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Pori Park. *Trial and Error in Modernist Reforms: Korean Buddhism under Colonial Rule.* Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 2009. 158 pp. $20.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-55729-094-6.

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Korean Buddhism during the Colonial Period (1810-1945) and Han Yongun's Reforms

For so long, English-language scholarship on colonial Korea has given scant attention to Korean Buddhism, despite its importance to the colonial government. Most scholarship on colonial Korea has predominantly focused on the political, economic, social, and cultural arenas of Japanese colonialism in Korea, and has overlooked the role of religion in general and Buddhism in particular. In the past three years, three books have been published that fill this gap: *Han Yongun's Selected Writings,* translated by Vladimir Tikhonov (Korean name Pak Noja) and Owen Miller (2008); *Trial and Error* by Pori Park (2009); and *Makers of Modern Korean Buddhism* edited by Jin Y. Park (2010). These books are aligned with the growing trend in scholarship that seeks to excavate the realities of colonial Korea by viewing this period through the larger East Asian and global context and by drawing out the multifaceted experience of Koreans under Japanese rule. Prior to the publications of these books, Henrik Sørensen and Vladimir Tikhonov, who are two representative scholars among others of Korean Buddhism during the precolonial (1877-1910) and colonial period (1910-45), wrote key articles beginning in the early 1990s. Their research has been a springboard for those seeking to comprehend the multiple dimensions of Korean Buddhism during the period in question. Pori Park and Satona Suzuki completed dissertations titled "The Modern Remaking of Korean Buddhism: The Korean Reform Movement During Japanese Colonial Rule and Han Yong'un's Buddhism (1879-1944)" in 1998 and "Japanese Buddhist Missionary Activities in Korea, 1877-1910" in 2000, respectively. They were followed by Micah Auerback's dissertation titled "Japanese Buddhism in an Age of Empire: Mission and Reform in Colonial Korea, 1877-1931" and my own "Strategic Alliances: The Dynamic Relationship between Korean and Japanese Buddhism, 1877-1912," both in 2007. These recent additions, along with other articles on the topic in the Japanese, Korean, and, most recently, English languages, have greatly advanced a critical understanding of Korean Buddhism during the precolonial and colonial period.

English-language scholarship, however, has done the most to shed new light upon Korean Buddhism during the modern period with the publication of the aforementioned three books. Among these, Pori Park's book is distinct in that hers is the first monograph that provides a sweep of the history of modern Korean Buddhism, with an in-depth examination of the colonial period. Tikhonov and Miller's book is a translation of the selected writings of Han Yongun, one of the most prominent monks during the colonial period. Jin Park's book is an anthology that encompasses Korean Buddhism from the precolonial era up to the present day.

Trial and Error is more than a historical work in that Park engages key scholarly issues in the study of colonial Korea. First and foremost, Park distances herself from the Korean language scholarship that predominantly confines itself to the nationalist paradigm. In so doing, she locates her work within the East Asian and global context by employing the framework of "colonial modernity." This concept, introduced in the late 1990s, has been energetically debated between and among Korean- and English-language scholars. Using this interpretative tool and other, new approaches, Park shows that in the first half of the twentieth century Korean Buddhism, like other Buddhisms in Sri Lanka and China, became even more of an underdog that it had been in the Chosŏn period. It now had to wrestle with the forces of modernity introduced primarily through Japanese colonization. Therefore, Korean Buddhism during the colonial period can be characterized, she asserts, as a series of endeavors among Buddhist leaders to reform their own tradition, to create a new, modern identity, and to make their religion socially responsive and nationally beneficial. The theme of the reform of Korean Buddhism undergirds Park's dis-

cussion throughout.

At the outset, Park's evaluation of the Korean Buddhist reform movement is indicated in the book's title: *Trial and Error*. She argues that Korean Buddhism, by the end of the colonial period, was not able to fully recover from the centuries-long stigmatization by Neo-Confucians during the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910). This marginalization had so crippled Korean Buddhism financially, socially, and politically that it disabled Korean Buddhism in the colonial and even postcolonial eras. That is, the lack of political and social clout, she maintains, prevented Buddhist leaders from taking full advantage of the interregnum following the disintegration of the Chosŏn's Neo-Confucian social and political structure. Because of the unstable situation of Korean Buddhism on the ground, reforms undertaken by leading monastic and lay leaders tended to be too hasty, radical, and ideal to bear fruit. In addition, the paucity of material and human resources, compounded by a passive disposition among Korean Buddhists, compelled them to emulate the education, propagation, and institutional programs of Japanese Buddhism and Christianity rather haphazardly. Japanese colonial rule further undermined the reform efforts of Korean Buddhist establishments by forcibly confining their work to the nonpolitical. Under these circumstances, Korean Buddhist leaders compromised with colonial authorities and limited their religious programs to institutional reforms, rather than also pursue social and political agendas. Park concludes that, due to these factors, all trials at reform were subject to error and eventually to "failure" (p. 9).

The book comprises five chapters that trace the cycle of trial and error. Chapter 1, titled "Rebound," provides a brief history of Korean Buddhism during the Chosŏn dynasty and then discusses a paradigm shift in late nineteenth-century Korean Buddhism. The demise of the Chosŏn dynasty and the influx of Japanese Buddhist and Western Christian missionaries prompted Korean Buddhists to seize upon "a chance to turn around their fate" (p. 33). Nevertheless, the damage done to Buddhism by the Chosŏn's anti-Buddhist policies and "their long-term effects" (p. 12) inexorably led Korean Buddhist reform efforts to become mired by "confusion and conflict" (p. 35). This disarray, chronic to the Korean Buddhist community under Japanese rule, is detailed in the remaining four chapters.

Chapter 2, titled "Caught in-Between," examines the unfavorable situation that Korean Buddhists found themselves in from the late nineteenth century to 1911. In order to maximize the chance of Korean Buddhism's survival, Korean Buddhist leaders approached Japanese Buddhist clerics, whom they considered "brethren" and "benefactors" (p. 34). Yet, Korean Buddhist leaders had to wrestle with the fact that these Japanese Buddhists were also colonizers who prioritized both their national prerogatives and the needs of their sect. In addition, Korean Buddhists were ambivalent about the colonial government. Fully cognizant of how Korean Buddhism could be used to pacify Korean subjects, the colonial government sought to cultivate an amicable relationship with Korean Buddhist monks. Many Buddhist leaders reciprocated the colonial government's favors by accepting the colonial government as the protector of Buddhism. But the colonial government's approach was double-edged. The colonial government simultaneously sought to strengthen Korean Buddhism as it tightened its control over Korean Buddhist institutions through the 1911 Temple Ordinance. This ordinance brought "a system of order" (p. 49) to Korean Buddhist establishments, which, on the whole, was beneficial to Korean Buddhism. However, Park points out that the micromanaging of the major head temples by the colonial authorities usurped Korean Buddhists of their ability to develop an autonomous institution, and thus crippled the possibility of true reform.

Chapter 3 deals with Korean Buddhist reform movements from 1910 to 1919, and chapter 4 takes up reforms from 1919 to 1945. In these two chapters, Park makes a major contribution to the field by offering an insightful distinction between these two periods with respect to Buddhist reforms. Park points out that the periodical divide parallels the colonial government's change in policy from military rule (*budan seiji*) to cultural rule (*bunka seiji*) in the aftermath of the 1919 March First Movement.

In chapter 3, Park looks at how the reforms of Korean Buddhism were excluded from political engagement and thus were primarily religious in nature. As such, Korean Buddhists focused on ensuring institutional survival through clerical education, propagation, and the publication of journals. A number of key monastics disseminated ideas for reforming the Korean *sangha,* and Park examines three leading figures: Han Yongun, Hyegŭn, and Kwŏn Sangno. Park focuses on Han's vision of reform as articulated in his 1913 *Treatise on the Reformation of Korean Buddhism,* and places it as an exemplar in the larger efforts toward reform. She divides Han's program into four areas: unification of the doctrinal orientation of the sangha, simplification of practices, centralization of the sangha administration, and reformation of sangha policies and customs (p. 53). However, the vision of re-

form promoted by Han and others notwithstanding, Park concludes that, due to "financial difficulties and a lack of direction and vision" (p. 67), Korean Buddhists failed to implement these programs.

In chapter 4, Park turns her attention to reforms after 1919, the period in which the colonial regime eased its strict policies. Park writes that the Buddhist reforms of this period displayed a political dimension. For example, young monks defied the colonial government's policies on Buddhism, specifically the 1911 Temple Ordinance. Another example is the movement among young monks of pursuing *minjung Pulgyo* or *taejung Pulgyo* (people's Buddhism) as opposed to *kwanje Pulgyo* (bureaucratic Buddhism). By virtue of a "possible socialist influence" (p. 76) on the *minjung* movement, Park suggests that it could have been "a way of resisting the Japanese government" (p. 77). But she also cautions that these nationalistic sentiments were more complicated than the "simple dichotomy" centering on a nationalism rooted in a "nation-state" (p. 70). To buttress her point, Park incorporates the concept of "ethical nationalism," a Christian self-reconstruction program which prioritized strengthening Koreans' individual, religious, and cultural identity in order to gradually obtain political independence. She views the Buddhist nationalism that Korean Buddhists generated as one of a number of diverse manifestations of nationalist discourse and as one that prioritized the revitalization of their own religion within the confines of colonial rule. Yet, even this type of nationalist movement initiated by young monks did not last long. Many collaborated comfortably with the colonial system for their personal and group ends without following through on the goals they set out for the betterment of Korean Buddhism. Park concludes the chapter by saying that Korean Buddhists were not successful either in devising a nationalist identity or in bringing about the institutional reforms that would have made their religion socially responsive.

In chapter 5, the heart of the book, Park tries to redeem Korean monastics' double failure. She returns to Han Yongun's vision of reform as a case study. Han sought to resolve an impasse (p. 94) that plagued Korean Buddhism's central institution by envisioning a socially engaged Buddhism. Park cites Han's writings published between the 1910s and 1930s to analyze Han's doctrinal, philosophical, and soteriological system. Han equated the traditional practice of *Sŏn* (meditation) with the pursuit of enlightenment and *Kyo* (sutra studies or wisdom) with saving society. With Sŏn addressing "existential suffering" and Kyo addressing "social suffering" (p. 113), the unity of the two created a holistic vision for modern Buddhism. Park attributes Han's doctrinal justification for the Sŏn/Kyo integration to his desire to resolve tensions in the Korean sangha, but she gives special weight to his writing on social equality, liberty, and freedom on the global level. Han "was critical of social inequalities, colonialism, and militarism as counter to the values of liberty and equality" (p. 116). Park is in agreement with other scholars who view Han as a staunch nationalist, noting that he resisted the forced family registry in the 1940s, went without heat in winter out of disgust for Japanese rule, and did not capitulate to the cajoling of the colonizers. However, Park writes that Han's nationalistic discourse was not narrowly defined. Rather, he employed it as a "strategic means" (p. 117) to cater to the needs of people and to ultimately accomplish the fulfillment of a liberalism and cosmopolitanism that would go beyond national, racial, and cultural boundaries. A close examination of Han's life and writings suggest to Park that, in the midst of continuous trial and error among Korean Buddhist monastics in their reform movements, there was a unique Buddhist monk who was both nationalistic and cosmopolitan. In her assessment, Han succeeded in presenting a systematic doctrinal foundation for formulating a Korean Buddhist nationalist identity and for overcoming the hasty secularization and the clumsy modernization of Korean Buddhism. Despite Han's heroic life and constructive vision for Korean Buddhism, Park concludes, "Unfortunately, however, Han's ideas remained ideals and were not expanded or developed into grassroots movements" (p. 124). She goes on to say that postcolonial Korean Buddhism is still struggling with similar issues and that therefore "Han's insight could be still relevant" (p. 125).

In this 158-page book, Park takes on the breadth of historical events in Korean Buddhism during the colonial era and examines many of the key issues, problems, and dilemmas that it encountered. She avoids tendentious nationalistic rhetoric that blames all the problems of Korean Buddhism on the Japanese and instead grants Korean Buddhists more agency. Park insightfully brings to light the problems not necessarily ascribable to colonialism but inherent in Korean Buddhism throughout its premodern and modern history.

That being said, this book would have benefited from considering the following. First, the research relies predominantly on Korean sources and does not integrate Japanese documents written during the colonial period in Korea and about Korean Buddhism. As Park acknowledges, Japanese Buddhism was a major reference point for the reforms of Korean Buddhism, much more so than Christianity. A close examination of the intellectual, in-

stitutional, and personal interactions between the two Buddhist communities in their almost seven-decade relationship (1877-1945) in Korea would make her points more substantiated, nuanced, and thus more convincing. Moreover, the integration of Japanese primary sources, albeit not ample but still available, would have complexified Park's conclusion that Buddhist reforms were a failure.

Second, Park's characterization of Han as a staunch nationalist who criticized Japanese colonialism and sought political independence requires more textual evidence. Park provides as a key piece of evidence Han's frontal attack on Japanese colonialism from *The Proclamation of Independence* that Han helped write for the March First movement in 1919. Yet, Han's overall political stance adduced from his other writings seems less confrontational. His other writings on socially engaged Buddhism and cosmopolitanism, which are rather metaphysical and speculative, can be viewed as trying to avoid direct conflict with colonial authorities rather than challenging them head-on. In addition, although Park does not mention it, there have been debates among Korean-language scholars on a problematic essay that Han purportedly wrote in 1937. In the preface of a Korean Buddhist journal Han lauds Japan's war against China in the same year.[1] This is another piece of evidence that problematizes the view of Han as an uncompromising nationalist. To fully understand Han, his later writings need be taken into consideration.

Of course, addressing these points would increase the length of this compact book and thus compromise its usefulness as an introduction to the topic. All in all, Park's book sets the terms for further research on Korean Buddhism during the colonial era. The first book-length work on colonial period Korean Buddhism, Park's publication can be used as core textbook for classes on modern Korean and East Asian Buddhism. Both scholars and students of Korean Buddhism in particular and of Buddhism in general will benefit from *Trial and Error*'s contribution to the field.

Note

[1]. *Pulgyo (Sin)* 7 (1937): 1; and *Han Yong'un chŏnjip* 2: 359. See also Mun Tŏksu, "Han Yong'un kwa Yu Ch'ihwan" *Kyŏngnam siron* (October 11, 2004).

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