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*Purification Buddhist Movement, 1954-1970:  
The Struggle to Restore Celibacy in the Jogye Order of  
Korean Buddhism*

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# A Review of *Purification Buddhist Movement, 1954-1970: The Struggle to Restore Celibacy in the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism*

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*Purification Buddhist Movement, 1954-1970: The Struggle to Restore Celibacy in the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism*. By Ven. Chanju Mun. Honolulu, Hawai'i: Blue Pine Books, 2011, ISBN 978-0-9777553-6-3 (paperback), \$35.

Ven. Chanju Mun is a Korean Jogye monk and chief editor of Blue Pine Books. He has written the most complete historiography of the Purification Buddhist Movement in Korea, which followed the Japanese Occupation of the peninsula from 1910-1945. Some previous scholarship has dealt with the movement, including Pori Park's essay, "The Buddhist Purification Movement in Postcolonial South Korea: Restoring Clerical

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<sup>2</sup> Pori Park, "The Buddhist Purification Movement in Postcolonial South Korea: Restoring Clerical Celibacy and State Intervention," in *Identity Conflicts: Can Violence be Regulated?*, ed. J. Craig Jenkins and Esther E. Gottlieb, (New Brunswick [USA] and London [UK]: Transaction Publishers, 2007), 131-145.

<sup>3</sup> See Michael K. Jerryson and Mark Juergensmeyer, eds., *Buddhist Warfare*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) for examples of violence. See Fabio Rambelli, "'Just Behave as You Like; Prohibitions and Impurities Are Not a Problem': Radical Amida Cults and Popular Religiosity in Premodern Japan," in *Approaching the Land of Bliss:*

Celibacy and State Intervention.”<sup>2</sup> Park’s essay focuses mainly on the political situation surrounding the movement. The essay suggests that the President I Seungman (1875-1965) used the minority celibate monastics as a political tool in furthering his erasure of colonial Japanese influence. Conversely, Mun uses an emic philosophical analysis in order to place the agency for the Movement with the Buddhist orders themselves. He shows the various strategies that were employed by the Buddhist orders to further their goals.

Many other accounts of the movement were produced by the Jogye and Taego orders, the two largest in Korean Buddhism, themselves. This book represents the most complete academic account in English produced thus far. The Purification Movement sought to eradicate married monastics and non-vegetarianism from the *sangha*. As a result, Korean Buddhism split between the majority Jogye Order which claims celibate monasticism and the Taego Order which allows for marriage. Mun writes a detailed historiography, providing a narrative which traces his philosophical typologies of sectarianism and ecumenism throughout the entirety of Korean Buddhist history.

Mun begins his monograph with a review of the academic literature surrounding the Purification Buddhist Movement. Most of the academic literature described is in Korean, and much of it is actually the production of the Jogye and Taego orders themselves. Mun’s overview makes these sources accessible in English. Similarly, it displays why Mun’s resource is so necessary. Aside from scholarly historiography, Mun also adapts the dates often associated with the Purification Buddhist Movement. Traditionally, the movement is cited as 1954-1962. This dates the movement with President I Seungman’s first presidential (May 20, 1954) message regarding the *sangha* and ends with the united

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Jogye administration. Mun extends this chronological frame to May 8, 1970, or the date of the Taego Order separation.

In Part One of the book, Mun begins the historical narrative from the Late Silla era (668-935) of the Seventh Century and traces the tensions of sectarianism and ecumenism throughout. In Western scholarship, ecumenism is often portrayed as a hallmark of Korean Buddhist history. Robert Buswell, Richard D. McBride, and others have all placed this philosophy at the center of Korean Buddhist thought. Mun complicates the narrative by discussing the occurrences of sectarianism throughout Korean Buddhist history and describes the instances of sectarianism and ecumenism simultaneously present within a single figure or institution. Taego, for instance, is often held as the central figure for Korea's *Dharma* lineage but this is complicated by his simultaneous use of ecumenical philosophy and sectarian Linji Chan *Dharma* transmission.

Scholars of East Asian Buddhism more broadly can benefit from Mun's discussion surrounding the academic study of *Dharma* lineages. Mun argues these links are often constructed and lack historical authenticity. He further claims that relationships of *Dharma* transmission are not one-sided, from master to pupil. He argues that we must take into account historical and social contexts, as well as the role of colleagues, other masters, and doctrinal disagreements between master and student. Mun discusses scholars of Korean Buddhism who have merely followed the emic line of succession propagated in Korean Buddhism which links Taego's Linji Chan lineage, brought from Shiwu Qingong (1272-1352) in China to the present day. Mun asserts that these direct lines are historically inaccurate and politically constructed. This is not to say *Dharma* lineages are not important for the study of East Asian Buddhism, rather that their importance lies in "a-historical or trans-historical" terms (51).

In Part Two, Mun begins to engage with the Purification Buddhist Movement. He analyzes the normative ideals upheld by the movement,

which include the *Vinaya* and the Brahma Net Sūtra. Mun presents the tenets which create the movement's orthodoxy and orthopraxy. The orthopraxy of the movement includes prohibitions on meat-eating, non-dispute amongst members of the *sangha*, nonviolence, and perhaps most importantly, celibacy. This section provides an interesting emic analysis of the historical situation and may work well as a template for textual analysis related to socio-historical studies. However, the merit of holding normative sūtra literature as a comparison to actual behavior is debatable. For instance, although Korean Buddhism has traditionally based its precepts on the Brahma Net Sūtra, to suggest monks and nuns do not always live up to these standards seem to be nearly a truism. Although always an interesting comparison, instances of monks and nuns behaving badly seem to present themselves so regularly so as to appear standard.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps what is more interesting here is Mun's ability to prove the Jogye and Taego orders adapted, upheld, or disavowed precepts in a politically motivated ad-hoc fashion. He presents the normative ideals of the *Vinaya* and Brahma Net Sūtra before describing the behavior and arguments of the Purification Buddhist Movement in order to display how they employed and embodied the ideals for their particular situation.

In Part Three, Mun details the colonial period of Korean Buddhism from 1910-1945. The colonial administration established the office of the Government-General and controlled all Korean Buddhist lineages through Temple Ordinances. The administration created a situation in which married monastics were made the most powerful.

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<sup>3</sup> See Michael K. Jerryson and Mark Juergensmeyer, eds., *Buddhist Warfare*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) for examples of violence. See Fabio Rambelli, "‘Just Behave as You Like; Prohibitions and Impurities Are Not a Problem’: Radical Amida Cults and Popular Religiosity in Premodern Japan," in *Approaching the Land of Bliss: Religious Praxis in the Cult of Amitābha*, eds. Richard K. Payne and Kenneth K. Tanaka, 169-197, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), for examples of sexual misconduct. Examples of monastics behaving in a manner which does not coincide with *Vinaya* rules are also prevalent throughout *Purification Buddhist Movement*, most noticeably including acts of violence.

Previous narratives of colonial-era Korean Buddhism pit the pro-Japanese married monastics against the nationalist celibate *sangha*. Mun provides numerous examples to the contrary, including Han Yongun (1879-1944) who was a Korean nationalist monk and wrote in favor of married monasticism. He suggests many nationalist monks were married because of their institutional roles, while many celibate Seon monks were content to disregard political strife in favor of practice. This historiography complicates previous dichotomous narratives from scholars of Korean Buddhism.

In the final section of the book, the Purification Buddhist Movement begins with the announcement of President I Seungman to purify the *sangha* and remove Japanese influence from Korean Buddhism. The management of temples was also a central issue, as married monks did not want to concede any of their power. Like the matters of celibacy and vegetarianism, temple management became an issue of Korean Nationalism whereby neither side would allow for any ecumenical leeway. As Mun argues, the sectarian principles of the celibate monastics adapted orthodoxy in order to promote violence and dispute amongst the *sangha* and further their nationalistic and political objectives. The disputes were fought through violence in temples and by engaging court cases against the respective organizations. The celibate monks which became the united Jogye Order promoted sectarianism and would not allow for the coalition of married monastics to even exist within the united order. Doctrinally, the Jogye Order advocated ecumenism by allowing for multiple patriarchs and lineages within a single organization. Politically, the Order refused ecumenism for nationalism and forced the married monastics out of the order. To the present day, Korean Buddhism remains split between the Taego and Jogye Orders. This time period had other lasting affects for Korean Buddhism as well.

Mun complicates the traditional narratives provided by the Jogye Order by identifying positive effects of Japanese Occupation on Korean Buddhism. He argues the Japanese administration pushed the

modernization of Korean Buddhism. The influence of the Japanese promoted well-organized temples, social activities, and other modern changes. The historical record is much more complicated than the picture given by the Jogye Order.

The most significant contribution of Mun's book is the complication of the historical record. Rather than the traditional narrative of the celibate *sangha* purifying Korean Buddhism from the Japanese influence of married monasticism, Mun's philosophical analysis allows him to view the issue from multiple angles. Mun provides the historical, doctrinal, political, and economic influences working upon and against the movement. He attempts to remain outside of the traditional polemic arguments and analyzes each side's strategic use of issues in order to promote their sectarian goals. His text helps to complicate traditional dichotomous interpretations of married "Japanified" monastics versus the celibate nationalist *sangha* (Mun 3). The text provides a much fuller picture of the historical narrative, which is of great benefit to scholars of East Asian Buddhism generally.

Buddhist Purification Movement is published by an ordained Jogye monk employing his own press. Ven. Chanju Mun received his Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2002. Blue Pine Books is not a university press, and often publishes books on subjects such as "Buddhism and Peace," with this text as the second published historical work. He dedicates his book to "Tongdo-sa Temple's monastics who have tremendously helped Korean Buddhists preserve celibate monasticism in modern Korean Buddhism" (Dedication Page). As mentioned above, a great deal of the literature cited throughout the text is in Korean or Japanese, meaning those without the ability to access these materials must rely on Mun's interpretation. All of these issues provide possible issues regarding the text. However, the substantial quality of the research undertaken is of a very high caliber. Mun cites Western and non-Western academics and engages his own translations

of primary sources in order to analyze the Movement from every possible angle.

As for critique of the text, a few issues do arise for readers. Mun's philosophical typology between ecumenism and sectarianism does become somewhat convoluted at times. His definitions are hard to follow at various times and seem relatively ad hoc. However, this typology does seem to explain many of the interactions surrounding the Purification Buddhist Movement. Similarly, the ecumenical spirit often ascribed to Korean Buddhism can be complicated with the influence of sectarian ideas. Although not necessarily a critique of Mun's writings, he provides so many names, dates, and philosophical lineages as to be very difficult for the uninitiated reader.

Nevertheless, for those studying East Asian Buddhism, the book provides an excellent source and complicates the historical narrative. The book represents a major contribution for Korean and East Asian Buddhist Studies with its detailed historiography and multi-disciplinary approach.