

Preserving the Korean Traditional Sacred Geography:

Theoretical Implications of Buddhist Religious Mimicry

Kim, Thomas Sung-Eun*

1. Introduction: Dilemma of Buddhism

When we look at the religious geography of a Buddhist temple, one cannot help but come to the conclusion of how significantly it is made-up of popular religious ethos and practices.¹⁾ Its analysis reveals a relationship between the indigenous religions and Buddhism that can be described as a "tension between localizing and unlocalizing tendencies" between the opposing "locative" and "utopian" visions of the world.²⁾

In the early transmission of Buddhism to various neighboring nations of China, Buddhism had to contend with its situation firstly as a foreign religion and secondly as a religion having different and conflicting world views from the local ones. There were real and significant problems that had to be resolved in order to adapt to a different land.

* 서울대학교 종교문제연구소 객원연구원

- 1) This relationship between the local religious ethos and practices with Buddhism has only been discussed superficially in past academic work. Up to now the meeting of the two traditions have only been simply labelled as syncretism with no further discussion beyond the descriptive. Syncretism between Buddhism and *Musok* is not a new phenomenon. In fact it has been taking place since Buddhism first arrived on the peninsula some 1700 years ago and has even been commonly noted by the early western travellers such as Hulbert and Clark. Yet, the processes and dynamics of this intermixing has not been discussed fully and its underlying theoretical implications have not been explored.
- 2) Smith's categorization of religions into a locative and utopian provides a useful ideal models for the two dominant tendencies in religions. Johnathan Z. Smith, *Map is not territory* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), pp. 132-138.

In the case of Korea, Buddhism could not help but come in direct contact with the local religions such as *Musok*, Korean Shamanism. Despite the differences between the two traditions and their different modes of religiosity, the relationship between the two eventually came to be one of integration. The points of contact and its ensuing differences were combined in a fashion that did not destroy the individual religious orientations even though Buddhism was other-worldly oriented and *Musok* was this-worldly oriented.

Their meeting led to not only mimicry of religious practices but also spatial mimicry. Interestingly, their interaction and relationship have led to spatial interaction initially in terms of taking of religiously significant space and later to forming layers of religious significance. I interpret this as simultaneous sharing of the same religiously charged space in a religious symbiotic relationship. Eventually, *Musok* and Buddhism both came to dwell in the same place arranged in a manner that reflected the structure of the autochthonous religious geography.

In this regard, the intent of this paper is to examine the dynamics between two religions of different orientations and what significance this has on Buddhist religiosity, based on the geographical and religious space of the Buddhist temple. Simply, I address the questions of what were the inner dynamics of syncretism between Buddhism and *Musok* and how did syncretism affect Buddhist religiosity.

2. Religious Mimicry - Historical Meeting

How did Buddhism survive when it was first transmitted to Korea? Buddhism had no choice but to imitate *Musok*. According to the "Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms" or *Samgukyusa* (三國遺事)³⁾ by Ilyeon

3) *Samgukyusa* or the "Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms" is a collection of legends, folk tales, and historical accounts that are related mostly to the period of the Three Kingdoms of Korea. Though it is not a purely historical record, the accounts and stories are accepted as interpreted reflections of historical facts.

(一然), what was noted about the first Buddhist missionary monks, Ado (阿道) and his fellow monks, in Shilla in the 3rd century were their supernatural powers.⁴⁾ It was a way to convince the local people of the religious powers of Buddhism but it had to be done in a way that was similar to that of *Musok* but better. It was a method of establishing itself by mimicking *Musok* but doing a superior job and this placed Buddhism squarely in competition with *Musok*.⁵⁾

Through this meeting the two religions came to learn and adopt from each other. The locative aspect of Buddhism came to play a significant part in the adaptation process which determined and defined Buddhism in terms of locally meaningful religious language. Despite the novel and superior techniques of Buddhism, it was by way of mimicking and cooperating with *Musok* that Buddhism learnt to provide what the locals needed. Without *Musok*, Buddhism might not have succeeded in becoming adapted to a new place.⁶⁾

4) Their relationship can also be summarized as Buddhism's skillful adaption to a new cultural-religious surrounding while *Musok* also skillfully accepted the more powerful new-comer from the more culturally advanced China. What was noted about the Buddhist missionary monks at that time were their supernatural powers in proselytizing the people of Shilla. In this sense, the process of adaptation of Buddhism in Japan was similar. There were similar patterns of adaptation. They include "1) preoccupation with the particular rather than the universal dimensions of religion, 2) accommodation of indigenous religious beliefs and practices, and 3) alliance with local cultural, social, and political structures." See Joseph M. Kitagawa, "The Buddhist Transformation in Japan," *History of Religions*, 4(2) (1965), p. 324.

5) The relationship between Buddhism and the indigenous territorial cult of the Mountain Spirit, evolved initially from that of conflict to become one of symbiosis. Initially, it took Buddhism over 100 years to become established on the peninsula. Sign of conflict is most evident in the incident when shortly after King Michu, a supporter of Buddhism, passed away, the first missionary monk, Ado, came to dig his own grave and killed himself. Such drastic action would have been related to those who opposed the Buddhist monks, most likely religious priests, or shamans. See 一然, 「삼국유사」, 李丙巖 譯, 『한국의 민속·종교 사상』 (서울: 삼성출판사, 1997), p. 149.

6) Buddhism must have been very successful in adapting to the new land. That is why after the official recognition of Buddhism, it came to have a great cultural impact. Active syncretism between Buddhism and other religions took place. In particular there was rapid syncretization starting from the time of King Jinheung's (眞興王, r.

Musok provided the religious ethos through which Buddhism was itself absorbed into the culture and society of Shilla.⁷⁾ Buddhism adapted well to become easily absorbed into the Shilla culture and the religious psyche of the people. Interestingly, this absorption into a new culture and the effect on the cultural and religious ethos have been played out in their spatial interaction. Eventually Buddhist temples were built on traditionally sacred sites, places that were previously occupied by *Musok*.

3. Spatial Mimicry - Adopting Traditional Sacred Space by Buddhism

One of the most representative founding of a Buddhist temple on a traditionally sacred site was related with the martyrdom of Ichadon (異次頓) in 527.⁸⁾ It resulted in the building of Jachu Temple (刺楸寺) on Mount Guimgang (金剛山) one of the four traditionally sacred sites that were linked to the traditional political power. The building of Jachu Temple can be interpreted as a method of coopting of traditional power base by King Beopheung (法興王, 514-540) who used Buddhism to consolidate his political power.⁹⁾ However, different from political motives, the religious

540-576). Hwalang (花郎) is a good example of this. The ideals of hwalang was the result of syncretism of Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism and Shamanism.

- 7) Yu Dongsik further claims that *Musok* provided the religious motives on which Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism have been absorbed into the culture and society of Shilla. 유동식, 『韓國巫敎의 歷史와 構造』 (서울: 연세대학교 출판부, 1975), pp. 83-85.
- 8) There was, however, another reason for a conflictive relationship between *Musok* and Buddhism. The meeting between incoming Buddhism and the autochthonous *Musok* is closely associated with the shift of political power from the traditional base to a newly centralized power. Initially, Buddhism's attempts to gain state recognition were impeded by the traditional aristocratic powers who were closely associated with the indigenous Mountain Spirit cult. See 박호원, 『한국공동체 신앙의 역사적 연구』(박사논문), 한국정신문화연구원 한국학대학원, 1997.
- 9) Mount Guimgang was where the high ranking statesmen of Shilla gathered to discuss state affairs. From this we can surmise that the traditional power base was closely tied to sacred sites. It may have been a politically symbolic act intended to usurp

dynamics was not that of usurping of *Musok* and its religious ethos but instead a form of integration between the two religions. Admittedly, the establishment of Buddhist temples on the traditionally sacred sites led to a formation of a balance with what then was a traditional religious power.

Soon after Buddhism was officially recognized, another temple called Heingryun Temple (興輪寺) was also built in the traditionally sacred forest known as Heavenly Forest (天境林). This was the start of a pattern that signified the rise of Buddhism on the foundation of the autochthonous cult located at sacred sites including mountains, forests and brooks. In the records of the *Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms*, temples were located in places, other than the mountains, that had names ending with "lim" (林) or "cheon" (川) meaning "forest" and "stream" respectively. These names usually indicated indigenous sacred places. This shows that temples were usually built on traditionally sacred places and these were usually also places of Mountain Spirit cult.¹⁰⁾ This meeting of Buddhism and the autochthonous cult was a foundation for further syncretism, mainly the adoption of "locative" cult by Buddhist cultic practices.

In particular, the Five Mountains located in the Gyeongju area and the Five Mountains mentioned in the *Chronicles of the Three Kingdoms*, *Samguksagi* (三國史記), all traditionally sacred mountains, had a close connection with Buddhism especially with the rise of Mountain Buddhism (山地伽藍) in the 9th century.¹¹⁾ The establishment of Buddhist temples at the location of previous Mountain Spirit worship must have led to its adoption by Buddhism that eventually metamorphized into the current form of Mountain Spirit cult within the temple precincts.

If it can be said that the current form of Mountain Spirit cult is a result of hundreds of years of development from the initial meeting between the two religions, then the establishment of Buddhism at

the religious power base of the state council by way of building a Buddhist temple on the sacred site and shifting its link away from traditional *Musok* to Buddhism.

10) 최광식, 「무속신앙이 한국불교에 끼친 영향」, 김광익 편, 『민족과 문화』 (서울: 한국문화인류학회 1편, 정음사, 1988), pp. 394-95.

11) 홍윤식, 「한국불교 의례」, 『한국불교』 (서울: 원광대학교 종교문제 연구소, 1974), p. 20.

traditionally sacred places was not a simple taking over of sacred space, both geographical and religious, nor the displacement of the original religious ethos. Instead, the construction of temples at traditionally sacred sites was a spatial mimicry, an attempt to find a balance between establishing itself and at the same time not erasing the memory nor transforming the space into an entirely different religious ethos. In a sense it was a harmonization between Buddhism and the autochthonous religion, representatively by adopting the previous religious geography and preserving it without destroying its original religious ethos.

For a religion to be accepted into a new place would be much more expedient if it were reinterpreted in terms of local ideas and practices. To introduce a new religion without the help of local concepts would be difficult if not almost impossible. Despite the sound reasoning of the thoughts and teachings of the new religion, it may be of a completely different ethos.¹²⁾

Despite the implied power struggle between Buddhism and *Musok*, their meeting has led to some interesting religious outcomes. From the initial relationship of conflict, the relationship developed into one of symbiosis. Though Buddhism was successful in establishing itself as an officially recognized religion, its religious meaningfulness to the common people and in effect its continued survival seemed dependent on its on-going relationship with the Mountain Spirit cult. It seems that building temples on the traditionally sacred places in the end resulted in the incorporation of the indigenous cult into Buddhism's religious geography, gaining additional patronage from the people. Furthermore, the traditional sacredness of the location and its original religious motive came to be preserved within an admittedly imposed framework.

12) Inversely, syncretism also indicates an acceptance of Buddhism by *Musok* by fitting Buddhism onto the foundational religiosity of *Musok*.

4. Inwang Temple and its Heterogeneous Religious Geography

The meeting of the two religions and their negotiation of religious space and ethos may have taken a similar form to the one that is currently taking place in the heart of a modern and cosmopolitan city of Seoul. Syncretism between *Musok* and Buddhism is visibly active at a temple known as Inwang Temple (仁王寺), where there is a clear sense that despite its name, it is not merely a Buddhist temple. Under a Buddhist name there is gathered a whole village consisting of houses and temples that maintain a predominantly *Musok* ethos. Inwang Temple consists of a conglomeration of houses, house-temples, Buddhist temples, and Guksa-dang (국사당) which together form the sect of *Inwongsa* (인왕사종). Outside of this area is a conglomeration of various *Musok* shrines and an oddly shaped rock formation called *Seonbawi* (선바위). It became wellknown as a place of shaman ritual starting from the time when the Guksa-dang was moved to this place in 1925.¹³⁾ Now, this area is called Inwang Temple which originally was a sacred place of *Musok*. In other words the place had been a traditionally sacred place even before the arrival of Guksa-dang and before the temples moved in.

There is basically three co-joining areas: 1) the village, a residence area and also the place where the temples and houses are located, 2) the area further up the mountain where the shrines are located, and 3) *Seonbawi*, where it has traditionally been known as a place to pray for a conception of a baby.

The first area is a mix of temples and *Musok* shrines and houses. The second area is located up beyond the village and consists of about five to six shrines with an altar setup for small *Musok* rituals (告祀). One can sense that these shrines seem to be well situated in a religiously

13) Its name derives from that fact that the rock formation looks like a seated monk wearing a monk cloak. Its other name is also Gija-am (기자암) or a Shrine for Praying for a Child. Visit 종교학벌레, “인왕산 선바위” (<http://bhang813.egloos.com/1875623>).

significant place. One example is a natural water spring which is known to be the residing place of Dragon King. At the shrines that are scattered over the mountain, people come to practice *Musok* rituals.

At special times such as the first day of the month, shamans (*mudang*) come to perform rituals, for various purposes. One can sense that the place is a religiously charged area that has intimate connections with *Musok*. Nevertheless, the third area, *Seonbawi* seems to be the most religiously significant place for which the whole area is wellknown. The unique rock formations have been traditionally known to be a highly charged place auspicious for praying for a birth of a child. Even the Buddhists cannot ignore the powerful energy of this place. Rather than disassociating itself from such a place of superstitious folk practices, Buddhist temples have come to reside closely and in this case to be associated with it.

Buddhism have been to some extent successful in laying a claim to this powerful place by having the whole area called Inwang Temple and by giving an association to Buddhism in the name *Seonbawi* which translates to "Meditating Boulders." However, the only thing that reflected any form of Buddhism were the many paper lanterns used on Buddha's birthday that were hanging over the whole altar and platform for prayer. Also, the shrine and the paraphernalia arrangement on the alter looked no different from those at the temples and a *moktak* in front of the alter was also distinctly Buddhist. The interesting aspect of *Seonbawi* is that there were no other Buddhist objects such as a statue of the Buddha or a Bodhisattva.

Another interesting point is that the whole area doesn't seem to have any form of organizing structure. It seems that the emanating energy of the place have drawn the residences including the Buddhist temples without any preconceived infrastructure. Nevertheless, the Guksa-dang and its history in the area and the scattered *Musok* shrines give away an undeniable *Musok* presence in the whole area. Moreover, the strength of *Musok* presence is further strengthened by the rituals performed in the houses and the temple-houses. According to Grayson, purely shamanistic

rituals take place in the houses. There are other buildings that look like authentic Buddhist temples with Buddhist status and paintings but the rituals are "similar in format and intention" to *Musok* rituals. Grayson explains that the format of the ceremonies performed in these "Buddhist" shrines and the reasons for their performance are nonetheless not much different from the rituals performed in the "undesignated" buildings. Grayson concludes that these rituals can collectively be called examples of syncretic shamanism.¹⁴⁾

It seems the village is essentially a *Musok* village but with a Buddhist name and some Buddhist temples. The Buddhist names such as Inwang Temple, *Seonbawi*, and *Maibul* (a relief of a Buddha on the side of a hill) all give the place an official sound and feel. There is also the outer visible layer of Buddhist veneer such as the lanterns, the colors and the architecture. Yet, the religious geography of the village together with the scattered shrines and *Seonbawi* can be characterized as an unstructured conglomerate of religiously significant nodes of merit. It is arranged in a heterogeneous format akin to the religious landscape of folk religions.¹⁵⁾

If some pattern were extracted, it is a heterogeneous coexistence of various nodes of merit, places where merits are attained, and *Seonbawi* was seemingly at the highest node acting as the focal point of the area, geographically and in importance. However, its religious landscape seems to fit the natural landmarks of the mountain, such as a shrine located adjacent to the natural spring or in a gully and without any structured order.

When compared to a temple, the outer layer of both the Buddhist temple and Inwang Temple is obviously Buddhist even though the underlying motives are far from the official outer image and not so easily

14) James Huntley Grayson, "The Accommodation of Korean Folk Religion to the Religious Forms of Buddhism: An Example of Reverse Syncretism," *Asian Folklore Studies*, 51, (1992), p. 214.

15) I accept Faure's view that the space of folk religiosity is 'heterogeneous' and 'pluralistic.' Oppositely, the space of Chan Buddhist religiosity was considered to be 'homogeneous' and 'normative.' Bernard Faure, "Space and Place in Chinese Religious Traditions," *History of Religions*, 26(4), (1987), pp. 345-346.

and simply characterized. Additionally, in the two places, there exist a center in a geographical and religious sense. In the case of the Inwang Temple, the *Seonbawi* acts somewhat like a focal point similar to that of the *daeungjeon* of Buddhist temples. Moreover, the religious center of both the Inwang Temple and an official temple are of a different religious ethos compared to the surrounding area. In the case of the Inwang Temple, the *Seonbawi* is located on a peak seemingly above the surrounding areas and takes on more of an official Buddhist image. At an official Buddhist temple, the surrounding area around the *daeungjeon* is of popular Buddhism and this-worldly in its orientation. The distribution of these nodes of popular practice at a temple is similar in its heterogeneity to the heterogeneity of the religious geography of the Inwang Temple with the surrounding area scattered with shrines for folk religious practices.

5. Meritorious Space of Buddhist Temples

A Buddhist temple is commonly known as an official place where Buddha (佛), dharma (法), and sangha (僧), are located.¹⁶⁾ Yet, today, it is difficult to find a temple that is without popular aspects such as the Mountain Spirit Shrine (山神閣) or the Shrine of the Dead (冥府殿) within its precincts. In the center is the *Daeungjeon* and in the surrounding space are located places of popular cultic practices. Between the center and periphery, there seems to be a complex synthesis that is beyond a simple geographical relationship. In this paper this interaction, represented by the relationship between Buddhism and *Musok*, is described using the model of "universal" and "parochial," or in Jonathan Smith's terms, "utopian" and "locative" world-views.¹⁷⁾

This model indicates the different and possibly conflicting tendencies

16) 佛-法-僧 or the Buddha, dharma, and community of monks are the three jewels of the Buddhism on which Buddhists must take refuge in, also known as the Three Refuges.

17) See Smith, *op. cit.*, (1978), especially chapter 6.

of Buddhism and *Musok*. Buddhism as a utopian world-view is beyond place or location. Its doctrine of emptiness is especially anti-locative. However, despite the tendencies of its world-view and given the practical realities, Buddhism must be grounded in reality or "located." *Musok* on the other hand is of a "localizing" tendency and "place" is essential to its religiosity. Its world-view and practices are localized at a specific location or place. These two religions have through history become melded religiously and geographically, as discussed in the above. Their resulting synthesis is revealed in the spatial layout of a temple and the inter-relational dynamics between them.

I make the argument that the physical layout of the temple is a reflection of this interaction and harmonization between the utopian and locative tendencies. It is a blending of both *Musok* and Buddhist "visions of space" which does not fundamentally compromise one over the other. It furthermore reflects the melding of the hierarchical notions of Buddhism with non-hierarchical pantheon of popular deities.

The temple ground is spotted with nodes of popular practices which is indicative of some level of independence of these nodes but also a systemization into a community of a temple. Though the basic structure of the temple layout is that of central-periphery, this does not determine strictly a hierarchical order. In addition the central-peripheral structure does not seem to be an overriding theme of hierarchy. Rather the center, usually the place of the main dharma hall (大雄殿) and the seat of the Buddha, seems to act more as a reference point and in the periphery are the popular cults that are defined in relation to the center.¹⁸⁾

Through this relational matrix the religious geography reflects more an accommodating and adjusting between the two inherently different religions into an ambivalent but mutually dependent relationship. Synthesis

18) Sometimes in a smaller temple the layout is adopted inside the main hall where the central shrine is that of the Buddha and the periphery along the walls is that of the lesser gods. This center-periphery layout also reflects the structure of the Buddhist cosmology where the center is the residing place of the Buddha, the secondary layer is for the higher Buddhist gods and the periphery is a place of lesser gods. See 정각, 『갈암, 절을 차자서』 (서울: 은주사, 1998).

occurred between two differently oriented religions, Buddhism as 'utopian' and *Musok* as 'locative' religions by placing the transcending utopian world-view in the center while the surrounding area was dotted with the more locative religions.

In other words, the temple grounds and its underlying ethos consists of inter-spaced nodes of merit where temple visitors visit to pray and practice for merit. The temple is a reflection of a variegated nodes of merit ordered into a relational structure by the center. The structuring of the center as transcending and the surrounding as locative provides an accommodating structure to the two differently oriented religions. The center allows Buddhism to maintain its other-worldliness while at the same time, through its peripheral popular practices, it is able to become religiously grounded.

This system preserves the heterogeneity of the local religious geography within the overall structure of the temple while also allowing for the existence of a utopian component within this plurality. It allows for the paradoxes of utopian religions that is dependent on popular aspects to mediate between its transcendent doctrine and the real practical needs of the patrons of the temple. Within this system of synthesis between the other-worldly and this-worldly religions, there is an interplay not just one of central-peripheral juxtapositioning but also that of functional-relational.

The overall framework is further strengthened through a system of interaction based on the sharing of functions between the center and the periphery and among nodes. This way the center, Buddhism, maintains a intimate connection with the peripheral non-Buddhist traditions and through this relationship, transcendent Buddhism is able to maintain a practical foundation. At the same time, the whole of the temple religious geography is able to maintain a cohesive network.¹⁹⁾

19) Obeyesekere describes a similar form of relationship in Sri Lanka (formly Ceylon) Buddhism between the Buddha and the various gods who have been incorporated into a hierarchy where the Buddha as a super deity is the head of the gods. It was a way to incorporate local gods into the Buddhism pantheon. Obeyesekere explains that one of the ways in which the gods are related to one another and to the Buddha is through a structure of distribution of power and authority. Gananath

Rituals and practices take place in the main dharma hall or in the various surrounding shrines. The center is related to official rituals and practices and the periphery is related to popular or indigenous rituals and practices. However, there is a interconnectedness between the two in terms of the rituals that take place at temples where the whole of cults and ritual practices must be taken in total as Buddhism. For example, popular rituals are performed by the monks such as the Passage to Heaven ritual (薦度儀禮). These popular rituals have become an integral part of the religious practices that makeup Buddhism in Korea.

The rituals that are performed at temples can be divided into 3 separate categories. These rituals and their performance are separated into official and popular and they coincide with the separation of the place of their performance into central and peripheral. Buddhist rituals performed at temples can generally be categorized into the following three:

- 1) Official - dharma services and ritual on various occasions including the Buddha's birthday or Buddha's entrance into Nirvana (成佛).
- 2) Unofficial - rituals for praying for this-worldly fortune and happiness such as praying to the Big Dipper (七星) for the birth of a baby, and praying to the Mountain spirit for success in business.²⁰⁾
- 3) Unofficial - 49day ritual or 100th day ritual for the dead soul, ritual for placating angry spirits (水陸祭), and ritual for birth in the Western Paradise (生前豫修祭).²¹⁾

The first category includes official Buddhist rituals but categories two and three are popular elements of Buddhism that address the religious needs that the official ritual practices do not. This sharing of roles makes abstract Buddhism more practical and relevant to the lives of the people.

In this system, the various deities are relegated to different roles

Obeyesekere, "The Great Tradition and the Little in the Perspective of Sinhalese Buddhism," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 22(2), (1963), pp. 139-153.

20) Furthermore, the second category is represented by the cult of Samseong (三聖閣) or the Three Sages which consist of three separate deities, Big Dipper (七星), Dokseong (獨聖), and the Mountain Spirit.

21) 오출세, 「한국 민속과 불교의 예」, 오출세 외 저, 『불교민속학의 세계』 (서울: 집문당, 1996), p. 20.

and different realms. The Buddha is obviously of the transcendent realm and is the figure of enlightenment. Therefore prayers regarding worldly needs are not directed to the Buddha. It is the peripheral gods who are delegated to the human world and whose roles are entrusted with helping with this-worldly needs.²²⁾ For example, the Mountain Spirit is well-known for a birth of a baby and long life. As a result, the Mountain Spirit shrine allows Buddhism to address the particularities of everyday life and inversely gives Buddhism practical assistance. This is all the more true when we consider the fact that Buddhism's dependence on the Mountain Spirit is underscored by the patronage it receives from the temple goers.²³⁾

The popular aspects are a fundamental and integral part of Buddhism. It points to the dependence of Buddhism on popular elements, a necessary buffering function between an abstract other-worldly Buddhism and the particularities of people's ordinary lives. This buffering role helps us to understand that official Buddhism is never found alone without a non-Buddhist elements.²⁴⁾

The difference at Inwang Temple would be that it does not have an other-worldly oriented Buddhism in the center. Other than this difference and in spite of its official status, official Buddhist temples have similar underlying characteristics as Inwang Temple. The grounds of an official temple are dotted as at Inwang Temple with nodes of popular practice or nodes of merits. The peripheral area of temples are very much a place of this-worldly merit. Like Inwang Temple, the popular elements are predominant at official temples that provide the underlying religious motive. Buddhism has come to accept the underlying structure of the autochthonous religious ethos on which Buddhism was able to become established.

22) The Divine Generals (神將) and other lesser gods of the Korean Buddhist pantheon are associated with worldly affairs and intercede on behalf of the common people.

23) In addition to its buffering role, the practical financial benefits that the Mountain Spirit shrine brings to the temple cannot be ignored.

24) Thomas A. Kirsch, "Complexity in the Thai Religious System: An Interpretation," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 36(2), (1977), p. 246.

6. The Common Language of Merit and its Doctrinal Basis

At temples, the relationship between the center and the periphery or between nodes of merit are defined by place in its religious geography. For example, the gate guards or the Mountain Spirits are always located at the front gates of the temple and towards the back of the temple above the *Daengjeon*, respectively. In the case of the gate guards, they protect the temple from any harmful ghosts or spirits that exist outside of the temple and in the case of the Mountain Spirit, it seems to represent the mountain guardian who overlooks and protects the temple. This relational definition of function and position are united in a common language of merit. Even the center, the place of official Buddhism is not free from the language of merit. It is a pervasive and common denominator of popular practices and of official Buddhist practices alike. It is the common language of merit that bonds the various nodes, even between Buddhism and popular religions, for a common religious trajectory.

Of course, this common language is not without basis in the rituals and practices but it also has basis in the Buddhist doctrines.²⁵⁾ The fundamental notions of Buddhist teachings such as karma and 'expedient means' provide the foundation for the religious practice of merit making.²⁶⁾

25) Most often cited Buddhist scripture that explicitly consents and indulges in its power to yield merit is the Lotus Sutra (法華經). It boards on excessive in its claims of merits and benefits to be had from reading and following this sutra. In one example, it states, "...if there are those who accept, uphold, read, and recite this sutra, such person will no longer be greedy for or attached to clothing, bedding, food and drink, or other necessities of daily life. Their wishes will not be in vain, and in this present existence they will gain the reward of good fortune (福報)." Burton Watson (trans.), *The Lotus Sutra* (New York, Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 323-324.

26) The Buddhist system of merit (功德) does not seem to have much difficulty in fitting with the system of gaining fortune or *gibok* (기복) in *Musok*. Their similarity encourages the meeting of the two religions. Their differentiation does not seem rigid or clear and so it is difficult to say if a ritual performed at a temple is for merit or fortune. In this sense "seeking fortune" (祈福) seems to have become

Even the doctrine of transference of merit (回向) gives additional credence and support to the connecting dynamics between Buddhism and popular religions as argued by Kirsch²⁷⁾.

Such notions of merit and related concepts are deeply ingrained in the Buddhist cultic practices. In particular the idea of intrinsic inequality sanctioned both by popular and official Buddhism provides the foundation for such conceptualization.²⁸⁾ This is evident in the doctrine of karma and rebirth and the different levels of worlds and the various states that one is reborn into due to one's past karmic deeds.²⁹⁾ Thus Buddhist world-view encourages the individual to participate in situations that produces merit, or rituals for merit-making. As a result, the problem of salvation of the laity who are unable to follow the tenets of Buddhism fully is resolved by the doctrine of merit.

The main point of contact between a lay-person and elite Buddhism is not through such complex doctrines as emptiness nor the basic tenets as the Four Noble Truths (四聖制) nor the Eight Fold Path. Most Buddhists are linked to Buddhism through the popular beliefs about "merit" and the pervasive ritual system connected to these beliefs, or "merit-making" rituals.³⁰⁾

accepted into or working cohesively with the Buddhist soteriological system.

27) Kirsch, *op. cit.*,

28) In Buddhism it is accepted that people are born with varying degrees of intrinsic ability (根機). Therefore the dharma must be taught differently to different people. Rather than teaching Buddhist doctrines, chanting the name of Amitabha (念佛) may be more effective for the salvation for some people. See 전종식(역·해설), 『大乘起信論精解』 (서울: 대승기신론연구회, 2001), pp. 300-301. Also see, Yoshito Hakeda (trans.), *The Awakening of Faith* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 102.

29) A person can be reborn into 10 different realms (十界) according to one's karma. These realms are in turn further subdivided. See 이기선, 『지옥도』 (서울: 대원사, 2001), pp. 22-28.

30) For example, "Folk Brahmanism does not constitute a separate and autonomous religious system vis-a-vis Buddhism, but rather consists of a number of interrelated ritual complexes that can be related to Buddhist values and beliefs." Kirsch, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

7. Some Concluding Remarks

What is important to note is that in the practical reality of most of the church-goers or temple-goers, the notion of merit and the power of a religion to provide merit for its practitioners is an essential aspect of a religion. In our case, merit has been not only the core of popular religions but also an essential part of Buddhism in Korea and most likely other places such as Japan, China, and Thailand.

Given that Inwang Temple is an example of Korea's indigenous religious geography, Buddhist temples also show similar underlying popular religious motives. This indicates a strong undercurrent of popular practices within Buddhism on which it is heavily dependent. Furthermore, it can be surmised that the model of adaptation of Buddhism to the local religious geography was not so much of domination and erasing of previous religious ethos but one of incorporating itself into the sacred conglomerate without fundamentally disrupting it. Buddhist temples can be seen as a model of how utopian tendencies have been harmonized into the locative conglomerate without transforming the logic of the traditional religious order. This model of understanding also gives us an insight into the "practical logic" of popular religious mind that has been a core of Korean Buddhist religiosity.³¹⁾

That is why once Buddhism was freed from political opposition through its official recognition during the time of King Bopheung, it rapidly became syncretised with *Musok*. Even now *Musok* has a permanent residence in the Korean temple and has become an important part of Korean Buddhism without which Korean Buddhism may compromise its unique identity.

31) I borrow this idea from Faure who argues that popular religious geography seems more akin to "practical logic" where "efficacy" was more important than "coherence." Faure, *op. cit.*, (1987), p. 346.

Bibliography:

- Clark, Charles Allen. *Religions of Old Korea*, New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1932.
- Faure, Bernard. "Space and Place in Chinese Religious Traditions," *History of Religions*, 26(4), 1987.
- Grayson, James Huntley. "The Accommodation of Korean Folk Religion to the Religious Forms of Buddhism: An Example of Reverse Syncretism," *Asian Folklore Studies*, 51, 1992.
- Hakeda, Yoshito (trans.). *The Awakening of Faith*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1967.
- Hulbert, Homer B. *The Passing of Korea*, Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1969.
- Kirsch, Thomas A. "Complexity in the Thai Religious System: An Interpretation," *Journal of Asian Studies* 36(2), 1977.
- Kitagawa, Joseph M. "The Buddhist Transformation in Japan," *History of Religions*, 4(2), 1965.
- Obeyesekere, Gananath. "The Great Tradition and the Little in the Perspective of Sinhalese Buddhism," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 22(2), 1963.
- Smith, Johnathan. *Map is not territory*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978.
- Watson, Burton (trans.). *The Lotus Sutra*, New York, Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Korean literature:

- 박호원, 『한국공동체 신앙의 역사적 연구』(박사논문), 한국정신문화연구원 한국학대학원, 1997.
- 一然, (李丙燾 譯), 『삼국유사』, 『한국의 민속·종교 사상』, 서울: 삼성출판사, 1997.
- 오출세, 『한국 민속과 불교의예』, 우출세 외 저, 『불교민속학의 세계』, 서울: 집문당, 1996.
- 유동식, 『韓國巫敎의 歷史와 構造』, 서울: 연세대학교 출판부, 1974.
- 이기선, 『지옥도』, 서울: 대원사, 2001.

- 이진수, 「한국인의 가치관과 민족사상」, 『한국의 청소년 문화』, 5, 2004.
정각, 『갈암, 절을 차자서』, 서울: 은주사, 1998.
전중식(역·해설), 『大乘起信論精解』, 서울: 대승기신론연구회, 2001.
최광식, 「무속신앙이 한국불교에 끼친 영향」, 김광익 편, 『민족과 문화』, 서울: 한국문화인류학회 1편, 정음사, 1988.
홍윤식, 「한국불교 의례」, 『한국불교』, 서울: 원광대학교 종교문제 연구소, 1974.

Internet sources:

종교학벌레, “인왕산 선바위” (<http://bhang813.egloos.com/1875623>).

원고접수일: 2009년 11월 16일

심사완료일: 2009년 12월 7일

게재확정일: 2009년 12월 14일

Abstract

Preserving the Korean Traditional Sacred Geography: Theoretical Implications of Buddhist Religious Mimicry

When Buddhism was initially transmitted to Korea, it had to contend with its situation firstly as a foreign religion and secondly as a religion having different and conflicting world views and religious problems from the local religions. Traditional records suggest a model of adaptation of Buddhism to the local religious geography that was not so much of domination and erasing of previous religious ethos but one of incorporating itself into the sacred conglomerate. Furthermore, Buddhist temples can be seen as a model of how utopian tendencies of Buddhism have been incorporated into the locative religious conglomerate without transforming the basic logic of the traditional religious order.

The process of adaptation of Buddhism led to not only mimicry of religious practices but also spatial mimicry. Interestingly, their interaction and relationship has led to spatial interaction initially in terms of taking of religiously significant space and later to forming layers of religious significance. I interpret this as simultaneous sharing of the same religiously charged space in a religious symbiotic relationship.

In this regard, the intent of this paper is to examine the dynamics between two religions of different orientations and what significance this has on Buddhist religiosity, based on the geographical and religious space of the Buddhist temple. This paper suggests a model of religious and spatial mimicry which simply means that Buddhism imitated local religious practices and also established itself in traditionally sacred places. In this way, this paper provides a model of understanding that highlights the "practical logic" of popular religious mind that has been a core of Korean Buddhist religiosity.

Key words: Korean Buddhism, Musok, traditional sacred geography, locative and utopian religious tendencies, religious mimicry, spatial mimicry, syncretism, religious symbiotic relationship.

한국의 고유한 종교적 풍경의 보전

- 한국불교 정착의 이론적 구성 -

김성은

불교가 한반도에 전승되었을 때에 해결해야 할 두 종류의 문제점이 있었다. 이른바, 불교는 한국에서 기반이 없었던 타국의 종교였고 그리고 불교는 한국의 고유한 종교와 다를 뿐만 아니라 서로 충돌되는 세계관과 기본적으로 다른 종교적 물음을 품고 있는 종교이었다.

불교의 정착은 사찰의 종교적 구조에서 종교적 합의의 모델을 추론함으로 탈현실적인 불교가 토착의 밀집하여 뭉친 종교적 토대에 정착의 과정을 이해할 수 있다. 이를테면 불교의 정착의 모델은 그 정착과정은 지배와 고유의 성스러운 풍경의 말소 보다 기존의 종교적 구조에 순응의 모델이 적합하다는 이 논문의 주장이다.

예를 들어서 불교와 민간 종교를 대표하는 무속의 만남은 종교적 흉내뿐만 아니라 무속의 성스러운 장소까지의 흉내내는 정착의 과정으로 이해가 된다. 최초의 만남은 무속의 성스러운 공간에 불교의 사찰의 설립으로 기존의 성스러움의 밀소가 아니라 성스러운 단층의 설립으로 이해하여 성스러운 공간을 동시에 공유하는 공생기의 관계로 설명이 된다.

이러한 면에서 이 논문의 의도는 불교와 무속의 혼합 그리고 그 내면의 역학에 조명과 불교의 현실적 종교의 면모 혹은 측면을 보다 더 정확히 서술하고자 하였다. 그러므로 이 논문은 이론적인 정착 및 혼합의 모델을 새움으로서 한국불교의 기반이 되었던 현실의 종교적 논리를 이해하고자 하였다.

주제어: 한국불교, 무속, 전통 구유 종교 풍경, 처격과 이상향의 종교적 경향, 종교적 흉내(religious mimicry), 성스러운 공간의 흉내(spatial mimicry), 혼합(syncretism), 종교적 공생의 관계(religious symbiotic relationship).