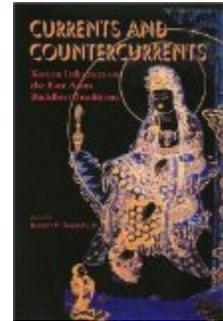




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Borders Remapped and Transcended: Reexamining Korea's Position in Medieval East Asian Buddhism

Two types of myths have been invented to account for the temporal and spatial transmission of Buddhism in East Asia. The first conceives of Buddhism in terms of a number of traditions, each of which has its “essence” transmitted from one generation to another. These different generations of dharma-transmitters are designated and worshiped as “patriarchs.” According to this kind of strictly linear structure, an enlightened master mysteriously came upon a set of essential teachings, which could be traced back to the Buddha ? ? kyamuni himself. These the master had kept jealously until, out of his wisdom and compassion, he chose from his numerous followers and disciples the worthiest as the new bearer of the dharma. This chosen successor then passed on the “dharma-lamp” in the same fashion, leading eventually to the formation of a continuous patriarchate which consisted of an increasing number of patriarchs and a defined set of teachings.

The second type of myth envisions each Buddhist tradition as a simultaneous or successive projection from a center to different “marginal” places. This spatial transmission could have occurred between culturally homogeneous areas or culturally distinct regions. In the former case, the center of the transmission is usually located in a religious and/or political-cultural center (usually national or provincial capital), or the temple or mountain at which the putative first patriarch resided. In the latter model, Buddhism was conceived as being transmitted from the center (China) to different parts of its satellite states, including Korea, Japan or Vietnam. This cross-

cultural and cross-border transmission revealed itself in two patterns depending on the interplay between a Buddhist ecumenical perspective, according to which Buddhism transcended borders and nations, and a “nationalist” view which perceived Buddhism as a form of Chinese culture and therefore an intrusion into the local culture. Local believers needed only to focus on the genuineness of the transmission from China to their state if the ecumenical perspective prevailed.

On the contrary, when nationalist sentiments won through, they had to defend local Buddhism with the claim that their state was as sacred, or even more sacred, than China—the origin of this sinic form of Buddhism—in preserving Buddhism. They may even have gone so far as to contend that the imported Buddhism had been locally cultivated before it was transmitted to China. We have thus seen two sharply contrasting reactions toward the status of China among non-Chinese Buddhist believers in East Asia: whereas often people were intent on proving the legitimacy of the local Buddhist traditions by showing that the marginal was the authentic extension and projection of the central, sometimes they attempted to prove that the marginal was actually the center, or even more central than the center. While the second attitude distorted or falsified the historical facts, the first masks for us the immense developments made locally and even more seriously, the fundamental contributions accomplished to the central from the “marginal.” More and more scholars have come to terms with the historical fallacies of the first type of myth. The linear patriarchate

turns out to be retrospectively created, which attests to a series of systematic campaigns aimed at fostering, creating and promoting such a lineage. The special set of essential teachings was actually stuffed into the mouths of earlier patriarchs by lineage-builders of later generations, and contrary to the general assumption that an earlier patriarch (spiritually) gave birth to the next patriarch, all of these patriarchs—or to be more precise, their images and status—were actually produced by the later lineage-makers.

Different from the first type of myth, which modern scholars have come to discredit, the second seems to have remained by and large intact, partly because it is relatively complex compared to the first. The protracted history of the formation and transformation of Buddhism in East Asia has thus continued to be studied as a unidirectional projection from its center to its periphery. Under the influence of this grand framework, Korea has been largely envisioned as a “bridge” between China and Japan in this “Tale of Three Buddhist Kingdoms.” Important exceptions do exist, though. A prime example is Robert Buswell’s *magnum opus*, *The Formation of Ch’an Ideology in China and Korea* (1989), which argues for the Korean provenance of an early Chan text that was extremely influential in the East Asian Chan tradition. By putting together several serious studies of Korean influence on the Buddhist tradition in other parts of East Asia, the book under review represents another remarkable success in redressing (and debunking) the center-to-periphery approach so deeply embedded in the study of East Asian Buddhism.

This book is composed of seven chapters plus an introduction. The introduction, by Robert Buswell, not only clearly lays out the contours of the book by summarizing the main contributions of individual chapters, but also aptly surveys several key patterns of the Korean influence on other parts of East Asia in the area of Buddhism. Buswell first highlights the integral role Korea played in the eastern dissemination of Chinese culture in general and various sinified forms of Buddhism in particular, both before and after Buddhism was directly transmitted to Japan from China toward the end of the seventh century. He then outlines various channels through which Korea performed this role. These included religious practice, doctrinal innovations, and financial means, the last of which has received relatively limited attention from scholars. Buswell also underlines the Koreans’ delicate sentiments in the face of the massive presence of the Chinese culture. Whereas it may have been against their will that those expatriate Korean

monks in China, no matter how sinicized they became, continued to be defined by (and sometime discriminated against, because of) their ethnicity, most Korean rulers deliberately worked to “maintain a cultural, social and political identity that was distinct from China throughout the pre-modern period” (p. 9).

Chapter 1 (by Jonathan W. Best) discusses Paekche’s role in the introduction of Buddhism into Japan, a widely acknowledged fact. Best’s contribution lies in providing several new perspectives for this well-discussed topic. He addresses several major aspects of the complicated socio-political and cultural dynamism, both in Paekche and Japan, that facilitated the Paekche’s use of Buddhism as a vehicle of political and cultural interaction with Japan, and the religion’s acceptance and subsequent development in the Japanese court. In particular, Best has judiciously taken into account the role played by the material culture of Buddhism (especially temple architecture) in the process of this complex religious transplantation, which was to prove one of the two greatest transformations of Japanese culture (the other being Japan’s opening to the West in the middle of the nineteenth century) (p. 37).

Chapter 2 (by Hee-Sung Keel) is a painstaking and well-balanced case-study of the Korean influence in Japanese Pure Land Buddhism. Keel has taken upon himself two tasks. One is to show the extraordinary extent of the influence Kyōngnong (fl. ca. 620-700), a seventh-to eighth-century Korean Buddhist scholar, wrought on Shinran’s (1173-1262) masterpiece, the *Kyōgyōshinshō*. Keel shows that in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, Kyōngnong is quoted more often than any other exegetes except for Tanluan (476-542/c. 488-554) and Shandao (613-681). The other is to identify and investigate some major factors contributing to Shinran’s exceptionally heavy reliance on Kyōngnong in the *Kyōgyōshinshō*, which appears unusual given that, compared with other Chinese and Korean Buddhist doctors, Kyōngnong was a relatively minor one. The author also emphasizes the necessity of recognizing the “general influence that Silla masters collectively exerted on the Japanese Pure Land tradition” (p. 67).

Chapter 3 (by John Jorgensen) is an exceptionally erudite and penetrating exposition of several key ideologies supporting Korea’s unique position vis-à-vis China during the Tang and Five Dynasties period. Jorgensen starts with an intriguing remark: of all the major neighbors of China, Korea was the only one which exerted significant influence on Chinese Buddhism in the pre-modern pe-

riod. Korea was able to do so because the Chinese of the Tang and the Five Dynasties took Koreans as their equals, at least culturally. This sense of cultural equality was not merely a consequence of geographical proximity; it also involved a profound ideological agenda. From very early times, the Chinese people understood Korea as the place which was originally converted by a Confucian sage. Such a perceived cultural closeness between China and Korea was strengthened after the An Lushan rebellion, when the Chinese became increasingly suspicious and hostile towards their “Barbarian” neighbors. This xenophobic sentiment left Korea as a rare exception, on which some Tang Chinese staked their hopes for the resurgence of their declining culture. Shrewdly taking advantage of the exceptional prominence that the Korean Chan master Musang (? -762) achieved within the tradition of the Mazu Daoyi (709-788) tradition, Korean S? n exponents like Ch’oe Ch’iw? n (857-904+) championed the *dongyi* regeneration theory, according to which Chinese culture was destined to be revived from its “eastern margin” (*dongyi*), meaning Korea. This theory immensely influenced the compilation of such major Chan texts as *Zutang ji* (Korean: *Chodang chip*). However, Chinese respect for Korea disappeared after the Five Dynasties as hostilities between China and Korea developed as the latter succumbed to the archenemies of China in the north, the Khitan, Tanguts and Jurchen.

While Jorgensen’s chapter impressively deals with general ideologies that made possible a sustained Korean influence over China, the following two chapters focus on two renowned Korean monks who spent almost the whole of their careers in Tang China. Because of his importance in the history of East Asian meditation tradition, Musang has been the subject of a string of scholarly works. However, rarely has this monk been studied with the depth and breadth accorded by Bernard Faure in chapter 4. After a brief review of Musang’s hagiobiographical account, Faure turns to discuss his prominence in Chan Buddhism as the third patriarch of Sichuan Chan and the founder of the Jingzhongsi school. Musang’s importance is not, Faure emphasizes, limited to Chan Buddhism, as is demonstrated by his abbotship of Jingzhongsi, a monastery with important political background, and his close relationship with Xuanzong and other political figures in the Sichuan area. Musang’s influence was even extended to Tibet. In addition to his soaring reputation in Tibet, Faure suggests that Musang was probably the person who initiated the Tibetan envoys, who were sent to China probably some time between 752 and 756, into Buddhism on their way back

via Sichuan, where they encountered Musang. As a stark contrast to his fame in both Tang China and Tibet, Musang’s name is conspicuously absent from Korean sources. Faure interprets this as the “silenced center of Silla Buddhism,” which Faure argues was derived from, generally, Korean resistance towards Chinese cultural domination and, particularly, the threat that Musang’s Chan school in China posed to the Korean S? n traditions represented by the Nine Mountain schools.

Chapter 5 (by Eunsu Cho) is a stimulating reassessment of the life and intellectual importance of W? nch’? k (613-696). On the basis of the work of some Japanese and western scholars, Cho brings out the significant but long-unnoticed contributions that W? nch’? k made to Chinese, Tibetan, Korean and Japanese Buddhism. Although as one of the two chief disciples of Xuanzang (600-664) (the other being Kuiji [632 -682], the *de facto* founder of the Chinese Yog? c? ra tradition [Faxiang; Kor: P? psang; Jpn: Hoss?]), W? nch’? k was believed to be a significant shaper of Faxiang, Cho has put forward an innovative argument that the most important aspect of W? nch’? k legacies should be sought in his impact on the Chinese Avata? saka tradition? “Huayan (Kor. Hwa? m, Jpn: Kegon), particularly in several key hermeneutic methods that were invented by him and were developed by Fazang (643-712), the systematic expounder of the Huayan tradition. Cho’s study also covers the crucial role that W? nch’? k played in Tibet and Japan as a contributor to the development of Buddhist hermeneutics, which she believes was much needed in these two Buddhist traditions.

In contrast to the preceding two chapters, each of which consists of an exclusive study of a major Korean monk, chapter 6 (by Chi-wah Chan), studies around a dozen Korean monks involved in the Chinese Tiantai tradition. Although most, if not all, of them have been studied elsewhere to varying extents, Chan’s work is commendable in bringing them together and contextualizing their contributions. He highlights a remarkable phenomenon: while those Korean monks who went to China before the Song period, such as Hy? n’gwang (539-575), P’ayak (562-613), Y? n’gwang (d.u.), P? byung (d.u.), I? ng (d.u.), left very limited traces on both Chinese Tiantai Buddhism and its Korean counterpart (Ch’? nt’ae), those who went during the Song, like Chijong (930-1018), ? it’ong (927-988) and Ch’egwan (? -970), directly participated in the affairs of the Tiantai community in China, and played instrumental roles in revitalizing the Tiantai tradition.

The last chapter (by Chi-chiang Huang) is a refreshing study of a unique monastery, Huiyinsi, which was located in the capital of the Southern Song dynasty (Hangzhou), but which had developed such a close relationship with Korea that it came to be known by a sobriquet meaning “the Monastery of Korea” (Gaolisi). The author brings to light different aspects of the socio-political, intellectual and international background against which this monastery achieved and maintained its special ties with Korea through the Korean prince-monk ? ich’? n (1055-1101), who arrived in Hangzhou in 1085 to study the Chinese Avata? saka teachings with Jingyuan (1011-1088), the abbot of Huiyinsi. Huang explains in detail the significant impact that ? ich’? n exerted on Chinese Buddhism both during and after his pilgrimage. His association with Jingyuan not only exalted the reputation of the Chinese monk and his monastery, but it also built up an extensive and dynamic network between ? ich’? n’s group and the Chinese scholastic monks in the Hangzhou area. Huang also successfully uncovers the complex of diplomatic and political concerns underlying the continuing attention that the Southern Song rulers showed to this “Korean” monastery.

This thought-provoking and elegantly presented volume will prove highly valuable to scholars of almost every area of Buddhist studies. It will certainly stimulate scholars who work in other fields to explore the roles played by non-Chinese East Asian peoples in the evolution of East Asian civilization as a whole. These eight carefully crafted pieces of work will inspire new lines of research on different aspects of East Asian Buddhism. First, a broad understanding of East Asian Buddhism as a whole should be complemented by in-depth investigations of peculiar characteristics of various Buddhist traditions in these East Asian regions. Scholars are now becoming more keenly aware of how necessary and rewarding it is to transcend borders in studying different Buddhist traditions in medieval East Asia, and to view East Asian Buddhism as a whole, rather than breaking it down into individual countries. Meanwhile, we should be careful not to over-simplify East Asian Bud-

dhism in terms of some overriding themes and practices to be gleaned from a selected number of “standard” and “central” sources, particularly those prescribed in a certain number of Buddhist texts that were acclaimed as the scriptural supports for major Buddhist traditions originating in China. Rather, in order to construct a full picture of East Asian Buddhism, we must take into account numerous “variances” implied in different traditions.

Furthermore, the transmission and development of Buddhism in East Asia have been so far studied mainly through specific Buddhist schools, or even more narrowly, through a handful of doctrinal frameworks. This is certainly a necessary and fruitful approach. Other similarly productive avenues should not be ignored, though. They might include some of the most sacred sites in India or China, which were reproduced in other parts of Asia; some specific forms of Buddhist material cultures or technical inventions closely related to Buddhism; commentary history of some key texts; and so on.

Finally, we need to exert more caution in deciding the provenance of some Buddhist texts written in Chinese. Given the status of the Chinese language as the lingua franca for East Asia in the medieval period, not all of these Chinese texts were written in China or by Chinese. Some of them were actually written outside China. To determine their provenance is not only to do justice to these non-Chinese authors, but more importantly, to expose ourselves to the particular intellectual and sectarian circumstances for the composition and transmission of these texts, the history and functions of which will remain unclear as long as we stick to their putative “Chinese” provenance. Some of these “Chinese” texts might have never been transmitted beyond the countries in which they were composed (Japan, Korea or Vietnam), while others were transmitted to China and had profound influence there. Even for those written in China by expatriate Korean or Japanese authors, we still need to recognize and reappraise how the authors’ ethnicities imparted their works with intellectual connotations that were absent from works by their Chinese dharma brethren.

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