

BEATRIX MECSI

**Celibacy or Marriage?
Dilemmas for Buddhist Monks in Korea.
Manhae Han Yongun 萬海 韓龍雲 (1879–1944) and His Ideas
for Promoting Clerical Marriage**

Introduction

Toksŏng 獨聖, or the Lonely Saint can often be seen in Korean Buddhist monasteries. For the question, why he is lonely, the usual answer – which appears in the not so technical literature about him as well –, is that he is alone; he doesn't have a wife.¹

But why do such explanations about a Buddhist monk exist when Buddhist monks at the time of the production of such representations were traditionally supposed to be celibate?

These interpretations were thought to reflect the influence of Confucianism – the dominant and official ideology of the Chosŏn times (1392–1910) – yet, it is more likely that these statements were usually made only after the early 20th century, when the Korean Buddhist religious landscape became considerably changed during the Japanese colonial period.

With the arrival of the Japanese, a trend appeared for Buddhist monks to marry, which was a custom in Japan that dated back as early as the Heian period (794–1185),² and became standard after the Meiji period edict of 1872³ when its purpose was to weaken Buddhist clergy and to blur the borders of religious and secular life while promoting Shintoism.

With the appearance of such an alternative, the traditionally celibate Korean monks had to face a dilemma – to be celibate or to get married. The question was twofold: the new custom to be a married monk is usually interpreted as

¹ Covell 1982: 62; Covell 1986: 76.

² Morinaga Sōkō 1993.

³ Ketelaar 1990: 6.

a sign of modernization, yet as a tradition connected to the colonizers, there was also resistance to this custom because of national sentiments.⁴

However, a closer look at this issue reveals a much more nuanced picture of what might have led Korean monks traditionally living in celibacy in the early 20th century to more willingly adopt the married lifestyle.

In addition to the simplistic and much-publicized views of research dominated by the greatest order that now considers celibacy as their ideal, it can be shown that in addition to ideological and religious considerations, many other, – sometimes much more prosaic–, factors have played a role in increasing or decreasing monastic marriages.⁵

If we look at the responses for the idea of married clergy we can find different approaches amongst Korean thinkers and monks. In this paper I will focus on the text promoting marriage for Buddhist clergy by the famous poet and politician monk, Manhae Han Yongun 萬海 韓龍雲 (1879–1944) and show how his personality and life story, the current ideologies of his times and Confucian ideals played a role in his approach to marriage.

It is also important to look at the original Buddhist teachings, where we can find a more complex attitude towards marriage and celibacy amongst Buddhist clergy.

1. Indian origins, Vinaya and the nature of sources on celibacy

Gautama Siddhārtha, the later Shakyamuni Buddha (“the Enlightened”), the founding teacher of Buddhism was himself married before he embarked on an ascetic life and search for liberation. But how did the idea of celibacy become connected to Buddhism? Buddhism is regularly understood as a monastic movement, of leaving the family (Skt. *pravrajyā*, Pāli, *pabbajjā*, “going forth”) and adopting an ascetic lifestyle.⁶ The original teachings of the Buddha known as the four noble truth says that life is suffering (Pāli, *dukkha*), and the cause of suffering (Pāli, *samudaya*) is attachment, but there is a possible way to end this suffering. This is explained as the eight-fold path to end suffering (Pāli, *maggā*). The key concept is then attachment, either in a literal or non literal sense. A central teaching of the Buddha is that even the most respected and pure attachments such as parental love unavoidably produce grief as everything in the world is perishable and temporary. The only way to avoid the pain of losing

⁴ Yun – Park 2019: 5.

⁵ Park, Jeongeun 2016.

⁶ Cole 2004: 280; Keown 2008.

anything dear to us is not to be attached to anything and anybody.⁷ However, if we consider that the relevant cause of suffering is not coming from outside but perceived subjectively, then we can assume that it is still possible leading a holy life as a householder, though it is more difficult.⁸ The easiest way to follow this ideal is to be a wandering monk, who is free from possessions and attachments to anything and anybody. Nonetheless, as Buddhism is practiced in organized communities, it was necessary to set certain rules (*vinaya*) for the community members. Vinaya texts are the Indian Buddhist monastic codes, regulating the lives of monks and nuns in the monasteries, but these rules later became to be debated and analysed more from a point of view of Buddhist teachings than regarded as a result of quoting certain cases to bring order in a community. We can find very detailed prescriptions about sexuality in those texts.⁹ Often, these types of documents were used when searching for attitudes towards family and sexuality in Buddhism, so we should be careful to what degree these documents are faithful depictions of actual practices, mentioning some special cases in order to punish the misbehaviours within the community.¹⁰ The other pitfall of taking the legal documents and vinaya texts on face value is that sometimes we can trace a hidden, or not so hidden agenda behind referring to these texts, serving some Buddhist or anti-Buddhist groups' interests by showing an image of a decadent Buddhism, keeping reformation or other goals in their minds.¹¹

In India, to prevent Buddhism being regarded as a threat to society due to converts leaving their families, they have adapted the four stages of life to allow a man to abandon the world only after he had fulfilled his family duties (Faure 1998).

2. China. Confucian Opposition and Issues of Filial Piety

When vinaya texts were translated into Chinese before the 5th century, they tried to stay consistent with Indian societal norms, whilst keeping in mind the historically legitimate aspirations of Chinese Buddhism¹² and taking into account the most influential religious and philosophical traditions in China, including the social norms of Confucianism in which the public and social spheres were

⁷ Ruzsa 2018: 12.

⁸ Majjhima-Nikāya, 36. Transl. Nāṇamoli-Bodhi 2009: 335.

⁹ Sexual offences were often taken such seriously that the offenders were expelled from the community (Asanga Tilakaratne 2007: 85–96).

¹⁰ Clarke 2015.

¹¹ Faure 1998: 204.

¹² Bodiford 2005: 5.

emphasized.¹³ Buddhism was regarded as a foreign creed practiced by mostly Central Asian merchants in Chinese trade centers in the former period.¹⁴

Buddhism often was criticized by Confucians for its lack of filial piety, the virtue regarded as the most important by Confucians. Leaving home, thus abandoning filial duties and not continuing the family line, was regarded as a big challenge to the traditional Chinese family system.¹⁵ As Buddhism embraced local traditions, Kenneth Ch'en believes that this special feature of Chinese Buddhism grew out of a response to Chinese culture and the appearance of filial piety in Buddhist practice comes from indigenous Chinese traditions.¹⁶ However, as it is referred to by Guang Xing,¹⁷ John Strong and Gregory Schopen argue that filial piety already existed in Indian Buddhism. They have shown recently that filial piety in Indian Buddhism can be connected to the idea of karma, and thus as a feature of Buddhism, it is based on a different logic to Confucianism, of where filial piety is a central plank in its system. Therefore, the criticism against Buddhism as not being filial cannot be fully justified. Praising living parents and taking care of the ancestors became an important aspect for Buddhists in China¹⁸ and we can witness the imitation of family relationships within the monastic community.

3. Married Monks in Japan

Even though the vinayas prescribe celibacy for Buddhist monks, from sources as early as the Heian period we can read about married monks in Japan.¹⁹ We can interpret this phenomenon not as a norm, but rather as a deviation from tradition. In some historical periods the local regulations became less strict regarding sexual issues.²⁰ While in the earlier times vinaya was taken more loosely in Japan, during the Edo period (1603–1868) we can witness a radical change with more serious punishments for Buddhist clergy by either death or banishment.²¹ However, in the Meiji period (1868–1912) with abolishing the power of the *bakufu* (the shōgun's administration) and giving back the power to the emperor, introducing Western technologies and philosophies, they have supported *shintō*

¹³ Yao 2000: 29.

¹⁴ Keyworth 2003: 170.

¹⁵ Lancaster 1984: 143.

¹⁶ Ch'en 1964.

¹⁷ Guang Xing 2016: 212–226.

¹⁸ Lancaster 1984: 143–145.

¹⁹ Morinaga 1993.

²⁰ Faure 1998: 176.

²¹ Faure 1998: 181.

as an official religion. Since Buddhism was connected to the shōgunate and intertwined with shintō in a syncretic way (*shinbutsu-shūgō* 神仏習合), Meiji politics attempted to separate the two religions (*shinbutsu bunri* 神仏分離), and the government, in order to undermine the prestige of Buddhist monks, allowed marriage and issued an order in year 1872 in which they have declared that priests might do as they wished in regards of eating meat, marrying and cutting their hair.²²

At the turn of the 20th century, the marriage of Buddhist monks became connected with modernization. Modernization, social Darwinism, and the consequent westernization of Japan had a strong impact on Buddhism by blurring the borders between clergy and laity, thus loosening the identity and prestige of Buddhist monks. As Japan entered the international stage as a respected, strong and modernized country, Koreans also aimed to reform Buddhism in Korea. Thinking in the spirit of social evolution which had made a huge impact on Korean society from the end of the 19th century, Korea felt that they needed to similarly change and adapt and looked at the modernized form of this secular Buddhism in Japan as an advanced phenomenon they should emulate in order to be seen as progressive, measuring themselves with Western standards.²³

4. Korea: From Celibacy to Marriage and Back to Celibacy

In contemporary South Korea the *Chogye* Order (조계종 曹溪宗) of celibate monks and nuns is the largest, while the *T'aego* Order (태고종 太古宗), which allows marriage for its clergy, is about similar in scale regarding its number of monks.²⁴ However, in 1945, at the end of the Japanese occupation about 7000 clerics were married and only 300 remained celibate in Korea²⁵ as a consequence of the Japanese intervention (in October 1926 clerical marriage became widely practiced with official governmental approval).²⁶ Nonetheless, we can see that this situation and the proposal that Buddhist clergy could take a spouse was not so obviously a policy purely driven by the Japanese, but was also propagated by Korean intellectuals, especially before 1911, before Japanese intervention to religious affairs was not much institutionalized.²⁷ In this paper I would like to focus on the ideas about clerical marriage as they appear in the writings of one

²² Ketelaar 1990: 6.

²³ Tikhonov 2010: 245 and Yun – Park 2019.

²⁴ Yun – Park 2019: 6.

²⁵ Pori Pak 2016: 27.

²⁶ Pori Pak 2016: 13.

²⁷ Huh 2000: 67.

particular and influential person, Han Yongun (1879–1944) (pen name Manhae) who wrote the first and most comprehensive systematic writing on Buddhist reformation in his time.²⁸

The struggle for and against monastic marriage had an interesting dynamic in the 20th century Korea, because traditionally – and Korea belonged to the really traditional Buddhist countries –, to become a monastic meant leaving home, renouncing the world, and focusing on ascetic practice, it was believed that monks could not marry while practicing asceticism.²⁹

In order to understand the changing attitudes towards clerical marriage in Korean Buddhism, it is important to summarize how Buddhist tradition in Korea was perceived and what were the special features regarding their interpretation of the vinaya rules in different times. The role of Buddhism in politics and state affairs was very prominent, especially in the formative periods, and this feature played an important role for later generations when thinking about clerical marriage, either supporting this idea (connected to social engagement) or opposing it (wishing to revitalize traditional Buddhism with an even stronger reliance on the vinaya rules).

4.1. Background: Korean Buddhism and Its Role in Society

Buddhism in Korea in the Unified Shilla (668–935) and Koryŏ periods (937–1392) was thought of as a national ideology and accorded higher status than the indigenous shamanism, bringing writing and other forms of civilization into the peninsula. Buddhism was treated as a state religion (Hoguk Pulgyo 護國佛教).³⁰ With the support of the royal court, Buddhist monks helped the nation to flourish by asking buddhist deities for their help. By the Koryŏ era, affluent economies were developing around monasteries with thousands of monks, their servants, and lands. They were involved in various businesses like noodle making, tea production and distillation of spirits.³¹ This enormous power and its subsequent abuse caused the final collapse of Koryŏ dynasty. In the following Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910), Neo-Confucianism was elevated as a central ideology, limiting Buddhism and pushing it to the margins of society. Because of Buddhism's previous affluence and connection with politics, the restrictions became more severe. Gradually the polemics extended from criticism of Buddhism's political, economic and social influence to its doctrines as well, criticizing Bud-

²⁸ Pori Pak 2010: 46.

²⁹ Yun – Park 2019: 5.

³⁰ Cho 1998; Birtalan 2013: 258.

³¹ Buswell 1992: 23.

dhism from this point of view to support their acts against it, and consequently the number of monasteries dropped from one thousand to 242.³² Monk ordinations were halted for some periods of time, and the support of Buddhism was limited to some royal women patrons,³³ resulting in Buddhism become a chiefly private enterprise rather than a state concern.³⁴ During this time Buddhist monks were banned from entering the capital,³⁵ a restriction which become permanent in year 1623³⁶ isolating Buddhism from power and the intellectual and cultural debates of the times.

4.2. Korean Buddhism During the Japanese Colonial Period

With the appearance of Japanese influence on the peninsula at the end of the 19th century (1897), which continued with the annexation of Korea to Japan in 1910, the situation for the Buddhists changed. We can differentiate two stages of its influence, first, the stage of attempted assimilation, then later, after the annexation and the introduction of regulations, we can talk about the time of control.³⁷

4.2.1. Attempts for Assimilation: Adopting the Japanese Model

The previously mentioned ban for Buddhist monks on entering Seoul was lifted due to the intervention of the Japanese Nichiren monk Sano Zenrei 佐野前勵 (1859–1912) who convinced King Kojong 高宗 (1852–1919) to make this proclamation.³⁸ Sano might have seen a good opportunity in supporting the weakened Korean Buddhism after the long years of Confucian marginalization to unify Korean Buddhist schools with Japanese congregations, more specifically, with the Nichiren school.³⁹ But those Japanese schools aiming for proselytizing and melting Korean Buddhist schools into their congregation (typically Pure Land and Sōtō Zen schools) were very different from the native tradition, not

³² Buswell 1999: 139.

³³ Yoshikawa (1920: 47) in his seminal work about Korean Buddhism attributed the survival of Buddhism in this time to the support of women. He noted the practice of women visiting monks at Buddhist hermitages around the city wall asking to perform prayers for them forgiving as not being born as a man (the privileged gender in Confucian ideology).

³⁴ Baker 2014: 153–169.

³⁵ Park 1964: 7.

³⁶ Buswell 2007: 32.

³⁷ Huh 2000: 67.

³⁸ Cho Sungtaek 2010: 315.

³⁹ Tikhonov 2010: 260.

having real counterparts in Korean Buddhism, and therefore these attempts usually failed in the end.⁴⁰

A group of Korean reformists who were conscious of the Western imperialist ideas permeating Japan, as well as the social Darwinist notion that society benefits from the survival of the fittest, adopted these ideas of modernization, believing that the current problems and backwardness of Buddhism in Korea would be mended by accepting the models of the more powerful nations. Moreover, by adopting modernization and secularization as seen in Japan, Korean Buddhism could gain back its former glory. Taking their examples from Japan, by calling for the marriage of Buddhist clergy, they aimed to be more responsive to the needs of modern life.⁴¹

4.2.2. *Time of Control: Conservative Opposition*

The Japanese colonial administration treated Buddhism as a tool of government policy. The Governor-General Terauchi Masatake 寺内 正毅 (1852–1919) promulgated a series of measures in November 1906, that began to place regulations on Korean Buddhism similar to those placed on Japanese Buddhism during the Meiji Restoration.⁴² On June 3, 1911 the Korean Monastery Law or Temple Ordinance 寺刹令 (Jap. *jisatsurei*; Kor. *sach'allyŏng*) formalized direct Japanese supervision of Buddhist temples and in 1911 established a new, centralized system of government control,⁴³ in which they changed the traditional system. Temples would now be run as a collective enterprise by the monastic community, replacing the previous system with Japanese-style management practices in which temple abbots, appointed by the Governor-General of Korea, were given private ownership of temple property and given the right to inherit it.⁴⁴ The abbots of thirty (later thirty-one) head monasteries, all licensed and confirmed by the Japanese government, controlled a large number of smaller branch temples.⁴⁵ The system of grouping head and branch monasteries created by the Japanese were often arbitrary and based purely on administrative convenience. This centralized structure also resulted in authoritarianism and corruption within the order which caused deep resentment towards the administration.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Buswell 2007: 32.

⁴¹ Buswell 2007: 34.

⁴² Ketelaar 1990.

⁴³ Tikhonov 2012: 227.

⁴⁴ Sørensen 1999.

⁴⁵ Buswell 2007: 33.

⁴⁶ Buswell 2007: 33.

While Koreans welcomed the help coming from Japanese Buddhists and concentrated on the survival of the Korean monastic community in the first period, after the introduction of the Korean Monastery Law, Koreans became more politically oriented. Desiring the separation of church and politics, they fought for the abolition of the Temple Ordinance, with which they believed the Japanese Government had taken their independence.⁴⁷ Conservative reformists opposed the strategy connected to the colonizers and aimed to restore the glorious past of Korean Buddhism of the Koryŏ and Shilla periods by emphasizing national sentiments and following the traditions. The most important representatives of the conservative movement were Sŏngu Kyŏnghŏ 鏡虛惺牛 (1849–1912) who wished to recreate the late Koryŏ *Imje* 臨濟 (Chin. *Linji*) shool of *Sŏn* 禪 (Chin. *Chan*) Buddhism with its practice of using keywords (*Hwadu* 話頭)⁴⁸ thus reviving Kanhwa Sŏn 看話禪⁴⁹ and Paek Hangmyŏng (1867–1929) who initiated an agriculture-based religious movement combining meditation with working in the fields, probably influenced by the *Sirhak* 實學 (Practical Learning) school of critical Chosŏn literati.⁵⁰ Paek Yongsŏng 白龍城 (1864–1940), the most conservative and traditionalist reformer of this group used the traditional Korean script (*hangŭl*) for his sūtra translations and was a strong advocate of the traditional celibate lifestyle of the monks, to such a degree that in 1926 he wrote a memorial to the Japanese governor-general entitled “Prohibit the Lifestyle of Breaking the Precepts” 犯戒生活禁止 (Pŏmgye saenghwal kŭmji) and several times transmitted the complete monastic precepts⁵¹ (*kujokkye* 具足戒).⁵²

⁴⁷ Pori Pak 2016: 3.

⁴⁸ Sørensen 2010: 131.

⁴⁹ Jin Y. Pak 2019: 248.

⁵⁰ Buswell 2007: 35.

⁵¹ Huh 2005: 29–63 and Buswell 2007: 35.

⁵² He was also the advocate for combining agricultural activities with Buddhism and in his hermitage at Paegun Mountain planted over 10,000 persimmon and chestnut trees, which he and his monks tended (Buswell 2007: 35–36) and emphasized the superiority of Buddhism to the alien and Western religion, Christianity. In his writing entitled *Kuwŏn chŏngjong* 鳩垣正宗 (The Orthodox School that Returns to the Fountainhead) he compared Buddhism to Confucianism, Daoism, and Christianity and concluded that only Buddhism presented moral and transcendental teachings. He even wanted to rename Buddhism to the “Religion of Great Enlightenment” 大覺教 (Taegakkyo), as its most important feature is awakening. Between the two groups there were also some voices combining the two opinions of modernization and traditionalism. An important representative of this was Pak Hanyong 朴漢永 (1870–1948) who saw hope in the betterment of Buddhism in Korea and argued for the combination of meditational practice with doctrinal studies bringing back the Koryŏ tradition, but he also promoted Western culture, science and technology (Buswell 2007: 36). Sot’aesan Pak Chungbin 朴重彬 (1894–1943) also had an important effect on Korean Buddhism.

4.3. Ideas of Manhae Han Yongun (1879–1944). Married Monastics as Solution for Korea?

Amongst many Korean intellectuals the idea of a married clergy was connected to modernization and an attempt to restore Buddhism and its monastic community, so as to make it more socially engaged and attractive for future generations.

Especially the ideas of Han Yongun (1879–1944) (pen name Manhae) were very influential and set the frame for future reforms.⁵³ He was a celebrated leading figure of his times, not only significant for religion, but also famous in the literary world (known for writing the first modern poem in vernacular Korean entitled “The Silence of the Beloved” (Nim-ŭi ch’immuk, 님의 침묵) in 1926, wrote 163 Chinese poems and five novels),⁵⁴ worked as editor for several journals and was prominent in his social activities (acted as leader of the March First Movement [Samil Undong], the independence movement from Japanese rule).⁵⁵

His ideas of clerical marriage appear in the 13th point in his writing entitled the *Chosŏn Pulgyo yusinnon* 朝鮮佛教維新論 (Treatise on the Restoration of Korean Buddhism) drafted first in year 1910⁵⁶ then published in 1913.⁵⁷

The ideas and arguments he uses in this text show a very complex attitude, taking inspiration from carefully selected Buddhist teachings and texts (the Hwaŏm teachings of consummate interfusion 圓融 (Kor. *wŏnyung* Chin. *yuanyong*).⁵⁸ In addition, he used the Vimalakīrti sūtra where the bodhisattva ideal is featured including the married householder way of life.⁵⁹ He also used the current ideologies of his time, such as Spencerian social Darwinism, and liberal democracy,⁶⁰ and was probably considerably influenced by his character and life events (such as being married early in his life, then abandoning his family, then remarrying again later in his life, fathering two children).⁶¹

Han Yongun was born on 29th August 1879 in Hongsŏng.⁶² During his childhood Korean society suffered from notable domestic and external events. The Tonghak (Eastern Learning) Rebellion (1894) which sought to purge Western influences from Korean society and restore native Korean values had a great

⁵³ Pori Pak 2016: 16.

⁵⁴ Pori Pak 2016: 10.

⁵⁵ Buswell 2007: 37. There are plenty of references to his work, not only in Korean, but in other languages as well, approaching his legacy from different aspects.

⁵⁶ Pori Pak 2016: 11.

⁵⁷ Han Yongun 1913. For the translation of the text see Han Yongun 2016.

⁵⁸ Buswell 2007: 43.

⁵⁹ Huh 2000: 83.

⁶⁰ Tikhonov – Miller 2007.

⁶¹ Huh 2000: 68.

⁶² Chŏng 1991.

impact on him in his adolescent years as both his father and brother were killed related to this event. He studied Chinese classics for ten years and in 1892, at the age of 13 (!) he married a woman from the Ch'ōnan Chōn clan.⁶³ In 1897, he left his hometown, to become a monk, wandering to various temples such as Paektamsa temple 百潭寺.⁶⁴ After entering the monastic order, he resided at Oseam hermitage where he acquired a basic knowledge of Buddhism and practiced sōn meditation.⁶⁵

He was greatly influenced by the encyclopedic writings about the West and Western philosophy and political thought by Liang Qichao 梁啓超 (1873–1929),⁶⁶ and decided to travel to the United States and Europe via Siberia. However, he only got as far as Vladivostok, and had to abandon his itinerary because of the threat to his life at the hands of immigrant ethnic Koreans who perceived Buddhist monks as carrying out espionage activities for the Japanese Imperialist forces. After this he came back to secular life, and in December 1904 his oldest son was born.⁶⁷ In 1905 he returned to the Buddhist order. Between April and October 1908, he travelled to several areas of Japan in order to observe first-hand the new culture and institutions and he studied at the Sōtō Zen University (today: Komazawa University) in Tokyo.⁶⁸ The peaceful connection between traditional forms of Buddhism and modern technological culture that he experienced here affected him greatly. After coming back to Korea, he presented two petitions to the Governor-General in 1909, addressing the issue of monks marrying⁶⁹ and wrote a treatise in 1910 promoting radical changes in Korean Buddhist traditions, applying Western liberalism in a Korean context that aimed to take his tradition-bound country into a modern dynamic society.⁷⁰

He mobilized the younger Buddhists and found support for his case later in Buddhist associations independent of monastic control, such as the Buddhist Youth Association, Buddhist Reformation Association, and General League of Buddhist Youth which associations were founded in the 1920s and 30s.⁷¹

Han Yongun emphasized egalitarianism in his treatise, meaning that all the inequalities of the world could be seen as in fact equal. He took this idea from the Hwaōm/Huayan notion of the unimpeded interpenetration pertaining between all phenomena in the universe 事事無礙 (Kor. *sasa muae* Chin. *shishi wuai*).

⁶³ Huh 2000: 68.

⁶⁴ Pori Pak 2016: 10.

⁶⁵ Huh 2000: 68.

⁶⁶ Pori Pak 2016: 11.

⁶⁷ Huh 2000: 68.

⁶⁸ Mohan Pankaj 2014: 3.

⁶⁹ Huh 2000: 68.

⁷⁰ Buswell 2007: 37.

⁷¹ Buswell 2007: 38.

This teaching says that each thing creates, and is in turn created by, every other thing, what he regarded as foundation for world peace and could develop into the modern political doctrines of freedom and universalism, what he opposed to the way of looking at things from the standpoint of the individual or the nation.⁷² The other principle he emphasized was the idea of saving the world with this compassionate and non-egoistic attitude. He believed that he could accommodate Western ideals of democratization while maintaining indigenous Korean culture.⁷³ But in order to do this, he proposed bringing Buddhism out of the mountains, where it had been forced into exile during the Chosŏn period, and into the cities and everyday lives of the people. To these ends he worked for the secularization of Buddhism, popularizing and simplifying rituals so that they might be more approachable for the laity and promoted education based on modern subjects and languages and encouraging overseas experiences to expand their intellectual horizons.

In Korea, celibacy was a distinct characteristic of Buddhist monks and nuns, but Manhae Han Yongun, in order to blur the border between clergy and laity, supported the idea of allowing monks and nuns to marry. During the time of the arrival of Japanese missionaries, more and more monks were encouraged to take wives and conduct family lives, emphasizing that materially advanced Asian Buddhist nations permitted monks to marry.⁷⁴ In Buddhist Journals, such as in the *Chosŏn Pulgyo wŏlbo* (Korean Buddhism Monthly) of November 1912, Korean monks were criticized for not keeping the precepts. However – as Han Yongun argued –, instead of hiding this deviation from the precepts, marriage should be allowed publicly. In March and September of 1910, Han Yongun sent petitions to the Japanese cabinet 中樞院 (Chungch'uwŏn) and the monastery supervisory board 統監府 (T'onggambu) asking that they lift restrictions on Buddhist monks and nuns taking a spouse and give them freedom (but not the obligation) to marry. Han Yongun used arguments referring to the socially changing society of modern times in which celibacy was no longer relevant. Furthermore, in order to increase the willingness of young candidates to become monks it could be more desirable, and, as Han Yongun argued, this revitalized Buddhism could strengthen both the government and society.

He used the Hwaŏm doctrine of consummate interfusion to solve the problem of the vinaya prohibition on sexual intercourse, the main reason he thought that stood behind the traditional practice of celibacy of Buddhist clergy.

“Since truth and falsity had no real essence, and merit and demerit had no fixed natures of their own, all such extremes were actually interfused. Thus,

⁷² Buswell 2007: 38.

⁷³ Buswell 2007: 39.

⁷⁴ Buswell 2007: 42.

celibacy and marriage were really no different, and neither should be considered optimal for monastic practice.”⁷⁵

He thought worthwhile and beneficial for monks to understand secular life. Since the vinaya rule about sexuality are from a later date than the other rules – Han argued –, that it cannot inviolate the original Buddhist practice and asked the government to permit marriage when necessary.

Since he did not get a response for his petitions, neither from the cabinet nor from the monastery supervisory board, he included his argument in the 13th point of his treatise (*Chosŏn Pulgyo yusinnon*) in a more systematic way, explaining why clerical marriage would be better suited to contemporary society. He made a list of four major arguments against clerical marriage and then rejects these one by one. His arguments were the following:

In the first point Han Yongun argued that marriage of the clergy controverts ethical norms. He was using here the ancient Confucian argument against Buddhists as being unfilial. However, it is interesting that he uses this old claim where he wanted to sound more progressive. Looking at his attitude, it is evident that he heavily relied on traditional Confucian ethics. He connected social engagement and the ideas of saving the world with a Confucianist approach.

In his second point Han states that clerical marriage injures the nation and argues this point in a way which would have appealed to the cultural and social inferiority complexes Koreans felt at that time. He says that “all civilized nations allow people to get married” and elevates Western politicians to a higher status, and argues from a kind of compulsion for conformity when he says that “Were any great Western politicians to hear about the prohibition of clerical marriage, would they not feel odd, shocked, or saddened?” “If we do not reverse the prohibition now, the state will make it obsolete by a law in the future”.⁷⁶ In this statement he accurately predicted events, as later, in October 1926 clerical marriage became widely practiced with governmental approval.⁷⁷

In his third point, Han says that not allowing marriage for monks is harmful for the propagation of the religion. He argues that if marriage is restricted for monastics and do not allow potential converts to have a family, then they will lose interest and revert to lay life.

In the final point Han Yongun says that marriage of the clergy inhibits moral development and he acknowledges carnal desires. He suggests that holding fast to such precepts cannot help Buddhism to develop for the better and it is not possible to suppress “natural human desires” what everyone possesses – he writes. Rather than keeping an “irrelevant precept”, he advocates the free choice

⁷⁵ Quoted by Buswell 2007: 43.

⁷⁶ Han Yongun 2016: 169.

⁷⁷ Pori Pak 2016: 13.

for clerics to marry or not if they wish so.⁷⁸ He quotes famous Western intellectuals who were not married but made a great contribution to science and politics, and later he names Buddhist persons, householder bodhisattvas, mostly from the Indian tradition who had children, though still they could be regarded as respectful religious persons. Emphasizing the opposite cases, he affirms his argument for the right of free choice.

Han Yongun goes as far to say that as long as the monk remained devoted to his religion, it was of little consequence whether he kept all the myriad rules of the vinaya. By allowing monks to choose, they would learn personal freedom in their choices, “a necessary quality along the road toward democracy”.⁷⁹

Han Yongun’s lobbying gained only little support within the order, but due to an intense Japanese pressure in October 1926 the head abbots were forced to withdraw the prohibition against marriage. From that point on, monks were officially allowed to marry 帶妻 (*taech’ō*) and eat meat 食肉 (*sigyuk*).⁸⁰ This was similar to what was promulgated in the 1872 edict of Meiji Japan.

The sedentary lifestyle of married monks who relied on their income and their families were usually regarded more convenient for the government to control than celibate monks who could travel freely and be involved in spying or other such activities considered harmful for those in power.

The schism between married priests 帶妻僧 (*taech’ōsūng*) and celibate monks 比丘僧 (*pikusūng*) became much bigger and while celibate monks concentrated on traditional monastic work such as doctrinal study, meditation practice, and proselytization,⁸¹ married monks took gainful employment and accumulated more private property and income to support their families. Consequently, by the time of liberation in 1945 about 7000 clerics were married and only 300 remained celibate in Korea.⁸²

Subsequently, immediately after the Japanese were removed from power, the conservative anti-Japanese voices became louder, aiming to revive the golden age of Buddhism of the medieval Koryō period and initiated the “Purification movement” 淨化運動 (*chōnghwa undong*) and in the 1950s and 60s they purged the Japanese elements from Korean Buddhism, amongst these maybe the more important feature, the married clergy⁸³ and promoted traditional celibate life.

They were supported by Syngman Rhee 李承晩 (1875–1965), the first president of the Republic of Korea who released a series of presidential instructions

⁷⁸ Buswell 2007: 44.

⁷⁹ Buswell 2007: 45.

⁸⁰ Pori Pak 2016: 13.

⁸¹ Buswell 2007: 45.

⁸² Pori Pak 2016: 27.

⁸³ Buswell 2007: 46.

that monk marriage was a Japanese legacy and thus should be eliminated to revive authentic Korean Buddhism. He needed to establish the legitimacy of his government against the communist North Korea, and the most important expression for it was to show anti-Japanese sentiments.⁸⁴ With this policy, the current situation for monastic marriage in Korea has turned in the favour of the conservative celibate monks, and the married monks of the T'aego Order are still looked upon as remnants of the Japanese occupation.

However, a recent study based on hitherto unpublished documents has shown that the willingness of Korean Buddhists to embrace monastic marriage in the early twentieth century was neither due to Japanese pressure or stemming from carnal desires, nor even the modernization and progress voiced by reformist intellectuals played as much a role as considerations of certain other material aspects, which Park Jeongeun (2016 and 2020), in her analysis of the household registers for monks and the documents of the abbot elections, has brought to light.

Marriage of priests was not the main interests of Japanese colonizers but was one of the means of adapting to their system of succession of temple property. The concept of the dharma family was the tradition in Korea before the colonial period, where the abbot's estate could be inherited by his chief disciple in the name of performing ceremonies in memory of his master after his death. However, with the introduction of Japanese household registers and rules, monks should have been listed under their names and could only inherit property within this system. Thus, as the previous possibility of inheritance between the master-disciples was eliminated, it became important for them that they could maintain the inheritance on a blood basis.

Conclusion

After centuries of Confucian persecution, Japanese colonizers were sympathetic towards Buddhism, and helped gain back the self-esteem of Buddhists. However, the concept of marriage of monks which was exercised in Japan from the Meiji period onwards deviated from the fundamental precepts of Buddhism. In Korea this was regarded as a Japanese tradition, and therefore many found it unacceptable. With the focus on ideas of the social role of Buddhism, progressive reformists called for secularization, including marriage of the clergy. The subsequent tightening rule of the Japanese colonizers coincided with the official introduction of these ideas and became associated with Japanese policy.

⁸⁴ Yun – Park 2019: 6.

By highlighting the texts promoting clerical marriage by the famous poet and politician monk, Manhae Han Yongun (1879–1944), we can see his ideas in context of his personal character, his life story, the current ideologies of his times and the Confucian ideals.

Following the Confucian period of the Chosŏn era, which overshadowed and limited Buddhists at the beginning of Japanese colonial rule, the possibility of monastic marriage, typical of Japanese practice, appeared as an alternative for Korean Buddhists in the early twentieth century. While the repressive memory of Japan's colonial heritage is often emphasized in the literature discussing clerical marriage, an analysis of documents written at that time presents us with a much more complex picture. Most notably among Korean intellectuals, one of the most significant personalities of the era, Manhae Han Yongun (1879–1944) whose systematic writing urged the reform of Korean Buddhism in his treatise entitled *Chosŏn Pulgyo yusinnon* 朝鮮佛教維新論 (Treatise on the Restoration of Korean Buddhism). In the thirteenth point of this work he uses polemics against celibacy and presents the circumstances to authorize the practice of priestly marriage. In this treatise we can see that his Confucian education, personality, and life played as much a role in his reasoning as the ideologies of the era- social Darwinism, modernism and democracy. However, primary documents revealing the daily lives and circumstances of the monks additionally show that the willingness to marry was also greatly influenced by the new inheritance rules introduced by the Japanese colonial system.

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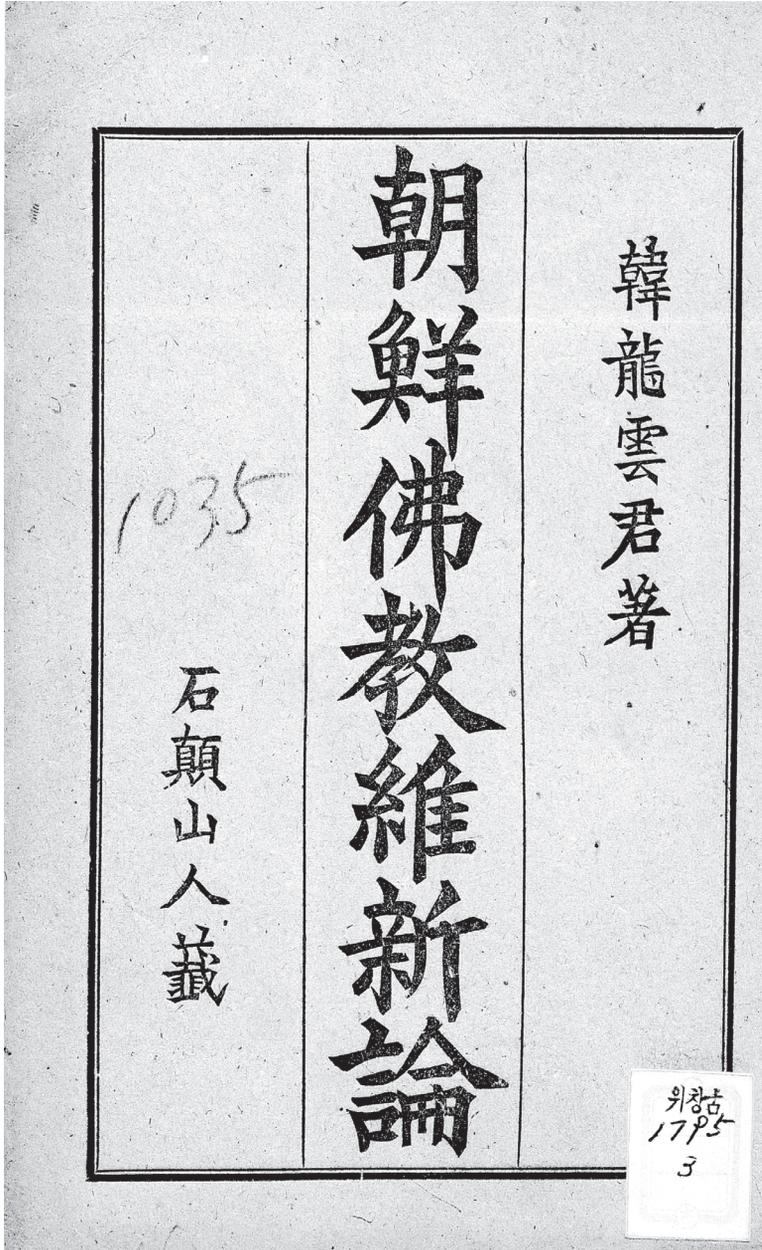
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Cover page and excerpt from Han Yongun's *Chosŏn Bulgyo Yusinnon*.

之良規라 楚越之人이 可以同事어 든 况聯其食同其鼎者乎 아 然則以上所言之二種特色이 皆他人之所無而我獨有之者也 니 豈不美哉 아 噫라 衣內明珠가 不能解傭作之貧則其孰使之然歟 아

論佛敎之前道가 關於僧尼嫁娶與否者

有問於余者曰 佛敎何以將興고 余一必曰 解僧侶嫁娶之禁이 亦一要事急務也 라

難曰 子一胡爲乎發此不經之言호야 以汚佛戒也 오 梵網經에 曰 若佛子一自淫斗敎人淫斗乃至一切女人을 不得故淫이라 호시고 四分律에 曰 犯不淨行을 乃至共畜生이라 도 是比丘波羅尼不共住라 호고 受戒儀中 沙彌十戒之第三曰 不淫이 오 比丘波羅尼戒之第一曰 不淨行戒 오 且戒淫之雜出於諸家者一 指不勝屈 則佛家之禁婚이 果何等申重乎 아 爲佛敎者一 豈能肆行嫁娶호야 墮損戒律也 리 오 以謂嫁娶而興敎은 無寧爲嫁娶而亡敎니 라 曰 子言이 似焉이라 雖然이 는 不足以知華嚴經事々 無碍之上乘也 리 다 夫高尚玄虛호고 深淵廣漠호며 眞妄이 無性호고 功罪一 本空호야 無處不入호고 無事不容之佛敎가 豈在於區々 戒律之間哉 아 求佛敎於戒律者는 實釣龍於盂水 오 探虎於蟻垤이라 烏可得也 리 오 果嫁娶而不成佛道 一 何故호 過去七佛이 無佛無子호고

恒沙菩薩이多出在家오但對小乘之根機淺薄하야流於欲樂而難回者故權設細律而制限之라夫佛敎者若實若虛고若縱若奪하야若王若霸고若天地若毫末하야不可名狀이오不可一端이라其微言至意로應病與藥하야并使人으로欲隨緣入道而已니平心循理하야先尋宗旨則思過半矣라迥乎漠哉하야저井蛙가豈聞江湖之相忘이며枝鷗가安知雲霄之圖南이리오圓敎는非律宗之敢望이니但有味乎秋月空山과春水大海則佛法이在是하니라

傳에曰處今之世하야反古之道면菑必逮夫身이라하니今日之舞臺는非前日之道場이라非改着長袖면不能登場善舞라五千退席이一時盡去則世尊이不得不先說阿含方等而導之오淫男이難化則觀音이不得不化美人而度之니此皆應時隨機也라雖使嫁娶로違於戒律而難行이라도當以嫁娶로利於佛敎之時機則權行嫁娶하야適時順機라가更得不嫁娶利於佛敎之時後에還收而復舊하면其誰曰不可리오且嫁娶之禁이不適於世道乎아請論其所以不適之理하리라

(一) 害於倫理라聞人之爲罪가不孝一爲大而無後一尤大니以其絕祀斷裔也라我之一身이已與前此千百世之祖先과後此千百世之血胤으로無復相續則罪何容貸리오

