Representation of Wonhyo (617–686) in Modern Korean Buddhist Society

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Abstract

This paper examines the background and aspects of the modern rediscovery of Wonhyo (617–686). Since the late 19th century, Wonhyo rapidly gained attention and was re-evaluated by Korean and Japanese Buddhists and intellectuals in the context of rapid changes in the society and the Buddhist community of that time. Wonhyo began to be characterized as a heroic figure, a source of national pride, a progressive-minded reformer, a symbol of T’ong Pulgyo, a warrior monk, and an ideological founder of Jogye order. Namely, under Japanese colonial rule, Wonhyo began to regain fame as a person who represented the ideology and culture of the nation rather than as a monk who realized

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the ultimate truths of Buddhism. Eminent elite monks and intellectuals built Wonhyo’s characteristics into a usable image and spread it through newspapers, journals, books, and speeches. Such images of Wonhyo have been constantly reproduced and disseminated by influential figures of Korean society up to this day; consequently, the general public has largely accepted these fixed images of Wonhyo as a historical fact without question. However, in fact, the fictitious elements and the national consciousness in the modern images of Wonhyo that are not actually found in hagiographical and historical accounts cannot be overlooked.

Key Words: Wonhyo, Modern Buddhism, Japanese colonialism, Korea Buddhism, T'ong Pulgyo, Hokuk Pulgyo

1. Introduction

This paper examines the background and aspects of the modern rediscovery of Wonhyo (617–686). Wonhyo is often described as one of the most eminent Buddhist thinkers and writers in Korean history. His major works, such as Taesŭng kisinlonso (Commentaries on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana) and Kŭmkang sammaekyonglon (Exposition of the Vajrasamadhi Sutra), have been widely read in East Asian Buddhist communities since his lifetime. Moreover, according to Samguk Yusa (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms), he was widely known to people of every class—from aristocrats to lower class people—in Silla as a monk who devised a mix of dance and singing called Muae (무애, non-hindrance).1) Wonhyo’s fame had endured until the middle of the Koryo Dynasty (918–1392), and King Sukjong (r. 1095–1105) awarded him the honorable title of Hwajaeng Kuksa (和諍國師, A National Preceptor of the Harmonization of Disputes).2)

Nevertheless, as Wonhyo neither formed a group of disciples nor developed a systematic ideological movement, during the period of the veneration of Confucianism and suppression of Buddhism in the Choson Dynasty (1392–1910), his fame gradually faded away, and his works were dispersed. Consequently, only an image of a mysterious monk, a legendary character, in the founding stories of historic temples across the country was passed down over time to posterity.

1) “Wonhyo, the Unbridled Monk (元曉不覊條)” in Samgukyusa (三國遺事) (Han’guk Pulgyo Chonso 6, 347b17–348b19).
2) Koryosa 11, King Sukjong 6, August.
However, the situation changed dramatically in the late 19th century. Wonhyo rapidly gained attention and was re-evaluated by Korean and Japanese Buddhists and intellectuals in the context of rapid changes in the society and the Buddhist community of that time. Wonhyo began to be characterized as a heroic figure, a source of national pride, a progressive-minded reformer, a symbol of *T’ong Pulgyo* (通佛敎, Interpenetrated Buddhism), a warrior monk, and an ideological founder of Buddhism who combined *Son* (禪, a school of meditation) and *Kyo* (敎, a school of doctrine). Namely, under Japanese colonial rule, Wonhyo began to regain fame as a person who represented the ideology and culture of the nation rather than as a monk who realized the ultimate truths of Buddhism.

This new trend in Wonhyo recognition was inextricably linked with the socio-political situation and the sudden changes in the Buddhist circles of modern Korea. Along with the Buddhist liberation policy of 1895,3) under the threat of the newly emerging Japanese Buddhism and Western religions, Korean Buddhism started seeking a uniquely Korean Buddhist identity and its intrinsic value by searching for the most suitable figure from history. Furthermore, the increasing popularity of social Darwinism, the Buddhist reformation movement, and the intensified war after the 1930s all forced Korean Buddhists to get out of temples and engage in social activities. Under these circumstances, Wonhyo emerged as the ideal model of Korean Buddhism because he was perceived as a monk who tried to take down the wall between sacred and secular after returning to his laymen status and associating actively with the public to transform monastic Buddhism into popular Buddhism.

Another important reason for the interest in Wonhyo was the discovery of new sources highlighting his life and achievements. Since the 1910s, Korean and Japanese Buddhists and scholars had investigated Wonhyo’s commentary works and essays, and eventually, by the late 1930s, approximately 90 of Wonhyo’s works had been accounted for, and the cumulative number was published in a Buddhist journal. Wonhyo’s accredited works totaled over two times more than the number of works counted by Washio Junkei 鷲尾順敬 (1868–1941), Takahashi Tōru 高橋亨 (1878–1967), and Jang Dobin 張道斌 (1888–1963) in the 1910s (Cho 1937, 21). Among Wonhyo’s

3) The termination of the ban against Buddhist monks entering capital city in 1895.
major works, *Hwaomkyongso* (*Commentary of Avatamsaka Sutra*), *Yijangūi* (*System of the Two Hindrances*), and *Simmun Hwajanglon* (*Reconciliation of Disputes in Ten Aspects*) received great attention in both Japan and Korea. 4) Spurred by Japanese scholars’ attention towards Wonhyo, Korean Buddhist intellectuals, especially those who studied in Japan in the early 20th century, began to reflect on their ignorance of Wonhyo and undertook the investigation of the lost manuscripts of Wonhyo.5)

In particular, Chong Hwangjin, who attended Sōtōshū University in Japan, had a chance to read an article about the discovery of a fragment of Wonyo’s *Hwaomkyongso* in 1915. He then visited the article’s author, a Rinzai priest named Imazu Kyōgaku (今津洪嶽, ?-?), to identify and obtain the related documents (Imazu 1915: Sahu 1921). Afterward, he continued to research the works left by Wonhyo, and in 1918, he managed to publish a list of Wonhyo’s writings titled “Taesong Hwachaeng-kuksa Wonhyo Chosul Ilramp’yo (The List of writings of Hwachaeng Kuksa Wonhyo, the Great Saint)” in *Choson Pulgyo Ch’ongbo* (Chong 1918b).

Through this process, Wonhyo gradually rose from an obscure and mysterious monk to the position of an honorable Buddhist thinker and writer. Moreover, in 1914, a previously undiscovered piece of *Sodang Hwasang pi* (*Stele of the Reverend Sodang, Wonhyo*), a monument to Wonhyo’s life and achievement, was found in Kyongju by the staff of the Japanese Governor-General of Korea (Oda 1920, 67).6) As a result, scholars began to recognize the fragmentary nature of data on Wonhyo’s life, including his birth and death date, early years, and achievements, and consequently, research on Wonhyo gradually became more active.

As mentioned above, there were many complicated circumstances that were involved in Wonhyo’s rediscovery: a resistance to the Japanese rule, a sense of yearning for Japanese Buddhism, a reaction against the remarks that insist Korean Buddhism

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4) *Mirūksangsangkyong Chongsyŏn saksang uphŏngch’ōng* (Kyōto University), *Yolban Chongyŏn songch’ōng* (Rinnō-ji), *Yijangūi* 二障義 and *Panbiryangnon*判比量論 (*Ōtani University*), etc. For example, Ono 1911; Imazu 1915; Nukaria 1930; Ōchō 1940; Cho 1937; Chong 1918a,b, 1920; Kim 1918 and so on.

5) For example, Chong Hwangjin pointed that “Even the people of other countries admire Wonhyo a great deal, how can our Korean people not worship Wonhyo? Since I have found these six kinds of preface [of Wonhyo’s works], I have repeatedly read them three times each day.” (Chong, “Chinyok Hwaonkyongso so” 1918a, 26–27)

is just an imitator of Chinese Buddhism, an effort to restore the status of Buddhism in Korean history, and so forth. Eminent elite monks and intellectuals built Wonhyo’s characteristics into a usable image and spread it through newspapers, journals, books, and speeches. Such images of Wonhyo have been constantly reproduced and disseminated by influential figures of Korean society up to this day; consequently, the general public has largely accepted these fixed images of Wonhyo as a historical fact without question. However, in fact, the fictitious elements and the national consciousness in the modern images of Wonhyo that are not actually found in hagiographical and historical accounts cannot be overlooked.

Despite these facts, it is hard to find any scholarly attempts to grasp the underlying background behind the changes in the perception of Wonhyo from the early 20th century to the present. Although Wonhyo is the most studied subject among the traditional Korean Buddhist figures, most studies have been exclusively focused on his life, philosophy, and certain commentaries. Therefore, this paper uses significant and specific examples to investigate Wonhyo’s images that were created in the 20th century as a result of the modern Korean political and religious circumstances.

2. Representations of Wonhyo in the Modern Era

1) Emergence as a National Hero

Buddhism, which the Choson dynasty viewed as a religion contrary to morality, was given the opportunity to re-emerge at the end of the 19th century, when it surged in popularity as a national religion to replace the confused state of the Confucian social order. At that time, Kwon Sangno 權相老 (1879–1965) named this trend “the period of regeneration and transition,” and Bak Hanyong 朴漢永 (1870–1948) called it “the revival period” (Kwon 1934; Bak 1914).7) One of the notable changes in the perception of Buddhism during this period was that most Korean intellectuals tried to equate Korean Buddhism with national identity. Even among Buddhists,

reconstructing Korean Buddhism as a national religion emerged as a primary concern rather than the pursuit of doctrines such as Nirvana and Anatman. This resulted from the transformation in the recognition of the others, Japan, China and Western countries, and as a response to the internal changes in the Korean Buddhist circle.

In particular, Korean Buddhism's relationship with Japanese Buddhism significantly impacted how Buddhism was revived in Korea. Since the Japanese branch's temple in Busan was established in 1877 by the Jōdoshin sect, Japanese Buddhism continued to infiltrate the Choson era with the theory of the requital of a favor (J. Hōon-ron) as their cause. More importantly, when the Japanese Governor-General of Colonial Korea promulgated the Temple Ordinance (寺刹令, J. Jisatsu rei) in 1911, resulting in the oppression of the Korean Buddhist system, the leading Korean Buddhists considered it urgent to seek the distinctive identity and autonomy of Korean Buddhism. Concurrently, Japanese colonialist scholars' remarks provoked a strong reaction from Korean intellectuals; for example, Takahashi Tōru (1878–1967) and Nukariya Kaiten (忽滑谷快天, 1867–1934) insisted on the non-originality of Korean Buddhism and emphasized the viewpoint called Sangoku Bukkyō Shiikan (三國佛教史觀), which explains the historical development of Mahayana Buddhism by focusing only on three countries (India, China, and Japan), thereby excluding Korea (see Takahashi 1921; Nukariya 1930). Regarding Western religions, after the signing of the France–Korea Treaty of 1886, Catholicism and Protestantism started increasingly contributing to the fields of medicine and education in Korea. These activities cumulatively posed a threat to the Korean Buddhist community. Thus, Korean Buddhists began paying attention to the relationship between Korean traditional culture and Buddhism as a factor that could aid in the competition against Western religions.

Interestingly, in this situation, Buddhists focused on the ancient times when Korea introduced its version of Buddhism to Japan, resulting in Buddhism becoming the national religion of Japan (see Cho 2012, 239–266). In particular, Korean Buddhists...
of the 19th century were proud of the fact that Wonhyo had established his own style of Buddhist studies during the Silla Dynasty without studying in China, unlike most of the eminent Buddhist monks at the time. There had been an increasing number of remarks, such as from “Korea’s unique Haetong (海東) and Punhwang (芬皇) sects of Wonhyo” (Chong 1919, 53–54; Kwon 1928, 2–8), that did not inherit the Chinese sectarian traditions. As another example, Kim Sangch’ol expressed his pride for the nation, “Choson is a country of saints, Choson is a Buddhist nation, and Choson is a genius civilized nation” (Kim 1925, 3), based on Wonhyo’s Kumkang sammaekyonglon, which was highly praised by Chinese and Japanese Buddhist scholars. Here, greater emphasis was put on “Choson,” as a proud nation that could create a genius like Wonhyo, rather than on Wonhyo’s characteristics themselves.

It is also worth noting that the people who led these discourses were not limited to those in Buddhist circles. Historians, journalists, and activists fighting for independence actively expressed their interest in Wonhyo. As a representative example, Chang Dobin published Wiin Wonhyo (偉人元曉, The Great Wonhyo) in 1917 under Sinmunkwan. Chang’s work suggests that the interest in Wonhyo at the time also developed to promote the idea of Buddhism as a force in the revival of Chosonhak (Korean studies), which centered on the organizations and publications of leading intellectuals. The Sinmunkwan and Hansong Toso Corporations led by Chang Dobin were modern publishing companies, where many Korean intellectuals published modern magazines, historical novels, translated biographies, and works of literature in an attempt to introduce foreign knowledge and enlighten the public.

One of the significant roles of such companies was the dissemination of historical biographies. By the late 1800s, heroism had been introduced throughout East Asia as a means of promoting patriotism and encouraging national enlightenment. Most Korean intellectuals tended to accept the theory of Social Darwinism and Self-Strengthening (自強論) through Liang Qichao’s (梁啓超 1873–1929) works and strived to translate his heroic biographies in circulation in Korea. These biographies include the Biography of Madame Roland the Foremost Women Hero of Modern Times and the Biography of the Three Makers of Italy. These significant historical figures were praised and

promoted by intellectuals as role models for the Korean people to emulate to contribute to the wealth and power of the country.

Chang Dobin, one of the important authors of heroic biographies in modern Korea, was influenced by Sin Ch’aeho 申采浩 (1880–1936), Jang Jiyon 張志淵 (1864–1921), and Bak Eonsik 朴殷植 (1859–1925) while serving on the editorial staff of *TaeHan Maeil Sinbo* (*The Korean Daily News*) and acting as a member of Sinminhoe. In particular, he published the *Choson Yongwung Chon* (*The Heroes of Choson*) (Koryŏkan, 1925), which was a collection of biographies on historical figures that Sin Ch’aeho had used for emphasis in various editorials to promote national accomplishments. Chang emphasized that Korean society should appropriately introduce outside culture and thoughts to keep up with the development of society while maintaining a national culture to avoid being overwhelmed by foreign cultures. For example, Chang wanted to raise the public awareness of Wonhyo’s spirit of independence and inclusiveness because, although Wonhyo observed Buddhism, an initially foreign religion, he was able to establish his unique system of thought from it. Chang also insisted that to enlighten the nation and build an advanced society, people must imitate their ancestors from ancient times who were known as being industrious, independent, and open-minded (see Kim 2011, 37–43). Among such figures, Chang stressed the greatness of Wonhyo’s spirit (Chang 1917, 62–63).

Another interesting point is that Chang frequently mentioned the names of Western philosophers, theologians, and scientists such as Plato, Socrates, Augustine, John Calvin, Nicolaus Copernicus, and Immanuel Kant who are respected in Western society as he lamented the lack of Korean awareness of its national heroes, including Wonhyo. As another example, Cho Soang (1887–1958) likened Wonhyo to a butterfly and common people to silkworms in his work *Sillaguk Wonhyo Taesachon pyongso* (*Introduction of the Biography of the Great Monk of Silla Wonhyo*) (Samkyunhakhoe, 1933), which was published when he acted as a member of the Provisional Government of Korea in Shanghai for the independence movement. He described Wonhyo as a leader with extraordinary talents who realized the ideals of the Korean people.11)

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11) Furthermore, in the third issue of the *Dokrip Kongnon* (*Independent Public Opinion*) (1936) issued by the *Dokrip Kongnon* association, run by the Nanjing Provisional Government, Cho also introduced the story of Wonhyo’s spiritual awakening and his writings.
Likewise, among the discussions that sought Korean cultural originality that are found in public magazines, such as *Kaepyok* (開闢) and *Samch’onri* (三千里), we can see the writers’ tendency to equalize the uniqueness of Korean culture to Wonhyo’s traits. The following example was written by Kwon Dukgyu 權悳奎 (1890-1950), a Korean linguist and historian, titled “Chaa-lŭl Kaepyokhara (Reform Yourself)” published in 1920 in the first volume of *Gaepyok* (The Down of Civilization):

He abandoned the honorable and sacred tradition of studying abroad [in Tang, China]. And regardless of whether others appreciated him or scoffed at him, he only tried to find himself and set himself up [...] When I see that Xianshou’s (643–712) *Kisinnonso* that has been highly acclaimed as a unique and creative viewpoint in China is just something copied from *Kisinnonso* by Wonhyo, thus, I cannot help but praise Wonhyo for his great opening up of himself. [Yet,] at the same time, the thoughtlessness of modern people saddens me [...] It is pretty pathetic that people would rather chase after the idea of Origenes in the morning, to Tolstoy in the evening, and even to Chaplin’s humorous behaviors. (Kwon 1920, 51–52)

The author presented the example of Wonhyo to lament the loss of cultural and ideological independence as a result of the remaining idea of sinocentrism and the rapidly surging Western thoughts. Furthermore, Kwon endeavored to encourage the awareness of national identity through the recognition of Wonhyo. Such an idea is also seen in his other article “Choson Saengak-ŭl Ch’ajŭltæ (Time to Seek Korean Thought)” in *Kaepyok*, volume 45, which was published in 1924.

Korean Buddhists’ passion for seeking new values in Wonhyo was no less than that of the aforementioned intellectuals. Jeong Hwangjin 鄭晄震 (?–?) actively introduced Wonhyo’s works that he found during his study in Japan by publishing articles like “Sosong Kuryong ŭi Kyokon (Proverb of Master Writer Kuryong)” (1920), “Jinyeok Hwaomkyongsso-so (Preface of the Commentary of Avatamsaka Sutra)” (1918), “Taesong Hwachaeng Kuksa Wonhyo Chosul Ilrampyo” (1918), etc. Kim Taehup 金泰洽 (1899-1989) also expressed his view and respect toward Wonhyo by publishing stories that were adopted from Wonhyo’s hagiographical sources, which included “Choson Phlgyo-ŭi Kongkwalon” (1934) and “Kosŭngilhwa Wonhyo Taesa” (Kim 1935; 1940). Furthermore, records such as “Wonhyo Taesong Che 1244-hoe
Chechonpopyo Kohaeng (The 1224th Celebration of Memorial Service for Great Master Wonhyo)” (1929) and “Che Wonhyo Songsamun (Commemorative Rites for Great Master Wonhyo)” (1929) indicate that there were annual memorial ceremonies for Wonhyo held in the 1920s by young Buddhists and the Choson Pulgyo Sonch’ahn-hoe in Korean Buddhist temples.

As evidenced from the above examples, Wonhyo, who had almost disappeared into the depths of history during the Choson dynasty, reappeared as a hero and a saint who was seen as especially unique to Korean thought and culture—as if he had always been treated in such a way—with the advent of the 20th century.12)

2) A Model of Buddhist Reform

In the early 20th century, young Buddhists who had studied abroad and received modern education tended to show a great interest in the changes in religious roles and society. With the spread of the reformation movement, Buddhist organizations consisting of young monks and students were formed at home as well as abroad. The records of these groups in Buddhist journals show that Wonhyo was described as a representative reformist monk. For the radical, young Buddhists who wanted to overcome old and conservative Buddhist traditions, Wonhyo was seen as the best role model for them to imitate based on historical records depicting Wonhyo as distinct from aristocratic monks who were stiffly formal. Instead, Wonhyo demonstrated unconventional behavior and characteristics in spreading Buddhadharma.

For example, U Imsaeng claimed in his article “Pulgyo Chongnyon-e taehayo (To Young Buddhists)” in 1919 that “[we should] not merely respect the Western greats but must educate new and talented figures in Korean Buddhism by exhorting them to emulate Wonhyo” (U 1919, 6). Similarly, Kim Kyongbong emphasized the ancient monks’ efforts in the military and in providing social relief to encourage young Buddhists to follow their examples in his “Tosok-ŭi Wiin Wonhyo (Wonhyo, the Great Man of Both the Holy and Mundane World)” (Kim 1921, 29–30); Kim’s

12) To compare with the perception of Wonhyo in the Choson Dynasty, see Chin Songkyu. 2000. “Chosonsidae-ŭi Wonhyo Insik (Reception and Comprehension of Wonhyo by Confucian Scholars During Chosun Dynasty).” Chungangsaaron 14: 1 – 22.
article referred to Chang Dobin’s *Wiiin Wonhyo*, in which he called Wonhyo “the Luther of the East” (Chang 1917, 46) because Wonhyo jumped into society to reform the overly formal Buddhist system of the Silla period. Such expressions can also be seen in the “Choson Pulgyo Chongnyon Chekun-ege Koham (Speeches to Korean Buddhist Youth)” (1920), which promoted the spirit of reform and warned against the corruption of Buddhist youths.

The fact that the *Wonhyo Taesong Ch’ananghoe* (The Great Master Wonhyo Praise Society) was formed by Korean students studying in Tōkyō in December 1926 is very notable. The members of this society argued in “The Declaration of the Great Master Wonhyo Praise Society” (1926) that the main problem with Korean society stemmed from Koreans’ excessive attachment to Western thought, such as the philosophies of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and Karl Marx (1818–1883) and continual ignorance to that of Wonhyo. Furthermore, the writer condemned young Buddhists because “Wonhyo was less well known in Korea than in Japan and China” (Chaeil Choson 1926, 57). The overall point was to urge young Buddhists to examine the originality of Korean traditional thought and culture throughout Wonhyo’s achievements that he acquired without traveling to China but, rather, on his own in Korea. Unfortunately, however, the specific activities of this association were not known due to the lack of records. Yet, the work titled “the Regulations of the Association” indicated that they had planned to work on the circulation lectures, paper presentations, Zen practices, and publications of *Nokwon* (Cheil Choson 1926, 57–58). Considering its initiators, Yi Yongje 李英宰 (1900–1927), Kim T’aehŭp (1889–1989), and Ch’oi Pomsul 崔凡述 (1904–1979), who actively led young Buddhist circles with regular meetings at the Kŭmkangjo (金剛杵) office in Tokyo, it is assumed that this association would have played a crucial role in reminding young Korean monks and students of Wonhyo’s existence.

As a similar example, Mun Chonson’s article “Wuri-ŭi Kangryong (Our Creed [of Tōkyō International Student Union])” published in 1937, following year of the formation of Tōkyō International Student Union, he introduces Wonhyo’s story in *Song Gaoseng Zhuan* (宋高僧傳) as a role model of the youth movement, mentioning “It was Wonhyo’s mission in life that converting the temple Buddhism, that was hierarchical, [mere] pleasure-seeking, and theoretical Buddhism into the Street Buddhism
that is a realistic and popularized form of Buddhism” (Mun 1937, 9).

Along with these views, it is also worth noting that, as the number of Buddhist students who were influenced by Japanese Buddhist culture increased, the perception of monk marriage and meat eating (k. Taech’o Sikyuk) began to change. These views were the same for Wonhyo’s act of breaking the commandments (apostasy, k. p’agye). At that time, the secularization of Korean Buddhism became an important social issue and provoked controversy among Buddhists. The advocates for monks’ marriages highlighted the importance of the social role of Buddhists and sought to find a successful case of marriage among the high priests in history. For example, “Chōsen Kōsōden: Shiragi no Sekitoku, Gan’gyōtaishi (A Great Master in Silla, Great Sage Wonhyo)” (1926) began to be serialized, starting with the special issue entitled “Disputes on the Choson Monk’s Eating Meat and Marriage” in Chosŏn Bukkyō. In the middle of the article, the author emphasized that “Wonhyo took a wife to gain a beneficial person for society and [as a result,] had a wise [son] like Sol Chong (薛聰)” (Kyerim 1926b, 29–31). Although it cannot be concluded that such a statement itself was an attempt to defend Wonhyo’s violation of the precepts, it is presumed that such remarks would have directly or indirectly influenced Buddhists’ perceptions of Wonho’s unusual conduct and the meaning of religious precepts.

The following is a part of “Kosŭng Ilhwa Wonhyo Taesa” by Kim T’aehŭp in 1940:

So the great monk thought deeply during a few nights at a temple in Mt. Namsan in Kyongju, contemplating whether he would finish with a clean ascetic life or pave the way for future generations by breaking the precepts and pioneering a new life of liberation […] But one day, he grappled with this problem until dawn and concluded that he must revolutionize and reform Buddhism for the people of the future rather than himself […] Therefore, when King T’aejong heard this, he smiled and interpreted, “This is because the great master Wonhyo wants to have a son by getting an honorable woman. If a national saint is born in this country, nothing could be more beneficial to our country than this.” […] After that, the princess conceived a baby and went to full term. [Eventually], she

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As seen above, in this article, Wonhyo’s marriage was expressed as a “revolution,” “sacrifice,” and an intentional act that anticipated the birth of a great figure to advance national interests rather than his self-interests. Considering that the writer Kim was quickly earning a reputation of being one of the greatest Korean missionaries of Buddhism at the time, the possibility that these remarks provided a chance for people to reconsider Wonhyo’s P’agye (破戒) cannot be ruled out.14) Moreover, people often grouped Wonhyo and Sol Ch’ong together and highly regarded them as ancient saints of Confucianism and Buddhism. Such descriptions can also be seen in articles, such as “Panto Yongwang-ŭl Nonham (Discussing the Peninsula Heroes)” (1934) and “Hwachaeng Kuksa-wa Sol Ch’ong-ŭi Chisong (Sol Ch’ong’s Devotion to Hwachaeng Kuksa)” (1940).15)

As indicated above, until the 19th century, Wonhyo was seen as a mysterious figure far outside the secular world. However, in modern times, with the proliferation of the idea that religion’s original role is social relief, Wonhyo was portrayed as a humanistic seeker with a variety of talents and as a reformist who integrated Buddhist doctrine and real life. Wonhyo’s way of breaking down the form of missions was considered a valuable achievement among the Buddhists who advocated for the socialization of Buddhism.

3) The Completion of Tong Pulgyo

The characteristics of Korean Buddhism, Hoet’ong Pulgyo (會通佛教, “All-embracing Universal Buddhism”)16) or All-Inclusive Buddhism), have been discussed by

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Shim Jaeryong (1999), Cho Eunsu (2004), John Jorgensen (1997), Keel Heesung (2001), etc. Their respective studies critically pointed out the issues with existing stereotypes for Korean Buddhism as well as Wonhyo. However, since their attention mainly focused on Ch’oe Namson 崔南善 (1890-1957)’s use of the term *T’ong Pulgyo* in “Choson Pulgyo” (1930) and its relation with the Japanese Buddhist trend in the modern era, many other valuable resources on this matter had not been thoroughly examined. Thus, I would like to introduce additional examples, including Ch’oe Namson’s, to discuss the background and emergence of the *T’ong Pulgyo* issue.

It was in the 1930s that the concept of *T’ong Pulgyo* (通佛敎, Interpenetrated Buddhism/all-embracing Buddhism) appeared in Korean society. Since then, this term has been used to define the characteristics of Korean Buddhism. The title “Choson Pulgyo - Tongbang Munhwasasang-e itnūn Kū Chiwi” (Choi 1930) is known as the first article to name the thoughts of Wonhyo as *T’ong Pulgyo*. This article was prepared for a presentation at the First General Conference of Pan-pacific Young Buddhist Associations in Hawaii in July 1930 and was written by Ch’oe Namson, an instructor at the Central Buddhist College (k. Chungang Pulgyo Chonmun Hakkyo). At the time, young Buddhists viewed participation in this conference as an opportunity to promote the value of Korean Buddhism to the world, and Ch’oe also wanted to strongly express the uniqueness of Korean Buddhism to foreign participants. Such a motivation is reflected primarily in the chapter entitled “Ⅳ: Wonhyo, the Builder of *T’ong Pulgyo*.”

This article’s argument went against Japanese scholars’ claims that Korean Buddhism was not independent but a mere imitation of Chinese Buddhism. Against such a view, Ch’oe was trying to highlight the distinctiveness of Korean Buddhism as superior to Japanese Buddhism and also as independent from Chinese Buddhism. Thus, he noted the possibility that Buddhism was introduced directly from India to the Korean peninsula through the sea route in addition to the conventional route through China (see Kim 2002, 258–259). Throughout “Chapter Ⅷ: Japanese Buddhism and Choson,” Ch’oe strongly emphasized the significant role of Korean Buddhism in the formation and development of Japanese Buddhism by giving specific examples.

In describing Wonhyo, while Ch’oe highly praised renowned Korean monks who were active in China—such as the Samlon sect of Sŭnglang 僧朗 (500?), Yogachara of Wonchŭk 円測 (613–696), and Hawyen of Ŭisang 義湘 (625–702)—Ch’oe ultimately emphasized that Wonhyo was the one who could truly realize the ideal state of Buddhism. Ch’oe’s view was based on the record that Wonhyo attained eminence in the Asian Buddhist circle without entering China or receiving direct teachings from any Chinese masters of a specific sector. According to Ch’oe’s expression, “Youngsu (Nagarjuna, BC 100–AD 100) was ultimately a theorist, Kumarajiva (339–413) was also after all a scholar, and Hyewon 慧遠 (334–416) also ended up belonging to the privileged class” (Ch’oe 1930, 12–16). Ch’oe argued that, instead, Wonyo was distinct from them because he combined philosophy and practice to spread Buddhism to the common people and realized the final and ultimate state of Buddhism, which transcends the tenets of diverse sects.

Importantly, in Ch’oe’s article, attention must be paid to the term T’ong Pulgyo. In his “Myoûm Kwanseûm” (1928), he mentioned that his Buddhist studies were greatly influenced by studying in Japan, and thus, it seems that he had come into contact with the concept of T’ong Pulgyo during his stay in Japan (Cho 2004; Kil 2001). Concepts and titles like “Bukkyō Tōitsuron (仏教統一論)” and “Tsū Bukkyōron (通仏教論),” which Ch’oe could have encountered in Japan, had been popular in the Japanese Buddhist community since the Meiji era. Among the representatives who asserted this theory were Murakami Senshō 村上専精 (1851–1931), Inoue Seikō 井上政公 (?–?), Inoue Enryo 井上円了 (1858–1919), and Takada Dogen 高田道元 (1858–1923). While observing the changes in Buddhist society, to escape the crisis of Haibutsukishyak (Oppress Buddhism and Expel the Monks) by the Meiji government, Japanese Buddhists started focusing on the comparative and historical research, which was a popular trend and methodology for religious research in Western academia at the time. By applying such a method, Japanese scholars tried to distance themselves from the traditional dependence on sectarianism, which is based on the succession of dharma within a sect. Instead, these scholars attempted to find an avenue

17) See Takada 1904; Inoue 1905; Inoue 1909; Murakami 1901, 1905. Murakami Sensyō’s Bukkyō Tōitsuron (仏教統一論) (1901) was translated by Kwon Sangno from, and was introduced sixteen times in Choson Pulgyo Wolpo, from no.3 to no.18, from 1911 to 1916.
for trans-sectarianism by focusing on the broad historical developmental process of Buddhism from its birthplace to Japan and by emphasizing the importance of returning to the original teachings of Buddha beyond schools or doctrinal classifications (Ketelaar 1990; Tamura 2011; Son 2012, 180–181).

Furthermore, the similarity between Ch’oe’s description of Buddhist history and that of the Japanese Buddhists of the Meiji era is also noteworthy. In “Choson Pulgyo,” Ch’oe expressed that Buddhism in the Tang Dynasty was characterized by the intense confrontation between sects and schools, and when such divisions and conflicts came to a head, a new type of organization was required. Then, he highlighted that Wonhyo fittingly emerged as a problem solver with his unique theory and methodology of Hwachaeng Hoet’ong (和爭會通, Reconciliation and Harmonization of Disputes). From this perspective, Ch’oe described the developmental process of Buddhism as an evolutionary process of “the introductory Buddhism in India, the specialized Buddhism in China, and the ultimate stage of Buddhism in Choson” (Ch’oe 1930, 20). Here, he argued that Wonhyo was able to complete the final realization of Buddhism in Korea (see Cho 2004). Interestingly, however, it is undeniable that Ch’oe’s narration closely parallels the Japanese Buddhists’ approach to Buddhist history. The following are Ch’oe’s remarks in Choson Pulgyo and Takada Dogen’s remarks in Tsū Bukkyō Ansin, published in 1904:

Buddha to Wonhyo means “differentiation from creation” and “reunification from differentiation.” Thanks to Wonhyo, the Ilsŭng Pulgyo (One Buddha-vehicle Buddhism) could still exist. (Ch’oe 1930, 16)

In general, even if the laws of the world are simple at first, it becomes complicated. Even so, it is the tendency of nature for complexity to return to simplicity again. (Takada 1904, 2)

As seen in the above statements, the evolutionary narrative of the Indian (creation) → Chinese (specialization) → Choson (synthesis) of Ch’oe Namseon was similar to the natural ontology suggested by Takada, who insisted upon “simplicity → complexity → simplicity” (Jorgensen 1997, 248; Ketelaar 1990, 177; Cho 2004). As mentioned earlier, Jorgenson, Ketelaar, Kil, and Cho have discussed this as they explored Korean Buddhist history and characteristics.
After the Meiji period, Japanese Buddhists set up the course of Buddhist historical development from India to China and then to Japan, insisting that Japan was at the height of its development and was completing Buddhist reunification with a sense of mission. However, as Cho pointed out, by reversing this logic, Ch’oe ironically brought Korean Buddhism to its peak, which showed a strong, integral characteristic, unlike Japanese Buddhism that featured various sectors (see Cho 2004). During this process, Ch’oe reinterpreted the term *Tsū Bukkyō*—coined by the Japanese Buddhists—and connected it with Wonhyo. Furthermore, Ch’oe also focused on the geographic nature of the Korean peninsula, which was located at the intersection of land and sea cultures, to argue that traditionally, Korea played an important role in integrating the cultures of all Asia and the West.

More importantly, Ch’oe’s declaration did not end as a temporary fad. Indeed, it had a significant influence on Korean Buddhists’ perspectives of Wonhyo and Buddhist historical development afterward. Its influence can be seen in the works of Jo Myongki 趙明基 (1905–1988), Heo Yongho 許永鎬 (1900–1952), Mun Chonsun 文瑑善 (?–?), Kim Kyongju 金敬注 (1896–?), etc. In particular, Kim Kyongju’s writings have arguably taken Ch’oe’s words almost literally.

Chinese Buddhism can be called the detailed (classified) Buddhism, and I would like to call the current Chinese trend Temple Buddhism (殿堂佛教), which practices immovable sitting meditation in the comprehensive monastic training compound (叢林, k. Chongrim) that has passed down without changes. Secondly, since Korean Buddhism was located at the crossing point of culture like the countries bordering Western China, it is not an exaggeration to say that a person like the great master Wonhyo appeared and completed the unification of Buddhism, that is, the ultimate stage of Buddhism. (Kim kyongju 1930, 20)

Similarly, Cho Myongki, who studied at the Tōyō University, emphasized the importance of Wonhyo’s achievements and *T’ong Pulgyo* in his “*Choson Pulgyo-wa Chonche Chui* (Korean Buddhism and Totalitarianism)” (1940), which mentioned the Buddhist unification theory of the Meiji Buddhists and related organizations as precedents for the way forward for Meiji Buddhism. Likewise, as we have seen above, the *T’ong Pulgyo* discourse of modern Korean Buddhism was made through the review and acceptance of Japanese Buddhism while seeking the identity of Korean...
Buddhism as a reaction against colonialist scholars’ negative remarks of Korean Buddhism. Accordingly, Wonhyo emerged as a great saint who had transcended sectarian strife and the gap between the secular (俗) and ultimate truth (聖).

However, defining the nature of Wonhyo and Korean Buddhism in terms of T’ong Pulgyo may have misled people into interpreting Wonhyo as an ambiguous integrator and the standardization of his various ideas. The T’ong Pulgyo theory emerged as a representative slogan of Korean Buddhism in the 1960s and became politically associated with the ideologies of North and South reunification, Kukmin Ch’onghwa (National Unification), and Kuknon Tanhap under the military regime to centralize authority and the sect unification movement in Buddhist community. One of the obvious examples that indicate Ch’oe’s influence on Korean people’s perceptions of Wonhyo’s philosophy can be seen in “Figures in Korean History-Ancient, Wonhyo,” which was written by a historian Chon Kwanu (1925–1991) in 1981. Here, Chon introduced Ch’oe’s remarks on Wonhyo and the ultimate state of Buddhism in “Choson Pulgyo” and subtitled with “Wonhyo established the theory of T’ong Pulgyo in Silla” (Chon 1981). Such a description has been used as a general introduction to Wonhyo and has continued to be used until recently.18)

4) A Monk Guarding His Own Fatherland

Since the late 1930s, Korean and Japanese Buddhist societies participated in wars in the name of Hoguk Pulgyo (護國佛敎, nation protecting Buddhism).19) Even the notion of the core doctrines of Buddhism, Anatma (no-self), and Nirvana were more likely to be interpreted as the spirit of self-annihilation for the sake of the country, which supported militaristic and totalitarian discourse. Here, attention must be paid to how Wonhyo was perceived during this time. At the time, Buddhists tended to paint Wonhyo as a loyal figure of the nation, a warrior, and a true patriot because Wonhyo lived during the war of the Three Kingdoms’ reunification and wrote the

commentary of *Keumkangmyeongkyeong* (金光明經), which was known as one of the three main scriptures for protecting the country. Some similar remarks were fictionalized in novels or newspaper articles, but subsequently, they hugely influenced the public’s perception of Wonhyo.

Especially, Yi Kwangsu’s 李光洙 (1892–1950) novel, *Wonhyo Taesa* 元曉大師 (Great Master Wonhyo) can be said to be a representative example. This novel was serialized in the *Maeilsinbo 每日申報*—which was the newspaper for the Japanese Government General of Korea—from March to October of 1942. There are contradictory views about Yi’s intentions of writing *Wonhyo Taesa* during this period. Some believed it was written to encourage young people’s participation in the Pacific War, while others asserted that it was to inspire a spirit of nationalism by describing Wonhyo as an ardent patriot. In any case, however, a common view is that Wonhyo was portrayed as a person who devoted himself to the nation rather than a practitioner of Buddhadharm. The image of Wonhyo in the novel that the author Yi imagined was delivered to the Korean intellectuals and the public as if it were real characters of Wonhyo.

In *Wonhyo Taesa*, even though the protagonist Wonhyo received ordination and became a Buddhist monk, he was always concerned about war and national security. Yi created Wonhyo as a *hwarang* (花娘; an elite warrior group of youth in Silla, Flowering Knights) who was filled with the spirit of *Ch’ung and Hyo* (忠孝; loyalty and filial piety). More interestingly, in the highlight of this novel—the chapter titled “*Yongshindang Suryon* (Training in *Yongshindang*)”—Wonhyo came to more deeply understand the value of the ancient, national belief that existed before Confucianism and Buddhism after being introduced to *Koshinto* (古神道, Ancient way of God) and training in the shrine called *Yongshindang* (龍神堂).

Moreover, in the novel, the content of Wonhyo’s sermon mainly teaches loyalty, the doctrine of the King-Master-Father Trinity (君師父一體), and self-annihilation for the sake of the country’s glory and honor. For example, when Wonhyo discussed the issue of killing with his pupil Ŭimyong, he taught him that self-sacrifice for

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a great cause is necessary, and killing others for the absolute and ultimate truth is nothing but a mercy (Yi 2011, 206; Pang 2011, 94–95). Therefore, to bring this spirit into practice, Wonhyo participated in the war together with a warrior Ko Chinrang. Furthermore, interestingly, in the last part of this novel, a character who was originally a bandit leader became a loyal general thanks to Wonhyo’s teachings and was given the name of Sodang Changkun (General Sodang). However, the title Sodang (誓幢) is not a simple novel setting that can be overlooked.

After the discovery of the Stele of the Reverend Sodang in 1914 by a Japanese officer, there was a tendency for Japanese scholars to understand the meaning of Sodang, the childhood name of Wonhyo, as Wonhyo’s military title. For example, Katsuragi Sueji assumed that Wonhyo would have been engaged in military affairs based on the fact that the word Sodang was recorded as a title in the military profession in Samguksaki (三國史記).21 After this interpretation, the origin of the monk soldier of Korea was retrospectively estimated to be in the Silla period (see Katsuragi 1931, 1935). Similarly, Eda Tosio 江田俊雄 (1893–1957) supposed that Wonhyo would have participated in the war, referring to Wonhyo’s Kumgangmyongkyongsu and the Stele of the Reverend Sodang in his “Gangyō to Gokoku Kyōten (Wonhyo and Scriptures for Protecting Nation)” (1935). Since the 1930s, when imperialism reached its peak, Japanese scholars began to interpret the tradition of Korean Buddhism within the framework of Hoguk Pulgyo, referring to Wonkwang 圓光 (542–640)’s the Five Commandments of Hwarang, Wonhyo, Chajang 慈藏 (590–658), and Hwangryongsa nine-story pagoda. However, this trend was not confined to Japanese scholars (see Pankaj 2010), indeed, Korean scholars and Buddhists also expressed a strong sense of pride in associating Wonhyo’s conduct as a tradition of Hoguk Pulgyo.

In addition, the record that Wonhyo deciphered the secret code of the Tang (唐) army, which was recounted in Samgukyusa, was also an important motive to frame Wonhyo as a military person. Many intellectuals and monks portrayed Wonhyo as an adviser for the army or Kim Yusin’s (595–673)’s loyal friend (Kim 1940; Chang 1920). In fact, there is little reason to believe that Wonhyo advocated for imperialistic and nationalist claims in favor of political power or romanticized war based on his

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21) The military organization part in Chikkwanchi (職官志) Mukwancho (武官條) of Samguksaki (三國史記).
existing writings and hagiographical accounts. However, because Wonhyo was characterized as a person who worked for the army, this view has been a big part of Wonhyo’s understanding to this day. For instance, O Popan defined Sodang as a rank in the military and said, “Wonhyo was a well-deserved youngster and became a Sodang (rank of military class)” (O 1992, 36). Moreover, some scholars even insisted that, because Wonhyo assisted in military affairs, this practice contributed to the establishment and solidification of the role and system of the Sangha army (Monk–soldiers) in the Korean Buddhist tradition (Cho 1962).

Especially, during the military regime in Korea, since the 1960s, when the spirit of Hwarangdo (the way of the Flowering Knights) and Bushido (the way and ethic of warriors) was promoted, Wonhyo tended to be portrayed as the guardian of the nation in many writings as well as media contents. More interestingly, in 1969, the statue of the Great Master Wonhyo (元曉大師像) was erected in Hyoch’ang Park in Seoul by the Committee for the Establishment of the Patriotic Ancestors Statue, and the president Bak Jeonghui 朴正熙 (1917–1979) and eminent people from various circles attended in the unveiling ceremony. This was a project aimed at creating a national ideology based on the spirit of loyalty and hwarang. In this process, among the Buddhist masters, Samyong 四溟 (1544–1610), who served as a commander against the Japanese invasions of Korea (1592–1598), and Wonhyo were chosen for the statue building project and promoted as honorable symbols of patriotism.

5) The Spiritual Founder of the Jogye Order

In the late 1930s, the movement to establish a headquarters for Choson Buddhism began, and finally, in April 1941, the Governor-General’s 125th ordinance of the Choson Buddhism Jogye Order Headquarters Taegosa Law (曹溪宗總本山 太古寺法)

23) “Wonhyo assisted the army, so this tradition was passed on to comprehensive monastic training compounds and developed into [the system of] Sangha army (Monk–soldiers)” (Cho 1962).
24) “Wonhyo Taesa Tongsang ŭi Chemak: Pak Taet’ongryong Pupu Ch’amso k (The Unveiling Ceremonies for Statue of the Great Master Wonhyo: The President Park Couple Attended)” Maeilkyongche, August 16, 1969. Regarding Park Chonghŭi regime’s promoting patriotic citizens through the spirit of Hwarang and Silla, see “Project for Making Patriotic People during Yushin Period of Park Chung Hee Regime -Based on the Case of Hwarangdo and Hwarang Educational Institute” (Choi 2014)
was approved. Officially, an integrated Korean Buddhist order distinct from Japanese Buddhist sects, Jogyejong (曹溪宗), was established. Along the way, while discussing the primary tenets and the spiritual founder of the order, the characteristics of Wonhyo’s thoughts were illuminated by leading Korean Buddhists once again.

The name of the Jogyejong sect was used as the representative Son (j. zen) order in the 13th century during the Koryo Dynasty. Because the name was derived from Son tradition, people tended to discuss the founder of the sect by focusing on the Son masters, such as Toûi 道義 (827–898), T’aeko 太古 (1301–1382), and Chinûl 知訥 (1158–1210). In fact, there was no room for Wonhyo in this discussion because he did not have a traditional connection with the dharma lineage, especially the Son lineage. However, once the name and founder of the order (Jogye and T’aego, respectively) were almost confirmed, some Buddhists became seriously concerned that Korean Buddhism would only be characterized by Son over time. For example, Cho Myongki criticized Korean Buddhists’ discourse, claiming that deciding that T’aego was the founder of Korean Buddhism is a remnant of toadyism toward China:

Selecting master T’aego as the founder of Son-Kyo Yangjong (禪敎兩宗) is a foreign-worshiping scholars’ reckless decision, and it is because Son school counts especially on the genealogy [within Son tradition]. Therefore, Korean Buddhism should be reorganized starting from ancient doctrinal history. [Then, a new] Choson Buddhism will be born that starts from Wonhyo and connects to the current Son-Kyo Yangjong, and without a doubt, Wonhyo must be the founder. (Cho 1937, 29)

Cho argued that Wonhyo was the best fit to be the spiritual patriarch of Korean Buddhism, which embraces both the meditation and doctrine schools. Some years later, in 1940, Cho presented a similar opinion that Wonhyo’s consistent methodology of Hoet’ong (會通), which is also seen in his view on Kyopan (教判: the classification of the various doctrines) and throughout all his works, is the most suitable to represent

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the spirit of Korean Buddhism. In this article, Cho first outlined the changes in the emerging trends of a totalitarian movement, and he expressed his main concern that Korean Buddhists need to seek a founder and the doctrine of Jogyejong in light of the current thoughts of the world (Hyon 1940, 25–33).

A similar view can be seen in Ho Yongho’s articles. Ho was ordained a Buddhist monk in Pomosa temple and studied at Taishō University in Japan. Since 1930, he published several articles on Wonhyo and the characteristic of Korean Buddhism (Ho 1937 a, b, c, 1941). 26) In his article “Choson Pulgyo-wa Kyochi Hwaklip (Korean Buddhism and the Establishment of its Main Doctrine)” published in 1937, he focused on Wonhyo, referring to him as “the determination of the name of the sect, the founder of the sect, and the main doctrine of the sect” (Ho 1937 a) as preliminary matters to be revised by Korean Buddhists. He emphasized that Korean Buddhism traditionally pursued unification in ideology and practice, so it should not be seen through a Son-oriented biased perspective. This claim continued after the approval of the Jogye Order Law in his essay “Wonhyo Pulgyo-ŭi Chaeŭmmi (Reappreciation of Wonhyo’s Buddhism)” (1940 to 1942), which was published serially in Pulgyo.

It is sure that Korean Buddhism, which returned to just one sect of the Jogye Order, could find its main tenet in the history of doctrines starting from Wonhyo. The reason why I refer to this again here is because when the name of the Korean Buddhist Jogye Order was announced, it became prevalent that people would misinterpret Korean Buddhism only as the Son Order by referring to Hoenŭg (慧能)’s southern Son sect, Linchi Yixuan (臨濟 義玄)’s, or Yangqi (楊岐) and Hwangbo (黃龍). (Ho 1941, 14)

Ironically, however, Ho Yongho emphasized that, since the New Order in Greater East Asia of Japan was being established in the 1940s, a new form of Buddhism that not only transcends sectarianism and localities but also arranges various aspects

of Asian Buddhism would be required. The view that he tried to establish the main doctrine of Korean Buddhism through *T’ong Pulgyo* seemed to concur with the logic of the Buddhism of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (j. *Ditoa kyōeiken no Bukkyō*), which was proposed by imperial Japan under the war system (see Kim 2014, 307–311). Namely, while Ch’oe Namson and other Korean Buddhists in the 1910s to 1930s promoted Wonhyo’s thoughts in an attempt to emphasize the uniqueness of Korean Buddhist tradition, Ho focused on Wonhyo’s trans-sectarian and reconciliatory philosophy so that he could apply it to incorporate Korean Buddhism into a unified Asian Buddhism to support the Japanese theory of Buddhism of the Greater East Asia. Ho’s remarks have been criticized as pro-Japanese by Korean Buddhists because he not only wrote articles supporting the Japanese army in the Second Sino-Japanese war and but also left remarks like “training the Japanese loyal subject (皇國臣民) through the primary tenet of Chosen Buddhist Jogye Order” (Ho 1940).

In summary, although some Buddhists’ goal of establishing Wonhyo as the founder of the Jogye Order was not realized, their argument could raise the necessity of examining the nature of Korean Buddhism without clinging to only the traditional Dharma lineage. Likewise, Wonhyo was re-evaluated for various purposes, and the image of the newly created Wonhyo reflected the adversity, difficulties, and the ideology of Buddhist society at the time.

3. Remaining Images to Further Understand Wonhyo after the Liberation of Korea in 1945

As mentioned above, the new portrayal of Wonhyo created at the beginning of the 20th century was constantly utilized in accordance with the political and social situations of Korea, even after the 1950s. In the early 20th century, Japanese scholars attempted to research the discovery of the data related to Wonhyo as part of the investigation of Japanese Buddhist history (see Yang 1979), but their evaluation and perception of Wonhyo were different than that of Korean scholars. For example, Wonhyo and Ŭisang were equally respected and hailed as a “*Haetong Hwaom oa* (a founder of the Korean Hwaom sect) by Japanese scholars, whereas Korean
Buddhists tended to value Wonhyo more than Ŭisang by hailing Wonhyo as “the founder of Korean independent Hwaom” and Ŭisang as “the founder of foreign Hwaom [in Korea]” (Kim 1929, 5; Kwon 1928; Chong 1919).

After entering the 1960s, as an extension of such nationalism, many Korean academics endeavored to explore Korean traditional thought and re-examine historical figures like Wonhyo, King Sejong 世宗 (r. 1418–1450), Toegye 退溪 (1501–1570), and Yulgok 栗谷 (1536–1584). For example, Park Chonghong 朴鍾鴻 (1903–1976) defined the ideological commonalities of the monks, such as Sŭn grang 僧朗 (?–?), Wonchŭk 圓測 (613–696), Wonhyo, Ŭisang, Toson 道訥 (828–898), Úichon, and Chi’nul 知訥 (1158–1210) as harmony and unification and tied them together to establish a lineage in his Han’guk Sasangsa (The History of Korean Thought) (Somuntang, 1972). It is worth noting that this attempt was almost identical to that of Ch’oe Namson in “Choson Pulgyo” in 1930. In addition, Yi Kiyong 李箕永 (1922–1996) published Wonhyo Sasang (Wonhyo’s Thought) (Wonûmkak, 1967) and opened the Wonhyo Haktang (Wonhyo Academy) to propose a rediscovery of Korean thought through investigation of Wonhyo’s life and philosophy. Despite these efforts to promote Wonhyo’s thoughts, nevertheless, his philosophy tended to be emphasized in conjunction with the political code of Ch’onghwa (統和, National Unity) and T’ongil (統一, Unification).

Wonhyo’s hwajaeng (harmony of disputes or reconciliation) has been mixed with the slogan of Kukmin Ch’onghwa (國民統和)—meaning national unification and solidarity—as the first national priority since Park Chonghŭi’s regime. This spirit of Ch’onghwa became an ideology demanding national unity in the confrontation between South and North Korea, and journal and news articles with titles such as “Filial Piety and Ch’onghwa thought” (1979) and “Ch’onghwa and Yusin” (1975) were published during the 1960s and 1970s.27) In particular, Cho Myongki was one of the authors who conceptualized Wonhyo’s thoughts as the embodiment of Ch’onghwa Pulgyo. His “Pulgyo ūi Ch’onghwasong-kwa Wonhyo-ŭi Kûnponsasang (The Integrated Nature of Buddhism and Wonhyo’s Fundamental Idea)” (Cho 1962) is a partial revision

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of his “Choson Pulgyo-wa Chonche Chaŭ” in the 1940s, and in this article, he explicitly named Hwachaeng thought “Ch’onghwa thought (Ch’onghwa Sasang).” Accordingly, even if Cho did not intend to use this term for political purposes, his remark would have affected the tendency for Wonhyo’s thoughts to be utilized as an example of the indoctrination of the Kukmin Ch’onghwa beliefs of the military regime.

Turning to the 1980s, as the unification of the Korean peninsula emerged as a hot issue, the government and local groups paid attention to Wonhyo’s thoughts. A representative example was the Saint Wonhyo Symposium hosted by the Board of National Unification in 1987. The publisher’s note listed in Wonhyo Yon’gu Nonch’ong (Proceedings of the Symposium), Heo Mundo 許文道 (1940 – 2016), the Minister of the Board, described Wonhyo as “an ideologue of the reunification of the Three Kingdoms” (Ho 1987). Similarly, Kim Jigyon 金知見 (1931–2001) also suggested that “I would like to use the Muae (No hindrance) and Hwachang thought of Wonhyo as a philosophical basis for the unification of North and South Korea” (Kim 1987, 136) in Wonhyo Yon’gu Nonch’ong.28) However, it is undeniable that such discourses provided the possibility for Wonhyo’s theory to be distorted as being aimed only at the ambiguous ideas of “unity,” “uniformity,” and the “whole,” rather than a theory to respect different opinions and open the door for communication after going through thorough examinations from various angles. Consequently, Hwachaeng and national unification appeared as idioms in numerous journals and news articles referring to Wonhyo.29)

During this period, Wonhyo was also introduced as a symbol of Korean Buddhism through popular media, including operas, plays, and TV dramas. In particular, the character of Wonhyo participating in the war as a hwarang, as described in Yi Kwangsoo’s novel Wonhyo Taesa (1942), was popularly received through movies and TV dramas. However, in one of the newspaper articles addressing the KBS drama Wonhyo Taesa, which aired in 1986, titled “Wonhyo Taesa, Russia eso Pangyong, 28) Ho mundo. 1987. “Kanhaeng sa刊行辭 (The Publisher’s Note)”, Wonhyo yon’gu nonch’ong; Kim Chikyon. 1987. “Haedong Samun Wonhyo sang somyo海東沙門元曉像素描 (Description on the image of Wonhyo, a Buddhist monk in Korea).” Wonhyo yon’gu nonch’ong; Yi kiyong. 1995. “Wonhyo-ŭi Hwachaengsasang-kwa Kŭmil-ŭi T’ongil Munche (Wonhyo's Hwachaeng Thought and the Problem of Unification Today).” Pulkyo Yun’gu:11・12, Han’kuk Pulgyo Yon’guwon.
Hochon Han’guk Ohaesochi Ko,” (1994)\textsuperscript{30} the author pointed out that because the drama was too biased toward the contents of the Three Kingdoms unification war rather than showing the religious philosophy of Wonhyo, it did not fit the original purposes of the broadcast. Likewise, his images built in the first half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century were constantly reproduced without careful examination as to whether Wonhyo was actually engaged in war as an elite warrior or acted as a hwarang. Through these processes, Wonhyo gradually became a person representing the national spirit. According to Ko Ikchin (高翊晉, 1934-1988), in his Sillasŏng-ŭi Kukga-ŭisik (Silla Monk’s National Consciousness) (Tongdae Shinmunsa, 1976), he argued that Wonhyo and Ûisang’s national spirit contributed to the unification of the three kingdoms, and it demonstrated that the religious purpose of Buddhism and the political ideology of the state never conflicted with each other (Ko 1976).

As another interesting example, Kim Pompu’s (凡父, 1897–1966) Hwarang Woesa (花郞外史), which was published in 1954, was an attempt to promote the national spirit. In chapter 11, Pakkyol Sonsaeng, Wonhyo, and Wonkwang appeared in a close relationship and practice what is known as the indigenous Korean ethos of P’ungryudo (Way of flowing like the wind) by playing a traditional musical instrument (Kim 1954).\textsuperscript{31} Fiction writers are free to imagine their own scenarios. However, when readers come across these types of writings, they are entitled to question the author’s or creator’s underlying motivations or ultimate aim—namely, why they picked hwarang and the Silla spirit as a theme of their works and why Wonhyo was portrayed in such a way, especially if one desires to further investigate Wonhyo without being colored by stereotypes and preconceived notions. Likewise, regarding the statue of Wonhyo in Hyoch’ang Park, a similar question can be raised as to why the statue needed to be built when the Hokun Sŭngkuntan (護國僧軍團, The Association of Military Monk Protecting Nation) was founded during the Yushin Regime.

In conclusion, as we have seen above, the image of Wonhyo throughout history has not been fixed. Instead, his likeness has been changed and recreated according

\textsuperscript{30} Han Hŭichong. 1994. April. 2 “Wonhyo Taesa, Russia eso Panyong, Hochon Han’guk Ohaesochi Ko元曉大師, 러시아에서 映映, 好戰 韓國 誤解 소지 커 (Wonhyo Taesa aired in Russia, It is highly likely to misguide as Korea is a warlike country).” Donga Ilbo. Seoul: Donga Ilbosa.

\textsuperscript{31} Kim Pompu. 1954. Hwarang Woesa (花郞外史 (The story of Flowering Knights), Haekunponpu Chonghunkamsil.
to the needs of the times. More importantly, the problems that Buddhists and intellectuals have been struggling with through examining perceptions of Wonhyo since the modern times are not irrelevant to the issues emerging in the present Buddhist world, such as controversies over nationalism and patriotism in Korean Buddhism, the characteristics of Korean Buddhism, the identity of the Jogye Order, and so on.32)

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32) Similarly, the creation of national hero and its political use can also be seen in the images of T’oegye, Yi Sunsin (1545-1598), Hyojong (1520-1604), Samyong, etc. For instance, Choi Jaemok in his “A Study on Changing the Image of Sonbi(士) through the Portrait of Toegye” (T’oegye Hakpo:130, Toegyeahk Yon’guwon, 2011) pointed out that “In the period of our modern and contemporary, in political and social context, had needed to be established a new Toegye image for the public enlightenment, education, and governance.” (Choi 2011)


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