousness or our true nature. This blended well with *tathagatagarbha* thought in that both propose an inherently pure or enlightened mind. Ching-ying Hui-yuan (523-592) further developed Paramartha's conception, and stated that the *amalavijnana* is the 'essence of all dharmas' and to divide the consciousnesses from it is only a taxonomical distinction (Buswell 1989: 97).

We see here another line of conceptual thought, which was already highly developed by Wŏnhyo's time in the 7th century. And, *amalavijnana*, along with its discussion by precursory scholar-monks, becomes another important concept in Wŏnhyo's commentaries. While we see here that Wŏnhyo's doctrinal commentary on this concept is

not original in itself, there are unique implications made by Wŏnhyo in terms of the accessibility of enlightenment (Buswell 1989: 100). He uses the idea of the immaculate consciousness to explain his conception of the pure mind which pervades all beings. He does this by equating it with original enlightenment:

The *amalavijnana* as original enlightenment is therefore constantly acting on sentient beings, exerting a beneficial influence that ultimately will prompt those beings to rediscover their inherent enlightenment. This treatment of *amalavijnana* as the catalyst of enlightenment corresponds to the *active* interpretation of the *tathagatagarbha* (Buswell 1989: 100). (italics added)

Here we see a move beginning to be made into the practical implications which Wŏnhyo's commentaries had. Because Wŏnhyo had an "active interpretation," he was able to move doctrine out of a simply philosophical or scholarly discussion, and into a discussion on how these concepts relate to Buddhism in practice. This is not necessarily where Wŏnhyo's originality lies, but it is where most of his more revolutionary ideas lie. Nam Jong-in contends that "Wŏnhyo's philosophy contains an anthropocentric world view, an egalitarian view of man, and an altruistic model of human relationships" (Nam 1995: 145).

The *Vajrasamadhi Sutra* is a text Wŏnhyo is most closely associated with due to his detailed commentary on it. Robert Buswell even surmises that it was Wŏnhyo who wrote the original text itself (Buswell 1989). According to his hagiographies, Wŏnhyo returned to Buddhist scholarship, after years of being a layman, in order to comment on this *sutra*. The issue of its authorship aside, this text has been of integral importance in Korean and East Asian Buddhism since it was written. Its association with Wŏnhyo has also pervaded much of the historical discussion on his life's work. So, why was this text so uniquely

important? The answer seems to lie in the title itself, and how its connotation of a more practical Buddhism pervaded Wŏnhyo's commentary.

Vajrasamadhi, or adamantine absorption, in historical Buddhist doctrine, came to represent a special type of knowledge which was associated with buddhas (Buswell 1989: 106). It became a highly discussed topic in early East Asian Buddhist scholarship as a way to approach enlightenment. Additionally, it was related closely to *tathagatagarbha* and *amalavijnana*, in that *vajrasamadhi* was the key to unlocking all obstacles to enlightenment (Buswell 1989: 112). Therefore, it was the catalyst to the realization of buddha-hood. Because this term was heavily incorporated by many Buddhists prior to Wŏnhyo, it becomes clear how it influenced his commentaries. He used *vajrasamadhi* primarily as a tool which subsumes Buddhist practice, and rectifies all "spiritual culture" (Buswell 1989: 115). Here, we see another syncretic aspect of Wŏnhyo's teachings that is not original, yet skillfully employed to help elucidate the practical nature of Buddhism. And, as Buswell notes, "draws on a wide-ranging debate concerning soteriological processes and their ontological underpinnings taking place in sinitic Buddhism" (Buswell 1989: 115).

Similarly, Jorg Plassen looks specifically at "*hwajaeng*," a concept most often promoted as being uniquely Wŏnhyo's, in his work *Entering the Dharma-gate of Repeated Darkening*. As mentioned earlier, *hwajaeng* is a key term that has been used to define Wŏnhyo's genius, and reinforces his modern appropriation as a uniquely Korean Buddhist. As Plassen points out, Wŏnhyo does give his own vague definition of *hwajaeng* in his work *Yolban chongyo*. Like in all of Wŏnhyo's works, his language is fleeting and indeterminate, yet poetic; the clearest phrasing in his definition of *hwajaeng* is: "it opens up the utmost

unselfishness of the Buddha's intention, [so as to] harmonize the one hundred philosophers' different quarreling [opinions]" (Plassen 2007: 215). The difficulty in elucidating such a definition has led to many scholars attempting to define Wŏnhyo's method in various terms while paying little attention to the historical foundations. This has resulted in the reinforcement of Ch'oe Namsŏn's overarching description of Wŏnhyo's uniqueness.

In other words, scholars have often approached the study of Wŏnhyo out of historical context, only dealing with Wŏnhyo's own works (Nam 1995: 148). Kim Sanghyon points to various instances of Korean and Japanese scholars seeking to identify Wŏnhyo's *hwajaeng* method with phrases such as "opening and folding," "all are wrong, all are right," "absence of obstructions," and "fusing the two yet not being one" (Plassen 2007: 216). While these attempts at clarifying are interesting, they fail to look at the historical implications of Wŏnhyo's *hwajaeng*. Plassen points out that it is naive to think that Wŏnhyo was unique in his exegetical style; Wŏnhyo was adding to the lineage of doctrinal commentary that was believed to trace back to the Buddha. Specifically, Plassen argues:

If my impression that Wŏnhyo's notion of *hwajaeng* is related to Chi-tsang's (549-623) description of the *wu-cheng fa-shih* ('Dharma master without strife') in the section on Dharma masters in his *Fa-hua hsuan-lun* should be correct, it would be not unlikely that Wŏnhyo also shared the former's conception of the Dharma master walking in the footsteps of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas, which is stated in the very same section. Almost needless to say, this would entail that any reference to the method of the Buddha refers to Wŏnhyo's own method (Plassen 2007: 215-216).

Wŏnhyo did not view himself as doing something unique, but rather continuing in the Buddhist tradition of doctrinal commentary. *Hwajaeng*, for Wŏnhyo, was something as original as the Buddha himself. Furthermore, Plassen comes to the conclusion that Wŏnhyo "shared with and probably inherited...a common hermeneutical and

methodological fundament” that was grounded in the thought of Chinese Samnon scholars Wang Pi, Kuo Hsiang, and Seng Chao (Plassen 2007: 238). Dongsin Nam also points to the ten discrepancies between Yogacara and Buddhata Schools put forth by Ch’eng-kuan (738-839) of the Chinese Avatamsaka School and the ten contentions put forth by Genei (?-829) of the Japanese Yogacara School as contemporaries necessary to discuss in studying Wōnhyo (Nam 1995: 149). While Plassen does concede that Wōnhyo appears to have attempted to push further the work of his predecessors, it is nonetheless evident that Wōnhyo was one in a line of many East Asian scholarly attempts to harmonize various Buddhist doctrines.

By approaching Wōnhyo’s doctrinal philosophy and hermeneutical strategy through the context of the East Asian tradition he was operating in, the theoretical framework adopted from his predecessors and contemporaries is distinct. The *Lotus Sutra* and its main commentaries elucidated the concept of a “single Buddha vehicle” which asserts universality in both a hermeneutical and soteriological sense (Kim Jong-in 2004: 7). This conceptual framework for the *Lotus Sutra* was grounded in Mahayana, Hua-yen, and *tathagata-garbha* thought (Kim Jong-in 2004: 93). One of the most influential scholars on the *Lotus Sutra* was Chih-I, who wanted to establish ontological unity through the unity of teachings. Wōnhyo adopted this teaching and took it further in creating a more “flexible” interpretation. He looked to prove the unity of the noumenal and phenomenal worlds, with *upaya* (skillful means) being the truth of the phenomenal world (Kim Jong-in 2004: 8).

Interestingly, Wōnhyo was also greatly influenced by Taoism, a relationship which Kim Jong-in believes has not been addressed nearly sufficiently in scholarship.

Generally, early East Asian Buddhists often used Taoist terminology to translate Buddhism to their audiences, marking a unique relationship between the two religions. Taoism also had a great influence in making Buddhism more “this worldly” (Kim Jong-in 2004: 10-11). Wŏnhyo specifically used Taoism to aid in his aim of making Buddhism more attractive to the laity. Wŏnhyo also borrowed numerous passages from Taoist texts to substantiate his exegeses (Kim Jong-in 2004: 12).

Consequently, by understanding the range of influences apparent in Wŏnhyo’s work, some of the conclusions that have been made about Wŏnhyo’s harmonization or syncretism are operating on a weak foundation. One of the most common distinctions made is that Wŏnhyo synthesized the Madhyamika and Yogacara schools of thought. Due to the lack of historical grounding and ambiguous evidence, Kim Jong-in opines that this equation concerning Wŏnhyo, “has not been particularly relevant to the context of the East Asian Buddhist tradition. The confrontation between Madhyamika and Yogacara, which has been continued for a long time, was not a significant issue for East Asian Buddhists” (Kim Jong-in 2004: 116-117). Dongsin Nam more definitively declares, “[T]here is no ground whatsoever for the harmonization of Madhyamika and Yogacara in any of Wŏnhyo’s works” (Nam 1995: 150).

Many of the doctrinal issues in Wŏnhyo’s works were not original, but were a continuation of a deeply rich commentarial tradition in East Asia. However, was this truly the issue that Buddhists during the modern period were interested in? The doctrinal issues themselves, while important, was not chief contributing factor to the bolstering of Wŏnhyo that occurred in early 20th century Korea. In trying attempting to modernize Buddhism, it would not be effective to become greatly concerned with metaphysics,

ontology, and soteriology. Consequently, it was the practical implications of Wŏnhyo's commentaries which held the attention of early modern scholars. The *Vajrasamadhi Sutra*, as one of Wŏnhyo's most important works, displays the emphasis Wŏnhyo places on practicality and broad appeal which became most important to Wŏnhyo's modern appropriation. For Wŏnhyo, this *sutra* became a medium for propounding his idea of Buddhism in practice. He used *tathagatagarbha*, *amalavijnana*, *alayavijnana*, *vajrasamadhi*, original enlightenment, and the One Mind in order to make a connection between East Asian Buddhist praxis and doctrine. Although the claim that he was original in proposing these ideas has been shown to be untrue, he was extremely important in developing these ideas into a more accessible form.

The *Vajrasamadhi Sutra* as Practical Doctrine

It is important to note that the *Vajrasamadhi Sutra* and Wŏnhyo's commentary on it, are not the only extant texts that are important to Wŏnhyo's exegetical career, but they give the greatest insights into the way Wŏnhyo sought to synthesize textual exegesis and Buddhist praxis. In Wŏnhyo's hagiographies, it is said that he returned to scholarship after a long hiatus just to comment on the *Vajrasamadhi Sutra*. This implies that there was something particularly forthcoming about this text that Wŏnhyo needed to expose.

These ideas, as well as a myriad of other historical and philosophical resources, were interpreted by Robert Buswell as pointing to Wŏnhyo being the author of the *Vajrasamadhi Sutra*, as well as its chief commentator. Whether this is true is of no importance to this study, but it does lend to the level of significance that these texts have to Wŏnhyo's legacy. With that said, the etymology of the term *Vajrasamadhi* holds a clue

into the significance of the text for Wōnhyo. *Vajrasamadhi* is usually translated as “adamantine absorption” and connotes a tool for achieving enlightenment. In early Buddhist doctrine, *vajrasamadhi* and *vajropamasamadhi* were often used interchangeably, and *vajropamasamadhi* initially viewed as “the factor that initiated final transcendence, or nirvana” (Buswell 1989: 105). As for the *vajrasamadhi*, its significance became greater as the East Asian Mahayana tradition developed. It came to be known as the factor that “augurs buddhahood,” and, throughout much of Mahayana literature, “was considered to be the consummation of the cultivation of samadhi” (Buswell 1989: 106-107). It becomes clear that *vajrasamadhi* was an extremely important tool for Mahayana Buddhists to substantiate their view on the path to enlightenment. As a single factor that could lead to enlightenment, *vajrasamadhi* was often associated with sudden enlightenment, a doctrine that would become of integral important in East Asian Buddhism and specifically Chan Buddhism. Furthermore, it played a role in syncretizing certain conflicting views of enlightenment, such as *tathagatagarbha* and *amalavijnana*. Because *vajrasamadhi* was written about in *sutras* as being the ultimate tool for enlightenment, it was often employed by scholastics as the essential argument in proving a view of enlightenment with one true source. Robert Buswell sums up this idea:

It is clear that, by the late sixth century, East Asian scholastics were treating the *vajrasamadhi* as the meditative analogue of the more scholastic terms *tathagatagarbha* and *amalavijnana*, if not the type of samadhi that was specifically intended to induce realization of the *tathagatagarbha* (Buswell 1989: 112).

Wōnhyo continued in this strategic usage of the term in his commentary on the *Vajrasamadhi Sutra*. However, where his uniqueness lies was his emphasis on practice, and not simply theological exegesis (Buswell 1989: 119).

While *vajrasamadhi* was a term signifying the culmination of wisdom, Wŏnhyo took it one step further as being the culmination of *practice*. It was not simply enough to say that, if you generate wisdom, you will become enlightened, or to expose doctrinal views of enlightenment. Wŏnhyo looked to systematize a technique for how this wisdom functions in practice.

Furthermore, the relationship between doctrine and practice became the overarching theme of Wŏnhyo's exegesis on the *Vajrasamadhi Sutra*:

Once one's practice produces nothing, one then experiences original enlightenment. Drawing from this, one transforms beings and prompts them to gain the original inspiration. Hence, this third chapter elucidates the aspect of the inspiration of original enlightenment.

If, while relying on original enlightenment, one therewith inspires sentient beings, then those sentient beings in fact can leave behind falsity and access reality. Therefore, the fourth chapter elucidates the approach of the edge of reality.

One's internal practice is in fact signless and unproduced. External proselytism is in fact the original inspiration's accessing of reality. In this wise, the two types of benefit [of oneself and others] are replete with the myriads of spiritual practices. These all derive from the true nature and all conform to true voidness. Consequently, the fifth chapter elucidates the voidness of true nature.

Relying on this true nature, the myriads of spiritual practices are perfected. One accesses the tathagatagarbha fountainhead that has a single taste. Therefore, the sixth chapter illumines the tathagatagarbha.

Since one has returned to the fountainhead of the mind, one then had nothing more to do. As there is nothing more to do, there is nothing that has not been done. Hence, it is said that these six chapters therewith incorporate all the Mahayana (KSGR 1 p.963c9-20)

It is clear that Wŏnhyo sees every chapter of his work as being different utterances of the same concept, *tathagatagarbha*. However, he also sees this theme as the culmination of wisdom in practice, and this is the aspect of Wŏnhyo's legacy that was utilized by modernizers in the early 20th century.

Wŏnhyo in his Hagiographies

It is not enough to say that he simply emphasized practice in his doctrinal commentary. A connection seems to be made between his doctrinal commentary and his personal life in later hagiographies. These extant hagiographies, written centuries after his death, are the only descriptions of Wŏnhyo's life that are available. Therefore, they are extremely important in understanding Wŏnhyo's legacy to later Buddhists, including those during the Japanese colonial period.

Some of the most popular anecdotes from Wŏnhyo's hagiographies are those that describe his initial enlightenment, and his divine providence to compose the commentary on the *Vajrasamadhi Sutra*. As for his enlightenment, it is written in the *Biography of Wŏnhyo, of the Hwangnyong Monastery in the Country of Silla, [vassal to] Tang [including] Dae'an* that he was on a voyage to China with the goal of gathering further training on doctrinal commentary. One night, the weather was so bad that he and his partner Uisang could not travel any further, so they took refuge in a cave. With nighttime making the cave pitch black, Wŏnhyo and Uisang happily drank water out of what they thought were cups, and slept peacefully. When they awoke the next morning, they realized that they had taken refuge in an old burial tomb, and the cups they had been drinking out of were actually human skulls. In this moment, Wŏnhyo proclaimed that their experience proved that the mind dictates all experience:

The previous night we thought we were in an earthen shrine and felt safe, but spending this night, we think we are in a village of ghosts and are full of superstitious awe. From this one can understand that it is because a thought arises that the myriad dharmas arise. If thought subsides, then the shrine and the tomb are no different. Thus the three worlds are merely mind, the myriad dharmas are only consciousness. Outside the mind there are no dharmas, there is no use in

searching elsewhere. I will not go to Tang. (Vermeersch 2012: 303)

It is this account that apparently proves Wŏnhyo never left Korea, and was an indigenous Korean scholar-monk for his entire life. It also shows his attentiveness to real-world phenomena in order to prove Buddhist concepts such as enlightenment, rather than simply relying on doctrinal exegesis.

An equally popular story from Wŏnhyo's hagiographies is the reason for his writing of the commentary on the *Vajrasamadhi Sutra*. In the *Biography of Wŏnhyo, of the Hwangnyong Monestary in the Country of Silla, [vassal to] Tang [including] Daeam*, it is said that the wife of the king of Silla had developed a brain tumor, and the only cure could be found in Tang China. Due to Wŏnhyo's popularity in the royal court, he was specifically chosen to take the journey and find the cure. While crossing the sea to reach China, Wŏnhyo and his envoy encountered the Dragon King, a popular divine trope in early East Asian literature. The Dragon King apparently gave Wŏnhyo the thought-to-be-lost *Vajrasamadhi Sutra*, and told him that the way to cure the king's wife's disease, Wŏnhyo must write a great commentary on the sutra. At this point, Wŏnhyo decided it was obviously no longer necessary to continue on to China, and returned to Korea to begin his commentary. When finished, he cured the king's wife's tumor, and was met with great praise by the royal court.

Much of Wŏnhyo's fame is attributed to this story, as well as a substantiation for the great significance of his commentary on the *Vajrasamadhi Sutra*. It also, once again, shows that he was always a Korean monk, having never made it to Tang China. However, while the stories of his enlightenment and his encounter with the Dragon King are very

important clues as to why Wŏnhyo was seen as distinctively Korean, more important clues to his significance are found elsewhere. Wŏnhyo did not just write about the overarching importance of Buddhist practice, he also lived a life that strove to relate practice to the common people. This was because Wŏnhyo apparently saw no difference between societal experiences and those achieved by ascetic monks. From this characterization, Dongsin Nam concludes “Wŏnhyo stressed proselytization of the masses in addition to textual studies; he himself put great effort into converting members of the working class...As a result of his activities, the powerless, uneducated masses who formed the majority of the laity came to embrace the Buddhist faith” (Nam 1995: 146).

There is a significant difference, however, in the two forms of practice which I am highlighting here. The first is Wŏnhyo’s exegesis, found in the *Vajrasamdhī Sūtra*, discussed earlier, which attempts to relate arcane doctrinal arguments to actual Buddhist practice. This marks, in one sense, a noteworthy shift in doctrinal commentary made by Wŏnhyo. However, in his extant hagiographies, this seems to be taken one step further; not only did he write about the seriousness of practice, he also lived a life which reflected that. This did not mean extreme asceticism; it meant challenging social norms in order to relate Buddhism to people who were lost in its cryptic doctrinal language. Historically, it is generally shown that most forms of Buddhism in Korea at the time were overwhelmingly dominated by doctrinal studies; therefore, it seems that an emphasis was made, by later authors of Wŏnhyo’s hagiographies, to show Wŏnhyo’s revolutionary pushback against the dominant approach to Buddhism. This meant that his personality and actions were represented by somewhat extreme uniqueness.

In the *Biography of Wŏnhyo, of the Hwangnyong Monastery in the Country of*

Silla, [vassal to] Tang [including] Dae'an, Wŏnhyo's eccentric personality is described as being somewhat spastic at first. In his attempts to propagate Buddhism, he did not find success right away:

At first, [Won]hyo was not constant in displaying traces [of his religious practice] and had no fixed way of converting the people. Sometimes he threw his plate to save the masses, sometimes he spat water to douse the fire; sometimes he manifested his form in several places, sometimes he announced his demise to the six quarters. He can thus be compared to Beidu or Baozhi. (Vermeersch 2012: 300)

According to Vermeersch's notes, Beidu and Baozhi were also monks noted as being eccentric and nontraditional monks. It is apparent from this hagiography that, above all else, Wŏnhyo was steadfast in his attempts to relate Buddhism to the people with the goal of conversion. Although, in another hagiography, *Wŏnhyo the Unbridled*, Wŏnhyo's life of propagation is described as being more developed and effective:

Again he made songs to spread into the world, and with these songs he went to all the villages and hamlets; singing and dancing, he converted [people] with his hymns and returned. He made sure that even the poorest homestead and those who were [as ignorant and misbehaved as] monkeys all knew the Buddha's names and could all chant the invocation 'namas.' The conversion he achieved was great indeed! (Vermeersch 2012: 291)

I believe it is this rendition of Wŏnhyo that established one of the most significant aspects of his legacy: his ability to convert. Why he was characterized in this way in his later hagiographies is not of importance to my study; but this characterization stood fairly uncontested by Buddhist modernizers during the Japanese colonial period, and had a large impact on how he was appropriated by those modernizers.

Yet it is important to note that, while Wŏnhyo's hagiographies give an interesting hint at the composition of his life, they are not exactly reliable historically. In fact, there

are no extant sources written during Wŏnhyo's life that involve any type of biographical work. It was not until centuries after his life that any sort of accounts of his personage were taken, and, in many ways these accounts were rife with literary tropes often found in East Asian hagiographies (Buswell 1989).

Conclusion

From the time of his death, into the Unified Silla period (668-935), Koryo dynasty (918-1392), and Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1897), Wŏnhyo was a fringe figure in Buddhist writings. In only a few instances, discussed by a few individuals, is he mentioned with any sort of significance. Robert Buswell in his work *Imagining 'Korean Buddhism'* notes that the place occupied by monks such as Wŏnhyo within the Korean tradition has been “blown out of proportion” (Buswell 1998: 104). As I mentioned earlier, it was not until centuries after his death that Wŏnhyo was even recognized as having any sort of significance; however, this does not mean that his recognition was sustained going forward. Buswell continues: “Wŏnhyo's works were all but ignored until the middle of the Koryo dynasty, when they were rediscovered by Uichon and, later, Chinul. During the Choson dynasty, Wŏnhyo was rarely cited at all, and none of his works were taught in Buddhist seminaries” (Buswell 1998: 104). Therefore, Wŏnhyo's overarching significance in the Korean Buddhist tradition was completely an invention of later colonial-era Buddhist monks and scholars. Then, how did Wŏnhyo come to be not only a key figure in Korean Buddhist history but also the “epitome of modern Korean Buddhist studies” (Nam 1995: 146)? We will look into this question in the next two chapters.

Chapter 2: The Construction of Religious Modernization

There is a serious gap between Wŏnhyo's significance in his time and the significance he gained over a millennium later in pre-modern and modern Korea. For much of this time, he was a fringe figure, not held in high regard generally among the Korean Buddhist community. It was not until modernization began in East Asia, specifically Japan and Korea, that Wŏnhyo was rediscovered as an historical figure that embodied the kind of Buddhism religious modernists were envisioning and promoting. Religious modernization in Korea began in the 19th century with the loosening of the Chosŏn government's isolation policy, culminating with the forceful opening of Korea by Japan in 1876. By the turn of the century, Korea was on an irreversible path towards modernization, both due to the will of the Korean people and their government, as well as pressure from Japan and Western countries.

This modernization manifested differently depending on the issues. Political modernization, military modernization, economic modernization, and so on, warrant unique study to understand their own context, influences, and consequences, in addition to the overall situation. This study is chiefly concerned with what I would call religious modernization. There are two striking features of religious modernization within the Korean as well as broader East Asian context: first, a religion's significance is judged by its social presence more so than its doctrine or philosophy. A religion should benefit a population in terms of social mobility, economic success, and education. While doctrine and philosophy are downplayed, they should also be restructured to complement a religion's greater benefit to society. Second, a religion should benefit the nation. With the rise of nationalism in East Asia, defined by the crystallization of a shared national

identity through historical, cultural, linguistic, and political substantiation, religion became an integral factor in developing a national consciousness. Because both the government of Japan and Korea supported such nationalist notions, they often judged an issue's importance by its benefit to the nation's political interests. Religions, in turn, had to adapt to this ideology to gain patronage from the government, which resulted in both monetary and social gain.

In this chapter, I will argue that these two facets of religious modernization were introduced by Christian missionaries and the so-called modern Christian religion during the 19th and early 20th century. First gaining ground in Japan, religious modernization manifested in unique ways there, and was appropriated to fit the needs of the Japanese nation, but never lost the foundational aspects introduced by Christianity. Religious modernization in Korea was established both by Western Christian missionaries, as well as by the Japanese colonizers. Specifically, modernization for Buddhism in Korea became a battleground for competing ideologies, spurred on by the rise of Christianity, proselytization by Japanese Buddhists, and the deeply rooted traditions of Korean Buddhism. It was within this religious climate that Wŏnhyo rose as epitomizing the aspirations that Korean Buddhism had for being a modern religion.

Historical Context

Korean Buddhism during Japanese colonization is much defined by the necessity to modernize in the face of encroachment by Japanese Buddhism and Christianity. While the Japanese empire officially annexed Korea in 1910, the close relationship, in the modern period, between the two nations began earlier. Following the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the Japanese government ushered in a new era of globalization, modernization, and

imperialism. One of Japan's most early conquests was Korea, not in the sense of annexation, but in the sense of ideological influence. The Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1887) degenerated into what is often called a "hermit kingdom" during the latter years of its rule, citing strong distaste for European colonial conquests. Japan had gone through a similar period of isolationism, broken by forceful gunboat diplomacy carried out by the United States Navy in 1854. In 1876 Japan sent its navy to Busan, Korea, forcefully opening trade relations. This began the loosely defined modern period of Japanese and Korean relations.

Studying the period of Japanese and Korean relations from 1876 to 1910 enlightens many aspects of the relationship during the formal colonial period (1910-1945). In terms of religion, specifically Buddhism, the two periods were very different. The period prior to annexation was a time of less aggressive policies and enforcement by the Japanese, and more so a time of dialogue between Japanese organizational leaders and their Korean counterparts. Of course, more often than not, Koreans ended up with what can be somewhat objectively called the raw end of the deal, but they were not powerless, and did not lose ground nearly to the extent that is seen during the colonial period. The issues confronting Buddhism, mainly religious modernization, which often entailed propagation, political involvement, as well as combating Christianity and Japanese Buddhism, caused Korean Buddhist leaders to find their place in rapidly changing Korean society.

By having a detailed understanding of the status of Korean Buddhism, Korean Christianity, Japanese Buddhism, and Japanese Christianity we can then make further conclusions about the way in which Wŏnhyo was appropriated in the religious climate of

the post-1910 colonial period. Christianity was the almost exclusive contact with the West for both Japan and Korea during their periods of isolationism. Along with the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, Christian missionaries from Europe and America also brought Western academic disciplines. This laid the groundwork for how both Japan and Korea would view themselves as part of the globalizing world, while finding their own uniqueness using the vocabulary that Western missionaries had given them. Western influence via Christianity would also be a key factor in the development of Japanese and Korean nationalism, specifically religious nationalism. Therefore, Christianity plays a key role in understanding the ways in which both Korean and Japanese Buddhists reestablished themselves in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and how they viewed what it meant to be a modern religion.

Social Presence and Propagation

Japan

While Christianity had a history in Japan dating back to the 16th century, it was not until the mid to late 19th century that Christianity became a significant presence in the greater Japanese religious climate. With aggressive reform policies propounded by the Japanese government, Christianity was often the medium through which Japanese discovered the various aspects of social and religious modernization. Christian missionaries brought with them Western scientific works, showcasing the academic structure of their so-called modern nations. Additionally, while being demonized by the government, Christianity was still able to gain social acceptance among the Japanese populace, prompting other religions to study their propagation techniques and social programs. This led to a greater awareness of an idea of religious modernization.

Buddhism was at the forefront of this changing religious climate. Specifically, in 1861, the Nishi Honganji sect petitioned the head temple to begin a modern reassessment of Christianity in order to better understand it (Thelle 1987: 27). In 1867-1868, Honganji priests were sent to spy on Christian missionaries in Nagasaki and make a detailed study of their activities. Some of the 20 Buddhist priests sent actually were baptized and joined the Christian faith as a result of the trip. This built up great resentment towards Christianity by Buddhists, but was also very telling of the current status of Buddhism. The study of Christianity was officially adopted in 1868 by the Higashi Honganji and Nishi Honganji (Thelle 1987: 28). Significantly, both Higashi Honganji and Nishi Honganji eventually became two of the most prominent sects to promote Japanese Buddhism in Korea. The Institute for Apologetic Studies, within the seminary of the Higashi Honganji, devoted itself to not only studying Christianity, but also to *yogaku*, or Western Learning such as astronomy and arithmetic; however, Christianity was by far the most popular subject (Thelle 1987: 29). At this point, the beginnings of Buddhist reform are evident, but were not widespread. By the time of the Meiji government, beginning in 1868, Buddhism, in the eyes of the government, had failed to show value to the state, and lost much of its political and national significance in favor of Shinto. Even though the government sided with Shinto, however, Buddhists kept pushing to identify Buddhism as a nation-protecting faith in order to combat Christianity. It seems that they viewed Buddhism as being a lot more significant to Japan than the Japanese government actually did (Thelle 1987: 30). This marks a turning point in which political, social, and national significance became the most vital goals of religions in Japan. While these factors have

always been important, they were now becoming the only way to retain importance in Japanese society.

Because Buddhist sects had begun making a point of studying Christianity and the Western disciplines, they began to use their new-found knowledge to criticize Christianity. Most often promoted was the use of Western science to discount Christianity, a tactic Buddhists had learned from studying Western anti-Christian thinkers. Jennes and Sakurai show how this strategy was actually a result of Christian attempts to discount Buddhism, which had backfired: “Hitherto Christians and other critics had made use of Western science to prove the inadequacy of Buddhism; once the Buddhist scholars recovered from the traumatic confrontation with the heliocentric theory, they discovered that rather than threatening Buddhism, modern science provided them with effective weapons against Christianity” (quoted in Thelle 1987: 33). Though this technique was not widely successful, of most importance is how it shows the intimate relationship Japanese Buddhists had with Western thought. Christian missionaries and their dissemination of Western academic disciplines had begun a new era of religion in Japan, one that stressed modern Western knowledge as a foundation for success. Whether the Buddhists accepted it or not, they were no doubt influenced by this on both a doctrinal level and a practical level, especially when met with Christians increasingly recognizing Buddhism as a real threat to prosperity.

By the 1870’s Christianity had begun to develop a stronghold in Japan both politically and socially. The Enlightenment Movement (*bunmei kaika*) generally supported Christianity as a gateway to Westernization and modernization. Even if some did not like Christianity, they felt that accepting it was necessary for development. Many

were interested in Western *anti*-Christian thought as well. The Popular Rights Movement was more staunchly pro-Christian, and consisted of a much wider range of the Japanese population. The group came to be known as a Christian movement. These two well-organized groups increased the tension between Buddhism and Christianity. Christianity was now becoming a catalyst for political and social change, the role that Buddhism had been trying to fill (Thelle 1987: 48-50).

Both foreign missionaries and Japanese Christians began to aggressively propagate in the 1870's and 1880's. It was the missionaries' work that started the trend, but the native Japanese Christians began an unprecedented campaign to Christianize Japan. The Bible Society in 1883 concluded: 'In no nation in modern times had the gospel made more rapid progress than in Japan' (quoted in Thelle 1987: 54-55). Additionally, publishing and journalism was a key factor in the dissemination of Christianity. The YMCA and other prominent Christian groups began publishing pro-Christian newspapers and magazines, with native Japanese Christians following suit by publishing books and journals (Thelle 1987: 56).

The spread of Christianity, and the subsequent recognition of religious freedom in the 1880's by the Japanese government lead Buddhism further into ruin. Not only were they losing political ground, the negative self-image of Japanese Buddhists was ever-growing. They recognized their failed ability to combat the Christian propagation methods, and noticed a number of Buddhist sects dissolving. The reaction was to modernize with the Christians as a model. Buddhists studied Christianity and Western disciplines to develop a stronger argument against Christianity. Buddhists had a presence alongside Christians in political groups such as The Enlightenment Movement, and began

to travel to Europe and America to gain knowledge about Christian opposition. Science and technology was adopted as a tool for Buddhists to combat Christianity. Christianity became both the model for which Meiji Buddhism designed a modernized form of Buddhism, as well as the enemy in their imperial conquests (Kim 2012: 63). While there was often a depressing view of Buddhism among its followers, many still believed it could conquer Christianity one day (Thelle 1987: 58-60).

One of the pivotal moments in Japanese Buddhist and Christian relations was the 1876 trip to Europe by two Higashi Honganji Buddhist scholars for the purpose of studying Western Buddhist scholarship. They traveled to various countries in Europe and even the Middle East, but the highlight of the trip was their studies with Max Müller at Oxford. The Japanese scholars were diligent students, studying both Buddhist scholarship as well as Christian scholarship. Hwansoo Kim recognized Jonathan Walters' analysis of this trip, concluding that Max Müller characterized Buddhism as a missionary religion. This was appropriated by the Japanese Buddhists who studied under Müller. Buddhism as a missionary religion is, therefore, an "Anglo-American" construct (quoted in Kim 2012: 74-75). Their motivation, however, was openly apologetic to Buddhism and against Christianity. This trip armed them with the tools to skillfully dispute Christianity on their return to Japan. Nevertheless, Christian apologetic studies continued in Japan, and an increasing number of Japanese were coming into contact with Christianity through missionaries, scholars, and Japanese Christians (Thelle 1987: 80-82).

A reformation movement in Buddhism called New Buddhism (*shin Bukkyo*) gained traction in the 1890's. It was heavily influenced by the Japanese notion of the Protestant Reformation, evidenced by calling itself 'New Buddhism' over 'Old

Buddhism.’ Mizutani (1836-1896) was a highly-respected Buddhist priest who criticized the moral decay of Buddhism and advocated for reform; thus, he was often referred to as a “Japanese Luther.” “Preliminarily it can be concluded that the very concept of a New Buddhism was formed by the popular image of the Reformation, the model for a religious renewal that involved a radical rejection of the “old” (Thelle 1987: 195-196). Shaku Soen was also a fierce advocate of New Buddhism. He always stood by his belief in the superiority of Buddhism over Christianity, but recognized that Christianity surpassed Buddhism in its ‘practical activity’ (quoted in Thelle 1987: 197). Buddhists agreed that they were superior to Christianity on the doctrinal level, but were way behind in terms of propagation, charity, education, and organization. We see here the formulation of what Buddhists considered to be a modern religion, and how they needed to reform in order to connect with the changing world. Similarly, Buddhists began to more so highlight the ways in which Buddhists could have a positive impact on society, rather than emphasizing the world-renouncing aspect of Buddhism. This included advocating equal rights for women, propagation programs for youths, and charitable work. This notion was extended to the colonization of Korea, where, most notably, Furukawa Rosen (1871-1899) saw a Buddhist responsibility to guide the Korean civilization by being active in social work (Thelle 1987: 200-204).

Korea

As Yune Leou-on observes, “the first Christian missionaries to Korea had a profound effect on the expression of Buddhism within the country” (Yune 2014: 6). They showed that it was possible for religious and spiritual people to engage with the

community and be involved with community service. This realization led to a revitalization and reimagining of Buddhist practices of compassion and charity.

From the beginning of the Protestant missionary work in Korea, the foreign missions adopted the “Nevius methods” in evangelizing the Korean peninsula. In his work “The Korean Church and the Nevius Methods,” Charles Allen Clark surmises that at least two-thirds of Korean Christians were affected by the Nevius methods (Charles Clark 1930: 4). John Livingstone Nevius (1829-1893) was an American Protestant missionary who was stationed in China for much of his life. He developed a system of missionary work which he put into practice in China, but was much more popular and effective when used by Protestant missionaries in Korea. His methods were defined by self-government, self-propagation, and, most importantly, self-support (Charles Clark 1930: 53). Nevius saw reliance on home countries’ funding as the greatest hindrance to foreign missionary work. As he witnessed, many missionary churches in China were almost completely financially supported by the home country of the missionaries. And, when these churches hired native clergy or employees, their salary was often paid by the home country. This led many missionaries to leave China once they lost significant funding from their home country, and, in turn, Chinese Christians would become dissatisfied with Christianity. Therefore, Nevius stressed self-support from the very beginning of a new mission. This meant no foreign support apart from the salary of the missionaries themselves. Examples of the self-support devised by Nevius were the building of churches by native Christians, salaries paid to native employees by the congregation, and self-propagation. Self-propagation was the most influential aspect of the Nevius methods, and led to the rapid, mass dissemination of Christianity in Korea,

especially in rural areas. For example, men were not allowed to attend mass unless they had evangelized their families and brought them to mass as well. Every Korean Protestant, under the Nevius methods, was taught that the most important aspect of being a Christian was to save others through propagation.

Protestantism saw its greatest success in the rural area of Korea. Edmund Brunner, in his work *Rural Korea* notes: “seventy-three per cent of the Christians in Korea are in villages. In the cities, there are approximately two hundred and twenty-five centres of work; in the country, about seven thousand. It is this that makes Korea a unique field” (quoted in Charles Clark 1930: 102). The reason for this success is most likely due to the Nevius methods’ emphasis on education, backed by self-support. Through education, Protestants developed a sentiment of self-sufficiency in their Korean followers. This was most significant because of, on the micro-level, the extreme poverty experienced by a vast majority of their followers, as well as, on the macro-level, the increasing encroachment of Japanese influence on everyday Korean life. According to the Presbyterian Northern Mission Rules and By-Laws of 1891:

Education was key in the Nevius methods. From broad organizational structure, to individual relationships between teachers and students, the Mission sculpted their methods of education thoroughly and uniformly. They felt the need to combat the mass illiteracy and lack of education in Korea, while at the same time converting Christians. It was something that no other group, including the Korean government, could offer in such a widespread and effective fashion. It resulted in the dominant form of knowledge among poor Koreans being Western, Christian, and markedly Korean in terms of forceful literacy through *hangul*. (quoted in Charles Clark 1930: 78-80)

This organizational structure was significant in the greater religious climate of Korea at the time. Buddhists took notice, and began to develop their own models for becoming more socially significant. This ideology provides a pertinent backdrop for the work of

Han Yongun (1879-1944), who often referenced Christianity as being worthy of imitation by Buddhism. Han was also well-read in Western philosophy, often making reference to Kant, Bacon, and Descartes because of the popularity of Liang Qichao's Chinese translation and commentary on seminal Western philosophical works (Tikhonov Miller 2008: 5). Furthermore, many of his reform ideas are derived from these sources, continuing in the culture of "imitating to overcome" begun by Japanese Buddhists in their relationship with Christianity. In other words, Han looked to appropriate Christian methods for a Buddhist audience because he believed Buddhism was the true source of social and national development.

Han Yongun believed that the Buddhism of Chosŏn, which promoted asceticism, lost social significance, and was suppressed by the government, was not worthy of a place in rapidly modernizing Korea. Thus, Han advocated for Buddhist social programs akin to the Christians in order to show the social significance of his religion. With the purpose of differentiating Buddhism from Christianity, however, Han sought to merge Buddhist personal salvation with social salvation. In other words, by involving oneself in the betterment of society, one was working towards enlightenment (Park 2010: 56-57).

Han, like many other Buddhist leaders, was most concerned with modernizing Buddhist education, creating new propagation methods, and forming a national Buddhist organization (Park 2010: 69). He believed that the Buddhist education system had totally failed, and was one of the major sources for the degeneration in reputation of Korean Buddhism. Similar to connecting with the laity, education, for Han Yongun, had the feature of gaining a relationship with the laity. If the education system could present

Buddhism as accessible and understandable to the modern public, a more positive relationship would develop between Buddhism and society.

Key to this idea, however, is propagation, which Han believed should be a main feature of the monastic side of education. Han explained that the reason for Christianity's success was its great propagation methods, an area which was almost completely lacking in Korean Buddhism. This attitude was consistent with the ideas of Takeda Hanshi, a Japanese Buddhist who greatly influenced the modernization of Korean Buddhism, and often alluded to Christian institutional techniques such as missionizing (Kim 2014: 116). Han's seminal work was his 1913 *On the Reformation of Korean Buddhism*, in which he explains his observations on religious propagation:

With the growth of the missionary enterprise, the strength of a religion grows correspondingly, and as it grows, it becomes easier for the people to follow this religion. And as it becomes easier to follow the religion in question, the level of missionary work also progresses by leaps and bounds, going beyond all expectations. At first, missionary work feeds the religion's strength, but in the end, the strength of the religion translated into further progress in missionary work. In this way, steady progress and accumulated successes lead to prosperity for a religion. This is the reason why Christianity has managed to spread itself throughout East and West (trans. Tikhonov Miller 2008: 75).

Han stressed developing propagation methods as one of the most important aspects in modernizing Korean Buddhism. Citing the success of other religions, mainly Christianity, Han lists their propagation techniques which he believes have been absent in Korean Buddhism:

Some have propagated the faith through speeches, some through newspapers and journals, some by translating widely circulating sutras, and some by philanthropic work. The lack of even one of these many methods of missionary work should have caused concern, but despite this, no such attempts at proselytizing are being made at all in Korean Buddhism today. (trans. Tikhonov Miller 2008: 77).

While it is not true that these methods were absent from Korean Buddhism at the time, this passage asserts Han's frustration with Buddhism's lack of ability modernize along with the other religions in Korea such as Christianity and Japanese Buddhism.

Furthermore, he lays out concrete techniques which he believes are the benchmarks for proper religious propagation. Such a list is often lacking in the publications of other Buddhist scholars.

By the 1920's, Han Yongun became more open and interested in Western, as well as Christian, views on society. This led Han to contribute to Christian-led Korean independence organizations such as the Korean Products Promotion Society, and Christian-led publications such as the *Tongwang* (Wells 1990: 127, 145). These interests developed concurrently with Han's interest in socialism, which prompted him to reevaluate socialism as being pro-religious, against the anti-religious socialism promoted by Marxists and Leninists (Tikhonov Miller 2008: 17). Specifically, Han became interested in Christian socialism, which had become popular among younger Christian activists. This movement, while short-lived, proved to be highly influential in reevaluating the position of religion in society among religious scholars, including Han Yongun. Preaching ideas such as Jesus being a 'non-violent socialist,' as well as Christianity being the religion of the proletariat, as opposed to the ruling class (Chang Kyusik quoted in Tikhonov Miller 2008: 25). The Christian socialist movement was envisioned as a new, better way to merge Christianity, social and political mobility, and modernity. These ideas inspired Han Yongun to propose a similar, alternative solution which centered around Buddhism (Tikhonov Miller 2008: 25).

Han and similar reformer's ideologies manifested into various organizations and methods in early 20th century Korea. *Kaehwa* (enlightenment) thought was developed by Buddhists in Korea to mimic the activities of Western rationalist thinking. Believing that Western rationalism stemmed from Christianity, Buddhists imagined *kaehwa* as a Buddhism form of rationalism that would be a catalyst for modernization (Yune 2014: 10). It was envisioned as penetrating all aspects of society, and constructing a new "Korean identity and consciousness" (Yune 2014: 11).

Similarly, Won Buddhism was created by Pak Chungbin with great influences from Christianity. Won Buddhism expressed the idea that the Buddha is present in all things, concluding that helping society was an aspect of enlightenment. "Won was attempting to play the same functional role that Christianity had played in Western nations, as a socially active institution that would work for the benefit of the community" (Yune 2014: 12).

Religious Nationalism

Japan

The relationship between Buddhism and Christianity in Japan shows the first stage of Buddhism's new process of pushing for the status of national religion. While, historically, Buddhism was recognized as a state religion in Japan, the 1889 freedom of religion act heavily encroached on that status, and resulted in Christianity gaining strength. From this point forward, the Buddhists began to advocate their faith as "the basic element of 'Japaneseness,' identifying Buddhism with the national polity and engaging in political activity designed to exclude the Christian element in society"

(Thelle 1987: 150). The Buddhist battle against Christianity to reestablish significance in the national religious scene played out in various ways and is worth exploring as a preface to the situation in Korea. It was mainly due to the conflict between the two religions that Japanese Buddhists developed techniques for the conquest into Korea.

One of the foremost voices in the Buddhist-Christian relationship was Inoue Enryō. Inoue Enryō recognized that Buddhism was totally unprepared to deal with Christianity; Buddhism had become a corrupted religion, with ignorant priests and uneducated followers. Inoue pushed for a “rejuvenation” of Buddhism in order for it to survive with Japanese modernization and Westernization. Thelle relates that “according to Inoue, the success of Buddhism was not merely a question of effective propagation, but depended upon whether or not Buddhism actually benefited the people (*minri*) and the state (*kokueki*).” He emphasized “international relations, politics, morality, education, and, more generally, the responsibility to promote enlightenment and religious reform” (Thelle 1987: 99). This attitude greatly mirrors that sentiment among Korean Buddhists beginning in the late 19th century, and was no doubt a result of the similarly increasing encroachment of Christianity, as well as that of Japanese Buddhism.

The Buddhist-Christian relationship became increasingly political into the 1890's, a fact that is most important to the vision that Buddhists had of modernization. If they could combat Christianity on the political level, a place where Christians saw their greatest influence by using their own tactics against them, Buddhists would be able to surpass Christians in modernization. The political war, however, was not proving as fruitful as expected to Japanese Buddhists, and as Buddhists began to lose the political war against the Christians, they turned to the issue of education. Buddhists criticized

Christianity as being dangerous to national polity, and claiming that Christian institutions were not following the orders of the government to revere the Emperor. Inoue Enryo specifically wrote a treatise defacing Christianity and their educational techniques. This sent the conflict between Buddhists and Christians into a new stage, with each side providing scholarly arguments against the other. In the end, however, Buddhists could only criticize Christians, rather than developing new ideas for the country, as Christians were doing. Therefore, Christianity was still on the forefront of politics and social reform, and Buddhism was fighting for relevance (Thelle 1987: 134).

What was left, and what would become the most important battle ground in the Buddhist-Christian relationship, was national polity. The 1890's saw a stark change in the Japanese attitude toward Westernization. Beginning in the 1870's, Westernization was seen as a key aspect to the success of the newly developing Japan. By the 1890's, however, this began to be seen as detrimental to Japanese society. Japan was in need of its own unique form of modernity that could challenge and eventually surpass Western society; therefore, almost every area of society was judged, in some part, on how it benefited the Japanese national polity. Religion was no exception (Thelle 1987: 137). From this point forward, the Buddhists began to advocate their faith as "the basic element of 'Japaneseness,' identifying Buddhism with the national polity and engaging in political activity designed to exclude the Christian element in society" (Thelle 1987: 150).

Nationalism was increasingly becoming one of the most important aspects of the new Japan and the Buddhist-Christian relationship mirrored this sentiment. For Japanese Buddhists in the late 19th century, religious modernization meant having an integral presence in the establishment of a Japanese national identity. If a religion could not show

its value to the advancement of the Japanese government's political, social, and imperial conquests, it was not worthy of recognition in modern society. Additionally, Christianity had succeeded in showing its worth to the Japanese government, often under the guise of touting the ways in which Christianity had been of value to Western society. This fact lead Buddhists to the conclusion that, in order to become significant to the national polity, they must use Christianity as a model, and eventually surpass it.

Important to this advancement was, again, Inoue Enryo. Inoue lead the more moderate reaction to Christian encroachment with his idea that the political changes should prompt Japanese Buddhists to modernize. He stated that victory over the Christians did not lie in doctrinal dispute, but rather in "whether or not Buddhist were able to compete with Christians on the practical level; Buddhism would succeed only if people felt the need of Buddhism in society." Charitable work was key to Inoue's philosophy, which included hospitals, charitable schools, and universities. "His hope was certainly that if Buddhism served the society and the state, its indispensable value would be recognized. Many prominent Buddhists shared Inoue's views" (Thelle 1987: 155). He advocated copying Christianity in order to neutralize it; this sentiment contributed heavily to the modernization of Buddhism.

While domestic reestablishment of Buddhism was important, foreign missionary work began to be stressed by Buddhists as well. Rather than worrying about Christian expansion into the interior of Japan, Fujishima Ryoan advocated overseas missionary work in order to support the Japanese government's colonial expansion as the way to reestablish Buddhist dominance. This sentiment became one of the key elements in the Japanese Buddhist relationship with Korean Buddhism as it stressed the need to Korean

Buddhists to follow suit in aggressively promoting Buddhism as a driving force in Japanese imperial conquest and to suppress Christianity. It is important to note that, during this conflict, there was not exactly a “pan-Buddhist” unification that sought to overthrow Christianity. Anti-Christian political movements of some Buddhist sects and organizations were criticized by other sects. While some advocated for recognition of Buddhism as a state religion, others did not. Therefore, the fastest way for a sect to assert dominance was to prove their value to the national polity (Thelle 1987: 161).

In the 1890’s, Christianity began to lose favor among Japanese nationalists as being too Western. Many Japanese Christians traveled to the West expecting some kind of utopian Christian society, but were met with quite the opposite. This led Japanese Christians to push for independence from foreign support, and to make Christianity more Japanese, which came at the cost of Buddhism. The issue came to fruition mainly during the Sino-Japanese War which was almost unanimously supported by Christians. Buddhists, on the other hand, while supportive, were much slower to act, and did not send representatives to the battle field as did Christians. The events of this war led to a reevaluation of Christianity in Japanese society. Once seen as a threat to national polity, Christianity was now a driving force in nationalism, and even, in the case of certain Christian groups, aggressively promoted imperialism. This marked a change for many Christians in their notion of Japanese nationalism or patriotism. While Christians once believed that individual patriotism was the source of nationalism, Christians were now becoming more and more involved in politics and the idea of state supremacy. Surprisingly, this promoted cooperation between the Buddhist and Christian institutions, who now saw a common goal of national development. Furthermore, Christians began to

develop a more amalgamated Japanized theology which sought to incorporate Confucianism, Shintoism, and Buddhism to create a more wholly Japanese Christianity (Thelle 1987: 163-174).

During the 1890's, the connection between Christianization and Westernization began to be questioned. This led to Japanese Christians creating a new identity for themselves as a chief part of Japanese identity, and separating themselves from Western culture. This initiated cooperation among Buddhists and Christians with the common goal of Japanization of their respective religions. By the end of the 19th century, the relationship between Japanese Buddhism and Christianity had reached a point at which both religions were gaining traction due to their support of the Japanese nationalist movement. Thelle sums up his moment well:

Nationalism became a basis for cooperation for the sake of the nation, primarily because Japanese Christianity changed its character and began to identify with the goals of the political authorities. The doctrinal divergences were radically deemphasized for the sake of political cooperation. And the threat from antireligious ideologies brought Buddhists and Christians together in a common front against irreligion and materialism. Their search for reform enabled them to learn from each other, and the strong conviction of Buddhists (Thelle 1987: 250).

Therefore, support of nationalism became the most important aspect of religious modernization in Japan. It was this sentiment which would define Japanese Buddhism as it proceeded to conduct missionary work both within and without of Japan. The reason for this attitude was due to the relationship that Buddhists had with Christians in Japan. Because Christians posed a greater threat to Japanese Buddhism than had been seen in history, Buddhists were forced to learn from Christianity, and appropriate its methods for their own advancement. Buddhists learned that the only way to survive as a dominant religion in a newly globalizing Japan, they would need to become a religion that could

support the goals of the new Japanese government. With the rise of nationalism in Japan came a reevaluation of all aspects of Japanese society. Because Buddhism had been in a state of degeneration, Buddhists had to once again prove that they were an integral aspect to Japanese society, just as they had been for the centuries prior. Christianity provided the model and antithesis to this restructuring and reconstitution of Buddhist social and political practices, a movement that would come to even greater prominence when Japanese Buddhism met, not only Korean Buddhism, but also Korean Christianity.

Korea

As discussed earlier, with the Nevius methods, Protestants were instilling a feeling of nationalism through education, uniformity, and, most importantly, Korean self-sufficiency. Kenneth Wells adds that, by the 1890's,

Protestantism began seriously to supplant Confucianism in education, its traditional pride and domain. The idea that Western religion and education were separable lost ground as the new education was advanced as the key to enlightenment, progress and national strength. Editorials of the *Tongnip Sinmun* (1896-1899) ...maintained in concert with explicitly Christian newspapers that there was an intrinsic connection between Christianity, modern education and national revival." (Wells 1990: 30)

The idea of Protestant Christianity becoming more nationalistic through its work in education is closely tied to the demographic of Korean protestants; as mentioned, the majority of Protestant Koreans lived in poverty in rural areas. This fact led to a drive for social and political recognition among the commoners (*baeksong*) who had been greatly suppressed under the Confucian Korean government. The way that organizational Protestantism could supply the needs of its followers through self-sufficiency worked as the leading example for Christian support in rapidly-changing Korea. This led to what

was, at the time, an indirect form of nationalistic political mobilization of Protestants.

Kenneth Wells notes:

The evangelical Protestantism of the missionaries denied the relevance of class to spirituality, in the sense that no social position afforded spiritual advantage. But it also thus denied the validity of discrimination attached to class and so supported social reforms. The revival itself forced the elites to take the labourers, peasants and merchants into account. Conversely, the elites infused national consciousness and new ideas among the commoners through Christian institutions. Moreover, both groups recognized the primacy of personal renewal, even if their conclusions at time were diverged. The tendency for elites, who are often the first to imbibe new ideas, to be cut off from the people by those very ideas, was greatly mitigated in Korea by the association of the new ideas with a new religion that had first gained acceptance among the followers. (Wells 1990: 45-46)

The way in which Christianity was being disseminated in Korea, mainly from the bottom-up, greatly influenced its position in modern Korea society. Whether the missionaries liked it or not, Christianity was increasingly becoming a vessel for political mobilization and Korean nationalism. It began with the aggressive national propagation techniques propounded in the Nevius methods, and developed into an increased feeling of significance in national polity among Korean Christians.

As this sentiment gained more strength, it was more frequently addressed by Christian organizational leaders, as well as rival religious organizations such as Korean and Japanese Buddhists. Christian leaders were forced to determine whether or not to openly declare, either their organization or Christianity as a whole, as nationalist. Just by debating the extent to which Christians should directly involve themselves in politics led to greater politicization of Korean Christianity. In other words, no matter what the opinion of an individual or group in politicization, Korean Christians began to become self-aware of the integral part that they played in modern Korea. Because of their far-

reaching influence, both geographically and socially, Christians were forced to reflect upon the socio-political impact of their religious actions. Moving into the 20th century, Christian leaders became more involved in the issue of Japanese involvement in the Korean socio-political sphere and what it meant to religions in general. This also meant that Christians would be in conversation with other Korean religious organizations, notably Buddhists, in order to calculate the best approach to Japanese influence.

Before delving deeper into this issue, I want to point out that the political movement among Korean religions, as well as within Christianity, had very diverse goals from group to group. This is especially true prior to the 1920's, which saw an exponential rise in Japanese control and religious suppression. Nevertheless, this study does not have the intention of surveying all of the competing nationalist or political ideas, but is rather more focused on how these ideas relate to religious modernization and the influence that Christianity had on the status of religion in modern Korea.

The development of Christian, mainly Protestant, involvement in Korean nationalism and politics during the early 20th century can be broken into three concurrent movements. The first, and most fundamental to Protestantism, is the significance placed on the individual by Korean Protestants. In Korea, this central aspect of Protestant belief became the basis for national revival among Protestant groups. They stressed that the individual's responsibility to the betterment of society, headed by the betterment of his or her self, was the only way to liberate Korea from its dilapidated state (not limited to Japanese oppression, but also the proposed historic degeneration of Korea due to isolation, Confucianism, and other factors). By putting the fate of the nation in the hands of the individual, Protestants could politically mobilize their followers; they equated

Christianity, directly or indirectly, to the success of the nation.

The second movement among Christians was outright political involvement. Protestant leaders believed that Christians had the duty to organize into political groups and help improve the Korean nation. With the backing of the supposed Christian doctrine that the people are the foundation of the state, various Christian groups vied for significance in the Japanese-backed Korean government. These overtly political groups succeeded in spreading their beliefs to the common people, but, in doing so, created great enemies of Christianity. Because of the aggressive and outspoken nature of their movement, Christian political groups probably became the largest problem to the Japanese government after annexation in 1910. The Japanese government was able to suppress the Christian political movements, resulting in the flailing reputation of Christianity in the country. Nevertheless, these political movements are a significant factor in the politicization of religion in Korea, an example that would greatly influence Buddhism.

On the other hand, the final Christian movement toward greater national and political involvement, and the one which would have the greatest impact on the vision of Korean religious modernization, was aggressive social involvement. This movement amalgamated the previous, more polarizing attempts. Because direct political movements had been failing to change the government, and had diminished the reputation of Christians, prominent leaders began a movement to infuse Christian values into every facet of society. This came mainly in the form of institutionalized Christian education, print-media, and massive organization among various Christian groups. At the same time, however, these three strategies were not simply Christian, they were pervasive with ideas

of democracy, nationalism, pluralism, and social involvement. With this movement, it seems that Korean Christians began to appropriate Christianity to the needs of modern Korean society, a turn that would become a baseline for religious modernization.

Protestant individualism as a catalyst for democracy, nationalism, and social change is not something uniquely Korean; it was most famously expressed by the scholar Max Weber to explain the political movements in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries. Protestantism as a driving factor for political change in Korea, however, has many unique facets; the first being the Nevius methods. While these methods were not meant to be political, and, in essence, only referred to the church as an isolated institution, the sentiment of self-reliance held much weight as Christians found themselves at the forefront of Korean social movements.

Korean Protestants were faced with the issue of whether to proclaim pro-Korean nationalistic intentions in the years leading up to Japanese annexation in 1910. While many Koreans, mostly of the lower classes, saw political and nationalist presence as essential to the Protestant movement, foreign missionaries were most often against this sentiment. Missionaries emphasized individual salvation, and claimed adherence to the Enlightenment idea of separation between church and state. It seems that a compromise was ultimately found doctrinally: Protestants felt that the success of a person, both materially and spiritually, would have greater, positive impacts on society and politics. Political mobilization of the common Korean, therefore, was simply equated to personal improvement. Kenneth Wells notes that this became a basic premise of “Protestant self-reconstruction nationalism” (Wells 1990: 40). Many staunchly nationalistic Korean protestants were not happy with this view, but recognized the shared goal of national

improvement and political mobilization. Buddhists strove to promote the same type of political mobilization among the lower classes.

Among the foremost Korean Protestant leaders who subscribed to this notion of national improvement through individual cultivation was Yun Ch'ihō. In his diary, Yun declared:

How then, given the present state of our country, can we hope for independence, and even were that attained, how will we be able to defend ourselves against subsequent evils and preserve our land? Thus the pressing need at present is to increase knowledge and experience, teach morality and cultivate patriotism... There is no other instrument able to educate and renew the people outside the Church of Christ. (quoted in Wells 1990: 51)

Important to Yun's social outlook was "civic morality" (Wells 1990: 53). He believed that Korean society was failing under the Confucian government due to the lack of social duty. Protestantism, for Yun, stressed individual morality, which had greater social, national, and political implications. He saw Confucian filial piety causing Koreans' ignorance to those outside of their familial relationships. Protestantism, in Yun's view, taught that individual responsibility was the key to social improvement; therefore, if everyone abided by their "civic morality," Korea would be a great nation. Yun would go on to be at the forefront, and one of the inspirations to the deeper cultural suffusion of Christianity during the 1920's and 1930's, but in the first two decades of the 20th century, his stress on individualism was fairly vague, as was the entire movement itself.

This view inspired the *Tongnip Sinmun*, one of the earliest and most outspoken Protestant newspapers on the idea of Protestant individualism (Wells 1990: 58). While only running from 1896-1899, the newspaper served as a gritty interpretation of the subjectively dissolute status of Korean society, and its proposed cure being Christianity. Many articles equated Yun's idea of "civic morality" to the betterment of the nation, and

held up the success of the West as its verification. The paper also stressed a complete reevaluation of the individual's status in Korean society in terms of economics, politics, and nationalism, as it related to Christianity. Through intense propagation, Christians could extend the word of God to the Korean masses, and, in turn, overhaul the socio-political structure of the nation. The *Tongnip Sinmun* served as the vehicle for this early movement. Interestingly, Ch'oe Namsŏn, the writer who is most often shown as the creator of the nationalist image of Wŏnhyo, was heavily influenced by the *Tongnip Sinmun*. Kenneth Wells described Ch'oe's later publication, *Sonyon*, as the "heir" to the *Tongnip Sinmun*, insofar as it continued in pushing the notion of national revival being at the hands of the individual (Wells 1990: 67). This relationship, however, will be discussed further in the next chapter.

The Conspiracy Trial of 1911-1913 was a watershed moment in the development of Christian political involvement in Korea. The event saw 123 Christian church officers and leaders arrested by the Japanese government for an apparent conspiracy to murder the Governor General in the name of Korean independence. The Christians were subjected to severe torture in prison. Eventually they were able to take the issue to court, losing in the first court deeming all participants guilty, but in the district court, 117 were freed and 6 were sentenced to ten years' imprisonment (Charles Clark 1930: 163-164). This event seems to have inadvertently sided the Christians more strongly with the Korean independence movement. While they were not truly guilty, the event showed the Japanese government's distaste for Christianity, and foreshadowed a continuing crackdown on foreign and Korean churches. This was a shared fate with that of Korean

Buddhists, who generally also began to stand more strongly on the side of Korean independence.

At this point, whether or not Christian leaders liked it, Christians had become at the forefront of politics and the independence movement against Japan. After the Conspiracy Case from 1911-1913, with the validity of the case being constantly scrutinized, there was one thing that was certain: Christians were the “most troublesome single focus of national identity” for both the Japanese and Korean governments (Wells 1990: 77). They both understood the seriousness of the challenge that Christianity presented in the volatile social and political climate in the immediate years after annexation. The effects of the ‘Conspiracy Trial’ were only magnified by the March 1 Independence Movement in 1919. Christians were on the whole demonized as the orchestrators of the event, and their reputation as a thorn in the side of the Japanese government grew rapidly from 1919 on. Christians were continually denied rights and abused by the Japanese government. (Charles Clark 1930: 170-172)

These events, for many Christians, created a strong desire for direct, overtly Christian, political involvement. They began to feel that they were the only group that had a chance to liberate Korea. Especially in the diaspora community, Korean Christians were likened to the chosen people of Israel, who were enslaved by outsiders and are destined to become their own liberators (Wells 1990: 97). In 1919, Presbyterians in Pyongyang reorganized the *Taehan Kungminhoe* (Korean National Association) with the aims of politically mobilization all Presbyterians for the cause of Korean nationalism and independence. Their Constitution and Manifesto drew a direct link between Christians and that state, noting that it was the responsibility of all people to be the foundation of the

nation:

The Ancient Texts say that the People are the foundation of the State. The saying is indeed the great maxim and reference of political economy of every age. Whichever the nation, the people preceded the birth of its government, and so the people do not exist for the government but the government for the people...citizens must not lose the rights belonging to citizens. They should bear the nation on their backs and themselves choose and commission state officials, small and great. In cooperation and harmony, the officials and the people should deliberate on all national affairs, daily increase the strength of the state and preserve forever the happiness of the people. (quoted in Wells 1990: 104)

Various groups followed suit such as the Patriotic Women's Society, the Independence Youth Corps and the Youth Diplomatic Corps. The Rev. Kim P'ilsu gave a speech at the Seoul Central YMCA in 1919 which called for the youth to rise up and become the force which makes Christ the foundation of Korea's national unity (Wells 1990: 105). In 1921, Shin Hungu of the Christian Youth Federation followed suit by exclaiming, "you young men are apt to lose heart and do not relish sound, persevering work, and so it is my hope that you will put short-term considerations behind you and grasp hold of the long-term, lend your strength to this Federation and through it strive to build Heaven in Korea" (quoted in Wells 107).

By this time, Christianity, especially Protestantism, had become closely linked with politics. Christians became an integral part of the struggle for a Korean national identity, and the overt political movements by various groups were evidence for the Christian's self-conscious efforts to fight Japanese occupation. However, this does not mean that Christianity was truly a political or nationalistic religion; it began to have the reputation as such. Whether it was true did not affect the image that was given of Christianity in Korean society. The Japanese government had begun to publicly recognize Christianity as a significant threat to its political motives, and certain Christian groups

responded with stronger involvement. This bolstered the religion to the national scene, and changed the way in which religion would come to be viewed in modern Korea. However, most of the direct political movement by Christians were unsuccessful, and lead to a reevaluation by Christian leaders of how to go about changing Korea into a more modern Christian nation.

Due to increasing Japanese suppression of Korean political movements, Protestants turned to “culturalism” (Wells 1990: 110). This was founded in the belief that, in order to have a strong Korean national identity, what constituted Korean culture, first, needed to be solidified. Scholars looked at Korea’s long history of dependence on China as hindering their development of a uniquely Korean identity. Benedict Andersen, in his work *Imagined Communities* points to historical indoctrination as a key foundation of national identity. While nations may not have been conceived, or been self-conscious in pre-modern history, modern nationalists appropriated history to fit the modern concept of the nation in order to substantiate their claims on a distinct national identity.

Because of some leniency by the Japanese government in private education, Korean Protestants took to education in order to establish a Korean national, historical identity. With this, they were able to, in theory, create a conscious recognition among the youth of a Korean identity, and mobilize them for nationalist purposes. This strategy was an integral part of Christian nationalism and general nationalism throughout the world. It was something that missionaries had brought to Korea and Japan centuries prior, and Japanese Buddhists and historians were already appropriating cultural and historical nationalism for their own benefit.

It was out of this climate that we begin to see an identification of Silla Buddhism

generally, and Wŏnhyo specifically, as being part of this reimagining of history. Already in 1885, William Griffis, an American Christian missionary, identified the Silla dynasty as being significant in Korean Buddhism. He writes that the “high-water mark of Korean civilization was reached under Buddhism” at this time (Griffis 1885: 170). This claim was later substantiated in the missionary periodical *Korea Review* in their extensive publications on Korean history.

More significantly, the Japanese scholar Takeda Hanshi (1863-1911), who wrote extensively on Korean history, used the nationalist discourse of historical indoctrination to create a narrative about Korean history. He wrote that Korean Buddhism, while currently in a degenerated state, had cultural and historical significance, and could aid in the development of Korean nationalist and the greater Pan-Asian movement (Kim 2014: 110). He also advocated a return to Silla Buddhism, as it was a golden age of Korean Buddhism (Kim 2014 111). Furthermore, he saw Wŏnhyo as a master of proto-*Son*, and was part of the development of the great Zen/Chan/Son tradition in East Asia (Kim 2014: 116-117). Nukariya Kaiten (1867-1934), an influential Japanese Buddhist historian, wrote of Wŏnhyo’s significance to East Asian Buddhism, and used Wŏnhyo’s fame to advocate for “Japanese-Korean harmony” (*Naisen yuwa*) (Tikhonov 2010: 182). This cumulative and nationalist understanding of history was greatly influenced by Western, Christian scholarship and its emphasis on cultural nationalism. Importantly, Han Yongun and Kwŏn Sangno, integral Buddhist reformers, most likely read Hanshi’s work and were influenced by him (Kim 2012: 302).

While Christians had already been directly involved in Korean politics, moving into the 1920’s and 1930’s, new strategies were used to mobilize Christians and non-

Christians alike. Creating a national identity for Koreans became a key element to the rising organizational development for Korean Christians, and this was carried out through, as mentioned, education; however, print media became a greater tool for revolution. Nationalist Christian publications were often done in *hangul*, the native Korean script. This was a marked change from the use of classical Chinese in all official publications. While the native script was not used across the board, even its limited use helped to develop a national sentiment around the indigenous alphabet. Where it was used most significantly was in private Christian education. In 1930, Charles Allen Clark remarked:

Japanese oppression of the Korean church from 1905 to 1945 cast it as a champion of Korean nationalism. the use of the native *Hangul* alphabet by the church further asserted the solidarity of Christianity and nationalism under colonial rule. Church schools were the only modern alternative to education by the Japanese; hence attendance at mission schools carried with it a sense of boycotting the Japanese. Common people who had suffered discrimination because of rigid stratification of Korean society enjoyed new social mobility in Christian organizations, which tried to be egalitarian. And the services, ceremonies and activities of the church provided important opportunities for self-expression and social contact (Charles Clark 1930: 36).

While this is not necessarily direct political involvement, by the 1930's, the alphabet became increasingly tied to nationalism, and it was the Christians who had created such a sentiment. Furthermore, as Clark notes, the script, along with the education system, provided an opportunity for Korean Christians to become socially and politically mobilized, feeling a part of something that was uniquely Christian, and, more importantly, uniquely Korean.

This attitude came to the forefront with the more aggressive use of print media for the purpose of nationalism and rebellion against the Japanese. Print media was the assembly for which revolutionary thinkers could assemble for the sake of national

revival, and Christians were the progenitors and proposers of such a forum. The *Tonggwang*, until it was banned in 1933, was a hotbed of supportive articles on “ethical nationalism, personal perfection and national unity” by Protestants from various organizations and denominations, as well as by Buddhist leaders such as Han Yongun (Wells 1990: 127). By the 1930’s the *Tonggwang* had become markedly political. In prior years, the stance taken by many in the movement was that of social and political separation. In other words, through moral cultivation the nationalist movement propounded by the *Tonggwang* could change society and revive Korea. However, by 1929, many contributors had come to believe that the attempted separation between social reconstruction and political activism was failing, and, indeed, had never existed. As seen by contributors to the *Tonggwang* as well as its parent organization the *Tonguhoe*, nationalism and political institutions were non-distinct; therefore, political independence became their only logical goal (Wells 1990: 132).

At this point in time, it seems that Buddhists were subscribing to Christian nationalist/independence groups after they had been created by the latter group. One such example was the Korean Products Promotion Society, which pushed for greater economic self-sufficiency for Korean’s. The KPPS, created in the 1920’s, had all but failed by the 1930’s due to further Japanese dominance of the Korean economy. However, this movement was grounded in self-sufficiency and nationalism, and had a large impact on these growing ideologies. Han Yongun, and other Buddhist leaders supported the Korean Products Promotion Society, which was explicitly founded by Protestants. The KPPS was seen by Protestants, most specifically by its founder Cho Mansik, a prominent Protestant leader, as embodying Protestant morality (Wells 1990: 145). Since the late 19th century,

Protestants had been preaching self-sufficiency and civic duty as the catalysts for Korean national renewal, and the KPPS was founded to propound those notions.

While many Buddhists disliked Christianity and its effects on Korea, it is clear that the support of Christian organizations by prominent Buddhists reformers such as Yi Kwangsu, Kwŏn Sangno, and Ch'oe Namsŏn has broader implications on the status of Buddhism during this period. These reformers obviously saw something worth emulating in the Christian reform programs, and explicitly supported the nationalist, political motives of such programs. It was within this backdrop of religious modernization in pre-modern and early modern Korea that Buddhists began to attempt to redefine Korean Buddhism.

In this chapter, the catalysts and expressions of religious modernization, leading to the changing religious climate of the time, were outlined. In the next chapter, through this lens of religious modernization defined in this chapter, we will see how the Buddhists scholars at the forefront of solving the issues Buddhism was facing would appropriate the discourse of religious modernization, and use it to construct a distinctly modern figure of Wŏnhyo.

Chapter 3: Becoming Wŏnhyo: Religious Modernization Applied to Korean Buddhism

The idea that religious modernization is defined by a religion's social viability and its value to national polity was laid out in the previous chapter. With various contributing factors, including Korea's history of isolation, Japanese colonization, and religious suppression, Christians took it upon themselves to be the driving factor toward a newly modern Korea. Many of the strategies employed by Korean Christians were highly influential in the religious, as well as political scene in early 20th century Korea. While we can attribute much of these developments to Christians, they were not the only ones who had visions of religious dominance in Korea. Buddhists came to the forefront as a religion trying to reestablish significance in the Korean social and political scene. With over 1500 years of history in Korea, Buddhism saw its ebbs and flows in terms of importance within the Korean society. By the early modern period, Buddhism had been suppressed and deemed an enemy of the state by the Chosŏn government. In this period, Buddhism was seen by the government as being a nuisance to the Confucian social structure in which adhering to familial piety and following economic standards such as paying taxes were crucial. Buddhists, who maintained a way of life as renunciates and often lived on huge plots of tax-free land passed down from the days of the Goguryo dynasty, did not fit into the Confucian model of the Chosŏn government. While there were pockets of reemergence during this period, Buddhism, by the late 19th century, had a very negative reputation in Korea. The government had been so effective in demonizing

the religion that it not only lost significance in the political scene, it was also viewed very negatively by the common people.

With the coming of the modern period, catalyzed by Japanese diplomacy in the 1870's, Korean Buddhists saw an opportunity to reconstruct the image of their religion. Of early importance to Korean Buddhists was the perceived positive reputation that Buddhism had in Japan. This gave Korean Buddhists hope that Japanese influence could mean a new era for Buddhism, one that saw a new opportunity for influence in society and politics. However, this optimism was quickly overshadowed by the further suppression of Korean culture, including religion, after 1910 when Korea was officially annexed by Japan. Prior to that, Korean and Japanese Buddhists had an interesting dialogue. While there were many competing ideologies, this laid the foundation for a newly modernized Buddhism in Korea and is often overshadowed by an unfair dichotomy of Korean nationalists versus pro-Japanese. Additionally, prior to 1910, Korean and Japanese Buddhists found a common enemy in Christianity; the Western religion was viewed as the embodiment of Western imperialism. As discussed earlier, Buddhists' aggressive negativity towards Christianity in Korea did not succeed in suppressing Christianity. What Buddhists did succeed in, albeit indirectly, was knowledge on the techniques used by Christians to gain followers and develop immense significance in society and politics.

By the 1920's, Korean Buddhists were working alongside Christians to assert Korean nationalism. As discussed in the previous chapter, Christianity was the foundation for which Korean Buddhists began to realize what religious modernization meant. By politically and socially mobilizing followers through social programs, political groups,

and print media, Christianity, and theoretically any religion, could serve the nationalist struggle in early 20th century Korea. Important Buddhist figures such as Yi Nūnghwa , Kwōn Sangno, and, of course, Ch'oe Namsōn, were integral in establishing the theory for a modern Korean Buddhism. And most importantly, these figures all had connections with Korean Christianity and a history of working alongside Korean Christians. Furthermore, these were the key contributors to the modern appropriation of Wōnhyo. Therefore, the relationship between Christianity, Buddhism, and Wōnhyo cannot be understated; it was exactly this relationship Korean and Japanese Buddhism had with Christianity that lead to the construction of Wōnhyo as a uniquely Korean, nationalistic, and revolutionary Buddhist figure.

Historical Context

In the 19th century, during the final decades of the Chosōn dynasty, Korean Buddhists were having a slight resurgence of their presence in Korean society. While, generally, over the course of the Chosōn dynasty, Korean Buddhists were unequivocally suppressed and pushed to the periphery of society, there was an interesting development taking place approaching the early modern period. As Koreans began to recognize that almost five hundred years of isolation left the country in serious need of reform, Buddhism was touted as an alternative ideology to save failing Korea. This was chiefly done through rural monasteries, which had been able to survive over the centuries of degeneration with the help of lay people. They found an increase in support by that same lay community in the years leading up to the 1870's and the subsequent increase of Japanese influence (Kim 2012: 40). By the early 19th century, foreign Christian

missionaries began entering Korea, mainly working in the rural areas. To many common Koreans, this signified changing times, especially with the possibly of increased Western influence. This lead many to identify with Buddhism as both an indigenous Korean tradition, as well as one that countered the Neo-Confucian ruling class which had, in the opinion of Buddhists, lead Korea into a disparate state.

Evidenced by William Griffis' 1885 work *Corea: Without and Within*, which was based on his travels in Korea in the previous years, Buddhism did not seem to be in complete disarray moving into the early modern period:

While, however, Buddhism is in low estate in and near the capital, it flourishes in greater strength in some of the provinces. Certain neighborhoods are strongly Buddhist, and there the monastic establishments and temples are old and rich, the shaven pates more numerous and the revenues from temple-lands yield handsomely (Griffis 1885: 169).

Griffis, who was openly pro-Christian, also concedes that Buddhism already held undeniable value in Korean society:

Hence it [Buddhism] is a civilizer, and in its first energy and freshness it fills a country with benefits, nourishes art, diffuses education, makes roads, establishes resting-places, promotes beneficence and multiples comforts in a thousand forms...The high-water mark of Corean civilization was reached under Buddhism (Griffis 1885: 170).

These aspects of the Buddhist institution which Griffis applauds, such as education and infrastructure, allude to the Christian conception of a great religion. In his work, Griffis makes frequent mention of his adherence to God, and his motivation in studying Korea being the dissemination of the Christian doctrine. When he observes the state of Buddhism at the time, he recognizes that it already held some similarities to the Christian institution, and, therefore, it has some inklings of being a valuable, modern religion. Consequently, it is unfair to say that Buddhism was in complete disarray moving into the

early modern period. There was already something of value on the ground, institutionally and socially, which modernist reformers were looking to strengthen.

Nevertheless, Korean Buddhism at this time was still, on the whole, in a state of great deterioration. As Hwansoo Kim puts it, “The systematic marginalization of Korean Buddhism during the Choson dynasty had become so deeply internalized in Korean society that the social stigma of monks could not simply be wiped away with the social and political changes of the time” (Kim 2012: 49). The chief task for Korean Buddhists, then, was to reestablish some sort of rapport with common Koreans, and begin to boost their reputation on the national scene. With the coming of Japanese gunboat diplomacy in the 1870’s, and the ideology of modernization penetrating all aspects of Korean life, Buddhists had to come to terms with an idea of a modern religion that could meet the needs of modern Korean society.

The Problems Facing Korean Buddhism

As discussed in the previous chapter, Japanese Buddhism had already been encountering issues with Christianity in their own country. They had systematically demonized Christianity, deeming it a foreign religion with no place in Japanese society. The crass hostility towards Christianity did not succeed in suppressing it, and Japanese Buddhists eventually became somewhat apologetic; they sought to learn from Christianity in order to overcome it. By the time Japanese Buddhist organizations, and their uniquely Japanese Buddhist missionaries, began to flood into Korea in the late 19th century, they had already sustained a decades long battle with Christianity and were coming out of it with a new attitude toward their religion. The rise of Christianity and the

success of its missionary work led many Buddhists to mimic their strategies to promote Buddhism (Pori Park 2009: 32). Christianity became both the model for which Meiji Buddhism designed a modernized form of Buddhism, as well as the enemy in their imperial conquests. The large influence of Christianity in Korea prompted Japanese Buddhists to pour huge resources into propagation against Christianity (Kim 2012: 63). William Griffis, in 1882, also noticed that Japanese Buddhists were ferociously missionizing in Korea due to the perceived threat of Christianity (quoted in Kim 2012: 109). This led to an emphasis on attracting the laity in order to develop a strong base for Buddhism in Korea to fuel a desired resurgence.

Much of the attitude toward the Korean religious climate held by Japanese Buddhists was in response to the burgeoning influence of Christianity in their own country as well as in their new protectorate. Japanese Buddhist missionary work in Korea was a strategy almost completely lifted from Christians. Similarly, the idea that Buddhism could be a vehicle for Japanese nationalism was also an idea lifted from the perceived notion of Christians by Japanese. Because many Christian missionaries touted Western countries as Christian nations, with Christianity being a catalyst for the powerful nationalism of those countries, many religious leaders in Japan, most significantly Buddhists, began to envision the same kind of nation-building image for themselves. And, in many ways, the Japanese Imperial government embraced Japanese Buddhism's new evangelizing and proselytizing prowess in spreading Japanese cultural dominance (Pori Park 2009: 25).

From the outset, when Korean Buddhists were met with Japanese Buddhist influence, the idea that Buddhism was a counter force to Christianity, as well as a

possible vehicle for nationalism, was already ingrained in Buddhist institutional methods. Hwansoo Kim lays out his opinion on why Japanese Buddhists focused so heavily on Korean Buddhism, especially monks: 1) each sect wanted to spread its influence; 2) sects wanted to prove to the government that they were transnational; 3) they wanted to keep Christianity at bay; and, 4) they could not convert laymen without the monks' help (Kim 2012: 80-82). Fujii Takeshi also theorizes on the attitudes that Japanese Buddhists had towards Korean Buddhists, as well as Buddhists in their other colonies: 1) Buddhism can challenge Christianity; 2) Buddhism is closely associated with the Japanese nation; 3) Buddhism is a modern philosophy that can bring enlightenment (Kim 2012: 104). James Grayson also attributes the institutional revival of Korean Buddhism directly to the Japanese Buddhist goal of countering Christianity (Kim 2012: 221). Japanese Buddhists saw the alliance of Korean Buddhists as an integral step in the fight against Christianity, and this was the reason for much of the interest that they had in reestablishing historical Korean Buddhist organizations.

The fact that much of the motivation for Japanese Buddhists' interests in Korean Buddhism was a reaction to the spread of Christianity does not necessarily prove that Korean and Japanese Buddhists were actually openly imitating the Christian religion. Most Buddhists still saw Christianity as having no place in Buddhist doctrine, and upheld Buddhist teachings as the most important aspect of their religion. However, in the face of Meiji government persecution in the 1860's and 1870's, Japanese Zen Buddhists developed a new form of Zen Buddhism, which emphasized deinstitutionalized Buddhism, appealing to Western rational, and philosophical concerns, which was then spread to the Japanese colonies (Pori Park 2009: 24).

Yet, the interest in Christianity, albeit greatly negative, was no doubt a revelation for Buddhists on new ways that a religion can function in society. The success of Christianity in Japan, and to a greater extent in Korea, showed that there was something of interest to Buddhists in Christian techniques. If Korean Buddhists wanted to reestablish themselves in the changing society of Korea, they had to learn from a religion that was greatly surpassing them in doing so. This idea was the foundation for the new theoretical model on modernization of Buddhism that was formulated by important Buddhist thinkers in the early 20th century. We can see that the influence of Christianity in Buddhism was nascent at the turn of the century, mostly due to the unwavering denunciation of Christianity by Japanese, as well as Korean Buddhists. However, by the time of annexation in 1910, these ideas would come to the forefront, and Buddhist leaders would not hold back in their interests to revive Korean Buddhism.

In the early 20th century, Korean Buddhists began a more aggressive campaign to fight for their religion. In the face of Japanese imperialism, Christian influence, and lack of government support, Korean Buddhists were turning to new techniques to regain significance in Korean society. By this time, the Buddhists faced the challenge of both reestablishing a strong lay community and creating a strong institutional organization that could influence the greater religious and political scene in Korea. These two aspects of Buddhism were, in themselves, new ideas in that they fit a new concept of a modern religion, mainly influenced by Christianity. A strong lay community and social viability, as well as a powerful religious institution were now the benchmarks for what could be called a modern religion. Both facets lead to patronage, which sustains a religion; however, in the case of Korea, they were also becoming increasingly important in the

creation of a Korean nationalism. By reconnecting with laymen, a task that Korean Buddhists had been struggling with for centuries, and establishing a legitimate Buddhist organization, Buddhists could succeed in social and political mobilization akin to that of the Christians.

One of the greatest hindrances to the development of Korean Buddhism in the early modern period was the lack of a lay community. As mentioned earlier, this was mostly due to the suppression of Buddhism during the Chosŏn dynasty; however, it was also, in much part, due to the culture within Buddhism at the time. As Hwansoo Kim explains in his work *Social Stigma's of Buddhist Monastics and the Lack of Lay Leadership in Colonial Korea*, in Korea there was a much stronger laicization of monks, as opposed to more lay people becoming monks (Kim 2014.a: 108). Therefore, reform was “monastic-centered” which hampered the development of a strong lay base. Furthermore, there was a great social stigma against Buddhists because of historical stigmatization by the Neo-Confucian government plus the increase of monks visibly not observing celibacy (Kim 2014.a: 108-109). At the time, *The Korean Daily Newspaper* told of four inadequacies of Korean Buddhism:

1. They advocate education, but do not deliver.
2. They make a society for “religious legitimacy,” but know nothing of outside disciplines.
3. They do not propagate Japanese Buddhism, but ask them to preach the Dharma.
4. They should not forget the Buddhist ideals of salvation, nationalism, and modernization. ([paraphrased] quoted in Cho 2013: 6-7)

These factors led to an extremely splintered lay Buddhist community as well as a very negative reputation of Buddhism on the whole; therefore, Buddhists had a very difficult task ahead. Buddhist leaders, however, were in no way oblivious to these facts.

Developing a strong lay foundation became bolstered as the top priority by many Buddhists leaders in the early 20th century. The two most outspoken figures to promote reform in propagation to the laity were Yi Nūnghwa (1869-1943) and Kwōn Sangno (1879-1965).

Yi Nūnghwa

Yi Nūnghwa was one of the earliest most outspoken voices in the reform of Korean Buddhism. He was a fierce advocate for focusing on revitalization of the Buddhist lay community as a catalyst for revitalization of Korean Buddhism as a whole. He thought that Buddhism was the best tool for the modernization of Korea (Jongmyung Kim 2010: 95). Yi viewed Christianity as being “supplementary” to the advancement of Western societies. The increasing influence of Christianity on Korean society was a catalyst for Yi’s ability to study Korean Buddhism in that it provided new-found research methods that he could apply to his own study (Jongmyung Kim 2010: 94). In his work, *History of Korean Buddhism*, Yi intended to catalog a history which he viewed as being unsatisfactory up to that point. His goal was to substantiate the claim that Buddhism was the cultural foundation of Korea, and was the source of a Korean national identity (Jongmyung Kim 2010: 96). Once again, this alludes to Benedict Andersen’s claim about nationalism that developing a linear relationship between the history of a nation and its present state is pivotal in creating a national consciousness. In general, according to Jongmyung Kim, Yi’s activities were of great importance in that they attempted to reach the larger goals of the Korean Buddhism community at the time:

Adopting the notion of ‘modernism’ from Western liberalism, Korean Buddhists carried out reforms by responding to the general movements of modernization and

nation-building, thus embarking on reforms in order to make Buddhism more socially viable (Jongmyung Kim 2010: 97).

Furthermore, interestingly, Kenneth Wells identifies Yi Nūnghwa as being Catholic earlier in life, indicating that he was influenced by Korean Christianity, and may have been inspired by the modernization techniques used by Christians. More specifically, Wells claims that Yi believed in the Christian notion that the religious strength of the people are the foundation for a prosperous nation (Wells 1990: 172). He may have adopted such an attitude towards the revitalization of Buddhism and the position of Buddhism in the greater prosperity of Korea.

Frederick Starr, in his 1918 work *Korean Buddhism* pointed to Yi as one of the most notable figures in Korean Buddhism at the time, specifically due to his editorship of the highly influential *Bulgyo*(Buddhism) magazine (Starr 1918: 37). In the face of much disillusion in the Buddhism community on what to do about the lay problem, Yi was an exception in that he attempted to allay these problems. He created three separate lay organizations: Joseon Bulgyo Jinheunghoe (Joseon Association for the Promotion of Buddhism), Bulgyo Onghohoe (Association for the Support of Buddhism, and Joseon Bulgyohoe (Society of Korean Buddhism). These associations were supported by Japanese Buddhist leaders, the Japanese colonial government, and Korean aristocrats because of the usefulness of such associations in the development of society (Kim 2014.a: 114). These groups recognized that a strong lay community for Korean Buddhism meant a more powerful ally in the fight against Christianity, and the fight for national recognition. Much of the strategies used by these lay associations, and more widely by Buddhist organizations looking for followers, were influenced heavily by Christian method of propagation. Sungtaek Cho relates:

Inspired by the social works of Christianity, as well as Japanese Buddhism in Korea, Korean Buddhists were also actively engaged in modern social service activities such as running hospitals, prison propagation, and so forth, endeavors all of which prove modern utility and social viability of Buddhism in modern society (Cho 2013: 3).

It was such programs and organizations that could prove the significance of Buddhism to commoners in early modern Korea. This work was all spearheaded by Yi Nūnghwa, who saw the lack of lay support as the primary problem in Korean Buddhism.

He was also a part of the institutional reform in Buddhism as well as in the promotion of Buddhist organizations. The way in which his organization were supported by both Japanese and Korean officials would be a key factor in the development of Buddhism in the early 20th century. In order for Buddhism to survive, it would need the support of the colonial government. We cannot assume, however, that all Korean Buddhists united to save their religion. On the contrary, there were competing sects in Korean Buddhism, just as in Japanese Buddhism, who were each attempting to gain influence and significance on the national scene. This was chiefly done through working with the Japanese Buddhist sects who were missionizing on behalf of their own interests, as well as Japanese nationalist interests. Korean Buddhists sects, therefore, did not practice complete denunciation of Japanese Buddhism; they saw the power that Japanese Buddhist organizations had in swaying national politics, and, thus, Korean Buddhists wanted to share that same sway. Hwansoo Kim explains this idea well:

By registering temples as branches of Japanese Buddhist sects, Korean monks intended to associate themselves with the powerful institutions of Japanese Buddhism that could shield them from exploitation, increase their chances for survival, and help them revive their tradition (Kim 2012: 151).

Political and social viability, gained through association with Japanese Buddhism, were the most powerful methods in modernization of Buddhism. Furthermore, this idea, as

shown earlier, was one that was chiefly instilled by Christians, first in Japan, and then in Korea. Organizational strength, with the ability to both propagate to lay people, and have a social and political presence, was a requirement for a modern religion. That is not to say, however, that the motivations for such reform were always clear cut. Different sects had different motivations, but, generally, the method was the same: gain social significance any way possible. It was not enough to rely on doctrine or the monastic community; social viability was the necessity for a religion to survive in modern Korea.

In the same vein, one of the most influential new Korean Buddhist organizations, the Wonjung, was created at this time. The aim of the Wonjung, according to leader Yi Hoegwang, was to “break irrational old customs and participate in civilization and enlightenment through the most effective methods” (quoted in Kim 2012: 182). The Wonjung exemplified the new-found methods used by Korean Buddhists to reestablish significance. That is not to say, however, that the Wonjung was supported by all Korean Buddhists. It was, nonetheless, an important factor in bringing Buddhism to the attention of the Japanese government and the Korean laity. The Wonjung officials had titles that emulated Japanese Buddhist institutions, rather than the ones mandated by the Korean government, in order to further their chances at becoming a more powerful group (Kim 2012: 182). Additionally, once again, the Wonjung shared the methods that had gained popularity in the Korean religious scene due to Christianity. However, the Wonjung was in favor of more moderate reform, rather than the more extremely progressive views that were often synonymous with Western, Christian ideologies. One of the most significant supporters of the Wonjung was Kwŏn Sangno.

Kwŏn Sangno

Kwŏn Sangno recognized Yi Nūnghwa and the members of his association as “truly responsible for the revitalization of Korean Buddhism,” and Kwŏn himself continued on the path laid out by Yi in promoting organization as the gateway to lay interest and social significance (quoted in Kim 2014.a: 118). In 1912, Kwŏn published a series of articles entitled *The Reform of Korean Buddhism*, which Kim Chong’in points to as the first of its kind (Kim 2012: 302). In these articles, Kwŏn highlighted the importance of developing a strong lay community, similar to the goals stressed by Yi Nūnghwa. In order to do this, he believed Korean Buddhism needed to create a modern education system for their followers. According to Kwŏn, Buddhists had been confined to their rural, mountain communities for so long that they had lost touch with Korean society; therefore, in order to show their social viability, they needed to engage in aggressive modernization of their education. He believed that the age of religious competition, mainly due to Christianity, required education on how to effectively propagate to the masses (Kim 2012: 304). Kwŏn specifically pointed to Wŏnhyo as embodying the ideal of propagation because Wŏnhyo lived at a time in which Buddhism had not yet gained significance; therefore, Wŏnhyo, as the great propagator, scholar, and reformer that he was, was able to connect to lay people by making Buddhism more accessible and more relatable to modern life (Kim 2012: 302).

Kwŏn himself engaged in efforts to help propagation in Korea through publications. He was the editor-in-chief of *Korean Buddhist Monthly*, a proselytizing publication. Later, he became the chief editor of the highly influential *Bulgyo* (Buddhism), the position Yi Nūnghwa once held (Pori Park 2009: 60-62). Kwŏn was one

of the earliest, and most serious advocates of Wŏnhyo's significance to modern Korea. Kwŏn believed that it was not enough to just mention the greatness of Wŏnhyo's scholarship and reform activities; he also sought to place Wŏnhyo at the forefront of Korean Buddhist history. As we have seen before, Kwŏn was one of many who supported the *Sŏn* lineage of Korean Buddhism, and he pointed to Toui and Wŏnhyo during the Silla dynasty as the originators of the sect, a claim which is unsubstantiated historically (Pori Park 2009: 82). Kwŏn also, like others after him, propounded that Wŏnhyo represented a uniquely indigenous Korean Buddhism because he never traveled outside of Korea, a claim which relates to Wŏnhyo's hagiographies (Pori Park 2009: 86).

Most significant in Kwŏn's discussion of the history of Korean Buddhism was the relationship between Korean Buddhism and the state. The Japanese colonialist discourse on the history of Korean Buddhism had most often posited the religion as subservient to the state. Kwŏn looked to challenge this notion, pointing to instances of monks breaking the code of non-violence to fight for the state as well as Buddhist institutions publishing numerous indigenous Korean texts such as the *Tripitaka*. Most important, however, was Kwŏn's effort to demonstrate that Silla monks fought with the state over recognition of Buddhism. Because the Silla dynasty saw the first flourishing of Buddhism in Korea, monks at the time attempted to gain recognition by the Silla government, and this often meant collaborating with, but also, at times protesting against the government. On the one hand, Kwŏn highlighted the martyr Ich'adon, whose death sparked official recognition of Buddhism by the state in 527 (Tikhonov 2010: 177). On the other hand, Wŏnhyo was also celebrated as a key figure in this struggle in that he, according to his hagiographies,

worked for the Silla government, and was touted by it as a great scholar-monk because of his propagation and doctrinal research (Tikhonov 2010: 178).

Consequently, Kwŏn was trying to portray Korean Buddhism as being socially and politically viable, substantiating his claims historically, and relating them to his current view of religious modernization. The development of this type of relationship between history, religion, and the state was part of a newly inspired idea of what a religion meant in modern society. As mentioned earlier, Kwŏn was responding to the Japanese colonialist discourse against Korean Buddhism, which had portrayed it as having no social viability in history. This notion depicted by Japanese scholars, was once used against their own religions in the face of Christian encroachment in Japan. Japanese religious scholars appropriated the Western colonialist discourse, which had once criticized the Japanese religions, to criticize the religions of their colonies. Therefore, the idea that Korean Buddhism must substantiate itself as being historically viable to the state in order to gain modern significance stems from the discourse of Christian missionaries. Furthermore, Kwŏn was one of the first to elevate Wŏnhyo as a key figure in Buddhism's social and political viability, a concept which was no doubt influenced by Kwŏn's relationship with the Japanese colonialist discourse (Tikhonov 2010: 178).

In Kwŏn's plan, the renovation of Korean Buddhism would come to fruition through organization and alliance of the competing Buddhists sects. Because he believed so strongly that Buddhism must gain social and political significance, he did not oppose collaboration with the Japanese in order to reach this goal. Therefore, he supported the Wonjung because the organization claimed to be for those same goals. This does not mean that Kwŏn was pro-Japanese, or anti-Korean; it can be argued that he was fiercely

nationalist, or more specifically a Korean Buddhist-nationalist, because he saw Buddhism as being the catalyst for a prosperous nation. He wanted to put aside all of the perceived petty differences between competing sects in order to improve Buddhism, and, therefore, improve the Korean nation. Kwŏn's thought would be highly influential to Ch'oe Namsŏn, the Buddhist reformer that would go on to have the greatest impact on Korean Buddhism and in the development of the modern appropriation of Wŏnhyo.

Ch'oe Namsŏn and the Definitive Making of Wŏnhyo

By the 1920's, Japanese rule in Korea gradually became more heavy-handed. As Koreans became more hostile to the Japanese government, the need to politically mobilize citizens was more pertinent than ever. By this time, the Christian community saw its first decline in influence due to more aggressive suppression by the Japanese government. To counter, Christian groups, mainly Protestants, felt obligated to become involved in the Korean Independence Movement. Buddhist leaders followed suit in their drive to reestablish significance on the national scale. The 1920's, then, saw a time in which religion in Korea was a decisive element in the struggle for independence. In 1918, Frederick Starr pointedly remarked on the political potential that Buddhism began to cultivate:

The Korean Buddhism of to-day is actually Korean, not Japanese. I can imagine nothing that would be more dangerous to Japanese control than a strong and vital Korean Buddhism that was hostile to Japan. On the other hand, I can think of nothing that would be a greater help to Japan than Korean Buddhism developed among those people by their own priests and friendly to Japan. What Korean Buddhism is to be in the future depends upon its relation to the government now there. If Korean Buddhism accepts and cooperates with the Japanese control, it will become the mightiest factor that can be devised to make Japan's hold on the peninsula secure. If hostile to Japan, when the crisis comes, as it surely will come,

when Japan will be tried out again and once for all on Korean soil, Korean Buddhism may be the decisive element in that moment of test (Starr 1918: 65).

This potential for Buddhism that Starr describes was inevitably linked with the modernist attitude of the leaders of the Buddhist community such as Yi Nūnghwa and Kwōn Sangno. From their mastery of the new, modern academic disciplines, Buddhist scholars and reformers had begun to accept the new ways in which religion must function:

Korean Buddhists accepted a melioristic view of history, sharing the views of the majority of contemporary Korean intellectuals, who were greatly inclined toward Spencerian social Darwinism and who viewed the activities of Japanese Buddhism and Christianity as advanced forms of religion. The arrival of these religions provided Korean Buddhists with both challenges and a frame of reference for their idea for modernity (Pori Park 2010: 41).

It was through this lens that the more substantial work on reforming Korean Buddhism was done in the 1920's and 1930's. As discussed in chapter 2, Han Yongun was a leader of such this progressive movement in Buddhism, especially in connection to social viability.

The most prominent scholar working at the forefront of Korean Buddhist modernization, as well as in scholarship on Korean history, politics, and language was Ch'oe Namsōn (1890-1957). Ch'oe Namsōn began his career as a scholar, historian, and writer at an early age. As a teenager, he journeyed to Japan to study in Japan's so-called modern education. This gave Ch'oe a breadth of knowledge in subjects which he could never have learned in Korea, such as the Western sciences, Western philosophy, and Japanese religions. While studying in Japan, he came to notice the way in which Japanese Buddhism, in comparison to Korean Buddhism, held a prominent position in Japanese society (Tikhonov 2010: 176). This would instill in Ch'oe a lifelong motivation to help

the reputation and social standing of Buddhism in Korea. This work often overlapped with his apparent apologetic attitude toward Japan. Ch'oe was not hesitant to look at Japanese society and governance as a model for Korea. Throughout his life, he also worked with many Japanese scholars and organizations to bolster his reputation as an academic and cultural icon. This fact has led to Ch'oe being deemed a traitor by many in postwar Korea; his collaboration with the Japanese sullied his reputation as a Korean nationalist in the immediate postwar years of South Korea. However, his importance in the study of Korean history, religions, and culture cannot, and could not, be ignored; in modern scholarship, his works are being reevaluated outside of the guise of the Korean nationalist vs. Japanese apologetic discourse, much like many figures in colonial-era Korea.

The debate on whether Ch'oe was truly an anti-nationalist began upon his arrest on charges of being an anti-nationalist in 1949 by the South Korean government. While demonized in the early years of South Korea, recently, scholarship has begun to reevaluate his position in Korean nationalism during the colonial period. He was one of the most well-known Korean and East Asian scholars of history at the time. His publications such as the *Sidae Ilbo* were funded by the Japanese authorities, and he was employed in various universities and institutions by the Japanese. His most significant assertion was about cultural expansionism. He often agreed with the idea that Japan has a right to expand in Asia in order to save Asians from the encroachment of the West. While many viewed this as Ch'oe being anti-nationalist, he often claims that his stance was always in the best interests of Korea. He believed that, by supporting Japan, Korea would be rewarded in the end. In 1949, after being arrested, he recounted much of his life's

work, and admitted that he made mistakes, but much of his labeling as an anti-nationalist was due to misunderstanding. He asserted that the best interests of Korea were always his primary motivation for all of his work (Allen 2005).

It is interesting to find that many of the discussions about Ch'oe's appropriation of Wŏnhyo have been caught up in the nationalist vs. anti-nationalist debate. Scholars such as Shim Jae-Ryong and Robert Buswell point to Ch'oe's proclamation about Wŏnhyo as a clear indication of his fierce nationalism; yet, he was arrested immediately after WWII on counts of being an anti-nationalist. This does not mean that his nationalist *bona fides* can be discounted, but rather that it points to the complexity in Ch'oe's motivations. To pin him down as either a nationalist or anti-nationalist creates too simplistic of a lens to assess his works. Therefore, it is important to look at other factors which may have led to Ch'oe's statement that Wŏnhyo "fulfilled the important mission" of creating a definitive form of Korean Buddhism, and who's "special duty" was to "do away with the distinctions of class, and the standing long evils of the original Buddhism" (Ch'oe 1930: 10).

At an early age, Ch'oe was introduced to a lot of Western literature from his education in Japan, as well as from his own personal interest. One of his most significant interests was in Protestantism. Ch'oe, like many in early 20th century Korea, noticed the burgeoning of Christian, specifically Protestant, influence in Korea. A 1934 journal entry by Ch'oe Namsŏn's son Ch'oe Han-in reveals his early thoughts on religion:

Father's view on religion, which, in one blow, demolished my own childish views on the subject...As soon as Father taught himself the Korean alphabet at age five, he read old Korean novels. He soon read the New Testament, laboriously translated by Western hands. It was a feast like he had never laid eye on before,

and having feasted on it, he was mesmerized by it until he reached his mid-teens. (Choi 2012: 39)

He witnessed the educational institutions, social programs, community organizations, and political activism.

Ryu Shiyun, in his work *Ch'oe Namsŏn's View on Culture and His Publication Activities in the 1910's*, focuses specifically on Ch'oe's academic experiences and scholarly works in his early life. Ch'oe received many of his ideas about "modern culture" from Chinese and Japanese publications about Western history, as well as Western works translated by missionaries. This was the case for many Korean intellectuals at the time. Ch'oe opened his first publishing house, naming it *Sinmunkwan*, or, "House of New Culture" in 1908 with the purpose of reevaluating Korean history and culture through a modern lens (Ryu 2003: 244). Ch'oe openly referred to himself as the leader of a new nationalist movement (*minjokundong*) and proclaimed his form of scholarship in his self-published *Boy* as "new knowledge" (*sinjisik*), based on Western thoughts and culture. He also founded the *Sinminhoe* (New People's Association) with prominent Christian leaders such as Yun Ch'i-ho, its first president, and An Ch'ang-ho, its founder (Choi 2012: 189). The Protestant educator and enlightenment activist An Ch'ang-ho had great influence on Ch'oe's thought. Ch'oe recounted his first meeting with An in 1907 in the article "The Spirit of Truth:"

He said, 'the fundamental reason for our national decline is the absence of true awakening, the absence of social consciousness and a sense of national history... Therefore, the national youth movement we are about to launch should put an emphasis on 'truth.' We should stress action over words, content over style' (Choi 2012: 125-126)

An's vision, summed up by Ch'oe, is reminiscent of the Protestant ideas of nationhood that were festering in turn-of-the-century Korea, and Ch'oe didn't take it lightly. He

recounted, “I have never regarded anyone as my teacher, except for Tosan An Ch’angho” (Choi 2012: 127).

Ch’oe’s ideas took hold mainly among Christian youths, especially in Pyongyang (Ryu 2003: 249). Ryu argues that “Ch’oe’s pursuit of “elegance” was a sort of ‘Puritanism’ and that this thinking was based on the experience of his boyhood when he willingly read Christian books. Ryu is referring to the way in which Ch’oe edited and published old Korean stories such as the story of *Ch’unhyang* in order to show a more refined aspect of Korean culture. He purposely omitted parts that contained “great obscenity” (Ryu 2003: 252). In other words, Ch’oe was packaging his scholarship in such a way that it appealed to the growing influence among the Korean populace in Western, Christian ideas. This rhetoric gave Ch’oe much popularity in Protestant communities, and, while never proclaiming himself a Christian, Ch’oe has been deemed a “Protestant nationalist” by Kenneth Wells seemingly due to his strong presence in the Christian community during his early life (Wells 1990: 93).

Ch’oe’s involvement in the March 1st Independence Movement was integral in forming his notions of Korean nationalism. He was one of the youngest signatories of the declaration of independence, working alongside mostly Christian independence activists. It is clear that at this time he did not identify as a Buddhist, as he recalled the joy in recruiting Han Yongun to represent Korean Buddhists (Choi 2012: 143). The Korean independence movement was part of a greater global phenomenon which centered around President Woodrow Wilson’s principle of self-determination, and Ch’oe was well educated in Western thought. The Korean Christians’ emphasis on independence, nation-building, and individualism centered around Christian doctrine also had influence on

Ch'oe, as his grandson recounts, “[f]or Grandfather, ‘independence’ represented a natural God-given right of the Korean people” (Choi 2012: 148).

Ch'oe's interest in Christianity, however, ran even deeper. Coming from the middle class (*chungin*), Ch'oe had animosity toward the upper class (*yangban*). He saw Western thoughts and culture not just as a way to develop a new modern Korean culture, but also to discredit the upper class' economic and ideological control. It can be discerned that Ch'oe's interest in Christianity had the same purpose (Ryu 2003: 254). Because Christianity took hold in the lower strata of Korean society, it had the effect of giving a voice and sense of purpose to the classes which, traditionally, had little influence. As a concept, this idea took hold in Ch'oe's scholarship, and would prove to be an important aspect in his framing of Wŏnhyo as “doing away with the distinctions of class.” Ch'oe wanted Buddhism to aspire to the same strengths that Christianity had in appealing to the lower classes and laity. Wŏnhyo's hagiographies make mention of his influence among commoners, and the Protestant-heavy religious climate of early 20th century Korea brought this aspect of Wŏnhyo's story to Ch'oe's attention.

However, the time of Ch'oe's early interest in Christianity and the time of his declaration about Wŏnhyo at the 1930 YMBA conference of religions in Hawaii, are a couple of decades apart. As Ch'oe's scholarship progressed into the 1920's and 1930's, he became deeply involved in Korean Buddhism. He took it upon himself to revitalize Korean Buddhism through his scholarship. As his scholarship matured, he used tools from the global study of religion to fortify his arguments about Korean history. Ch'oe, as noted earlier, was well-read in Japanese scholarship, and used the colonialist discourse to his advantage. In terms of Japan, colonialist discourse entailed drawing conclusions

historically about the reasons for Japan's contemporary superiority. This helped aid Japan's pan-Asian movement, in which they labeled themselves the society that would rid Asia of Western imperialists and unify East Asia. They believed to be the rightful dictators of this movement because of their rapid modernization socially, militarily, and politically. Through this lens, Japanese scholars such as Takahashi, Takakusu, Nukariya Kaiten, and Kuroita Katsumi inferred that Korean Buddhism was in need of Japanese style reforms, mainly due to the obvious superiority of Japanese Buddhism at the time (Tikhonov 2010: 170-172, 181-182). This also led to Korean Buddhism and Korean society being deemed dependent on China by Japanese scholars, and, thus, in need of complete reconstruction if it wanted to have autonomy. This, of course, meant reconstruction Japanese-style. Significantly, much of the opinions of Japanese scholars about Korea were derived from an historical outlook adopted from Western scholarship. Creating an historical narrative that reflected a nation's identifying, and often superior, qualities is key to developing nationalism. And, as noted earlier, much of these ideas were transmitted to Japanese Buddhist scholars through the influence of Christianity in their own country.

It was natural, then, that Ch'oe Namsŏn, with the influence of Japanese scholarship and Christian thought from within Korea, would use the same framework to develop his historical narrative of Korean Buddhism, and, thus, his idea of Korean nationalism centered on Buddhism. Ch'oe took the Japanese pan-Asian argument, which put Japan as the pinnacle of civilization, and made Korea the pinnacle (Allen 1990: 802). This led Ch'oe to some wild conclusions about the global influence of Korean culture; most significantly he supposedly documented the indigenous Korean religion "Way of

Park (박).” He claimed that it was once a great religion of worshipping mountains and people, which spread across Asia and even into Eastern Europe. He backed his claim through philological arguments, citing Korean-originated cognates referring to mountains across various languages (Allen 1990: 798-799).

Ch’oe’s writings on Buddhism, though, were much more historically grounded, yet still led to conclusions which cannot be taken out of the context of colonial Korea. Ch’oe mimicked Takakusu’s assertion that East Asian Buddhism was the culmination of all Buddhism; however, while Takakusu pointed to Japanese Buddhism as the greatest, Ch’oe pointed to Korean Buddhism. ‘Culmination’ is an important concept here in that it directly reflects the position of Wŏnhyo in the history of Korean Buddhism which Ch’oe would emphasize. The assertion that Korean Buddhism is a culmination of Buddhism, in which Wŏnhyo played the most pivotal role, has been criticized by looking at Buddhist doctrine by Robert Buswell, discussed in chapter one. Ch’oe’s writings definitely referenced Buddhist doctrine in order to substantiate his claims about Korean Buddhism and Wŏnhyo; however, it is not what is most important at this juncture. Rather, the negative criticisms of Korean Buddhism by Japanese scholars, in which they claimed Korean Buddhism had no social viability left, and the growing influence of Christianity in Korea, led to Ch’oe Namsŏn using his knowledge in modern scholarship to bolster Wŏnhyo as a figure that could prove the social viability of Korean Buddhism and make Buddhism the center of modern Korean nationalism. These intentions become clear by looking at specific arguments made about Wŏnhyo in Ch’oe’s 1930 speech at the YMBA conference, and his subsequent writings on the subject.

Ch'oe's speech had the purpose of introducing Western scholarship to the history of Korean Buddhism. Starting from the introduction of Buddhism to Korea, moving to the dissemination of Buddhism into Japan from Korea, and ending with the relationship between Korean and Buddhist culture, Ch'oe dedicates Chapter 4 entirely to Wŏnhyo, the only figure that receives such extensive treatment. The beginning of the chapter is dedicated to the doctrinal teachings of Wŏnhyo, and is concerned with the argument that Wŏnhyo was the first to syncretize East Asian Buddhism. In summation:

Wŏnhyo is usually known in the world for Hwaom teaching. There was no clear direct relationship between China's Haktong and Chosŏn's special Hwaom teaching so Wŏnhyo looked for the true connection of Haedong, Hwaom and Byolmyong; before Wŏnhyo there was no unity in the teachings (Ch'oe 1930 trans.by Park and Feuer).

As discussed in chapter one of this thesis, this declaration has been extensively critiqued by Robert Buswell, and has been shown to hold little footing historically. That is not to say, however, that Ch'oe's exposition of Wŏnhyo's doctrine is incorrect, but rather the conclusions that he draws about the uniqueness or originality are easily debunked by looking at the Buddhist doctrinal development of the time.

At the end of the chapter on Wŏnhyo, however, Ch'oe summarizes the reasons for his emphasis on the 7th-century monk. Interestingly, Ch'oe's speech was translated into English at the YMBA Conference by a Ch'oe Pongsu for dissemination among the Western scholars. The translation is much shorter than the original Korean version, and misses much of the eloquent rhetorical techniques employed by Ch'oe Namsŏn. Not just an historical and religious scholar, Ch'oe Namsŏn was also a skilled poet, and is often remembered for his various *sijo*, or traditional Korean poems. It is no surprise then that the way in which Ch'oe highlights Wŏnhyo's importance is with rhetorical grace:

Wŏnhyo brought the Buddhist teachings out from the temple grounds (전당(殿堂)), onto the street corner (가두(街頭)), and into the minds of the people(백성), working tirelessly to relate the teachings to real life.

Wŏnhyo's mission was that the long standing evils (적폐) in Buddhism of discriminating based on class or lifestyle should be broken down, and Buddhism should return to unifying principles (보편평등법문) based on returning to one's province. (Ch'oe 1930 trans.by Park and Feuer)

The conceit employed in the first passage directly relates to the understanding the Ch'oe had of religious modernization in his time. He saw the social presence of Christianity, and Wŏnhyo represented, for him, the exact strategies that Christians were employing. Over a millennium earlier, Korean Buddhism had a figure which represented what they should be working for in contemporary times. Ch'oe's understanding of the importance of history in forming a national identity was a strong indicator in his selection of Wŏnhyo has the most prominent figure in Korean Buddhism. "He [Ch'oe] came to firmly believe that the only way to establish Korean identity is through history" (Choi 2012: 40). The bolstering of Wŏnhyo had social significance, not just doctrinal significance.

Ch'oe Namsŏn solidified his ideology in the 1930's and 1940's. It seems that the speech he gave in 1930 was the first step in his crafting of Korean history, and he continued with rhetoric of nationalism through historical indoctrination. He published multiple books on Korean history in these decades, and spent much of the period teaching in Japanese-occupied Manchuria (northeast China). His perspective on Korean nationalism was taught in full force in his years at the University of Manchuria, and he embedded these thoughts in his students. With his history books becoming commonplace, he helped raise a new generation of Koreans who would be the backbone of post-WWII Korea. At the heart of his construction of history was a uniting the *minjok*, or people of

Korea, through shared culture. He incorporated all the major Korean dynasties, and marked the founding of Korea with *Tan'gun* in the second millennium BCE. Religion played an integral part in his theorizing.

While he was most keen on Buddhism and Christianity, his ultimate goal was to unify all the historical religions of Korea under the shared umbrella of Korean culture. This idea, however, as we have seen, was greatly influenced by his understanding of Western scholarship in formulating national identity. And, in turn, this understanding was passed to him through his interest in Christianity, and his work alongside prominent Korean Christians. This helped him develop his unflinching dedication to Korea. When he was arrested on counts of anti-nationalism in 1949, he questioned much of his life's work and the lack of respect he had gotten from his own country. It seemed a fitting end to his life, however, when the culmination of his work led him to convert to Catholicism in 1955. Upon his baptism, he reflected upon the connection between Catholicism, Korea, and his life's work:

On November 17, 1955, leaving behind all my religious seekings of the last 50 years, I was baptized a Catholic. From a personal point of view, this baptism represents my quest for salvation, and from a national point of view, it represents my ardent wish for my country as it advances toward the new and reforms the old (Choi 2012: 111).

His grandson adds:

with the embrace of the Catholic faith, he hoped to be unburdened of the legacy left behind by the earlier Korean philosophers and thinkers whose sole concern had been for the good of their country...He firmly believed that the spiritual framework of Catholicism would help advance the cause of the country's modernization (Choi 2012: 112).

His conversion at the end of his life reconciles much of the speculation on his changing faith over the course of his life. While his official conversion happened years after his

most important scholarship, it reflects the attitude he most likely had: Christianity and the Christian institution were the best framework for a Korean national and religious identity that could lead Korea to independence and successful modernization. Through this lens, it is clear what his goals were in documenting Korean history, Korean Buddhism, and especially Wŏnhyo.

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Conclusion

This study has looked to trace the historical developments that constructed religious modernization in late-19th and early 20th century Korea through the lens of the appropriation and construction of Wŏnhyo by the colonial-era Korean Buddhist scholars and reformers. I have defined Korean religious modernization in terms of a religion's social viability and its contribution to nationalism. Korean Buddhism and its leaders in pre-modern and early modern times were forced to come to terms with the modernization of their nation after centuries of national isolation, as well as suppression of their religion. The influence of Christianity, spearheaded both by foreign missionaries and native converts, and the influence of Japanese Buddhist missionaries, introduced Korean Buddhists to the idea of religious modernity. While there wasn't a uniform idea among Korean Buddhist leaders of how to change, or even whether to change, certain scholars and reformers were at the forefront of the relationship between religion, society, and politics. Those such as Ch'oe Namsŏn, Yi Nŭnghwa, and Kwŏn Sangno provided a voice for the more progressive side of the Buddhist institution and were able to influence the Korean people and the government with modern views of Korean Buddhism. Their aim was to revitalize Buddhism both historically and contemporarily in order to show its value to society and national polity. Using scant evidence of Wŏnhyo's life from his doctrinal commentaries and hagiographies, Buddhist reformers were able to make Wŏnhyo into an icon of religious modernization. While detailed discussion of Wŏnhyo's doctrinal philosophy was an important aspect to his description by Buddhist scholars, it

was his supposed ability to make Buddhism appealing to both lay people and the government that truly caught the attention of these reformers.

In chapter 1, an overview of Wŏnhyo's doctrinal philosophy was given. The idea that Wŏnhyo's syncretic philosophy was completely unique was debunked, and shown to have been couched in the greater East Asian Buddhist commentarial tradition of the time. While Wŏnhyo did develop concepts that were highly important to East Asian Buddhism, such as One Mind and *tathagatha-garba*, the claim made by scholars such as Ch'oe Namsŏn that Wŏnhyo's thought was the culmination of East Asian Buddhist philosophy and that he represents the Korean Buddhist mind were shown to be farfetched. However, a detailed study of Wŏnhyo's doctrinal philosophy wasn't what made him attractive to reformers such as Ch'oe in the religious climate of his time. Religious modernization emphasizes social viability over doctrine, therefore, there was something else appealing about Wŏnhyo. By looking at his hagiographies, we see that Wŏnhyo was characterized as a great proselytizer, a native Korean who never left the peninsula, and a scholar who made Buddhism appealing to the Silla government. His doctrinal philosophy was used by early modern reformers to substantiate those claims because those claims supported the idea of religious modernization that they were aiming for. However, because Wŏnhyo was a relatively obscure figure historically from his own time in the 7th century to the late 19th century, it is important to trace the developments that led to his resurgence in modern times.

Chapter 2 traces the construction of the idea of religious modernization in pre-modern and early modern Korea. The developments of modernization in Japan this period are important historical factors in the way religion came to be viewed in Korea.

State instituted modernization and reform in Japan led to the adoption of many Western ideas about the way government, religion, and society should function in the modern world. Some of the most prevalent ideas of modernization were brought by Christian missionaries. The influence that Christianity, in tandem with Westernization, had on the Japanese government and Japanese Buddhism would prove to be highly influential in Korea. Korean Buddhism was somewhat caught in the middle of the struggle between Japanese Buddhism and Christianity. Korean Buddhists found common ground in their religious beliefs with Japanese Buddhists, yet the Japanese's fierce imperialism was often disheartening to Korean Buddhists. On the other hand, Christianity, especially Protestantism, became synonymous with Korean nationalism, which many Korean Buddhists revered, yet Christianity still posed a threat to Buddhism as an alternative ideology that challenged Buddhist influence in Korea. This led to Korean Buddhists adopting modernization techniques from both Christians and Japanese Buddhists. It was through this adoption of ideas that religious modernization was solidified in Buddhist scholarship, and would lead to the appropriation and construction of Wŏnhyo.

In chapter 3, the specifics of the Buddhist situation in early modern Korea were discussed in detail. Having to recover from centuries of suppression under the Chosŏn government, Korean Buddhists were tasked with reestablishing a positive reputation in the nation. This led Buddhist leaders to envision various ways to reform Buddhism, often lifting ideas from a religion they saw rapidly gaining influence: Christianity. The most important scholars that added to the appropriation of Wŏnhyo, Yi Nŭnghwa, Kwŏn Sangno, and Ch'oe Namsŏn, were all shown to have a relationship with, and often reverence for, the activities of Christianity in Korea. Ch'oe Namsŏn, the definitive maker

of modern Wŏnhyo, worked with Christians throughout his life, and converted to Catholicism in the 1950's. As one of the most influential Buddhist reformers, Ch'oe's idea of religious modernization was integral in the greater discourse on the modernization of Buddhism. By looking at his influences and possible motivations, we can see that his description of Wŏnhyo at the 1930 conference of religions in Hawaii was not simply about Wŏnhyo's doctrinal philosophy, it was more so about his significance to the state of Buddhism in colonial Korea. Wŏnhyo represented something Korean Buddhism was striving for in Ch'oe's time: the ability for Buddhism to connect with the laity and have value to the nationalist project.

It was Ch'oe's use of Wŏnhyo that would leave a lasting impact on Wŏnhyo's reputation in late colonial, and post-war Korea. Yi Kwangsu, colonial Korea's foremost novelist, wrote *Grand Preceptor Wŏnhyo* in 1942 which fictionalized Wŏnhyo as a nationalist figure (Tikhonov 2010: 182). He was shown to be a great monk who sacrificed anything to propound compassion, even if it meant becoming a lay person. Yi alludes to Wŏnhyo being a national figure, whose actions represented the values of the Korean nation, such as his participation in warfare and violation of monastic disciplines for the good of the nation (Tikhonov 2010: 183). Through characterizations of Wŏnhyo like those by Yi Kwangsu, Wŏnhyo came to represent a figure that would challenge tradition for the betterment of both Korean Buddhism and the Korean nation. Such a description mirrors Ch'oe's thoughts in his concretization of Wŏnhyo, and would become the dominant picture of Wŏnhyo in Korea after 1945.

Wŏnhyo's modern appropriation as a figure which represents the goals of religious modernization still holds much significance today. At the 2016 International

Conference on Ganhwa Seon hosted by Dongguk University in Seoul, four masters—three from the Korean Seon tradition and one from the Japanese Zen tradition—met to discuss the current state of Buddhism in Korea. The Venerable Subul began the conference by stating the goals of Korean Buddhism. To paraphrase, he declared that Buddhism's top priority is to make Buddhism more appealing to the modern Korean populace. He stated that Buddhism must continuously adapt to modern life and compliment the changing social and political climate of the times.

The Venerable Subul's comments mirror the attitude of Korean Buddhism that began in the later 19th century. Korean Buddhists have been striving to make Buddhism a religion that is relevant to modern life, rather than something that stands apart from it. The depiction of Wŏnhyo by early modern scholars is one aspect of this greater drive towards modernization in Korean Buddhism. While doctrinal issues continue to be of great importance within the monastic and scholarly community, it is the social aspects of Buddhism that are most appealing to the greater populace. Therefore, the early modern making of Wŏnhyo was an active effort to redefine Buddhism as a nationalistic and socially viable religion.

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