

Re-visiting Han Yong-un's Buddhist Texts and their Nationalist Contexts

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Perhaps no other period in modern Korean history witnessed such doubt and uncertainty as the late 19th century. The leadership, torn by intense factional feuds and shackled by obsolete conventions, was too feeble to meet the challenges of the times. The warships of the brave, new world made deep inroads into the so-called Hermit Kingdom, and the peasants, yoked to the unrelenting oppression and alarmed at the fate of the country, held aloft the banner of rebellion. Attempts of reform, initiated by the champions of enlightenment were repeatedly frustrated. It is interesting to note that Manhae Han Yong-un was born at this juncture of history, because his political consciousness in the formative phase of his life was moulded by the circumstances of the times.

Han Yong-un is generally regarded as a pioneer nationalist poet and an intrepid champion of Korea's independence during the colonial era. His essay "Choson Pulgyo Yusin non" (on the Reformation of Korean Buddhism) is considered by many as the first major glimmer of religious modernization in Korea. In the recent years, however, attempts have been made to divest his poetry "Nim ui ch'immuk" from nationalist attributes and interpret it plainly as an anthology dedicated to a woman. Several authors have also noted that between Han Yong-un's notion of Buddhism and his understanding of the role in modern society bore close resemblance to the ideas underpinning Buddhism of Meiji Japan, also to the ideas on Buddhism formulated by such pro-Japanese collaborators of Japan in colonial Korea as Kwon Sang-no and Yi Nung-hwa.

By examining the entire gamut of Han Yong-un's life and career as a Buddhist monk and writer I will prove that the criticism of Han is invalid. The paper will also explore how within the complex context of Japanese colonial rule Han Yong-un constructed and imagined in cultural form, through his poems and essays, Korean Buddhism with indigenous sensibility.

Early Life and Influences

Han Yong-un was born in 1879 in Hongju county of Chunchong province which served as an important center of Tonghak rebellion anti-Japanese guerrilla campaign, initiated by the Righteous Army in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, and produced General Kim Jwa-jin, known as the General of Manchuria. When Han was 18. The country was engulfed in the flame of Tonghak peasant Uprising. The lives of his father and brother became the sad casualty of the Tonghak War. It needs to be recalled that in early 1893 approximately twenty thousand members gathered at Poun in Chungcheong province to press their demand of maintaining the independence of the country. The egalitarian principles of Tonghak, encapsulated in the teaching "Service to humanity is equivalent to service to God and Human heart is the abode of God" may have infused nationalist consciousness in the minds of Han Yong-un at a very early stage of his life.

Soon after the Tonghak Uprising was crushed, Han Yong-un left home. He lived in Ojang-am Monastery for about 5 years, devoting himself to the studies of a wide range of subjects. His exposure to modern knowledge stirred a desire in his heart to see the world with his own eyes, and as a consequence he embarked on a world tour, traveling as far as Vladivostok. He, however, felt

compelled to abandon his onward itinerary because of the threat to his life at the hands of the ethnic Koreans. The immigrant Korean population perceived Buddhist monks as member of the New Advancement Society who carried out espionage activities for the Japanese Imperialist forces. Han described this event in an essay entitled “Buk Daeryuk-eui haru bam” (A Night at the Northern Continent), published in Joseon Ilbo in 1935.

Han returned home briefly, but in 1905 he left home with the firm intention of becoming a monk. He joined the Buddhist clergy on 26 January 1905, adopting the investiture name of Yong-un and the Buddhist name Manhae. After spending three years at a temple, he left for Japan and studied at Soto Zen Monastery of Komazawa in Tokyo. As a result of cultural immersion in the world of Japanese Buddhism, he acquired ‘bilingual cultural literacy’ that Benedict Anderson considers as an important attribute of a nationalist leader. To quote Anderson:

It is generally recognized that the intelligentsia were central to the rise of nationalism in the colonial territories... [Their] vanguard role derived from their bilingual literacy, or rather literacy and bilingualism..Bilingualism meant access. Through the European language-of-state, to modern Western culture in the broadest sense, and in particular, to the models of nationalism, nation-ness, and nation/state produced elsewhere in the course of the nineteenth century

Although Han did not learn a European language, his acquisition of Japanese language facilitated his access to the world of Western history and culture, because the Japanese commenced translating major Western works with exemplary zeal in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Han also realized how Buddhism in Japan underwent reform and adapted itself to the new needs of the nation. Han saw firsthand how the rise of Shinto as the guiding ideology of Meiji Japan led to the purge of Buddhism, and how Buddhism was able to overcome this crisis when Buddhists supported Japanese nationalism. His experience in Japan also paved path for his interaction with several pioneering Korean intellectuals such as Choe Nam-seon, Choe Rin, Yi Gwang-su who subsequently formed the backbone of the March First Movement.

It is apparent that there were two basic sources of influence upon which Han was able to draw in evolving his own political vision. The first such stream of influence was the familial and social environment of his early life and early education. He was well-versed in Confucian classics, and major Buddhist texts. Reminiscing about his father Han once wrote, “My father used to tell me about the valiant deeds of our national heroes whose names are indelibly imprinted in our history. He also used to discuss in great detail current national and international affairs. And always on such occasions I felt stimulated, and I was overwhelmed with patriotic feelings. Filled with deep respect for those heroes from the pages of Korean history, I solemnly pledged in my childhood years to follow their footsteps.

The second force and factor that went into the making of his personality was his exposure to modern Western thought and inculcation of scientific temper through his profound reading of the works of modern reformers of China, particularly Liang Qichao. His knowledge of Western philosophy helped him evolve a critical and analytical approach to the socio-religious issues of the times. His visit to Japan and study at Komazawa Buddhist college also proved to be an important milestone in his career as a reformer of Korean Buddhism and nationalist leader of Korea.

Buddhism in Japan had to respond to a vicious campaign of 'haibutsu kishaku' (Reject Buddhism and Expel the Monks), whose strength was derived from the belief that Buddhism was incompatible with the Japanese national character because of its alien origin. The Meiji era witnessed the publication of long polemical treatises such as *Bukkyo katsuron joron* (Prefatory Remarks on the Revitalisation of Buddhism, 1887) by Inoue Enryō (1858-1919) and *Bukkyo ikkan ron* (Essay on the Consistency of Buddhism) by Murakami Senshō (1851-1929) which emphasised the *gokoku* (nation-protecting) spirit of the Japanese Buddhist tradition and sought to appropriate and establish nationalism as an essential component in the history of Buddhism in Japan.¹

Another important development in Meiji Japan the close collaboration between Japanese Buddhist sects and the expansionist and imperialist forces of Meiji Japan. Soon after Japan imposed the Kanghwa treaty of 1876 on the Choson dynasty, the Otani sect became active in Korea as an ideological underpinning of Japan's imperialist penetration into Korea.² By the 1890s, when the Sino-Japanese war broke out, Buddhist sects armed themselves with militant ideological ammunition in order to overcome the increasingly aggressive attacks launched by Shintoists. Takeda Hanshi of the Soto Zen sect was involved in the assassination of Queen Min, the promotion of the government policy of annexing Korea and a plan to absorb the Won sect of Korean Buddhism within the fold of Soto.³ Takeda's legacy of using Buddhism to serve the imperialist needs of Japan was energetically carried forward by the Soto sect in colonial Korea. The establishment of *Bukkyo Gokokudan* (The Buddhist Corps for Protection of the Nation) in the early years of the colonial era to foster and

¹Kathleen M. Staggs in her 1979 PhD dissertation *In Defence of Japanese Buddhism: Essays from the Meiji Period* by Inoue Enryō and Murakami Senshō (Princeton University, UMI Microform) has provided a detailed introduction and complete translation of these two texts. Also see her "Defend the Nation and Love the Truth: Inoue Enryō and the Revival of Meiji Buddhism", *Monumenta Nipponica*, 38- 3 (1983). Other important studies on Meiji Buddhism are: James Edward Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs in Meiji Japan*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990; Ienaga Saburo et al, *Nihon Bukkyo shi* (V. 3), Kyoto: Hoshokan (The first two chapters, "Meiji Ishinki no bukkyo" and "Meijiiki no bukkyo" in the section on Modern Buddhism are particularly relevant.), pp. 251-392. Please note that the discussion of Buddhism in Meiji Japan is adapted from my article on the Origin of Nation-Protecting Buddhism, published in the *Review of Korean Studies*.

²Ch'oe Pyong-hon, has discussed some aspects of the challenges posed by the agreement to assimilate the Korean Won sect within the Soto Zen sect and the opposition movement launched by Han Yong-un. See his "Ilche pulgyo-ui ch'imt'u-wa Han Yong-un-ui 'Choson pulgyo yusunnon' " in *Chinsan Han Ki-du paksa hwagap kinyom hanguk chonggyo sasang-ui chaechomyong* (I), edited by Chinsan Han Ki-du paksa hwagap kinyom nonch'ong kanhaeng wiwonhoe, Iri: Wonkwang taehakkyo ch'ulp'anpu, 1993, pp. 452-453

³Han Chol-hui, *Nihon no Chosen shihai to shukyo seisaku*. Miraisha: Tokyo 1988 pp. 59-66; Kim Kwang-sik, *Hanguk kuntae pulgyosa yongu*. Seoul; Minjoksa 1996 pp. 55-71; Ishikawa Kikizan, "The Social Response of Buddhists to the Modernization of Japan: Contrasting Lives of Two Soto Zen Monks", *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 25-1/2 (1998) pp. 94-106.

promote Korean loyalty for the Japanese emperor and construction of a temple in the name of Ito Hirobumi in Korea in the early 1930's are its ideal illustrations.⁴

Han Yong-un's vision of reality and his nationalist sentiment found their first expression in his opposition to the merger of Japanese and Korean Buddhist sects and famous thesis "On the Revitalisation of Korean Buddhism" that he wrote in 1910. Despite its several limitations this thesis represents the initial glimmer of modern consciousness in the world of Korean Buddhism, and an attempt to re-interpret the history of Korean Buddhist tradition in the light of Western scientific theories and liberalism.

Han wrote in the preface, "Clamor for reform echoes throughout the world. The sweeping wave of reform is rolling on. However, it had not yet engulfed Korean Buddhism. Why? Is it because Korean Buddhism is impeccable, needing no reform? He further argued that the obstinate priests who were isolated from the reality of the world, leading sequestered lives in the deep mountains, along with myopic conservative forces who lacked an incisive understanding of the world affairs, served as breakwater, hindering the wave of reform to touch Korean Buddhism. He wrote, "However, the fervent aspiration of young Buddhists to bring about reform will serve as a bedrock, supporting them in the face of the intrepid opposition of conservative priests. The storm of change is raging with fierce force everywhere in the modern world, heralding an imminent eruption of a reform movement in the Buddhist world.

In this essay Han Yong-un emphasized the need to understand the central philosophy of Buddhism, its essence as against excrescence or outmoded customs and beliefs. This idea was also emphasized by May Fourth writers in China who launched relentless assault on all the legacies from the past which suppressed of ideological plurality, legitimized hierarchical society and were incompatible with the modern laws governing individual rights and freedom

Han Yong-un articulated the same vision in his essay on Cultural prejudice (Wenhua bianzhe lun) that only those aspects of our cultural heritage needed to be preserved which could preserve us. Han Yong-un wrote that True Self was of seminal significance in the world of Buddhism, and those forces running counter to and hindering the path of its discovery needed to be combated. True Self, according to Han, denoted freedom, as against Phenomenal Self which meant the state of darkness or lack of freedom.⁵

⁴ Nam-lin Hur, "The Soto Sect and Japanese Military Imperialism in Korea", *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 26-1/2 (1999), pp 107-134

Ōtake Myogen, administrative head of the Soto Zen sect, issued the following apology to the Korean people in 1993: "Especially in Korea and the Korean peninsula, Japan first committed the outrage of assassinating the Korean queen [in 1895], then forced the Korea of the Choson Dynasty into dependency status [in 1904-5], and finally through the annexation of Korea [in 1910], obliterated a people and a nation. Our sect acted as an advance guard in this, contriving to assimilate the Korean people into this country, and promoting the policy of turning Koreans into loyal imperial subjects." January 1993 issue of *Soto Shuho*, pp. 28-31 quoted in Brian Victoria, *Zen at War*, New York: Weatherhill. 1997 p.156

⁵ Compare: "The central focus of a philosophy of life is the self. What is relative to it is the nonself. ...But all problems of the nonself are related to human life. Now human life is a living thing and cannot so easily be governed by formulae as can dead matter. The unique character of a philosophy of life becomes especially clear when we compare it with science." (Zhang Junmai, et al, *Rensheng guan* In *Kexue yu rensheng guan*, Vol 1, Shanghai, 1923)

Another important theme in the history of Buddhism, Han argued, was egalitarianism and salvation ideology. He elaborated the point by noting that liberalism and universalism were the inevitable intermediate stages in the historical process, the ultimate stage being equality. "The World would continue to evolve and progress until the Buddhist ideal of complete equality was realized. Explaining the point of salvation doctrine of Buddhism, Han said that Buddhism is not a religion for the salvation of individuals, but all the living beings. He substantiated his point with an excerpt from the Garland Sutra: I will certainly submit myself as a hostage to the King of Hell in order to help the masses shatter the chain of evil habits, encourage them to atone for their sins and lead them on the path of deliverance and salvation.

Amongst various measures Han Yong-un suggested, the following are of particular interest for his appraisal as a nationalist leader.

Moving temples from the seclusion of mountains to hamlets and cities, humming with activities of day-to-day life, so that monks have their fingers on the pulse of social reality. Indeed, the appeal for monks to work in the midst of the common people rather than engage in meditation in deep mountains was an important agenda which the great Chinese reformer and leader of Buddhism also emphasized in his slogan "renjian fojiao (Buddhism for mankind). The Buddhist world of China under the leadership of Taixu made fervent pleas to modernise Buddhism and make it more relevant to the current circumstances of the times.

Lifting the ban marriage for monks and nuns on the ground that celibacy projected a negative picture of Buddhism, inhibiting young men and women to embrace monastic life. Celibacy, Ha argued, constrained the natural growth of human beings, and furthermore, it was in conflict with the filial, familial and social obligations. Han was doubtless aware of the Confucian attack on Buddhism ever since this faith spread to China in the 1st Century AD. All the Confucian scholars found fault with Buddhism because monks cut their hair, inherited from their father, left home, did not produce any offspring and did not engage in any productive activity which violated the sacred Confucian norms of filial piety and loyalty to the ruler. However, by importing the tradition of 'meat-eating, married monks' developed by the Japanese, Han sought to downplay the role of ethno-symbolism or myth-symbol complex that plays a critical role in the construction of national identity. It creates shared cultural meaning and experience enabling citizens to believe in a collective self, and therefore, acts as the basis for a nation's social conventions and political action. The myth-symbol complex is 'the nature (forms and content) of myths and symbols, historical memories and central values'⁶. It includes ethnic activities and genres such as sacred texts and languages, religious shrines and tombs, style of dress, art, legal code, city planning, forms of hierarchy (civil, military, and religious), modes of warfare and production technology, and arts and crafts⁷. The myth-symbol complex enables nations to differentiate themselves from others. Citizens are given a means by which they are able to achieve national pride and unity. In the late Meiji period of Japan, the myth-symbol complex was solely responsible for the emergence of a new Japanese national identity from which new social conventions were established and political actions were made. In the first two Meiji decades (1868-1887) Japan underwent massive political and social institutional change including westernization, centralization, movement for a parliamentary government, and universal compulsory education⁸. These institutional changes culminated in an upsurge of public comment in the late 1880s ultimately calling for a suitable national identity for modern Japan⁹. With criticism from conservative legal scholars and bureaucrats on the overwhelming influence of the West at the expense of Japanese

⁶ Smith, (1986), p 15

⁷ *ibid.* p 14

⁸ Gluck, 1985, p 17.

⁹ *ibid.* p 20.

tradition and culture, Japan needed a national identity which embodied its distinctive national spirit and custom but allowed the nation to progress into the 20th century as a world power equal to those of the West¹⁰. This was essentially achieved through the invocation and implementation of the *kokutai*, which can be defined as the unique essence of Japan and its people based on the belief of the divine descendent of the imperial house. In the construction of national identity in the 1890s the emperor was presented to the nation as the patriarch of the Japanese family-state symbolizing national progress and unity.¹¹ Han Yong-un was aware of the role of tradition in consolidating the foundation of a modern nation-state, and yet he called for the importation of Japanese form of Buddhism. This showed his limitation in the nationalist consciousness at this point of time in his life. Edward Said has also noted the significance of indigenous tradition to the construction of national identity in colonial and semi-colonial states. Indeed, the importation of the Japanese sect of ‘married clergy’ led to the dilution and ultimate division of the Buddhist order of Korea during the colonial period.

Han’s emphasis on reform of the old curriculum, incorporating subjects which would help monks understand the modern world and cope with the challenges of modern society, along with his advice that monks took part in social affairs and contributed to the prosperity of the nation formed some important clauses of his agenda of reform. Han substantiated this point by arguing that for centuries monks faced persecution and lived a life devoid of dignity, because they were perceived by the state and society as parasites, eating food and wearing clothes that they were gifted. They did not earn them.

Although Han’s political consciousness was not fully ripe when he wrote this thesis, his warning to the world of Buddhism that Korean Buddhism would become extinct, if it failed to adapt to the future civilization’ matured in the subsequent period when Monk Yi Hoe-gwang, patriarch of the Korean Won Sect, formed an alliance with the Japanese Soto Zen sect under the pretext of the strengthening of Buddhism. The leader of the Japanese Soto Sect, Takeda Hanshi met Yi Hoe-gwang through the mediation of a pro-Japanese leader belonging to Sicheon-gyo, a branch of Cheondogyo.¹² The agreement consisted of seven clauses, making it mandatory for Korean Buddhists to place Japanese priests in major Korean temples and help them carry out missionary activities in Korea. Han yong-un organised protest demonstration against this merger in front of Songgwang sa, Beomeo sa and other temples. Han’s ideas on nationalism, particularly the strengthening of the nation through Buddhism, further matured when he wrote for the magazine *Yusim* (Mind Only). He was able to spread his ideas amongst the common masses even in the early phase of the Japanese colonial rule when press was gagged and draconian measures were strongly enforced.

In the first decade of the colonial rule Han Yong-un travelled widely in the country in pursuit of reform on the lines of the thesis he had published. Later when the March First Movement broke out, he took part in it with unrivalled passion. He is also credited with authoring the Three pledges for the nationalist leaders which appear to bear the influence of Gandhi. The three pledges to which he unwaveringly adhered during the three years of imprisonment were: 1, not to hire lawyers 2. Not to eat privately supplied food in jail and 3. Not to apply for bail.

When the Japanese authorities arrested him on the charge of sedition and asked him whether he would continue to lead any nationalist anti-Japanese resistance movement in the future, he replied very candidly, “Yes I will never wander from the path of Korea’s fight for freedom. Even if I die, my spirit will remain alive, abetting the cause of Korea’s liberation”.

¹⁰ Ibid, p 112.

¹¹ Tipton, 2002, p 64-65.

¹² Wi Jo kang, *Religion and Politics in Korea under the Japanese Rule*, Lewiston and Queenston: Edwin Mellen press, 1987, pp. 45-105

While in prison he wrote an article, "A Plea for Korea's Independence" in which he argued with great force and conviction that Japanese militarism was digging its own grave. He compared Korean fight for freedom with a round rock rolling down a slope, pointing out that it would gain further momentum and its force and speed would not abate until it reached its destination. He reiterated his belief in the evolutionary nature of human civilization with the words: "From now on we must chart a course with the solid aim of defeating Japanese militarism and the victory of Korea's independence movement". He very prophetically argued that Korea's independence was crucial to the peace and prosperity of entire Asia, because Japan regarded Korea as a springboard to launch its military adventures in other Asian countries, and inherent in this was the possibility of igniting another world war.

After his release from prison he lent his support to cultural nationalism which initiated such campaigns as Creation of a National University to foster cultural power of the nation, Korean language Research to systematise Hangeul orthography and grammar and empower it not only as a force of national cohesion but also as a vehicle of national resurgence on the cultural front and the Korean Production Movement, modelled on Mahatma Gandhi's Swadeshi Movement that aimed at promotion of native industry by boycotting Japanese goods.

During this period he also published a collection of poetry, entitled, *Nim-eui Chimmuk*, variously translated as *Your Silence, Everything Yearned For* and *Silence of Love*. *Nim-eui chimmuk* (*Your Silence*) is justifiably regarded as the first and finest flowering of modern Korean poetry. Han's poems are remarkable for their originality of ideas, break with the past poetic tradition and use of new symbols. These poems are woven around a spectrum of themes, including love, nature and nation.

Gergory Evon in his PhD dissertation, submitted at the Australian National University, argued that although the poems of "Your Silence," have been 'interpreted primarily as a veiled expression of patriotism on the basis of his political activities, Such analyses freely use his political writings, and while there is nothing inherently wrong with this approach, the absence of any attempt to discuss the eroticism of the poems seems to be a conspicuous oversight'. Greg Evon, and recently a Korean author Kim Gwang-sik have sought to understand Han's poetry as an expression of eroticism, underpinned with the 'tensions between the celibate and married priests', an issue with which the poet ceaselessly struggled during his life time. It seems to be more appropriate, however, to understand the erotic imagery in Han's poetry as an aspect of mystic-ecstatic devotionalism which he learnt through the writings of Tagore. Tagore drew on the rich tradition of Indian spirituality to compose his highly subjective lyrics. Religious poetry of medieval India and the tradition of 'Bauls' (mad lovers) which Tagore read with great fondness in his formative age, combined mysticism and eroticism, devotion and ecstasy. Medieval Indian poets such as Meera, Kabir and Chaitanya fused mundane love (Eros) and divine love (mysticism). The poetic vision and craft of Tagore was subsequently adopted by numerous Chinese poets, notably Bing Xin, Xu Zhimo and Guo Moruo. Han Yong-un read both the Tagore's poems and the works of Chinese poets who were influenced by Tagore. By comparing and contrasting Han Yong-un's poetry with the works of Tagore, and placing his literary career within the broad context of India's devotional poetic tradition, one can understand the true meaning of his verse and assess his contribution to the development of modern culture in colonial Korea with greater accuracy.

Korean poetry during the 1920's accommodated Western poetic technique of romanticism, symbolism and aestheticism and integrated them within the matrix of Korean attitudes and themes. Han Yong-un used the Buddhist concept of transitoriness and nothingness with great intensity. Occupation of Korea

by Japan meant that the Korean people lost their ancient land, and Han imagined his motherland as love, and heard her sight and sound in nature which is evident in the following poem:

“ Whose footsteps are the paulownia leaves eddying and drifting down in the breathless wind

Whose face is seen in the blue sky, in the empty space amongst patches of blue sky, floating in the west wind after long spell of rain

Whose breath is the fragrant breeze blowing through the orchard of flowerless tress and brushing past the firmament above the old pagoda

Whose night does my ceaselessly burning heart illuminate with its weak lamplight”.

LHan Yong-un’s love found a beautiful expression in the following poem entitled “Secret”

What secret can I have

I wanted to keep secrets from you, but failed.

My secret became tears and reached you through your sight

My secret became sighs and reached you through your ears

My secret became throbbing heart and reached you through your touch

I have one more secret . It became a patch of red heart and entered your dreams

And I have one last secret. It is indelible like a quiet echo.

To the Korean people living during the colonial period night represented an escape from repression, and time to dream of something better. Dream, as in European poetry, became a favourite symbol in Korean poetry. Han also wrote poems on the theme of beautiful heroines from the Korean past who sacrificed their lives at the altar of the country.

In the late 1920’s Han Yong-un joined Singanhoe, a coalition of nationalist and socialist groups and emerged as a major champion of the Korean causes. However, when the Japanese militarism reached climactic height and Hwangminhua (kominka or imperialization) assimilation policy intensified after the Mukden crisis of 1931, the colonial authorities heightened surveillance and banned all the literary, cultural and political activities that they realized as too powerful to be manipulated because of their nationalist or nativist content, Han started a magazine Pulgyo (Buddhism) as a conduit of his cultural nationalist concern.

A recent paper in a Leiden-based journal has sought to cast doubt on the credibility and credence of Han Yong-un as a national hero. First of all, the author cited an interview in which Han privileged Buddhist salvation of entire mankind over salvation of a specific nation. The reporter interviewing Han argued that the Buddha was an Indian, and his primary loyalty was towards the people of India amongst whom he wandered. Based on this assumption the reporter asked Han “ what was wrong with seeing Buddha as a savior of the Indian people and, further, of the Korean nation? Han was consist in his answer that the Buddha would not save the Indians to the neglect of others. Here we see the maturity of Han’s thought as a nationalist leader. As a leading monk of Korean Buddhism he realized the danger of following the path that Japanese Buddhism trod since Meiji Restoration. Indian poet Tagore made the same point that The Buddha filled his heart with the light of truth and wisdom, and the life and philosophy of Lord Buddha is more relevant today when religious fanaticism is tearing the fabric of mankind asunder and painting the face of the earth with the blood of innocent people". To Tagore and Manhae Buddha represented hope of salvation for the whole humanity, a universalist force of cohesion of mankind which was in sharp contrast to the Japanese imaginary of a particularistic Japan-centred Buddhism . One needs to recall that_ when the Sino-Japanese war broke out, Buddhist sects invoked the memory of the 13th century militant monk Nichiren and raised such

slogans as “Let’s carry out only actions of aggressive thought” and “Let’s rather say that the Lotus Sutra is the sword.”¹³ Other Buddhist leaders raised equally spirited slogans relating to the revival of the time-honoured practice of *saisei itchi* (unity of rites and rule), unity of Buddha dharma and the Imperial law, and of the nation-protecting spirit of the Buddhist tradition. Such Buddhist sects as Pure Land and Soto Zen engaged in vigorous ideological campaigns in Korea in order to make the Buddhist population amenable to the imperialist designs of Japan. The activities of Takeda Hanshi of the Soto Zen sect eloquently illustrate this point.¹⁴ Takeda's legacy of using Buddhism to serve the imperialist needs of Japan was energetically carried forward by the Soto sect in colonial Korea. Han was aware of the danger of the particularistic Nation-centred configuration of Buddhism, and that is why he did not fall in the trap laid by the reporter.

The author of the paper also sought to dent the nationalist thought of Han Yong-un by referring to Han’s opposition to the politicization of Buddhism. In order to understand why Han insisted on maintaining a clear line of demarcation between religion and politics was because he was wary of the danger inherent in the Japanese production of "knowledge" about Korean Buddhism. The Japanese was intimately linked with the web of power. The Japanese Buddhist scholarship emphasised either the dependent nature of Korean Buddhism or sought to mould early Korean Buddhism in the Japanese image of "nation-protecting Buddhism", with the implication that Koreans needed to support Japan’s war in China and beyond.

Han’s view is in complete agreement with the early Buddhist texts. Early Buddhism was ambivalent and skeptical towards these new political patterns of monarchical state. The Buddha described kings as poisonous snakes, as robbers who violate people's property, and asked his followers to stay away from the domain of monarchical authority. Serving soldiers were not allowed to join the sangha and monks were forbidden to watch military parades. . However, with the increasing growth of centralised monarchical power, Buddhism could no longer evade the inevitable-- a grudging recognition of the “necessary evil” of monarchy. It revised its initial principle of “tribal-republicanism” and formulated the Buddhist version of ‘cakravartin’.. Cakravartin symbolized normative kingship, an upholder of the dhamma (*dhammikko dhammaraja*) whose compassion extended not only to men and women all over the world but also to birds and beasts.

Finally the author of the article refers to an article entitled “Jina sabyeongwa bulgyodo (China Incident and Buddhism), a pro-Japanese article, supporting Japan’s invasion of china in 1937 which does not specify its author, but is assumed to be Han’s editorial in the journal *Bulgyo*. It needs to be remembered that *Bulgyo*, initially owned and published by Han, discontinued its publication in 1933, and four years later when it resumed publication, Han provided advice and assistance. The article in question bears no stamp of Han’s writing. Han did not refer to China as “Jina” in his other writings. He called it “jungguk”. And during the same period he criticised Japan with his friends, and made a prophesy that Japan would be doomed to complete destruction. The journal *Bulgyo* contained many pro-Japanese articles between 1937 and 1938 which were authored by pro-Japanese monks at the behest of the colonial authorities, and on many occasions Censored Board forced the publisher of *Bulgyo* to publish pro-Japanese editorials which were written by people chosen by the Board. Han had no direct hand in the publication of the journal, and therefore, he successfully campaigned for its closure which took place a year after its resumption,

¹³Kathleen M. Staggs, 1979, op. cit, p.343

¹⁴Han Chol-hui, *Nihon no Chosen shihai to shukyo seisaku*. Miraisha: Tokyo 1988 pp. 59-66; Kim Kwang-sik, *Hanguk kuntae pulgyosa yongu*. Seoul; Minjoksa 1996 pp. 55-71; Ishikawa Kikizan, "The Social Response of Buddhists to the Modernization of Japan: Contrasting Lives of Two Soto Zen Monks", *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 25-1/2 (1998) pp. 94-106.

Although Han did not live to see the independence achieved by Korea in 1945, his words and deeds remain indelibly imprinted on the hearts of the Korean people, and serve as a lamp of inspiration for the succeeding generation. The evaluation of Han's life and achievements by Poet Jo Jeong-hyeon remains valid even today:

Han Yong-un was a monk

And he was a poet

But above all he was a Korean patriot

A fighter for Korea's freedom

He fought till his last breath

He fought with steel-like determination

Fire-like passion

Stern spirit

Using his body as a weapon

Concluding Remarks
