

***Empire of the Dharma: Korean and Japanese Buddhism, 1877-1912.* Hwansoo Ilmee Kim, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012, xxvi.**

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At first glance, it seems improbable that a comparative study of early twentieth-century engagement between Korean and Japanese Buddhist orders could tell us much about larger issues regarding Japanese colonialism in Korea. The presence of Buddhism in Korea and Japan extends to ancient times, enjoying periods of major influence over the centuries; but in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Buddhism faced an uncertain future due to geo-political shifts in their respective countries. Unseating Buddhism from its pedestal was one of the mandates of the founders of the Chosŏn Dynasty (1392-1910) that systematically suppressed Buddhism and banned Buddhist monks from the capital. While Japan's Tokugawa *bakufu* (1600-1868) did not target Buddhism in the same manner as Chosŏn Korea, Buddhism after the establishment of Imperial Japan (1868) became secondary to the Emperor who was ascribed with god-like characteristics and demanded religious devotion and observance.

In his imaginative, rich, and thought-provoking study, Hwansoo Ilmee Kim turns Buddhism's supposed weakness into methodological strengths. He argues that it is exactly Buddhism's complex interweaving of narra-

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tives that problematizes colonial history—in effect, complicating historiographical paradigms that tend to reduce actors in early twentieth century Korea to “either-or” classifications.

Inspired by Charles Hallisey’s critique of one-dimensional interpretations of the colonizer and colonized and Pierre Bourdieu’s work on overcoming binary constructs, Kim sets out to explore the engagement between Korean and Japanese Buddhism as sites for reexamining the prevailing interpretation about Korean Buddhism in the early twentieth century. As Japanese imperialism spread to Korea, Japanese Buddhist sects for the first time undertook a transnational expansion. A Pan-Asian Buddhist culture was envisioned whereby greater participation between the Buddhist sects would strengthen itself against common challenges, most notably the advancement of Christianity in Korea and Japan. Aligning itself with Meiji nationalism and ideology, Japanese Buddhist sects entered Korea as a part of the increasing Japanese influence over the peninsula. As such, marginalized and disenfranchised Korean Buddhist sects sought to create what Kim argues was a “strategic relationship” between Korean and Japanese Buddhism. Kim’s choice of case studies and his comparative approach are effective in demonstrating parts of this complexity, such as the Wŏnjong (Complete Sect) counterbalancing the perspective of competing Japanese sects even as it seeks affiliation and protection from them. The relationship between Korean and Japanese Buddhism was without a doubt an unequal one considering their respective states under the colonizer-colonized rubric, but Kim complicates this seemingly simplistic narrative by introducing inter-Buddhist negotiation within a transnational context that reveals a framework of Korean Buddhism’s struggle for recognition and support in pre-colonial rapprochement. For example, Wŏnjong contested representations formed by Japanese sects and developed counter-narratives through a critique of Japanese Buddhism as sectarian and mired in “fragmentariness” (p.318).

The book is divided into seven chapters which are aimed “to provide a thorough revision and comprehensive understanding of the history of the relationship between Korean and Japanese Buddhism from the late nine-

teenth century to mid-1912” (p. 12). Chapter 1 deals with the historical development of Korean and Japanese Buddhism, highlighting the Chosŏn Dynasty’s anti-Buddhist policies that created a situation whereby Korean Buddhist leaders sought assistance from Japanese Buddhists beginning in the late eighteenth century. Chapter 2 discusses the evolving identities among Korean and Japanese Buddhist leaders as the pending collapse of the Chosŏn Dynasty and Meiji modernist reforms re-shaped the political and religious landscape. Unshackled from the restraints under Chosŏn, Korean Buddhist leaders highlighted their historical origins and contributions to Japanese Buddhism since ancient times.

Chapters 3 and 4 discuss competing visions of Korean and Japanese Buddhism. As the reality of Japanese colonization of Korea became more evident, Japanese Buddhist sects vied to incorporate Korean Buddhism and re-assert Korean Buddhism’s position in Korea. Although Korean Buddhist leaders affiliated themselves with Japanese Buddhism (and thereby adjoining to the larger narratives of colonialism), Korean Buddhists determined that an alliance with Japanese Buddhist sects provided the “best opportunity” to position Korean Buddhism in the wake of shifting political realities. As in all the book’s chapters, the richness of Kim’s material—in both Korean and Japanese sources—is quite extraordinary, his conceptual distinctions often astute, and his conclusions informative. Kim provides a more nuanced understanding of how alliances and positioning in the early twentieth century inform, in surprisingly fluid ways, larger Buddhist transformations in Korea and Japan. Despite being dominated by a foreign power, the participant observer methodology offers an “insider’s” view of the consciousness of Korean Buddhism and their efforts to resist, challenge, and impact existing power structures.

The final three chapters constitute the book’s most original contribution. They discuss the role of Buddhism in colonial Korea, the complicated story of the negotiation between Korean and Japanese Buddhist leaders, and the lasting impact of the 1911 Temple Ordinance that severed Korea-Japan institutional links and effectively redrew the Buddhist landscape by setting up a separate development of the two Buddhisms. Here, more than

anywhere else in the book, we see the in-betweenness and complex rhythmic structures of early twentieth century Korea-Japan relations: how Korean Buddhism emerged from Chosŏn's shadows and how, in the unpredictable years leading up to the Japanese colonization of Korea, Korean Buddhist leaders were engaged in a complex negotiation with their counterparts in Japan (at times contentiously) as each side with distinct interests vied for a greater stake in the direction and authority of Korean Buddhism.

The originality and empirical richness of this fine study might have benefited from more attention to the activities of Korean monks, especially in the years leading up to Japanese colonization, which would have complemented the extensive analysis of Takeda and the Sōtō-Wŏnjong agreement of 1910. Nevertheless, Kim delineates a careful study of the contestation of the soul of Buddhism at the most critical juncture in modern Korean history, a contribution that will be used for many years as a reference for scholars. Although Kim's main objective was to problematize the conventional narratives of Korean Buddhism's relationship with Japanese colonialism, he furthermore succeeded in critically acknowledging the appraisals of the complex web of political, economic, and religious forces in play and the difficulties Korean leaders face in balancing strategic concerns under the larger framework of colonialism.