

Korean Buddhism



Three Main Topics

01

What is “Korean Buddhism”?

02

Distinctive features of Korean Buddhism

03

Major works and translations

What Do We Mean by “Buddhism”?

Essentialist

- 19th–early 20th centuries
- Early Indian Buddhism through Pali texts
- “Original” Buddhism
- Later forms: modifications or deviations



Multiple “Buddhisms”

Pluralist

- Different cultural and historical contexts
- No single, identical essence

“Family Resemblance”

- Buddha · Karma · Nirvana

What Do We Mean by “Korean”?

When did a larger “Korean” community emerge?

Primordialists

- Three Kingdoms
(ca. first century BCE–668 CE)

Modernists

- Benedict Anderson
- Japanese colonization
(1910–1945)

Premodern Proto-National Identity

- John Duncan: stable states and territorial boundaries
- JaHyun Kim Haboush: foreign invasions
- Koryŏ (918–1392) and Chosŏn (1392–1910)
- “Imagined community”



Major Concepts and Figures in Korean Buddhism

- *Different from Chinese or Japanese Buddhism? Korean Buddhism as a “bridge”*
- *Concepts and Figures in Korean Buddhism:*

- State-Protection Buddhism

- Ŭisang (625–702) and Wŏnhyo (617–686)

- Contribution to Early Chan

- Korean Monks across East Asia

- Pulguksa, Sŏkkuram, and the Maitreya Image

- Chegwan, Ŭich’ŏn, Koryŏ Buddhist Canon

- Buddhism and Confucian Values

- Celibate Monasticism

Introduction of Buddhism

Koguryŏ (37 BCE–668 CE)

- 372
- Former Qin (351–394 CE)
- Monk · Buddhist images · Scriptures

Paekche (18 BCE–660 CE)

- 384
- Eastern Jin (317–420 CE)
- Diplomatic and cultural exchanges



State-Protection Buddhism

- Buddhism and political power
- Royal support for temples and monks
- Legitimation of royal authority
- Protection of the state



Monks and Military Defense

- Koryŏ: Khitan and Mongol invasions
- Chosŏn: Japanese invasions
- Monastic military forces
- Hyujŏng (1520–1604)
- Mountain fortresses



State-Protection Buddhism in East Asia

- Concept developed by modern Japanese scholars
- Later applied to Korean Buddhism
- State-protection rituals: China and Japan
- Korea: monks directly participating in military defense



Ŭisang and Hwaŏm Buddhism

- Huayan — China / Hwaŏm — Korea / Kegon — Japan
- *Huayan Sutra* (Avataṃsaka Sūtra): All things interconnected and interdependent
- Fazang (643–712)
 - Third patriarch of Huayan
 - Sogdian immigrant family



13

Ŭisang (625–702)

- Established Hwaŏm in Korea
- build Hwaŏm temples with Royal support
- had a close relationship with Fazang

**Simsang (J. Shinjō; d. 742) transmitted Huayan teachings to Japan*



Ŭisang across East Asia

- *Samguk yusa* (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms), late 13th cent.
- *Song gaoseng zhuan* (Song Biographies of Eminent Monks), 988
- *Kegon-shū soshi eden* (Illustrated Biographies of the Founders of the Kegon School), 13th cent.



Wŏnhyo (617–686)

- Major Buddhist thinker
- Popularization of Buddhism
- Around 100 works about 240 fascicles /
About 20 works survive
- Reconciliation of different Buddhist teachings
- Breaking the monastic precepts, living as a layman
- Spread Pure Land belief to ordinary people with the chanting of the Buddha's name



Wŏnhyo across East Asia

Commentaries on the *Dasheng qixin lun* (Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana) and the *Jingang sanmei jing* (Vajrasamādhi Sutra)



Contributions to Early Chan/Sŏn

- Sŏn began to appear in Korea around the 7th century
- Nine Mountain Sŏn Schools



Jingang sanmei jing (Vajrasamādhi Sutra)

- Composed in Korea in late 7th century
- presented Buddhist practices with Buddhist philosophical traditions and Chan/Sŏn movements
- influential also in Japan and Tibet



Chǒngjung Musang (684–762)

- Silla royal family
- Wuxiang in China
- Sichuan
- Jingzhong Monastery — Jingzhong school



Korean Monks across East Asia

- Three Kingdoms and Unified Silla
- Active maritime trade
- Ennin (794–864) reported Silla communities and temples in China



Korean Monks in China and Japan

Wŏnch'ŭk (613–696)

- Xuanzang (602–664)
- Commentary to the *Jieshenmi Jing* (Saṃdhinirmocana Sutra)
- Yogācāra
- Tibetan Buddhism

Hyeja (fl. late 6th cent.)

- Prince Shōtoku (574–622)

Tamjing (fl. 7th cent.)

- the murals of the Golden Hall at Hōryūji in Nara, Japan

Pulguksa Temple

- Śākyamuni Pagoda (Sökkat'ap)
- Many Treasure Pagoda (Tabot'ap)
- *Lotus Sutra*
 - Buddha Śākyamuni and Buddha of Many Treasures (Prabhūtaratna) appear together
- “Buddha Land Temple”



Sökkuram Grotto

- Unlike the cave temples of India and China
- The state of the central Buddha
- Represents Unified Silla (668–935) Buddhist art



Gilt-bronze Pensive Maitreya

- Housed in the National Museum of Korea
 - Resembles the Maitreya image at Kōryūji
- : Korea–Japan cultural connections



Chegwon (fl. 10th cent.)

- Tiantai texts lost in China
- Wuyue requested Koryŏ
- Chegwon
 - Composed the *Ch'ŏnt'ae sagyoŭi* (Tiantai Fourfold Teachings), which became a seminal Tiantai text



Ŭich'ŏn (1055–1101) and the *Kyogjang*

- Koryŏ prince and Buddhist monk
- Travelled to Song China in 1085
 - Published thousands of volumes of Buddhist commentaries through Buddhist networks in Koryŏ, Song, Liao, Japan



The Koryŏ Buddhist Canon

- Another example of state-protection Buddhism
- First canon (1011–1087) for Khitan invasions: Destroyed during Mongol invasions
- Second canon (1236–1251)



Palman Taejanggyŏng “Eighty-Thousand Tripitaka”

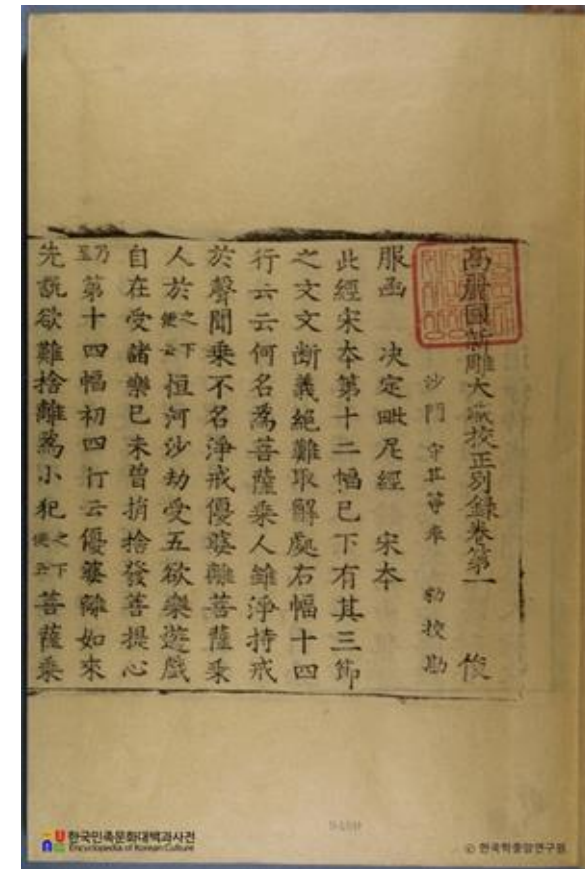
- Second canon
- More than 80,000 woodblocks
- Mongol invasions



Sugi and Textual Comparison

- Earlier Koryŏ canon, along with editions from Song China and Khitan Liao
- Robert Buswell

: Compared Sugi with Erasmus (c. 1466–1536)



Changgyŏng P'anjŏn (Depositories for the Tripitaka Koreana Woodblocks)

- At Haeinsa Temple
- Woodblocks intact today
- Koryŏ canon represents Scholarship, Printing technology, Buddhist culture



Chosŏn Buddhism

- Era of Cheng-Zhu Confucianism, “Promoting Confucianism and suppressing Buddhism”
- Loyalty and Filial piety
- Hyujŏng (1520–1604): a major revitalizer of Chosŏn Buddhism
 - Sŏn, Doctrinal learning, Pure Land



Buddhism and Confucian Values

Ch'oŭi Ŭisun (1786–1866)

- *Daxue (Great Learning)* lead to Buddhist awakening

Yŏndam Yuil (1767–1852)

- Filial piety and loyalty for Rebirth in the Pure Land

Celibate Monasticism in Modern Korean Buddhism

- Opening of ports in late 19th cent.
- Maintained Celibate monasticism despite Japanese colonial intervention and financial difficulties
- Temple Stay program (from 2002)



Major Works and Translations

- Examining from socio-cultural, historical, and political perspectives
- Focusing on specific Buddhist thinkers, texts, and practices
- Exploring through issues such as colonialism, modernization, and transnationalism

Socio-cultural, Historical, and Political Approach

- Robert E. Buswell Jr. (ed.), *Currents and Countercurrents: Korean Influences on the East Asian Buddhist Traditions* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2005)
- Richard D. McBride II, *Domesticating the Dharma: Buddhist Cults and the Hwaom Synthesis in Silla Korea* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2008)
- Sem Vermeersch, *The Power of the Buddhas: The Politics of Buddhism during the Koryŏ Dynasty (918–1392)* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2008)
- Juhn Y. Ahn, *Buddhas and Ancestors: Religion and Wealth in Fourteenth-Century Korea* (University of Washington Press, 2018)
- Seong Uk Kim, *Monks and Literati: The Transformation of Buddhism in Late Chosŏn Korea* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2024)

Buddhist Monks, Texts, and Practices

- Robert E. Buswell Jr., *The Korean Approach to Zen: The Collected Works of Chinul* (University of Hawaii Press, 1983)
- _____, *Tracing Back the Radiance: Chinul's Korean Way of Zen* (University of Hawaii Press, 1991)
- _____, *The Formation of Ch'an Ideology in China and Korea: The Vajrasamādhī-Sūtra, a Buddhist Apocryphon* (Princeton University Press, 1989)
- _____, *The Zen Monastic Experience: Buddhist Practice in Contemporary Korea* (Princeton University Press, 1992)
- Jin Y. Park, *Women and Buddhist Philosophy: Engaging Zen Master Kim Iryōp* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2017)
- Eunsu Cho, ed., *Korean Buddhist Nuns and Laywomen: Hidden Histories, Enduring Vitality* (SUNY Press, 2011)

Colonialism, Modernization, Transnationalism

- Hwansoo Ilmee Kim, *Empire of the Dharma: Korean and Japanese Buddhism, 1877–1912* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2013)
- _____, *The Korean Buddhist Empire: A Transnational History, 1910–1945* (Harvard University Asia Center, 2018)
- Jin Y. Park, *Makers of Modern Korean Buddhism* (SUNY Press, 2010)

English Translations

- Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, *Collected Works of Korean Buddhism*. 13 vols. (Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, 2012)
- _____, *Collected Works of Modern Korean Buddhism*. 10 vols. (Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, 2015–2017)
- _____, *Selected Works of Korean Buddhism*. 10 vols. (Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, 2021–2022)
- Charles Muller, *Korea's Great Buddhist-Confucian Debate: The Treatises of Chŏng Tojŏn (Sambong) and Hamhŏ Tŭkt'ong (Kihwa)* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2015)

Two Introductory Works (2026)

- Yongtae Kim and Seong Uk Kim, *The History of Korean Buddhism* (Kong&Park, Inc., 2026)
- Park, Jin Y., and Sumi Lee, eds. *Korean Buddhism: Selected Readings from Primary Texts* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2026)

