

The Nature and Social Basis of Buddhism in Late Chosŏn Korea

Boudewijn Walraven
Leiden University

Introduction

According to the standard explanation the advent of Neo-Confucianism in the Chosŏn period heralded a steady decline of Buddhism in almost all respects, institutionally, doctrinally, morally and socially. Deprived of elite support, Buddhism inexorably sank down, so the narrative goes, to the level of the superstitious shamanic cults of the lower echelons of society, particularly in the second half of the Chosŏn period. The evidence of this is still supposed to be with us in certain places, as in the little shrines devoted to Ch'ilsŏng 七星 (the Seven Stars of the Big Dipper widely worshipped by shamans) in modern temple complexes. This negative view of Late Chosŏn Buddhism is undoubtedly one of the reasons for the relative scholarly neglect it has suffered, particularly on the part of scholars who are primarily interested in the history of doctrine *per se* (rather than historians who want to understand the role of religion and doctrine in history), although in the period concerned practice was arguably more important in Korea than doctrine (as in the whole of East Asia).¹ To a certain extent, the neglect of Chosŏn Buddhism also may be explained as a colonial legacy. Japanese scholars of Buddhism, who undeniably have exerted some influence on the direction of Korean Buddhist studies, have tended to be interested in those phases of Korean Buddhism that were most relevant to the development of Japanese Buddhism: hence the attention lavished on figures such as Wŏnhyo 元曉 and Ŭisang 義相, who in Japan were regarded as patriarchs of the Kegon-school. Japanese scholars, moreover, were also inclined to take a negative view of Buddhism in their own country in the corresponding period, regarding the Edo period as an age of the degeneration of Buddhism.² On the other hand, the ideals of colonial modernity may also have predisposed some Korean scholars to take an unduly harsh view of late Chosŏn Buddhism.

The standard narrative of the decline of Chosŏn Buddhism is flawed in several ways. The cult of Ch'ilsŏng, for instance, was not due to accommodation with native folk beliefs in the Chosŏn period, but had arrived in Korea from China (where it had Daoist roots) complete with related Buddhist scriptures, as an integral part of Buddhism.³ Possibly it was grafted onto a native form of heaven worship, but in any case in the form Ch'ilsŏng worship took in temples it was not the result of the degeneration of Buddhism.⁴ If we consider other evidence for a supposed decline of Buddhism in the Chosŏn period, an examination of temple records, inscriptions on Buddhist paintings, Buddhist publications and private writings shows, moreover, that the connections between Buddhism and the elite were not severed so easily. Buddhism was

¹ In the second volume of the well-known *Sourcebook of Korean Civilization*, which is devoted to Late Chosŏn and the Modern Period (1860-1945), Buddhism is almost absent. For Late Chosŏn it only figures in two fragments in the section "Popular Unrest." Then there is nothing until Han Yongun's "On Revitalizing Korean Buddhism", which was written in 1909. Similarly, the volume on Chosŏn and the modern period of *Han'guk purhaksa* by Ko Yŏngsŏp (Seoul: Yŏn'gisa, 2005) contains nothing about late Chosŏn except for a chapter on the early modern priest Kyŏnghŏ (1846-1912).

² The representative spokesman of this view is Tsuji Zennosuke with his *Edo bukkyō darakuron*. John Jorgenson suggests a relation with the "Protestant" approach Japanese Buddhist scholars took over from 19th-century European scholars, which gave primacy to textual and philological studies: Jorgenson, "Japanese Research on Korean Buddhism," *Review of Korean Studies* vol. 9, nr. 1 (March 2006), p. 11.

³ Henrik H. Sørensen, "The Worship of the Great Dipper in Korean Buddhism" in Henrik H. Sørensen (ed.), *Religions in Traditional Korea*. Copenhagen, Seminar for Buddhist Studies, 1995), pp. 71-105.

⁴ A similar argument can be made for the inclusion of shrines for the mountain god in Buddhist temple complexes.

quite radically eliminated from the public sphere, but in the realm of the private the situation was much more complex (as it was with the relation between Confucianism and popular religion⁵). Throughout the Chosŏn period evidence of upper-class patronage of Buddhism is not difficult to detect. Additionally, in the eighteenth and nineteenth century Buddhism found patrons among social groups who could not claim elite yangban status, but who were nonetheless highly literate and who played a growing role in Chosŏn culture. Even if Buddhist monks in certain cases had to stoop down for survival, to a considerable extent they attempted to survive by doing the exact opposite: by accommodating to the Confucian culture of the elite (which, it has to be added, as time went by increasingly became a national culture shared by very diverse layers of society). The early stages of this process can already be detected in the Buddhist apologetics of Kihwa 己和 (1376-1433) in early Chosŏn,⁶ but it assumed new dimensions in late Chosŏn (here loosely defined as the period from 1600 to 1900).

One major point I want to make with regard to the discussion of the nature of late Chosŏn Buddhism is that we need to improve our understanding of the relationship between social and cultural developments in the period. As said, one often encounters statements to the effect that Buddhism lost elite patronage and, oppressed as it was, had no choice but to “go down in society” and become “popular” (which usually implies that it amalgamated with shamanism and thus turned “superstitious”). Terms that are often used in this context in writings in Korean are *min’gan* 民間, *minjung* 民衆 and *sŏmin* 庶民. From a sociological point of view this is not sufficiently precise. The “people” or “masses” were not homogeneous. It is characteristic of late Chosŏn that more and more social strata adopted elements of what originally had been elite culture and made use of writing, either in Chinese or in Korean, thus differentiating themselves from other social groups. This was closely related to processes of urbanization and commercialization that went in this period. All this resulted, for instance, in a flourishing of book culture and print culture (not identical at that time!) including Buddhist publications,⁷ for which the label “popular” has little meaning.

Although this paper intends to add nuance to the standard view of the position of Buddhism in late Chosŏn society, it cannot be denied that the Buddhist community had to cope with an oppressive load of non-religious duties, including military service, and had many restrictions imposed on it by the government, which severely hampered its development, both materially and intellectually. Obviously, it will not do simply to turn the traditional narrative on its head, defective though it may be. The situation of Buddhism was fraught with contradictions. What is needed is a much more nuanced view that accounts for both the positive as well as the negative aspects within a comprehensive framework that includes a more sophisticated acknowledgement of social differentiation, going beyond the simple dichotomy of the elite versus the people. Obviously this is not something that can be achieved within the scope of this short conference paper, which unavoidably bears the character of a prospectus rather than a definitive treatment of the various aspects mentioned, which each would deserve much more intensive scrutiny and, I should add, in recent years to a certain extent have received such attention in Korean-language sources.⁸

Paintings and Books

As my point of departure I will take very concrete, material evidence in the form of Buddhist

⁵ Boudewijn Walraven, "Popular Religion in a Confucianized Society," in Martina Deuchler and Jahyun Kim Haboush (eds.), *Culture and the State in Chosŏn Korea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 1999), pp. 160-198.

⁶ A. Charles Muller, "The Buddhist-Confucian Conflict in the Early Chosŏn and Kihwa's Synthetic Response: the Hyŏn chŏng non," WWWeb document: <http://www.human.toyogakuen-u.ac.jp/~acmuller/budkor/aar-hcn.htm>.

⁷ See, for instance, Yi Chino, *Han'guk pulgyo munhak ūi yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Minjoksa, 1997) for a survey of the many collected works of Buddhist monks published in this period.

⁸ In recent years, some publications have been moving in the direction this paper advocates. One of these is Kim Sunsŏk, "Chosŏn hugi pulgyogyŏ ūi tonghyang," *Kuksagwan yŏn'gu* 99 (2002), pp. 79-100.

paintings and books. *Kamnot'aeng* 甘露幀, “sweet dew paintings” (also referred to as “Nectar Ritual paintings”) are a uniquely Korean type of Buddhist painting that is particularly relevant to a discussion of the relationship between Buddhism and Confucianism.⁹ The paintings were (and are) used in rituals for the well-being of the dead, which may be, and were, considered an expression of the Confucian virtue of filial piety. Structurally they consist of three planes. In the top part one sees the Buddhas and bodhisattvas whose assistance makes entrance to the Pure Land possible, with Amitābha, of course, taking pride of place. In the middle, an actual ritual held for the departed is depicted, with an altar table, monks who make music and dance, and believers who attend the ritual. One or two grotesquely painted hungry ghosts sit in front of the altar. The lower part is reserved for depictions of scenes from our world, with particular emphasis on the many ways in which mankind can die an untimely and violent death. Sometimes this part also contains scenes from hell. This lower part is visually the most interesting and in many cases the focus of discussion. For the purposes of this paper, however, it is the middle part that is of greatest interest. Mourners in the kind of garb Confucian mourners would wear pay homage in front of the altar, confirming that the rituals related to the *kamnot'aeng* are primarily death rituals. But there are numerous other figures. Many *kamnot'aeng* very helpfully have captions that help us to identify these. These tell us that some of the figures are monarchs and queens, ministers and loyal and righteous generals and court ladies. In the Kukch'ōngsa 國淸寺 *kamnot'aeng* of 1751 that is in the possession of the Musée Guimet in Paris we also see a group of solemn gentlemen respectfully watching the ritual who are identified as Confucians by the label *yudo* 儒道. There are two ways to interpret the appearance of these figures, and both, I think, are to a certain extent valid and relevant to the argument put forward here. The first interpretation is that the state of affairs depicted here is as Buddhists ideally would like to see it, not a reflection of reality, which in the Chosŏn period favoured Buddhism much less. The depiction of the ruling elite, then, was intended to *suggest* rather than to reflect harmony between the powerful and Buddhism, with the aim of promoting the social standing of Buddhism. To a certain extent this is true. Certainly the paintings show nothing of the oppression Buddhism suffered at the hands of the ruling elite, or the sharp criticisms Confucian scholars might direct at it.¹⁰ The paintings, in this interpretation, suggest a harmony that was not entirely genuine; an ideological ideal rather than reality. On the other hand, however, there is sufficient evidence to show that, in spite of some ups and downs, *on the private level* the royal court throughout the Chosŏn period continued to support Buddhism, and not only the women at court, although they played a major role in this respect. Examples of court ladies (*sanggung* 尙宮) who sponsored Buddhist paintings, for instance, are seen in the colophons of a *Yaksa hoesangdo* (Assembly of the Medicine Buddha) of 1792 in Hūngguksa and a huge painting to be displayed outdoors (*kwaebul* 掛佛) in Chikchisa 直指寺 made in 1803.¹¹

Prominent officials, too, might offer donations. In another Hūngguksa painting, *Yōngsan hoesangdo* 靈山會相圖 (Assembly on the Buddha Śākyamuni) of 1693, one of the donors is an official of senior third rank, who wishes for the rebirth in the Pure Land of his father and mother.¹² This could be interpreted as inspired by the Confucian virtue of filial piety, but one of the sponsors of a *kamnot'aeng* in Namjangsa 南長寺 made in 1701, an official of the junior second rank, wished for his own rebirth in the Pure Land.¹³ Min Tuho 閔斗鎬, who at the time was a senior second rank official and who eventually would become a Chief State Councillor (senior first rank) in 1892 contributed to a *Samyōrae hoesangdo* 三如來會相圖 (Assembly of the Three Tathāgatas) and *kamnot'aeng* in Pongūnsa 奉恩寺, wishing for long life and

⁹ Kang Woo-bang (Kang Ubang) & Kim Sūnghūi, *Kamnot'aeng* (Seoul: Yekyong, 1995). Hereafter referred to as *Kamnot'aeng*.

¹⁰ In one painting, on the other hand, Confucian scholars seem to be ridiculed in a rather humorous fashion. It represents a group of figures lolling about on the ground, reading and writing. One of them is reading the *Mencius*. *Kamnot'aeng* p. 72.

¹¹ Hong Yunsik, *Han'guk pulhwa hwagijip* vol. I (Seoul: Karamsa yŏn'guso, 1995), pp. 216, 229.

¹² Hong Yunsik, *Hwagijip* I, p. 58.

¹³ Hong Yunsik, *Hwagijip*, I, p. 62.

promotion to first rank (which he eventually achieved).¹⁴ When this kind of evidence is taken into consideration, it becomes clear that the kamnot'aeng were not entirely unrealistic when they included the ruling elite in their iconography.

Elite support for Buddhism is also apparent in the publication of books. The most famous example from late Chosŏn is king Chŏngjo 正祖 who in 1796 had an edition prepared of *Pumo ūnjunggyong* 父母恩重經 (Sutra of the Great Debt Due to One's Parents) with illustrations that probably are by Kim Hongdo 金弘道.¹⁵ Other instances are not difficult to find. In 1853, the Minister of State Kim Chwagŭn 金左根 (1797-1869), a brother of King Sunjo's 純祖 consort, together with his wife had a thousand copies printed of *Pulsŏl Amit'agyŏng yohae* 佛設阿彌陀經要解 (Sukhavativyuha sutra, with commentary) which was printed at Samgaksan.¹⁶ Like the quite exceptional sponsorship of Chŏngjo, this case is remarkable because of the high rank of the benefactor (who also contributed to the restoration of Tosŏnsa 道說寺 in 1864¹⁷), but as an example of yangban involvement with the publication of Buddhist scriptures it certainly is not unique.¹⁸ In the middle of the nineteenth century there was a concerted effort to print Buddhist scriptures in which, except for monks, several literati were involved.¹⁹

Royal Support

A nineteenth-century description of Seoul, *Tongguk yŏji pigo* 東國輿地備攷, lists some of the Buddhist temples that surrounded Seoul in considerable numbers, but reflects a fundamentally negative attitude towards Buddhism, stating that (according to law) no new temples should be established, although old temples might be restored, and citing regulations to the effect that it was strictly forbidden to found temples in the immediate vicinity of royal tombs (1770) and that the *wŏndang* 願堂 (temples which functioned as prayer halls) of various government bureaus and offices in the royal palaces had been abolished (1776).²⁰ Such prohibitions are often quoted in histories of Korean Buddhism, but in fact their meaning was very limited. They did not at all reflect the reality on the ground, particularly where *wŏndang* for the benefit of deceased members of the royal house were concerned. One should not discount the possibility that the very reason such prohibitions were (re-)issued at this time was that in the late 18th century *wŏndang* were becoming so popular also outside court circles, among yangban families for instance, that the need was felt to keep this development under control.²¹ However that may be, throughout the Chosŏn period, including the age when these decrees were issued, royal *wŏndang* were maintained, restored and created. This was already noted by the author of *Religions of Old Korea*, Charles Allen Clark (who, we should remember, had personally witnessed the end of the Chosŏn period).

“...near practically every royal tomb there was a Buddhist temple erected. ...In 1419,

¹⁴ Hong Yunsik, *Hwagijip*, I, pp. 336-337.

¹⁵ For a detailed study of a particular instance of the publication of Buddhist works by the royal house, see Nam Hŭisuk, “Chosŏn hugi wangsil ūi pulgyo sinang-gwa pulsŏl kanhaeng: *Pulsŏl changsu myŏlchoe hodongja taranigyŏng* ūi kanhaeng-ŭl chungsim-ŭro,” *Kuksagwan nonch'ong* 99 (2002), pp. 47-78.

¹⁶ Courant, *Bibliographie Coréenne: tableau littéraire de la Corée* 3 vols. with supplement (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1894-1901) vol. 3, no. 2645. For Kim Chwagŭn, also see Yi Nŭnghwa, *Pulgyo t'ongsa* vol. 3 (Korean edition, transl. by Yun Chaeyŏng, Seoul: Pagyŏngsa, 1980) p. 76 (1854).

¹⁷ Sach'al munhwa yŏn'guwŏn, *Seoul ūi chŏnt'ong sach'al* (Seoul: Sach'al munhwa yŏn'guwŏn ch'ulp'anbu, 1995), p. 138 (hereafter: *Seoul ūi chŏnt'ong sach'al*).

¹⁸ E.g., Courant, *Bibliographie* vol. 3, no. 2682.

¹⁹ Kim Chongjin. 2004. “1850nyŏndae pulsŏ kanhaeng undong-gwa pulgyo kasa: Namho Yŏnggi-rŭl chungsim-ŭro,” *Hanminjok munhwa yŏn'gu* 14, pp. 109-140.

²⁰ *Tongguk yŏji pigo* p. 71. Yi Nŭnghwa, *Pulgyo t'ongsa* III, p. 68.

²¹ Cf. Chŏng Pyŏngsam, “Chin'gyŏng sidae pulgyo ūi chinhŭng-gwa pulgyo munhwa ūi palchŏn,” in Ch'oe Wansu *et alii*, *Uri munhwa ūi chŏnsŏnggi chin'gyŏng sidae* (Seoul: Tolpegae, 1998), p. 162.

the practice of erecting monasteries near these tombs was forbidden, . . . , but it is interesting to note that, even now, wherever you find a tomb, you are pretty sure to find a temple just over the hill. . . .²²

Even kings who are on record as having taken measures that were detrimental to Buddhism assigned to Buddhist temples the task of promoting the salvation of deceased relatives (who, as a monk expressed it, would be able to listen to the sermons from their graves²³). King Hyōnjong 顯宗, for instance, who severely curtailed Buddhism and had the last two remaining nunneries within the walls of Seoul removed, made Pongguksa 奉國寺 the wōndang for two of his daughters.²⁴ King Yōngjo 英祖 made Yōnhwasa 蓮華寺 the “grave prayer temple” (*nūngch’im wōnch’al* 陵寢願刹) for his predecessor Kyōngjong 景宗 and his consort.²⁵ Chin’gwansa 眞觀寺 was the wōndang of his mother²⁶, and Pongwōnsa 奉元寺 of his grandchild.²⁷ Yongjusa 龍珠寺 was founded in 1790 by Chōngjo, the very monarch who issued the prohibition against wōndang in 1776. When he built a tomb for his father, Sado Seja 思悼世子, the Coffin King, Chōngjo had this temple erected near the tomb in the vicinity of Suwōn, with contributions collected in the whole country, for the benefit of the, no doubt troubled, soul of his father. A hymn by Chōngjo himself leaves no doubt as to the purpose of this temple.²⁸

In accordance with their function, in such temples the central images usually were Buddhas and bodhisattvas associated with the afterlife, like Amitābha, with his Pure Land, Avalokiteśvara, who was regarded as a manifestation of Amitābha, and Ksitigarbha (worshipped in this context because of his vow that he will save all sentient beings from Hell). Many of the temples I have mentioned also possess kamnot’aeng with inscriptions on the banners that hang above the altar table in the picture. In several cases the text on these banners is a wish for the long life of members of the royal family, testimony to the close relationship between the court and Buddhism.²⁹ In a kamnot’aeng of 1901 the banners are half concealed by the offerings piled up in front of them but enough is visible to make out that they were for the Emperor and his Consort, the Crown Prince (the future Sunjong 純宗) and his younger brother Yōngch’inwang 英親王.³⁰ Paintings of different types, too, sometimes also have wishes for the long life of the king, queen and crown prince, like a *Yōngsan hoesangdo* in Hūngguksa 興國寺 of 1693.³¹

Surviving accounts for the expenses of prayers and rituals from the royal palace (*palgi* 件記) reveal that the ladies of the court for occasions like birthdays of members of the royal family or the New Year patronized many of the temples around the capital. In fact, they did not limit their patronage to the temples nearby, but sent donations to famous temples all over the country.³² One subject that deserves further study is the exact relation between the donation of specific objects and certain events. It is quite likely, for instance, that the donation by court ladies

²² Charles Allen Clark, *Religions of Old Korea* (reprint, Seoul: Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1961), p. 46.

²³ *Seoul ūi chōnt’ong sach’al*, p. 261.

²⁴ Yi Nūnghwa, *Pulgyo t’ongsa* III, p. 61

²⁵ Pak Pyōngsōn, “Chosōn hugi wōndang ūi chōngch’ijōk kiban: kwanin mit wangsil pulgyo insig-ūl chungsim-ūro,” *Minjok munhwa nonch’ong* 25, p. 130.

²⁶ *Sach’al munhwa yōn’guwōn*, *Seoul ūi chōnt’ong sach’al*, p. 274.

²⁷ All temples with *pong* 奉 (to respectfully serve) in the name, such as Pongsōnsa, Pongguksa, Pongūnsa and Pongguksa, had connections with the royal family; *Seoul ūi chōnt’ong sach’al*, p. 223-224. The presence of the character *kuk* 國 (country/king) has a similar implication. Thus Suguksa was the wōndang for King Sukchong, and Hūngguksa for King Sōnjo’s father.

²⁸ Yongjusa, *Yongjusa* (Seoul: Sach’al munhwa yōn’guwōn ch’ulp’anbu, 1993).

²⁹ E.g. in the 1893 Sweet Dew painting in the Pongūnsa; *Kamnot’aeng*, p. 249.

³⁰ *Kamnot’aeng*, pp. 289, 290.

³¹ Hong Yunsik, *Hwagijip*, p. 58.

³² Kukhak chinhūng yōn’gu saōp unyong wiwōnhoe (comp.), *Komunsō chipsōng* vol. 13 (Sōngnam: Han’guk chōngsin munhwa yōn’guwōn, 1994). Cf. Boudewijn Walraven, “Religion and the City: Seoul in the Nineteenth Century,” *Review of Korean Studies* Vol. 3, No 1 (2000), pp. 178-206.

in 1878 of an Amitābha group carved in wood, which was to serve as the backdrop to the central statue of the Paradise Hall of the Kyōngguksa 慶國寺, was related to the Mass that was celebrated in the same year at that temple on the forty-ninth day after the death of the consort of King Ch'ölchong 哲宗.³³

It should also be noted that not only the court itself contributed to temples related to temples with a connection with the royal family, but also more distantly related members of the royal family. Thus, Prince Nakch'ang 洛昌 restored Paengyōnsa 白蓮寺, wōndang of the 15th-century Princess Ŭisuk 懿淑, in 1774.³⁴ Moreover, connections with the royal house were a strong incentive for local magistrates and Confucian literati in general to treat a temple with due respect. Ŭnhaesa 銀海寺 in Yōngch'ōn 永川 in North Kyōngsang Province provides a good example.³⁵ In 1847 the temple was destroyed by fire. The magistrate of Yōngch'ōn made a substantial donation for the rebuilding because the temple was a wōndang for the *t'aesil* 胎室 of King Injo (the place where his placenta was buried) and treasured a document from King Yōngjo with instructions to protect the temple. Officials from Taegu followed suit, while the court, too, contributed.

The conclusion that emerges from even a casual survey of the relations of the royal court with Buddhist establishments, and which is confirmed by more thorough scholarship,³⁶ is that during the entire period the care for the souls of the dead expressed through the creation of such wōndang was one of the strongest elements linking the court and Buddhist temples: whenever a royal tomb was built, a monastery in its vicinity was designated as nūngch'im wōnch'al. Pak Pyōngsōn has even argued that in late Chosōn, when all kinds of corvée labour and other governmental impositions weighed heavily on the Buddhist community, the royal wōndang constituted one of the most important factors that allowed Buddhism to survive. Altogether he lists five factors, of which this is the first. The four others are the existence of shrines (often called Py'och'ungsa 表忠祠) within Buddhist temple complexes where monks were venerated who had defended the state militarily, the support given to temples by central and local officials, the support by yangban to temples that cared for the well-being in the hereafter of their ancestors, and specific local functions certain temples fulfilled within a particular region.³⁷ It should be noted that of the five factors that according to Pak ensured the survival of Buddhism, at least four implied elite support. Of course this squarely contradicts the idea that Buddhism to survive had to look for support among the masses, which for the sake of simplicity I would like to call the *minjunghwa* 民衆化 hypothesis (which usually implies a *misinhwa* 迷信化 corollary: the notion that this went together with an increase in superstitious elements).

The Rapprochement of Buddhism and Confucianism

In our brief survey of the Sweet Dew paintings we have already seen how Buddhist ritual could be made to serve the Confucian purpose of displaying filial piety. Literary sources, too, point to the possibility of a rapprochement between Confucianism and Buddhism. Buddhist kasa of the

³³ *Seoul ũi chōnt'ong sach'al*, p. 307, 310.

³⁴ This again was a reason for a descendent of Prince Nakch'ang, Yi Ikchōng, then a junior first rank official, to compose a record of the restoration of the temple, only one example of many such documents written by yangban authors; *Seoul ũi chōnt'ong sach'al*, pp. 238-239.

³⁵ Chōsen sōtokufu, *Chōsen jisatsu shiryō* (reprint. Tōkyō: Kokusho kankōkai, 1971), pp. 453-461, 465.

³⁶ Pak Pyōngsōn, "Chosōn hugi wōndang ũi chōngch'ijōk kiban: kwanin mit wangsil pulgyo insig-ül chungsim-ūro," *Minjok munhwa nonch'ong* 25, pp. 103-137, and "Chosōn hugi pulgyo chōngch'aek-kwa wōndang (1): isūng ũi chonjae yangdang-ül chungsim-ūro," *Minjok munhwa nonch'ong* 18.19, pp. 223-255.

³⁷ Pak Pyōngsōn, "Chosōn hugi wōndang ũi chōngch'ijōk kiban," p. 03-104. This theory does not account for the role of the *kye* 契 associations that were so important in providing an economic basis for the temples according to Yi Chaech'ang, *Han'guk pulgyo sawōn kyōngje yōn'gu* (Seoul: Pulgyo sidaesa, 1993), but there need be no conflict between both theories inasmuch as *kye* formed by monks are concerned, because the big question is where the monks got their funds from.

Chosŏn period may, with a few exceptions, be regarded as records of the message the clergy wanted to transmit to lay believers. From the eighteenth century at the latest they represent Confucian morality as completely in agreement with the moral standards of Buddhism.³⁸ The kasa “In’gwamun” 因果文 (On Karmic Retribution) is available in the Kyujanggak copy of a printed edition of *Yŏmbul pogwŏnmun* 念佛普勸文 (On the Propagation of the Invocation of the Buddha [Amitābha]), which was compiled by the monk Myŏngyŏn 明衍 and first published in 1704. “In’gwamun” reminds us of the fleeting nature of human life and suggests that the proper way to spend one’s life is “taking care of one’s parents with filial piety, reverently serving one’s teachers and seniors, [acquiring] virtue and happiness [by displaying] loyalty [to the monarch] and faithfulness [to one’s friends], by joining the invocations of the Buddha, and by offerings to the Buddha and giving donations” (leaf 31a). Conversely scoffers at Buddhist devotion are represented as ridiculing filial piety as well (leaf 31b).

The same copy of *Yŏmbul pogwŏnmun* contains a kasa entitled “Hoesimga ko” (Manuscript of the Conversion Song; from leaf 40b onwards).³⁹ This song begins with a description of the dawn of history that is entirely couched in Confucian terms, with the sage rulers Yao and Shun, King Wen and King Wu, and the Duke of Zhou laying the foundations for civilized society, where the Three Bonds (三綱) and the Five Constants (五常) were respected. Unfortunately, the kasa continues, the days of Yao and Shun have passed, and the Latter Age (*malse* 末世) has come upon us, with as its consequence the abandoning of the Confucian virtues of loyalty, filial piety and faithfulness, resulting in social chaos and distress. To remedy this, people are encouraged “on the one hand to invoke the Buddha, on the other hand to display loyalty and filial piety” (leaf 42a). Further on, the kasa describes devoted children (*hyoja* 孝子) who earnestly beg their parents to avoid the torments of hell as “avatars of Avalokiteśvara” (leaf 45a).

Another kasa that can be firmly dated is “Chŏnsŏl in’gwagok” 奠設因果曲 (A Disquisition on Karmic Retribution), which was written by a lay believer who called himself Chihyŏng 智瑩 and who published this kasa in a woodblock edition in 1795. Here it is stated that the Confucian gentleman (*kunja* 君子) who displays loyalty and filial piety after death will go to Paradise (Amitābha’s Pure Land), while doers of evil who are lacking in loyalty and filial piety will suffer the torments related to the three lowest forms of reincarnation (as hungry ghosts, animals or beings in hell).⁴⁰ This is confirmed by “Pyŏlhoesimgok” 別回心曲 (Conversion Song: A Variation; of uncertain date, but definitely belonging to the Chosŏn period) where the judges of the Underworld who have to decide whether to consign the deceased to one of the hells or send them on to the Pure Land of Amitābha to an overwhelming extent use Confucian criteria of morality.⁴¹

These kasa represent the message Buddhist priest or ardent lay believers had for ordinary believers (whatever their class). Very similar arguments were also used in the apologetics of Buddhists addressed to Confucians. The priest Yŏndam Yuil 蓮潭有一 (1720-1799) defended Buddhism against all kinds of Confucian objections in a letter to a certain Han Nŏngju 韓綾州.⁴² Yuil quite explicitly took the ecumenical view that a good Confucian could be admitted to Paradise even without practicing Buddhism. Good people who loyally served their king, cared for their parents with devotion and excelled in humanity and righteousness would be reborn in

³⁸ Some kasa with “Confucian content” are attributed to famous earlier priests, such as Hyujŏng Sŏsan taesa (1520-1604), but cannot be dated with certainty.

³⁹ A similar source, *Sinp’yŏn pogwŏnmun*, also includes this kasa, but attributes it to Hyujŏng. There is no such attribution in *Yŏmbul pogwŏnmun*. The fact that the latter source was compiled earlier and by a priest from Hyujŏng’s own lineage, who did *not* bestow this prestigious attribution on this kasa, must be regarded as strong evidence that actually Hyujŏng was not the author.

⁴⁰ Im Kijung, *Pulgyo kasa wŏnjŏn yŏn’gu* (Seoul: Tongguk taehakkyo ch’ulp’anbu, 2000), p. 124.

⁴¹ Younghee Lee. “Gender Specificity in Late-Chosŏn Buddhist Kasa,” *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2006), pp. 61-88.

⁴² Tongguk taehakkyo Han’guk pulgyo chŏnsŏ p’yŏnch’an wiwŏnhoe, *Han’guk pulgyo chŏnsŏ* vol. 10 (Seoul: Tongguk taehakkyo ch’ulp’anbu, 1997), pp. 280—283.

the Pure Land. “It is not just invoking the Buddha [that leads one to Paradise].” Similarly, those who showed a lack of loyalty or filial piety, deceitfulness, wickedness and rebelliousness would suffer in hell. “It is not just slandering the Buddha.” In this letter, as well as in other writings, Yuil demonstrated a thorough knowledge of Confucianism.⁴³ Of course, like many learned priests, he had in his youth first studied the Confucian classics. For an educated person, this was almost inescapable. Even the primers used for the most basic education, such as *Tongmong sōnsūp* 童蒙先習 (First Lessons for the Young and Ignorant), embodied Confucian views and values.

Many, if not most, Buddhist monks truly believed in Confucian values and earnestly attempted to live up to them. There is abundant evidence that monks showed filial piety to their biological parents, in spite of the fact that they were supposed to have completely broken with their natal families by assuming the new surname of Sōk 釋. The 1786 colophon of a kamnot’aeng in T’ongdosa 通度寺, for instance, does not only contain a dedication by a monk to his deceased teacher, but also one by another priest for the well-being in the hereafter of his mother.⁴⁴ Similar the colophon of a painting of the Buddha Śākyamuni preaching on the Vulture Peak made in 1803 for the Kūmnyongsa 金龍寺 mentions that the monk who was the main sponsor dedicated it to his deceased father and mother.⁴⁵ Apart from making donations to have Buddhist paintings made, merit might also be acquired by contributions to defray the expenses of Buddhist scriptures. This, too, was a costly affair and in some cases sponsors paid for the printing of a single leaf only, which then in the margin might bear the name of the sponsor and the purpose for which the donation was made. Among such donors there also were monks and nuns. In a copy of an *Amitābha sutra* (阿彌陀經) kept in Paris,⁴⁶ for instance, four nuns dedicate the merit of their pious deed to their parents.

As regards the Confucian virtue of loyalty (忠), the example of the soldier-monks during the Japanese and Manchu invasions is well-known. Their valour was amply acknowledged by the government, even long after the fact. Thus in the *imjin* year 1772, exactly 180 years after the first Japanese invasion, a memorial service was held at the behest of King Yōngjo at the graves of 800 monk-soldiers who had perished fighting under the leadership of the monk Yōnggyu 靈圭 (?-1592).⁴⁷ Much earlier, in 1743, Yōngjo already had founded a shrine (P’yoch’ungsa) for Hyujōng, Yujōng 惟政 (Samyōngdang 四溟堂) and the same Yōnggyu.⁴⁸ Such shrines could be found all over the country.

The rapprochement of Buddhism and Confucianism made it possible even for staunch Confucians to take a positive view of Buddhist undertakings. Around 1870, a group of people probably mainly consisting of city dwellers who shared certain religious ideals created the Chōngwōnsa 淨願社, Pure Vow Association. This organization had a book printed entitled *Ch’ōngjujip* 清珠集 (Collection of Clear Pearls). The first preface of this is by a prominent Confucian yangban and government official Cho Sōngha 趙成夏 (1845-1881; Cho was for instance Minister of the Board of Personnel), who states that the association was founded by the monk Ch’ijo 治兆, who with a number of monks and lay-believers for thirty years had held a summer retreat (e.g. from about 1840). Cho declares himself to be a Confucian, but notes that Buddhism and Confucianism, although different, are not so far apart as some might think. He even suggests that Śākyamuni might be called a Confucian vinaya master (*yumun yulsa* 儒門律師), because he exemplified proper conduct and dedication to the Way. There is also a second preface by very prominent monk of that period, Hōju Tōkchin 虛舟德眞 (1806-1888), who was very active for the propagation of Buddhism and performed prayers and services at the

⁴³ Yi Chino, *Han’guk pulgyo munhak ūi yōn’gu* (Seoul: Minjoksa, 1997), pp. 289-298.

⁴⁴ *Kamnot’aeng*, p. 425. For similar cases, see Kungnip pangmulgwan misulbu, *Yōch’ōn Hūngguksa ūi pulgyo misul* (Seoul: Han’guk kogo.misul yōn’guwōn, 1993), vol. 1, pp. 157, 161.

⁴⁵ Hong Yunsik, *Hwagijip* I, p. 224.

⁴⁶ Collection INALCO: COR I 302.

⁴⁷ Yi Nūnghwa, *Pulgyo t’ongsa* III, p. 68.

⁴⁸ *Chodurok*, 22 a. For *Chodurok*, see Courant nr. 1156.

request of the Hŭngsŏn Taewŏn'gun 興宣大院君.⁴⁹ He speaks of loyalty and filial piety as the basis of Buddhist practice.

Confucian Views of Buddhism

It will be clear that there were many different views of Buddhism among Confucian literati, ranging from outright rejection to sincere interest.⁵⁰ One and the same person might also have quite divergent views of different aspects of Buddhism. It is quite impossible, therefore, to provide a comprehensive survey in a paper like this. I will just briefly mention some aspects that bring out how many nuances there could be in Confucian attitudes toward Buddhism.

Temples were frequently used by Confucians to study in quiet surroundings or, as Hendrik Hamel noted, to divert themselves “with whores and other company”. Sympathy with Buddhist teachings was not required for the students of Confucianism who went to a temple to study (let alone those who went there to fornicate), but it seems that at least in some cases this became an opportunity to acquire a deeper understanding of Buddhism or even became the occasion for a lasting tie with a particular temple. Song Inmyong 宋寅明 (1689-1746) who became a confidant of King Yŏngjo, had studied in the Kaehwasa 開花寺 before he passed the examinations. When he became Prime Minister he donated land to the temple. His great-great grandson Song Paegok 宋伯玉 wrote a record of the restoration of the temple in 1799 (to which the family contributed), and in 1827 another descendant, Song Sugok 宋叔玉, did something similar. Thus, for a century or more the Song family showed special favour to the Kaehwasa (nowadays known as Yaksasa 藥師寺).⁵¹

Even members of the royal house might spend a considerable time at temples in this manner. Kojong 高宗, who it should be noted belonged to a collateral branch of the royal family and was not from birth destined to be king, received much of his early education from a monk at Kaeunsa 開運寺 (or Yŏngdosa 永導寺, near Korea University). Not unexpectedly one finds on paintings in this temple, too, inscriptions that mention the names of court ladies as donors.⁵² Whether it is because of this early influence or not, King Kojong's attitude toward Buddhism was quite benevolent. When his son was healed, it was thought, thanks to the prayers at the Suguksa 守國寺 (originally the wŏndang for Sukchong and his first wife) he declared that “filial piety and [Buddhist] faith in origin are not two” (*hyoshim shinshim wŏn puri* 孝心信心元不二).⁵³ Such ideas were also fed by the concept that the three teachings of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism were fundamentally one, which in the late nineteenth century was quite popular in Korea.

Cho Hŭiryong 趙熙龍 (1789-1866), who nowadays perhaps is best known as a gifted painter but who also left many writings and should be counted as a prominent figure in the intellectual circles of his time, is a particularly interesting figure when the relationship between Confucianism and Buddhism is concerned. He demonstrated an attitude towards Buddhism marked by many nuances. In a collection of short biographies (*Hosan oegi* 壺山外記) put together in 1844 he relates a story about Nongsan 蘆山, a monk who had died in 1790.⁵⁴ Nongsan was very strict in his obedience to the vinaya and for ten years did not step outside the gate of his temple, the Kŭmsŏnsa 金僊寺. When King Sunjo was born in the year *kyŏngsul* 庚戌 (1790), there was a strange aura, like a five-coloured rainbow, which came from the North West and reached the room where the child had been delivered. People in the Bureau of Medicine were

⁴⁹ Yi Chŏng, *Han'guk pulgyo inmyŏng sajŏn* (Seoul: Pulgyo sidaesa, 1993), p 69.

⁵⁰ In the latter category belongs Ch'usa Kim Chŏnghŭi. Cf. Sŏn Chusŏn, “Ch'usa Kim Chŏnghŭi ŭi pulgyo ūisik-kwa yesilgwan yŏn'gu,” Phd thesis Tongguk taehakkyo, 2001.

⁵¹ *Seoul ūi chŏnt'ong sach'al*, pp. 105-106.

⁵² *Seoul ūi chŏnt'ong sach'al*, p. 292, 300.

⁵³ *Seoul ūi chŏnt'ong sach'al*, p. 262.

⁵⁴ Cho Hŭiryong, *Cho Hŭiryong chŏnjip* (transl. and annotation by Silsi haksajŏn munhak yŏn'guhoe) vol. 6 (Seoul: Han'gil at'ŭ, 1998), pp. 152-154.

astonished and they sent someone to investigate from where the light came. The messenger went out of the North Gate of Seoul and found that the aura came from the Kūmsōnsa. He entered the temple and noted that the light came from a crack in a window of the monks' quarters. He opened the door and looked in. An old monk sat there with his eyes closed and his legs crossed. The light streamed from his nostrils, with great brightness, rising up into the air. He called the monk but there was no reply. In a sitting posture he had already entered nirvana. When this was reported to the King, Chōngjo had a portrait of Nongsan made and a memorial mass performed. Cho Hūiryong adds a lengthy commentary in which he says among other things: "The Great Master Nongsan, by purifying himself, had found his original nature and all his wordly attachments were eliminated. But what he realized was loyalty and filial piety and whenever he prayed to Heaven and the Buddha it was for abundant offspring for the monarchy (*kukka* 國家)."

Elsewhere, in *Sōgu mangnyōng nok*, Cho Hūi-ryong first notes that Buddhism is on the increase.⁵⁵ "Whenever the ancients spoke, they spoke of Yao and Shun. Whenever people speak today, they speak of the Buddha. They pray for long life happiness while they are alive and for salvation after death. The remote mountains [i.e. mountain temples] are full of gold and silk [donated by believers]." Cho asks why people show less respect to the Confucian classics than to the words of the Buddha, and his answer is that the Buddha inspired fear and awe by his teaching of reincarnation and karma. This, Cho says, is a form of skilful means (*upaya*). It is, however, not *upaya*, he concludes provocatively, to transmit the Buddhist teachings, but to reach those who are left unmoved by the Confucian message. "[The Buddha] instituted this teaching in order to complete what the Sages had not completed. I say: Buddha, too, is 'a disciple of the Sages'."⁵⁶

Cho Hūiryong's ambiguity towards Buddhism also manifested itself in his reaction to danger. He recounts that he silently recited the *Kwanūmyōng* 觀音經 (the part of the Lotus Sutra, which promises the assistance of Avalokiteśvara to anyone who invokes the bodhisattva in moments of peril) as he felt threatened by a flooding river, which almost reached his house. The flood was indeed averted. Yet Cho remained skeptical about cause and effect in this case and laughed about it.⁵⁷

An important part of the attraction of Buddhism for Cho Hūiryong seems to have lain in the style of the scriptures. In a passage that betrays that in his study he had Buddhist sutras lying about he says: "That the people of old were attracted by Buddhist scriptures was not just because of the principle of meditation, but because they rejoiced in the mysteriousness (*myo* 妙) of the style."⁵⁸ Elsewhere he states that sutras like the Lotus Sutra and *Nūngōmyōng* 楞嚴經 are no more than footnotes to the Confucian classics, and are read because of their style, which is mysterious, like riddles, and dazzling. But in the end an intelligent person will see through this. Cho Hūiryong concludes that in the final analysis the Buddhist teachings are not different from those of Confucianism. "What is the difference between the Buddhist striving for the Perfections (*pāramitās*) and Confucian self-cultivation?"⁵⁹

Cho Hūiryong probably was of *chungin* 中人 extraction, and not a proper yangban. Figures with a similar class background played an increasing role in the cultural and religious life of late Chosōn. In this connection it is interesting to speculate a little on the identity of the lay believer Chihyōng, mentioned briefly earlier, who was the author of a number of Buddhist kasa published at the end of the 18th century and published a number of books of various kinds. We know from a copy of a collection of Buddhist tracts (*Ch'ōnji p'aryang sinjūgyōng* 天地八陽神呪經) published in the same year as the kasa, at the same temple, that his name was Hong T'aeun 洪泰運.⁶⁰ A Hong T'aeun is also the compiler of a *Thousand Character*

⁵⁵ *Sōgu mangnyōn nok* (Record of Years Passed in Oblivion with Friend Inkstone), in Cho Hūiryong, *Cho Hūiryong chōnjip* (transl. and annotation by Silsi haksa kojōn munhak yōn'guhoe) vol. 1, pp. 73-74.

⁵⁶ The phrase "a disciple of the Sages" echoes *Mencius*, Book III, 9.

⁵⁷ *Sōgu mangnyōn nok*, pp. 120-121.

⁵⁸ *Sōgu mangnyōn nok*, p. 132.

⁵⁹ *Sōgu mangnyōn nok*, pp. 53-54.

⁶⁰ The book is part of the Kyujanggak collection: Karam library, nr. 294.336-B872p. Also see

Text (*Ch'ŏnjamun* 千字文) published in Seoul in 1804.⁶¹ The same name appears in an *Ilŏngnok* 日省錄 entry for the 22nd of the fourth lunar month of 1809 as the name of a man of the relatively lowly junior sixth rank. If this is indeed the same person as Chihyŏng, this suggests that Chihyŏng was a person of rather modest background, possibly belonging to a secondary status group. Persons with such a social background were extremely active in the cultural domain around that time and may have constituted one of the forces that sustained Buddhism. In publications from the late 19th century there is certainly evidence to that effect. Many persons of chungin or *sŏl* 庶孽 status were often highly cultivated and their support for Buddhism would in no way imply a degeneration of Buddhism into any form of “superstition”.

Conclusions

In an article in English on kamnot'aeng Kang Woo-bang says: “The notion of Buddhism’s steady decline during the late Chosŏn dynasty stems from a policy stance rather than actual fact.”⁶² It will be clear that I fully agree with this. However, I have tried to question Kang’s judgment in an earlier but more extended version of his essay on kamnot'aeng that “Buddhism lost the ruling-class patronage that it had enjoyed for centuries and developed into a religion of the ruled, the outcasts, and the weaker members of society.”⁶³ There were enough patrons of high status to make this claim at least in part invalid. It is probably true that Buddhism during this period reached a greater number of commoners, for instance through the medium of *kasa*, but there is no more reason to think of this as meaning that Buddhism degenerated than there is for interpreting the spread of Confucianism among the lower ranks of society that took place simultaneously as a sign of the degeneration of Confucianism. It should be noted that practices that easily can be regarded as popular because they did not require literacy or great intellectual capacities, such as *yŏmbul* 念佛, invoking or concentrating the mind on the Buddha Amitābha, were practiced among the elite (including the Taewŏn'gun) as well. More research is needed on the social background of Buddhist believers, but I think there needs to be no doubt that the *educated classes* on which Buddhism could rely were growing.

Accordingly, Buddhism survived more by adapting to the dominant ideology than by catering to those who remained untouched by civilization in that specific form. Confucians tended to accept Buddhism inasmuch as it contributed to the “Confucian order”, proposing support for the reconstruction of temples, for instance, if they had a connection with the royal family, or if they had some association with monks who fought for the fatherland. Buddhism, for its part, eagerly subscribed to the hegemonic Confucian ideology of the priority of the public good (*kong* 公) which was promoted by fostering the duties of filial piety and loyalty to the monarch. At the same time it offered consolation in the realm of the private (*sa* 私), which was not necessarily in conflict with Confucianism, itself less suited to this purpose. Thus Buddhism, not much less than Confucianism, came to promote a sense of (Confucian) nationhood. This may be illustrated through the wishes for the well-being of the royal family and the country in a *Yŏngsan hoesang* painting of 1693: “Long, long life for the Three Majesties [King, Queen and Crown Prince], that the country may be great and the people in peace, that the wheel of the Law may turn for ever.”⁶⁴

As far as Buddhist institutions (temples, the community of monks and nuns) were concerned, there is insufficient reason to claim that popularization (*minjunghwa*) was the main trend in late Chosŏn, or even a major trend. This does not mean that elements of Buddhism did not penetrate the lower social orders in this period. Evidence of Buddhism affecting other forms of religion and ritual in this period (or even earlier) is abundant in

Chaoying Fang, *The Asami Library*, pp. 228-229.

⁶¹ Kyujanggak, nr. 418.3-J936.

⁶² *Kamnot'aeng*, p. 413.

⁶³ See p. 97 of his “Ritual and Art in the Eighteenth Century,” in Hongnam Kim (ed.), *Korean Arts of the Eighteenth Century: Simplicity and Splendor* (New York: Weatherhill, 1993) pp. 79-98.

⁶⁴ Hong Yunsik, *Han'guk purhwa hwagijip* I, p. 58.

shamanic practices. My point is that this should be seen as the filtering down of cultural forms that originally were part of the culture of the elite or at least of the literate, not as the *misinhwa* of Buddhism. Confusion has arisen because of twentieth-century pleas from within the Buddhist community to get rid of "shamanistic," "superstitious" elements. These pleas owed more to a Western, modernistic discourse, grafted on Confucian prejudices, than to truly Buddhist ideas and have obscured the true nature of late Chosŏn Buddhism.