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“The *Yeongsanjae* Ritual and *Sŏn* Buddhism: A Critical Analysis”*

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Unique to Korea¹ and considered a representative of Buddhist memorial rituals (*chae*) (Sim 2005, 249; Sim 2011, 46)² and the greatest of all Buddhist rituals in contemporary Korea (Kim 2013, 6), the *Yeongsanjae* ritual (Ritual on the Miraculous Mountain) entails a comprehensive and performing Buddhist art, accompanied by elaborate Buddhist music,³ dance,⁴ painting, as well as the four Buddhist objects of the drum, the bell, the metal ball, and the wooden fish (Kim 2013, 6-16). This ritual has been registered on the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) intangible heritage of humanity list since 2009. The purpose of this paper is to examine the *Yeongsanjae* ritual as a *Sŏn* (Chan in Chinese; Zen in Japanese) practice in contemporary Korea based on the 26th *Yeongsanjae* ritual (hereafter, 2014 *Yeongsanjae* Ritual) performed at Pongwŏn Monastery, the headquarters of the T’aego order, the second largest Buddhist order in contemporary Korea following the Chogye order,⁵ in Seoul on July 6, 2014, in which I participated as an observer, and *The Yeongsanjae Ritual* (hereafter, YR 2014).⁶

To this end, this paper will consist of two sections: Section One will give an overview of the 2014 *Yeongsanjae* Ritual, including its history; and Section Two will analyze the ritual in relation to *Sŏn* practice in contemporary Korea. Conventional research on the *Yeongsanjae* ritual has focused on the dance, music, painting, cultural contents, clothes, esthetics, popularization, and globalization of the ritual (Sim 2005, 249).⁷ However, no such research has attempted to investigate the subject with relation to *Sŏn* practice.⁸ Thus, this paper will address this neglected area for analysis. This research hopes to contribute to a better understanding of the nature of *Sŏn* Buddhism in Korea in particular, and by extension, that of Chan/Zen Buddhism in

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¹ “Korea” in this paper refers to the Republic of Korea or South Korea.

² Scholars argue that there are five (Chang 2011, 4) or four (Kim Unggi, 2012, 25-27, recited from Kim H. 2013, 5) or three types (Sim 2005, 249) of Buddhist memorial rituals that have been transmitted from the past to the present. For the types of Buddhist memorial rituals, Sim 2011, 16-34.

³ For a discussion of Buddhist music, Sim 2011, 50 ff.

⁴ The origin of Buddhist ritual dances in Korea is unknown. However, Buddhist paintings indicate that they existed in sixteenth to seventeenth centuries Korea (Sim 2012a, 242-4).

⁵ For its history and development, see Kim 2004, 158-59.

⁶ *The Yeongsanjae Ritual 2014* is a brochure for the ritual of 2014 published from the T’aego order.

⁷ RISS (<http://www.riss.kr>): sponsored by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology of Korea, it provides knowledge information of high quality, including Korean academic journals, theses and dissertations, resources owned by Korean universities, lecture materials, and overseas DB. According to my survey of the YR with the term of “*Yeongsanjae*” in RISS (accessed August 6, 2014), there were 86 theses and dissertations, 71 articles in Korean academic journals, 185 monographs, one open lecture note, and six others.

East Asia in general, bridging scholarly gaps in these disciplines and filling a lacuna left from the *Zen Ritual* edited by Steven Heine and Dale Wright (2007), which covers rituals from the early Chan period to modern Japan, but lacks the Korean counterpart.

I. An Overview of the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual

1. Definition

Regarding the definition of the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual, the *YR 2014* says, “The Yeongsanjae Ritual is a symbolic reenactment of the historical Buddha Sakyamnuni’s delivery of the *Lotus Sūtra* on Mt. Grdhakuta some 2,600 years ago, in which offerings are made to the Buddha and Bodhisattvas in attendance.” (*YR 2014*, 10). According to this quotation, the ritual is a symbolic representation of the teachings of the Buddha as expressed in the *Lotus Sūtra* whereby participants in attendance give offerings in honor of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

2. History

Regarding the history of the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual, Ven. Kim Gu-Hae, Director of Yeongsanjae Preservation Association, says, “Passed down to us since the Koryŏ Dynasty (917-1392 C.E.)”⁹ (*YR 2014*, 7), “It [The 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual] is Buddha’s most magnificent and impressive Buddhist ritual passed down through the ages.” (*YR 2014*, 10). According to Kim, the Yeongsanjae ritual dates back to the Koryŏ dynasty and its tradition has been transmitted down through the ages, even up to the present.

3. Nature

The *YR 2014* points out: “As preserver/transmitter of The Yeongsanjae Ritual (Rep. of Korean Important Intangible Cultural Property No. 50), Pongwŏnsa Temple’s Yeongsanjae Preservation Association conducts regular performances for world peace and national reunification”; “The ceremony is held in hopes of leading both the living and the departed into the joy of enlightenment and perpetual peace”; and “It is a ceremony that prays for the unity of the living and the deceased in the Dharma throughout the universes.” Kim Kuhae says, “The Yeongsanjae ritual, in addition to being a reenactment of the Buddha Sakyamuni’s delivery of the Lotus Sutra, is renowned as a Dharma Assembly that contributes to national fortune and harmony and world peace, while at the same serving as an opportunity to symbolically spread the Buddha’s teachings in order to relieve sentient beings of their sufferings.” (*YS 2014*, 7) and “We dedicate the ceremony to the nation and to the spirit who have served their country so dearly.” Kim also emphasizes, “The Yeongsanjae Ritual should be revered as a truly important Buddhist ritual, not as simply a ‘performance’ ” (*YR 2014*, 7-10), manifesting that the ritual is an important religious ritual. Scholars have also argued the Yeongsanjae ritual was intended to promote the spread of Buddhism to the ordinary masses (Sim 2011, 200), along with promise of salvation to all sentient beings (Kim 2002, 101).

⁸ As for trend in research on Korean Buddhist ritual, see Yi 2014, 18-24.

⁹ The year 917 is an error of the year 918.

Therefore, the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual was an important Buddhist ritual that was held with multiple purposes of the fulfillment of world peace, the reunification of the divided Koreas, the solace of the war dead, the edification of people, the attainment of enlightenment, and the propagation of the Buddha's teaching.

4. Procedure

According to the *YR 2014* (pp. 2-3), the 2014 Yeongsanjae was composed of three parts, accompanied by elaborate Buddhist music, Buddhist dance, Buddhist paintings, lanterns, incense, flowers,¹⁰ cookies, tea, rice,¹¹ and dhāraṇīs chants. It was performed by 66 monks for eight hours from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Part One, the preparatory ritual, lasted for two hours from 10:00 to 12:00. Its contents included the ringing of a huge bell,¹² the invitation of the Buddha, bodhisattvas, Buddhist deities, and the spirits of the deceased, the symbolic bathing of the spirits of the deceased to wash off their defilements before listening to the Buddhist dharma, the transfer and raising of a huge Tangka painting¹³ to the ritual site,¹⁴ which occupies the greatest significance among the preparatory rituals and symbolizes to invite the Śākyamuni Buddha to the ritual site, and dharma talk by abbot of the monastery.

There was lunch time for two hours from 12:00-14:00 between Part One and Part Two. During the lunch time, the Meal Offering (*siktang chakpŏp*),¹⁵ the gem of the Yeongsanjae (Sim 2012b, 330-1), was performed along with an offering of food to monks and the general participants. Regarding this, the *YR 2014* says, "The Meal Offering is the meal provided to monks at a monastery for their efforts in conducting Dharma events such as ceremonies. Unlike usual meals, this Meal Offering is accompanied by music and chanting, as well as dancing and drumming. It is an extremely complex ritual, and the participants take the opportunity to dwell on whether they are worthy of receiving the offering, and to renew their fervor to practice the

¹⁰ Incense and flowers symbolize the infinite world of Buddhism and the Buddha (*YR 2014*, 21).

¹¹ Incense stands for liberation; lantern for wisdom; flower for all behaviors; fruit for donation; tea for sweet due; and rice for jollity from meditation (*YR 2014*, 6).

¹² "The huge bell is rung to signal the beginning of the ceremony, in which the Buddha, Bodhisattvas, gods, devas, guardians and other spirits are beseeched to come down from the heavens to join the ceremony a success. Bodhisattva as the Guide of Souls (*Illowang posal*) leads the spirits from outside the temple grounds to the ceremony site in a processional, with the palanquin symbolically carrying the spirits" (*YR 2014*, 12).

¹³ The Painting of the Assembly on the Miraculous Mountain (*Yeongsan hoesang do*) depicts the Buddha's teaching on Mt. Vulture Peak, which was later compiled as the *Lotus Sutra*, and served as a representative Buddhist painting of Korea during the latter period of the Choson dynasty, reflecting the cultural characteristics of the time (Yŏm 2010, 324).

¹⁴ "There are various types of huge outdoor Tangka painting, but the most commonly used in Korean Buddhism is the *Lotus Sūtra* Sermon Tangka. The Tangka, featuring the Buddha Sakyamuni, is carried to the ceremonial site and raised. This represents the appearance of the Buddha at the ceremony" (*YR 2014*, 14).

¹⁵ For an arrangement plan of the Meal Offering and its structure, see Sim 2012b, 343 and 349, respectively.

teachings of the Buddha. All of this is done in hopes of attaining compassion of the Buddha” (YR 2014, 27).

The Meal Offering is also accompanied by elaborate Buddhist dances and music. Buddhist ritual dances are considered a corporeal offering to the Buddha and various types of dances are performed in the Yeongsanjae ritual. They are composed of the drum dance (*pŏpkomu*), the butterfly dance (*ch’akpongmu*), the cymbal dace (*paramu*), and the pillar striking dance (*t’ajumu*), which are considered to be unique to Korea. The drum dance is a dance of hilarity and performed to awaken all sentient beings from their ignorance (Sim 2012a, 241-50). The butterfly dance is performed to invite Buddhas and bodhisattvas, which represents that the ritual place is the place where truth is being taught, and to protect the ritual place from evil spirits. The cymbal dace is intended to increase the accuracy of Buddhist music and is performed to represent merriment through the Buddha’s teaching (Sim 2011, 381-91). The pillar striking dance is performed to attain the Buddhist truth based on the Eightfold path, which include right view, and best exemplifies the Buddhist doctrine among Buddhist dances (Kim 2003, 124-125). As part of its process, the monk dancers topple a pillar which has the words of the Eightfold path printed on it. This acts as a symbolic expression representing the significance of the teachings of the Eightfold path.

Along with poetic (*kagok*) and epic songs (*p’ansori*), Buddhist music comprises one of the three representative vocal songs of Korea, and focuses on the inner spiritual world rather than outer beauty. Therefore, the purpose of Buddhist music is not simply based in the performance of song (Sim 2012a, 241-63) but aims to embody the middle path, which is also the purpose of Buddhism and Buddhist memorial ritual (Sim 2011, 380).

Part Two, the main ritual, lasted for two hours from 14:00-16:00 and its contents are composed of three parts: introduction, the main body, and conclusion. The main body consists of taking refuge in the Three Treasures of Buddhism - the Buddha,¹⁶ the Dharma, and the Saṅgha,¹⁷ which constitute the gist of the Yeongsanjae ritual (Sim 2011, 182). This part ends with Buddhist hymns, paeans, incantation to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, and the recitation of dhāraṇīs.

Part Three, the send-off ritual, lasted for two hours from 16:00-18:00 and its contents consisted of an offering to the ten kings in the Hades, an offering to all the Buddhist deities of the three realms of existence, prayers for fulfilling wishes and the verbal explanation of conditionality and impermanency, and an offering to the spirits of the deceased.

In sum, the 2014 *Yeongsanjae* Ritual is presumed to have originated from the Koryŏ dynasty, during which time it was important Buddhist memorial ritual performed for one day on the National Memorial Day, and developed as a tool for the fulfillment of this-worldly happiness and the attainment of enlightenment.

II. The Yeongsanjae Ritual as a Sŏn Practice: An Analysis

¹⁶ In particular, taking refuge in the Buddha with offerings of six things, including incense, and vocal sound is the beginning of the Yeongsanjae ritual and its gist.

¹⁷ This part is called an offering to the upper altar, which is considered the gist of the Yeongsanjae ritual as a representation of the meeting of the Buddha and bodhisattvas on Mt. Vulture Peak and aims to assist sentient beings to attain enlightenment (Chang 2011, 21).

In this section, the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual will be analyzed in terms of its characteristics and underlying ideologies.

1. Characteristics of the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual

The origin of the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual and its history still remains unclear. The ritual appeared to be very significant for the T'aego order. However, it functioned as a grand Buddhist performance for the monk-performers and the laity-observers rather than part of Sŏn practices for them. In addition, its structure and procedure are not systematized yet and still in progress.

(1) History

The origin of the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual is still in debate among scholars. Scholars have argued that feeding monks (*pansŭng*) was a precedent to the Yeongsanjae ritual (Sim 2011, 382); the Yeongsanjae ritual probably meant the *Suryukchae* ritual,¹⁸ which originated from the reign of Emperor Wu (r. 502-49) of Liang China and was a large scale Buddhist memorial ritual for the solace of sentient beings on water and land during the Chosŏn dynasty (Chang 2011, 3); or it was a refined form of the *Suryukchae* ritual (Sim 2011, 380).

The *YR 2014* records that the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual dates back to the Koryŏ dynasty. However, there remains disagreement among scholars as to what the original date may have been. They argue that: it was during the Koryŏ dynasty, attributing it to National Master Ŭich'ŏn (1055-1101) (Sim 2011, 42);¹⁹ or it was during the early period of the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910); or it was during the Chosŏn period (Sim 2005, 250). In addition, it is presumed that the Yeongsanjae ritual was performed for three days (Chang 2011, 5; Sim 2011, 46-47) at night in former days (Sim 2011, 380; Yi 2014, 208). The Yeongsanjae ritual in contemporary Korea has only a history of two decades. In addition, the contents of a ritual text change in different situations (Sim 2011, 2). In fact, Kim Kuhae says, "Beginning last year²⁰ we began performing the ritual annually on National memorial Day, June 6" (*YS 2014*, 7). This means that the ritual was not held on the National Memorial Day before 2007. The 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual was also held for eight hours during daylight hours. Although the notion of "tradition" was already under criticism by such scholars as Hobsbawm and Ranger (2012) and Fujitani (1998), the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual is considered to be in the process of making a "tradition" by the T'aego order.

(2) Nature

The 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual appeared to be a very significant event at least for the members of the T'aego order in that all the 66 monks affiliated with the order (*YS 2014*, 28-30)²¹ participated in it, and they performed the ritual with all their strength. However, in

¹⁸ For a discussion of the relationship between the *Yeongsanjae* and the *Suryukchae* rituals, Sim 2011, 42-46.

¹⁹ For the origin and history of the *Yeongsanjae* ritual, see Sim 2011, 35-46.

²⁰ According to the Korean version of this part (*YR 2014*, 6), the "last year" refers to the year 2007.

²¹ The T'aego order currently holds about 60 monks and over 100,000 lay followers (*YR 2014*, 6-8).

spite of the argument of the T'aego order that the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual was not just a "performance," it seems to remain just a grand Buddhist ritual.

The ritual also held political elements in terms of its subtitle, participants, and supporters' organizations. The subtitle of the 2014 Yeongsanjae Rituals was "Hoguk yŏngnyŏng kwa Sewŏlho hŭisaengja wangsang kŭngnak ūl wihan Yeongsanjae" (The Yeongsanjae Ritual for the rebirth of the spirits of the fallen patriots and the victims in the accident of the Sewol ferry.²² According to the "Ōsanbang" (List of participants in the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual) in the *YR 2014*, the dramatis personae in the ritual included three national assemblymen as advisors. In addition, the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism of Korea, and the Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea were among the supporters' organizations of the ritual. These political elements found in the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual points out that the idea of "Buddhism as national protector" (*hoguk Pulgyo*), one of the concepts to have characterized Korean Buddhism, is still effective in the realities of Buddhist communities in contemporary Korea. However, in his *Imagined Communities*, a classic of political science and history and one of the most important and influential books on the phenomenon of nationalism currently in print, Benedict Anderson had a detailed analysis of nation and nationalism as a community and an ideology, respectively, created in imagination (Anderson 1991), and the concept of the "Buddhist as national protector" also has been under criticism (Kim 1995, 23-55; Kim 2001, 277-86) in the academic world in Korea and overseas.

(3) Function

The function of the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual appears to be significant for the Taego order, but its significance was not as part of Sŏn practice but in terms of "practical considerations."²³ In addition, the role of the ritual for the laity was not significant and it primarily served as a simple Buddhist ritual.

In fact, the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual appears not to have fulfilled its goals. This is because as in the case of a Buddhist ritual in late morning in contemporary Korea (Kim 2007, 11-32), the 2014 Yeongsanjae Rituals was highly stratified both spatially and temporally, no clear evidence was found to support the contentions that it functions to solidify the identity of the participants in the ritual, and is an outward expression of the key Buddhist doctrine of the *Lotus Sūtra*. In addition, key Buddhist texts recited or read in the ritual site were recorded in classical Chinese, which is hardly accessible to the laity. The *Heart Sūtra* (*Panya sim kyŏng*) is also recited in the Sino-Korean pronunciation. Moreover, the *Thousand Hands Sūtra* (*Ch'ŏnsu kyŏng*) is recited in the Sanskrit-Korean pronunciation,²⁴ which is incomprehensible even to most of the monk-performers regardless of the laity. However, the laity are almost

²² The accident of the Sewŏl ferry refers to Korea's worst offshore incident occurred on April 16, 2014. In that accident the ferry named Sewŏl that carried about 500 passengers and crew, including 300-plus high-school students, sank on a trip to Cheju Island, causing hundreds of casualties.

²³ I quoted this term from Martina Deuchler. Deuchler suggested that certain social transformations that took place during the Chosŏn period were a result of practical considerations, i.e. of a "logic of practice," rather than of "Confucianization" as an ideal force (Walraven 2012, 106).

²⁴ For principal chantings used in Korean monasteries, including the *Heart Sūtra* and the *Thousand Hands Sūtra*, see Buswell 1992, 229-42; Robŏt Bŏswel 2000, 295-319.

incomprehensible of its meaning.²⁵ Then, why do they, monks and the laity, recite the text or dhāraṇīs without understanding its meaning? This issue may be related to the educational level. Scholars already pointed out that one's educational level is correlated to his religiosity. In his recent article in the *Mensa* magazine, Paul G. Bell argues that the higher one's intelligence or educational level is, the less one is likely to be religious (Dawkins 2002). In their "Leading scientists still reject God" (*Nature* 394 [1998], 313), E. J. Larson and L. Witham also argue that most top American scientists were atheists (Dawkins 2002). It is also important to note that nearly one in the three people in the Arab world, where most of the people are Muslims, is illiterate, including nearly half of all women in the region, and three-quarters of the 100 million people unable to read or write in the 21 Arab countries are aged between 15 and 45 years old.²⁶ It is also noticeable that radical imams used the content of the *Quran*, "Martyred warriors in the Jihad shall be compensated by 70 brown-eyed virgins in the heavenly paradise," as a tool for mobilizing warriors. However, there was one exception: the members of the Islamic State (IS) believe that one who was killed by a woman cannot go to heaven, and female foes are considered the most dreadful existence even for those who are brave enough to take a suicidal attack.²⁷

Buddhist followers in contemporary Korea are predominantly comprised of women in their forties, in low-economic-status, and low-educated. A recent study also reports that only one out of ten Buddhist followers read Buddhist texts (Ch'oe 2014), thus remaining "Buddhist illiterates."²⁸ Many of the laity-observers of the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual looked not different. There is a saying that belief comes from magnificence (Sato Mitsuo 1991, 3), and the magnificent size [of a Buddhist event] appeals to those of lower educational level (Yöm 2010, 331). In addition, the Buddha's birthday, when elaborate Buddhist rituals are accompanied, in contemporary Korea is one of the largest income-producing events of the year (Buswell 1992, 46; Roböt Böswell 2000, 67), and memorial rituals for payment constitute an important part of Buddhist events of most Korean monasteries. Although there were no forced activities for donation in the ritual site, Buddhist followers who visit a monastery in general make a rule to donate to the monastery. In this sense, it is highly probable that the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual played a role as a major income-producing Buddhist event of the T'aego order.

In short, unlike the argument of the T'aego order that The [2014] Yeongsanjae Ritual should be revered as a truly important Buddhist ritual, not as simply a 'performance' (YR 2014, 10),

²⁵ In contrast, Chinese Buddhist followers understood its meaning. When I visited the Dharma Drum University in Taiwan for a conference in 2011, I joined a Buddhist ritual in early morning held in the Buddhist hall. The ritual ended with the recitation of the *Heart Sūtra* in the Chinese pronunciation. After the ritual, when I asked several of the participants in it whether or not they could understand the meaning of the sūtra, their answer was that they could understand it.

²⁶ http://wikiislam.net/wiki/Muslim_Statistics_-_Education_and_Employment (accessed September 29, 2014).

²⁷ <http://news.donga.com/3/all/20140929/66796220/1> (accessed September 29, 2014).

²⁸ The Academy of American Religion coined a neologism of "religious illiteracy" in 2010, which meant the lack of understanding of the basic doctrine of world religious traditions, and emphasized the significance of education about religions academically and non-devotionally as a way to reducing religious illiteracy. The world of religious studies in Korea recently adopted this concept to explain the situation of religion in contemporary Korea (Ryu 2013).

this ritual appears to play a role as “simply a performance” with splendor and grandeur to appeal the laity who are not much familiar with what the Buddha actually taught.

(4) Procedure

The structure of Buddhist memorial rituals, including the Yeongsanjae ritual, is in general composed of invitation, offering, and a memorial service for the deceased (Sim 2011, 12; Kim 2013, 17-18). Diverse ideas exist regarding the structure of Buddhist ritual in contemporary Korea, including its texts and performances. Although there is a unified ritual text in Korean Buddhist communities, each Buddhist order or each monastery uses its own ritual text (Yi 2014, 5-6). However, the structure of Korean Buddhist ritual is not systematized yet and has changed in accordance with circumstances (Yi 2014, 379-80). The 2014 Yeongsanjae ritual is not an exception in this regard. The procedure of the Yeongsanjae ritual is different among Buddhist ritual texts (Chang 2011, 20-22)²⁹ and the exact procedure of the Meal Offering is also unknown. Therefore, since the ritual procedures of the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual is not yet become systematized, there remains room for change in the future.

(5) Doctrine

First of all, the T'aego order emphasizes the significance of the transfer of merit. It says, “The merit derived from conducting the Yeongsanjae is transferred to the monks, followers and spirits who have taken part in the ceremony, and prayers are offered so that all suffering sentient beings may reach the shores of Nirvana.” (YR 2014, 26).” However, the Buddha utilized the idea of the transfer of merit as an expedient (Kalupahana 1995, 98-99) and the doctrines of karma and rebirth as a wager (Kalupahana 1995, 106) or a metaphor (Kalupahana 1995, 145). In fact, the Buddha greatly emphasized one’s own will and action.

Scholars have argued that Buddhist ritual is a precious treasure of Buddhist doctrine (Yi 2014, 382); it is the pure rule and a path to cultivation (Sim 2011, 379); in general, Buddhist memorial rituals are based on the doctrine of dependent origination, the theory of transmigration, and the idea of meritorious virtue (Yön 2007, 265); an understanding of the Yeongsanjae ritual means that of the whole of Korean Buddhism, which is represented by syncretic Buddhism (*wönyung Pulgyo*) (Sim 2011, 2); and the Yeongsanjae ritual stands for the materialization of Buddhist doctrine into one’s religious life (Sim 2011, 258-9). They also say that the combination of ideal life and real life is represented in the *Heart Sūtra* and the Meal Offering, and Buddhist dances in the Yeongsanjae ritual converge to the real feature of all existence (Sim 2012a, 241-59).

However, these Buddhist doctrines were not expressed well through the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual. For example, the toppling of the pillar by kicking did not convey the meaning of the Eightfold Path to the observers. In addition, major bodhisattvas appearing in the ritual include Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva and Bodhisattva as the Guide of Souls whose role is not to teach people Buddhist doctrine but to have compassion for people and to guide the spirits of the deceased, respectively.

²⁹ A detailed account of the procedure and content of the *Yeongsanjae* ritual, see Sim 2011, 127-365.

2. The 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual and Sŏn Buddhism

The T'aego order takes the monk T'aego Pou (1301-83), who flourished during the Koryŏ dynasty (918-1392), as its founder, and proclaims itself to be a Sŏn Buddhist order. Therefore, it is natural that the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual is associated with Sŏn Buddhism and developed as part of Sŏn Buddhist practices. However, Sŏn Buddhist elements are rarely found in the ritual and this ritual clearly opposes the traditional scholarship that Zen Buddhism rejected ritual.

According to T. Griffith Foulk, modern Japanese Zen scholars constructed the antiritual theme in Zen in order to make Zen more relevant to the modern age (Heine and Wright 2008, 16), and in Western literature Zen also has been repeatedly represented by its bibliophobic nature and emphasis on enlightenment to one's mind and manual labor. However, scholars in recent years argued that the Zen tradition of East Asia never rejected the ritual. Chan/Zen Buddhist communities in traditional China (Adamek 2003, 36-73) and Japan (Foulk and Sharp 2003, 74-150) worshipped the portraits of Chan/ Zen masters. It was not an exception in traditional Korea. The Sŏn monk Hyujŏng (1520-1604), the grandfather of modern Korean Buddhism (Buswell 1999, 135-46), also authored a Buddhist ritual text titled *Unsudan* (Cloud and Water Altar) (Kim J. 2013). Albert Welter and Paula K. R. Arai also provide a concrete analysis of Zen ritual in the earliest stages of Japanese Zen and in the contemporary Sŏtō sect of Zen, respectively (Heine and Wright 2008, 16-18). Therefore, the emphasis on ritual of the T'aego order as a Sŏn Buddhist order is not new in light of the East Asian Buddhist tradition. Buswell argues, "Modern Sŏn monastic life in Korea offers a valuable counterparadigm to the usual Western portrayals of Zen, an alternative vision that yields quite a different picture of the day-to-day reality of Zen religious experience from that to which we in the West have become accustomed." (Buswell 1992, 217-23; Robŏt Bŏswel 2000, 277-84). In this sense, the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual may contribute to broadening scholarly horizons of Zen studies. For all that, it is problematic that Sŏn Buddhist elements, including emphasis on mind, are rarely found in the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual.

The essential Buddhist texts of the T'aego order are the *Diamond Sutra* (*Kumgang kyŏng*) and the *Flower Garland Sutra* (*Hwaŏm kyŏng*),³⁰ whose tenet is emptiness and totality or conditionality, respectively. However, the ideas of emptiness and conditionality were not presented through the process of the 2014 *Yeongsanjae* Ritual. Rather, the ritual was marked by the splendid customs of the monk-performers and the loud sound of musical instruments. There was no mutual relationship between monk-performers and laity-observers. Moreover, the source text of the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual is the *Lotus Sūtra* (YR 2014, 10) and its doctrine is the true feature of all existence. However, the doctrinal underpinnings of this scripture emphasized in the ritual were not the true feature of all existence but the eternity of the Buddha's body and the immeasurable lifespan of the Buddha (Sim 2011, 392). This means that the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual gave the top priority not to doctrine but to devotion.

In sum, the underling doctrine behind the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual appears to be far from the spirit of Sŏn Buddhism, thus representing the ritual simply as a Buddhist performance with splendor and grandeur. There is an argument that researchers on ritual need to understand the position of insiders (An 2009, 185). This is true in one sense, and the insiders refer to the

³⁰ "Soŭi kyŏngjŏn" (Essential Canons), <http://www.taego.kr> (accessed September 15, 2014).

monk-performers in the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual. However, consideration for the laity-observers is equally important. This is more so in that the Yeongsanjae ritual as part of intangible cultural heritages of the humanity designated by the UNESCO is now open to the public, and is no longer a ritual for the sake of the monastic members associated with a particular Buddhist order. Buddhist ritual needs to be congruous with the essential tenet of a given Buddhist order and to play a role in materializing Buddhist doctrine into action (Yi 2014, 383).

The World Heritage properties currently listed on the home page of the World Heritage Centre demonstrates the successful lobbying efforts of the UNESCO commissions' national representatives (Pai 2013, xvii). In particular, Asian nations' tourist destinations have become the most anticipated growth area for attracting global capital investments, municipal funds, and real estate developers (Picard and Wood 1997; T. Oakes 1997, recited from Pai 2013, xviii). In addition, at the reception after my lecture at the Center for Korean Culture in France in January of 2014, a French participant in it, who once worked for the UNESCO, informed me of the significance of the political lobbying of each country in relation to the registration of heritage properties, suggesting that the registration of the Yeongsanjae ritual on the UNESCO heritage list itself, which has been emphasized by the organizer of the ritual, does not guarantee its authenticity in content and superiority in quality.

Conclusion

Based on my observation of the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual performed at Pongwŏn Monastery in Seoul, Korea, this paper examined an overview of the ritual, including its history, and analyzed the ritual, including its relation to Sŏn Buddhist practices in contemporary Korea. This paper came to a conclusion that: the origin of the Yeongsanjae ritual still remains unclear; the ritual is in its formative period, including its history, structure, and procedure; although the ritual emerges as a very important ritual for the maintenance of the T'aego order, its religious significance particularly for the laity was not great and remains just a Buddhist performance with splendor and grandeur; and, above all, doctrinal underpinnings behind the 2014 Yeongsanjae Ritual appeared to be far from the spirit of Sŏn Buddhism; nevertheless, the Korean ritual shows well that Sŏn Buddhism in Korea does not reject ritual, supplementing the arguments by Heine and Wright. This result also suggests that the Yeongsanjae ritual needs to be reborn as a Buddhist ritual faithful to what the Buddha actually taught and to the spirit of Sŏn Buddhism in Korea rather than as a grand performance under secular and political influence.

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