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Mark A. Nathan. *From the Mountains to the Cities: A History of Buddhist Propagation in Modern Korea.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2018. 206 pp. \$62.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8248-7261-8.

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The study of modern East Asian Buddhism has received greater attention in the last decades, but rather than regard the Buddhisms of South Korea, Japan, China, or Vietnam as merely contemporary reflections of ancient truths, scholars have taken seriously the question of how the unique forces of modernity have impacted the development of Buddhism in those countries. In such studies, even the very category of religion itself is not taken for granted. Mark Nathan contributes to the conversation with this modest book, which argues that legal definitions of religious activity derived from the Protestant West had a profound effect on the evolution of institutionalized Buddhism within Korea over the course of the twentieth century.

Within Anglophone scholarship on modern East Asian Buddhism, Japan has always been well represented, and within the past decade scholarship on Chinese Buddhism, this reviewer's area of expertise, has begun to keep pace. However, despite increasing funding, the number of works on Korean Buddhism available in English still lags far behind both of those (to say nothing of books on Vietnamese Buddhism). This is a shame, as Korean Buddhism has been, and continues to be, a vibrant and unique part of the Buddhist world. Furthermore, as in other areas within Buddhist studies, study of the modern has typically been neglected in favor of studying the tradition's roots. Nathan's book joins those by Robert Buswell Jr., Hwansoo Kim, Jin Y. Park, and Pori Park on the slowly growing list of good works on modern Korean Buddhism to appear in English.

The primary content of the present volume is a his-

tory of the importance of the concept of propagation, or *p'ogyo* 布教, within Korean Buddhism, and "the central claim of this book is that the discourse and practice of *p'ogyo* generated a capacity for a coordinated action in the face of perceived threats to the survival or social viability of the religion" (p. 2). Although it purports to deal with both the discourse and the practice of *p'ogyo*, the book is more thorough in addressing the former than the latter. As a component of internal discourses created by Buddhists about Buddhism, this book takes propagation, a topic that may at first appear dry to some readers, and places it squarely in the center of modern Korean Buddhist history.

As is generally well known, the hyper-Confucian Chosŏn Dynasty (1392-1897) was not kind to the Buddhist institutions of Korea. Although, as Nathan cites Eunsu Cho to argue, Korean Buddhism was likely stronger in the nineteenth century than is generally recognized, it was severely limited socially and economically at the start of the twentieth century. Since that time, Buddhism has once again become a vibrant and important part of South Korean society. In one of several important observations he makes in the book, Nathan points out that this revival was not guaranteed. Scholars cannot take for granted the ways in which Buddhism regained its position in Korea. A key to this success was an emphasis on propagation, which had a deep impact on the formation and structure of modern Korean Buddhist institutions. In his words, "this book argues that the ideas, practices, and institutions associated with the goal of propagating Buddhism were uniquely well-suited as an organizational response to some of the most significant socio-cultural,

political, legal, and technological changes that have occurred in the last one hundred years” (p. 3).

This book is organized chronologically, with each of the four main chapters covering roughly thirty-five years of the period from the late nineteenth century to the early twenty-first. It begins with a review of existing scholarship on propagation and missionary work within global Buddhism. Nathan argues that while existing scholarship has generally done a good job of recognizing how Christian practices have been imitated and adopted within Buddhist propagation, far less work has been done analyzing the ways that the laws and regulations of modern nation-states, rooted in Western theories of governance, religion, and citizenship, established propagation as a category of legitimate religious action. His study works to address this lacuna by examining the place of religion in a variety of legal documents from the 1880s to the 1990s. Among other works, he looks at treaties between Korea and Western powers, and temple regulations and ordinances enacted in 1899, 1915, and 1930. He also cites several propagation manuals published by Buddhist actors in Korea from the 1970s to the present.

The term *p’ogyo* has a long history in East Asian Buddhism, but was relatively uncommon in Korean Buddhism until the start of the twentieth century when it became central to Korean Buddhists’ understanding of their own tradition. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Western definitions of religion began to enter East Asian law, first through international treaties and then through new constitutions. Western powers, who were usually as eager to open Asian countries to Protestant missionaries as they were to international trade, included provisions in their treaties that defined freedom of propagation as a core element of freedom of religion. To gain the protections offered to religion within the new legal frameworks, religious institutions had to meet the definition of religion they implied. In Korea, government reforms pushed through by Japanese force, and later by direct Japanese colonial rule, explicitly defined propagation as one of the lawful activities of religion. Nathan argues that by legally defining propagation in this way, the state effectively prescribed the creation of a new sphere of action. While such legal changes impacted Buddhists throughout East Asia, they were particularly important for Korean Buddhism, which had been highly restricted by government policy until the end of the nineteenth century. With the lifting of these restrictions, and the relative support offered to Buddhism under Japanese colonial rule, Korean Buddhists looked to spread the Dharma in Korean society, and the discourse of *p’ogyo* became quite

compelling to them.

Nathan’s discussion of how scholars do, and could, treat the period of Japanese colonial rule is one of several useful interventions he makes in this work. He notes that although much has been written within Korea about Buddhism under colonial rule, scholarship tends to focus on two issues: how colonial forces oppressed Korean Buddhism, and who was a collaborator in this. While some scholars, including Hwansoo Kim, have attempted to take a broader view of that period, Nathan argues that such narrowness of focus still generally obtains. He attempts to avoid this by arguing that even though the laws put in place by the colonial authorities were oppressive, they were still laws that allowed certain things. These allowances had an impact on the development of Korean Buddhism. This is especially true given that, as Nathan points out, the Temple Ordinances put in place by the Japanese were not repealed in South Korea until the late date of 1962.

This book succeeds in identifying the factors involved in the emergence of *p’ogyo* as a dominant discourse within Korean Buddhism. The reader clearly sees how it became important for how Korean Buddhists envisioned their work in reintegrating into society after the Chosŏn persecutions, and again after the loosening of government oversight that occurred after the 1980s with the full democratization of South Korea. The book is relatively thin, however, with regard to the actual practice of this *p’ogyo*. Mention is made of the construction of temples in cities (Kakhwang Temple in 1910, and the many independent lay-oriented Sŏn centers of the 90s and 00s, for example), but more could have been said about the activities that were actually carried out at these locations under the banner of *p’ogyo*. While the temple stay program is probably important, it is only one kind of activity, and some discussion of the contents of lectures, classes, and other endeavors would have helped provide a fuller picture of recent *p’ogyo* efforts. The same need for detail occurs in the book’s treatment of Buddhist publications, either those of the colonial period or those of the last several decades. For example, in discussing the journals that Korean Buddhists published in the 1910s as a central part of their propagation efforts, Nathan merely cites Henrik Sorensen’s well-known 1990 article on the topic, but does not provide additional analysis of their contents. What do all of these publications tell us about the specifics of *p’ogyo*, how it was to be done, where, and by whom? This reviewer acknowledges that this may be a minor quibble derived from his own field, as scholars of Chinese Buddhism from this same period spend a great deal of effort

analyzing the contents of similar journals because they have much to tell us. There is only so much you can do in a single book, of course, so it is hoped that in his future work, Nathan will provide a deeper account of the practice of *p'ogyo* in Korea.

This book makes a clear contribution to the field of Korean Buddhist studies, but it also offers a new perspective on aspects of modernity that have been at work across East Asia, and this reviewer recommends it to those who study Chinese and Japanese Buddhism. It is a good model for analyzing how the global legal system engendered by the colonial period continues to structure internal and external discourses of religion in East Asia. Even if one is not reading the book for its primary argument, it provides a useful summary of the changing political and legal status of Buddhism in South Korea from the Chosŏn Dynasty through occupation and military rule to the present day. This book is useful for scholars of Japanese and Chinese Buddhism on two

other levels: first, it is simply good to know what has happened in Korea. Certain modern trends played out differently there than in other East Asian countries. This reviewer was especially struck by Nathan's assertion that *p'ogyo* today is a continuation, a century later, of a general East Asian Buddhist focus on propagation that did not continue in Japan. Scholars of Chinese Buddhism should take note. Second, Korea played an important role in the internal development of Japanese Buddhism and in the political picture of East Asia generally. For example, the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) is seen as a watershed moment that led to the Self-Strengthening Movement and presaged the end of the Imperial System, and provides the backdrop for many of the modernizing movements we see within Chinese Buddhism. But it is good to be reminded that this war was fought about, and mostly within, Korea. This book continues the University of Hawai'i's clear commitment to expanding the number of works on Korean Buddhism in English, and one hopes they will continue publishing works such as this.

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