

Crossing Boundaries or is it Blurred Boundaries?

— A Reevaluation of Popular Buddhism in Korea —*

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目 次

1. Introduction
2. Syncretism of Korean Buddhism and *Musok*
3. Meeting of Mountain Spirit and Buddhism,
4. Ambivalence
5. Ending Remarks

1. Introduction

1-1. Building boundaries

In our discussions of Buddhism we often talk about Zen(K. *Seon*, 禪) or *Ganhwa Son*(看話禪) as orthodox Buddhism and popular Buddhism as corrupted or impure. Furthermore we consider orthodox and popular forms as separate traditions and rarely as closely interrelated or as a single tradition. The boundaries of Buddhism is highly rigid and well defined. These are depictions of idealized types that do not actually exist but strongly determine our understanding of Buddhism. In effect, this leads to distortions most clearly exemplified by Suzuki's Zen that has significantly determined our general knowledge of Buddhism especially in the West. In Suzuki's discussion of Zen, there are assumptions of an ideal or essence of Buddhism that are connected to

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an ideology.¹⁾ Similarly, in Korea, Seongcheol adamantly claims that *Seon* Buddhism that is strictly based on the notion of Sudden Awakening and Sudden Practice(頓悟頓修) is orthodox.²⁾

Though Seongcheol's claims are still contentious, there is somewhat of a consensus about *Ganhwa Seon* (J. Koan Zen) as the tradition that is generally practiced by Korean monks. Again, *Ganhwa Seon* has been depicted as the true form and other forms and dimensions of Buddhism practiced in Korea as inferior practices. One of these is the most “un-Buddhist” but an important aspect of Korean Buddhism, *Musok* or Korean shamanism. Through the long history of Buddhism in Korea, *Musok* has become an important part of Korean form of Buddhism, a fact often denied and academically labeled as degraded folk practices. Yet, *Musok* is undeniably seated within Korean Buddhism. It is enshrined on the temple grounds in the form of Mountain Spirit cult along with other Buddhist gods that reside in the temple. This is an example of crossing boundaries or “blurred” boundaries between what is referred to as “official” and “popular” Buddhism.

Nonetheless, separating and drawing such boundaries have been a integral part of academic work. Religious Studies is no different from other fields in humanities that model itself after sciences that is built on the tradition of dividing and separating as a fundamental method of doing research. Just as a scientist tries to isolate an object of study and define a clear boundary around it, religionists also isolate a religion into its “essential” forms. We also imagine religions to be severed from its natural surroundings of interconnections with cultural forms and talk about religions as if they naturally exist in isolation.

Religious models based on separation and isolation only distorts what most people have practiced and only reify our “imagined” idealized religions. It

1) For example, in such claims, Zen is “neither a religion nor a philosophy but the spirit of all religion and philosophy,” the ideological basis is discernable. Bernard Faure, *Chan Insight and Oversight: an Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993, pp. 57-58.

2) Based on this argument, Seongchol discredits Jinul's line of Buddhism widely known as Sudden Awakening and Gradual Practice. See 심재룡, 「현대 한국불교 頓漸論의 비판적 小考」, 『불교연구』 14 (1997).

becomes an essentialist definition that may have more to do with our ideologies and political motives than what is and has been practiced throughout centuries.³⁾

Sam Gill argues, borrowing the map-territory metaphor of Jean Baudrillard, that our generic ideas regarding religion have become "simulations of culture and history" or "hyperrealities" where the concepts have become detached from what they represent. Gill writes, they are also part of a discourse that favors the domination of Western concepts of world-view over indigenous ones.⁴⁾

In his example, he states that definitions such as "world religions" and "East Asian religions" or "Western religions" came to be formed and applied to religions such as Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, categories that were also closely tied to the persistent Western colonial ideologies.

In this discourse, the comprehension of territory is "static," "stable" and "mappable" and in effect is an argument that religion and its boundaries are

3) Ortner points out the inaccuracies in trying to describe Buddhism among the Sherpas in Nepal through "essentialist" definitions. Sherry B. Ortner, "The Case of the Disappearing Shamans, or No Individualism, No Relationalism," *Ethos*, 23(3) (1995), pp. 355-390.

Another very poignant example is that of Colonel Olcott who is credited by many as creating "Protestant Buddhism" where Buddhism was defined as a "scientific religion." It was part of Olcott's effort to revive Sinhalese Buddhism in response to Christian missionary's criticism of Buddhism as a superstition. See Stephen Prothero, "Henry Steel Olcott and 'Protestant Buddhism'," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 63(2) (1995), pp. 281-302.

4) Sam Gill convincingly points out that in the development of the study of religions throughout the world, the idea of religion began to be defined in terms of territorial classifications or in terms of space and time. He argues that such divisions that are based on colonial ideologies have been reflected in the formations of categories such as world religions and East Asian religions or Western religions that are then applied to religions like Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. He argues that this is evidence of continuing colonial tendencies. Sam Gill, "Territory," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor, Chicago Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 301.

In a similar argument Chidester makes a close connection between denying the existence of religion among the Africans, and the European colonization policies of Africa. David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa*, Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia, 1996.

also static, stable, and mappable. Furthermore, traditional conceptions of categories are drawn whose members are assumed to share common traits that are essential to each categories despite the diverse manifestations within a single category.⁵⁾

To summarize, depictions of religious traditions become fixed in its form of essence. Models with rigid boundaries are formed that then start to become reified and become the foundation for generating further knowledge. It is a circular process that eventually creates academic studies that are distant and removed from the experiences of the people.

In other words, we can gather that boundaries are products of scholarly work. We apply them in definitions such as “religion” or “Buddhism.” These definitions have in turn become reified and have become strong determiners in our understanding of Buddhism or religions and, in effect, have gained a life of its own and have replaced what they once represented.

1-2. An alternative approach

Essentialist definitions create boundaries in order to determine clearly what is and is not Buddhism or religion, what we as scholars have long been doing. The problem here is that such rigid boundaries are often highly subjective and furthermore, they are not stable. Religion is a dynamic entity, comprised of “situational or relational categories, mobile boundaries which shift.”⁶⁾ Just as the tactics in negotiations need to change with situational changes, so do the boundaries.

I suggest then that Buddhism and religions in general must be understood on the basis of relational dynamics. In line with this thought, I also argue that rather than boundaries, cohesion through relationships is a significant part of the dynamics. Therefore in our attempt to describe Buddhism, as a religion, we must consider its continual negotiations of life's obstacles and its meaningful

5) Gill, *op. cit.*, pp. 309-311.

6) Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map is not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions*, Chicago Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 291.

cohesiveness in a relational construct. Smith defined it well when he claimed that,

“Religion is a distinctive mode of human creativity, a creativity which both discovers limits and creates limits for human existence. What we study when we study religion is the variety of attempts to map, construct and inhabit such positions of power through the use of myths, ritual and experiences of transformation.”⁷⁾

Additionally, Smith argues that religion is the mapping of the world that “guarantees meaning and value through structure of congruity and conformity.”⁸⁾ Smith correctly emphasizes congruity or cohesion as the basis of drawing a relationship even across boundaries. This means that relational interaction is important in drawing out those structures of cohesion. What was considered to be within the defined boundaries take on a different meaning when its relationship with religions outside of its boundaries are considered.

Faure in his discussion of Buddhism and popular religions also emphasizes the relational framework where the two modes reflect tensions and conflicts resulting from a “subtle epistemological shift,” a transformation in the minds of the people. He describes the two religions as “two modes of thought,” or “two ways of access to knowledge” that are not completely separated and do not inhabit completely different types of minds.⁹⁾

In other words, various modes of reason coexist in the mind of a religious person and he or she is not limited to only one mode. It must be noted here that the two modes of thought are coherent and cohesive in the mind and this structure of congruity represents a religious geography in the mind of a person. Therefore, it is necessary that we consider the various modes and their relationships when describing religion or Buddhism.

7) *Ibid.*, p. 291.

8) *Ibid.*, p. 292.

9) Bernard Faure, “Space and Place in Chinese Religious Traditions,” *History of Religions*, 26(4) (1987), pp. 352-353.

With the above in mind, I would like to discuss the phenomenon of religious practice that takes place at Buddhist temples and make an argument that temple practices are far removed from how scholars describe Buddhism. Temple Buddhism as a practiced religion reflects the attempt to negotiate life's challenges. It is valuable in the sense that it is a living form of Buddhism that has survived through centuries. This form of Buddhism, due to its combination with non-Buddhist elements is considered to be distant from the Buddhism that is defined in terms of its essence. Then, to understand practiced Buddhism, its relational network or push-and-pull interconnections may be more important. Then, non-Buddhist elements are parts that organically makeup a complete whole and not just a combination of heterogeneous parts. They are elements that cannot be separated. It is a coherent structure that is experientially meaningful in its "present cohesion."¹⁰⁾

What should be in this "present cohesion" is not the role of a scholar to decide. Our job is to determine the relationship that gives it its cohesive religious meaning. In the case of Korean Buddhism, it only seems natural that within this cohesive structure, various "non-Buddhist" aspects play an important relational role.

2. Syncretism of Korean Buddhism and *Musok*

Unlike what may be expected in modern day Korea, examples of syncretised or blurred boundaries between Buddhism and *Musok* are easily encountered. A good example is the area that surrounds an oddly shaped rock formation called *Seonbawi*(선바위). Because of the odd-looking rocks, it was traditionally a place

10) I borrow Faure's idea of religion that have meaning only in its "present cohesion." He argues that religion is not merely a survival or a patched-up syncretism of superstitions and Buddhist or Daoist doctrines. "A belief or a rite is not the combination of residues and of heterogeneous innovations, but an experience that has meaning only in its present cohesion." Bernard Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: a Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991, p. 89.

where people went to perform folk religious rituals. Later, it was made into a place of shamanistic rituals by building a shrine or a *Guksa-dang*. In the recent past *Inwang* temple(인왕사) was built within this area sharing the traditionally sacred area. There are also buildings where purely shamanistic rituals take place and others that look like authentic Buddhist temples with prominent Buddhist status and paintings. In the latter type of buildings, rituals "similar in format and intention" to *Musok* rituals are performed. 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. He concludes that the rituals performed in these shrines can collectively be called examples of syncretic shamanism.¹¹⁾

In present day *Musok* shrines, syncretism between Buddhism and *Musok* is strikingly visible. The intimate mixing of the two traditions has gone to the extent of forming indistinguishable boundaries between the two traditions. The *mansins*¹²⁾ call themselves Bodhisattvas and call their homes Buddhist shrines (庵) or temples and mark their houses with the insignia of Buddhism(卍) on the building itself or on a flag over their houses. Inside, they usually have a shrine of gods among which the Buddha and/or a Bodhisattva is often found. Moreover, in the *Musok* pantheon, Sakyamuni Buddha and *Jeseok*¹³⁾, a Buddhist god, are considered among the most powerful along with *Musok* heavenly gods.

Even among Buddhist rituals, Passage to Heaven ritual(천도의례) or the ceremony of the Ten kings of Puratory(十王儀禮) has been accepted wholeheartedly with some changes by *Musok*. The boundaries between the two traditions may be at times difficult to draw, if not blurred. For the many

11) 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.

12) *Mansin*(萬神) literally means 10,000 spirits, but it a commonly used word for Korean shamans. Another word more commonly used is *Mudang*.

13) *Jeseok*(帝釋) was originally the supreme Hindu god *Indra* who was adopted into the Buddhist pantheon and together with the god *Beomcheon*(梵天) became the protector of the dharma. See 편무영, 『한국민속불교론』, 민속원, 1998.

temple-goers there would hardly seem to be any acute feeling of contradiction in going back and forth between the temple and a *Musok* shrine.¹⁴⁾

Syncretism and thus hazy lines between the two traditions are evident even at Korean Buddhist temples. The Buddhist temple is the most official place of Buddhism, but nowhere is popular Buddhist practices more evident than at temples. The relationship between official Buddhism and *Musok* is evident even to an untrained eye. In an interesting fashion, they have attained a harmonious interrelationship. Rituals and Buddhist practices take place in the main dharma hall and 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.

Even the performance of rituals that have no relationship with enlightenment such as praying for fortune or the birth of a baby are not shunned or discouraged by the monks. Some are readily performed officially by the monks such as the Passage to Heaven ritual. It has nothing to do with the ultimate goal of Buddhism, namely awakening, but have become a natural part of Buddhism in Korea.

We can categorize the rituals that take place at a temple into the following three:

- 1) Official - dharma service for the various occasions including Buddha's birthday, Buddha's acceptance of precepts(出家), Buddha's attainment of Great Wisdom(成道), and Buddha's entering of Nirvana(成佛).
- 2) Unofficial - rituals for praying for this-worldly fortune and happiness(現世福樂) such as praying to the Big Dipper(七星) for the birth of baby, longevity, and praying to the Mountain spirit for success in business.
- 3) Unofficial - 49day or 100th day ceremony for the dead souls, ritual for placating angry spirits(水陸祭), ritual for birth in the Western Paradise (生前豫修祭).¹⁵⁾

14) 김태근, 『巫俗과 靈의 세계』, 한울, 1993, p. 191.

15) 오출세, 『한국 민속과 불교의례』, 우출세 외 저, 『불교민속학의 세계』, 집문당, 1996, p. 20.

The first category includes official rituals but the second and the third are fortune-seeking and characteristic of folk religious practices and therefore are deemed unofficial rituals. Kirsch argues that most Buddhist are linked to Buddhism through the popular beliefs about merit and the pervasive rituals that are connected to these beliefs. The popular aspects seem to be a fundamental and integral part of Buddhism. It points to the dependence of Buddhism on popular elements. Kirsch claims that they are necessary as a buffer between abstract other-worldly Buddhism and the particularities of people's ordinary lives. Kirsch argues that this buffering role helps us to understand that official Buddhism is never found alone without non-Buddhist elements.¹⁶⁾

We have so far discussed what seems to be a natural mixing between *Musok* and Buddhism even at a temple, the seat of official Buddhism. It is an indication of the natural processes of mixing that seemed almost non-existent in academic discussions. No matter how the scholars would like to draw Buddhism or "official" Buddhism, syncretism seems like an undeniable cultural phenomenon in Korea.

From here on I will discuss the dynamics involved in the interaction. Below, aspects of historical, political and the ambivalent tension in the relationship between the two traditions will be discussed.

Among the popular cults associated with *Musok*, we focus our attention on the Mountain Spirit cult, one of the major cults at a temple and a representative of *Musok*. Despite the location of the Mountain Spirit shrine in the periphery, it has a rich history of relationship with Buddhism from the time that Buddhism first set its foot on Korean soil.

3. Meeting of Mountain Spirit and Buddhism

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

The relationship between Buddhism and the indigenous territorial cult, Mountain Spirit cult, evolved initially from that of conflict to one of ambivalent tension. In summary, it is an effort by Buddhism to adapt and overtake, and *Musok's* effort to survive. Starting from the beginning of their meeting there occurred a complex interaction that was more than a mutual influence, but rather an ambivalent interdependence.

The meeting between incoming Buddhism and the autochthonous Mountain Spirit cult is closely associated with the shift of political power from the traditional power base to a newly centralized power. The official recognition of Buddhism may have been the foundation for the rise of central power in the Kingdom of Shilla under the rule of king Beopheung(法興王, 514-540). 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. It was shortly after the martyrdom of Ichadon(異次頓) in 527 that Buddhism was officially accepted.

Buddhism's initial actions associated with conflict can be characterized as overtaking the places of sacred power. Soon after Buddhism was officially recognized, the first temple named *Heingryun Temple*(興輪寺) was built in the traditionally sacred forest of Heavenly Forest(天境林). This signifies the rise of Buddhism on the foundation of Mountain Spirit cult and with it the development of a syncretism between the two in Korea.¹⁷⁾

Hong explains that in the records of the Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms

17) As a result of the martyrdom of Ichadon, *Jachu temple*(刺楸寺) was built on Mount Guimgang(금강산) one of the four sacred areas where the high ranking statesmen gathered to discuss state affairs. From this we can guess that the traditional power base was closely tied to sacred areas. As a result, the building of Buddhist temples at the areas linked to traditional power can be interpreted as the coopting of the traditional power base by Buddhism. It is usurping of the religious power base by Buddhism. However, it can also be an attempt by Buddhism to appease or to gain some relationship with the traditional powers to win over the people of Shilla. See Bak Howon's thesis for more detailed discussion of political implications of official recognition of Buddhism in relation to the traditional power base. 박호원, 『한국 공동체 신앙의 역사적 연구』, (박사학위 논문) 한국정신문화연구원 한국학 대학원, 1997, p. 77.

or *Samgukyusa*(三國遺事)¹⁸⁾, temples were located in places 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 sites and these were usually places of Mountain Spirit cult.¹⁹⁾

In particular, the Five Mountains located in the *Gyeongju* area and the Five Mountains mentioned in the Chronicles of the Three Kingdoms or *Samguksagi* (三國史記), all traditionally sacred mountains, had close ties with Buddhism especially with the rise of Mountain Seon Buddhism(山地伽藍) in the 9th century. Moreover, the establishment of Buddhist temples at the location of previous Mountain Spirit shrines must have led to the establishment of the Mountain Spirit cult within the temple precincts.²⁰⁾

From the initial relationship of conflict, the relationship developed into one of ambivalent symbiosis. Though Buddhism was successful in establishing itself as a state recognized religion, its continued existence seemed dependent on its on-going relationship of dependence on the Mountain Spirit cult. The history of the relationship between Buddhism and the Mountain Spirit is one of ambivalence and tension. Even the boundary between the two is ambivalent. By building temples on the traditionally sacred places, it was an attempt by Buddhism to usurp and incorporate the cult into its own religious geography possibly to control its disruptive influences and also to gain the patronage of the people. Nevertheless the traditional sacredness was preserved within an hierarchical structure that was imposed on the indigenous structure.

New geography was created by “relocating and resacralizing of space,” but ironically through this process, the universalism of Buddhism gradually became “subverted by popular tradition and its ‘finite provinces of meaning.’”²¹⁾ In

18) *Samgukyusa* is a collection of legends, folktales, 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.

19) 최광식, 「무속신앙이 한국불교에 끼친 영향 : 산신각과 장승을 중심으로」, 『민족과 문화』, 한국문화인류학회, 1988, pp. 394-395.

20) 홍윤식, 「한국불교의례」, 『한국불교』, 원광대학교 종교문제연구소, 1974, p. 20.

essence, Buddhism could not help but also adopt itself to the foundation of *Musok* and at the same time accept *Musok* elements into its own pantheon and practices and into the temple. Through this process Buddhism was able to become localized and meaningful to the local people. Buddhism was in a foreign land and culture, it needed the guidance and support of *Musok*, to know the skills of the trade in a foreign place, a topic to which we now turn.

4. Ambivalence

4-1. An Ambivalent relationship

The ambivalence of the relationship between Buddhism and *Musok* is further expressed in the tales of their meetings. The basic theme is that of Buddhism receiving assistance from the autochthonous religion, *Musok*. In a story in the *Samguk yusa*, a monk named Chin-ja who lived during the time of King Jinji (眞智王, r. 576-579) was in search of *Miruk-bosal* (Maitrya Buddha) incarnated as a *hwalang*.²²⁾ He was given special knowledge by a Mountain Spirit manifested as an old man about the whereabouts of the incarnate *Miruk*.²³⁾

In another example, a mythic Mountain Spirit appears in the dream of a Buddhist nun named Chi-hyeo who did not have the means to reconstruct the dilapidated main hall, and reveals herself as the Spirit Mother of *Seondo* mountain (仙桃山神母). The Mountain Spirit instructs the nun to build a hall and in it, to decorate the three statues and paint on the wall fifty three images of the Buddha, the six Benevolent Beings, the Heavenly Spirits (諸天神), and the

21) Faure explains that this occurred in China between Buddhism and popular religion. Faure, *Ibid.*, 1987, p. 355.

22) *Hwalang* is an organization of young men from aristocratic families for the purpose of developing an elite group of future military leader. Its identity and purpose is much debated among modern scholars since the extant evidences seem to point to various identities and purposes. See 이진수, 「한국인의 가치관과 민족 사상」, 『한국의 청소년 문화』 5 (2004), pp. 45-81.

23) 一然, 『三國遺事』, 李丙巖 譯, 한국의 미속·종교 사상, 삼성출판사, 1997, pp. 184-185.

Spirit Rulers(神君) of the five mountains.²⁴⁾ In her instructions she tells the nun where to find the gold coins for the construction and to hold ceremonies twice in spring and autumn of every year.²⁵⁾

In these stories, Buddhism is clearly in a position of receiving assistance from the indigenous Mountain Spirit. It is a depiction of a relationship of dependence where the Mountain Spirit is the provider of special knowledge that only the autochthonous spirit would have, and even financial means, possibly in a literal sense. *Musok* as the main traditional religion was initially the foremost opponent and later the principle supporter of Buddhism.

Given the above discussion, it is unclear whether *Musok* was overtaken by Buddhism or the supporter of Buddhism. For certain, there had been a very intimate interaction with a significant interdependence. It is not surprising that such relationship is also an important part at present between Buddhism and *Musok*.

Today, it is difficult to find a temple that is without a Mountain Spirit shrine within its precincts. Yet, the relationship of ambivalence is a visible subtext consisting of its place within the temple grounds in relation to the center, the main hall.

4-2. Mountain Spirit cult, its ambivalent place

Given the centuries of interweaving history between the Mountain Spirit cult and Buddhism, it would be difficult to see the two as being separate traditions. The place of Mountain Spirit cult within the temple grounds is telling of the inseparable relationship. The temple is a place of all things that are identified as official, Buddha(佛), dharma(法), and sangha(僧)²⁶⁾, and among them exists Mountain Spirit cult.

The positional layout of the temple is from the center to the periphery

24) The five mountains are Toham(吐含山), Jili(智異山), Gyeolyong(鷄龍山), Taebaek(太白山), and Buak(父岳山).

25) *op. cit.*, p. 253.

26) 佛法僧 or the Buddha, dharma, and monks are the three jewels of the Buddhism on which Buddhists must take refuge in, also known as the Three Refuges.

which reflects the structure of Korean Buddhist pantheon. In the center is the main dharma hall(大雄殿) and the periphery is the place of lesser gods including the Seven-Stars (Big Dipper) shrine, the Mountain Spirit shrine and the Shrine of the Underworld(冥府殿).²⁷⁾ It also reflects the structure of the Buddhist cosmology where the center is the residing place of higher Buddhist gods and the periphery is a place of lesser gods.²⁸⁾

Situating the gods from the center to periphery in a hierarchical structure places the various cults in a relational position. This way the center of Buddhism is not isolated from the surrounding gods but maintains the various nodes that makeup Buddhist and semi-Buddhist traditions in a cohesive relational network.

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. Below him are the Guardian deities of Ceylon and then come the Attendant Gods followed by the lesser gods and the Demons at the lowest level.²⁹⁾ Similar to the Divine Generals(神將) of the Korean Buddhist pantheon who protect the temple and act as Attendant Gods, gods below the Buddha are associated with worldly affairs and intercede on behalf of humans. That is why people come to the temple and offer prayers to the lesser gods or to the Bodhisattvas and not directly to the Buddha.

Obeyesekere argues that the hierarchy of the "supernaturals" does not exist as a discrete strata, but is linked together to form a well-connected structure. He explains that one of the ways in which the gods are related to one another and to the Buddha is through a distribution of power and authority. The power that the gods and demons possess is relegated to them ultimately by the

27) 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 is that of the lesser gods.

28) See 정각, 『가람, 절을 찾아서』, 운주사, 1998.

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

Buddha.³⁰⁾

Furthermore, Obeyesekere warns that drawing a distinct stratum that is linked to a certain great or little tradition fails to reflect the coherent whole of the religious tradition of a people. He makes this point by emphasizing that the various gods that have been imported into the Sinhalese religions have lost their historical connections and now have meaning only in relation to the Buddhist tradition.³¹⁾

In a Korean Buddhist temple, the Mountain Spirit is usually enshrined in its own building that is often situated at a distance and at a higher place than the main hall(*Daeungjeon*), where the statue of the Buddha is housed. It indicates that the Mountain Spirit is a lesser god that provides a supporting role within the pantheon. Its legitimacy as a member of divine Buddhist beings who reside at the temple is verified by the homage it receives during certain times of the year. The *Seokmunuibeam*³²⁾(釋門儀範) describes the fortuitous days for offering a ritual for the Mountain Spirit³³⁾ either by a *mansin* or a monk.

Though the Mountain Spirit cult may be visibly separate from the center, its place understood within Buddhism is more meaningful. The role of the Mountain Spirit in relation to the main cult of Sakyamuni, is to protect and to play a supporting role as a member of Buddhist spirits(神衆) who reside at a temple. It is part of the pantheon of gods and Bodhisattvas who assists ultimately the Buddha.

30) *Ibid.*, p. 145.

31) *Ibid.*, p. 146.

32) *Seokmunuibeam* is a Buddhist ritual handbook that is commonly used at temples in Korea.

33) Mountain King Sutra(山王經)

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|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 대산소산산왕대신 | 대악소악산왕대신 | (大山小山山王大神 | 大岳小岳山王大神) |
| 대각소각산왕대신 | 대축소축산왕대신 | (大覺小覺山王大神 | 大丑小丑山王大神) |
| 미산재처산왕대신 | 이십육정산왕대신 | (尾山在處山王大神 | 二十六丁山王大神) |
| 외악명산산왕대신 | 사해피발산왕대신 | (外岳名山山王大神 | 四海被髮山王大神) |
| 명당토산산왕대신 | 금궤대덕산왕대신 | (明堂土山山王大神 | 金櫃大德山王大神) |
| 청용백호산왕대신 | 현무주작산왕대신 | (靑龍白虎山王大神 | 玄武朱雀山王大神) |
| 동서남북산왕대신 | 원산근산산왕대신 | (東西南北山王大神 | 遠山近山山王大神) |
| 상방하방산왕대신 | 홍산길산산왕대신 | (上方下方山王大神 | 凶山吉山山王大神) |

정각, 『한국의 불교의례』, 운주사, 2001, p. 360.

Despite its distance from the central focus, namely the Buddha and his cult, its higher placement tells us that it is in some sense highly regarded in the whole religious structure of Buddhism. It is as if to accept the guardianship of the Mountain spirit which is traditionally known as the guardian of the mountain. The Mountain Spirit is a lesser god, but its ambivalent relationship with Buddhism is evident in that he is like a guardian god whose land on which the Buddhist temple is built; Buddhism is a guest. The Mountain Spirit shrine is high above the rest of the temple and seems to oversee it. Its character is strong and independent and not fully proselytized into a Buddhist figure. Its depiction has never taken on a "Buddhist" look, but has maintained the look of a Taoist sage with long white hair and wearing a loosely fitting and flowing robe and always with a tiger. It is obviously not a Buddhist god, but it is also at the same time very much part of Buddhism in Korea.

The paradox is more evident when outside of the temple, the Mountain Spirit cult hardly exists in such highly developed form. Its identity and significance has meaning mostly in the form found at a temple, in relationship to Buddhism. Through historical development the relationship between the two traditions has developed such that each has taken in the other as part of a process of development of its own identity. Separating one from the other would take away a part of the identity of both.

This ambivalent tension of push and pull defines its position within Buddhism. It has become part of Buddhism to the point that it cannot be understood without Buddhism and reversely Buddhism without the aid of the Mountain Spirit cannot be as meaningful to the people. Buddhism's dependence on the Mountain Spirit is underscored by the patronage it receives from the temple goers. Its place within the temple grounds means that the patronage the Mountain Spirit brings to the temple is not lost. Its role in bringing patrons to the temple is directly connected to the practical matter of survival of Buddhism. The Mountain Spirit cult is a major source of revenue for the temples and this can be another reason for its continued place at the temple.

The cultic function of the Mountain Spirit is well-known for a birth of a

baby and long life.³⁴⁾ Worshippers who pray to the Mountain Spirit for their help can provide offerings of various food stuffs but mostly rice and fruits, and sometimes offerings of money. They may also choose to pay to have a candle (electric) lit for a period of time that are placed in rows to the side of the shrine.

If we observe the life of a temple-going Korean women, what place do the two traditions take within their religious world and how are the two related? As Maspro have argued, Buddhism and popular religions are aspects of one's religious sphere of reality that make up a part of the total reality. In the religious world, Buddhism and the Mountain Spirit cult are two tools of negotiation that are closely interrelated and have related but separate purposes.

Outside of the mind of the temple-goer, the two traditions exist in an interdependent ambivalence most likely not that much different from that within the mind. Our religious belief is made up of an amalgamation of various beliefs. This is especially telling when those who claim to not believe in any religion also have some form of beliefs such as in ghosts, the afterlife, or astrology.

Despite this fact, we tend to study religion as if our religious world or religious mind is fractured into distinct religious traditions. Such compartmentalized conceptualization of religions is a heuristic perceptualization and not a true reflection of religious reality.

Then what is the use of making separations and rigid boundaries other than to serve the purposes of academics. Such ideas are made-up by and meaningful only to scholars of religion. In the minds of the people both poles of a religions spectrum, official-popular or Buddhism-*Musok* coexist in a coherent fashion and they are able to oscillate between the two without the mental barriers that the scholars have imagined to exist.

34) The cultic purpose of the Mountain Spirit seems to vary depending on the scholars of Buddhism and even among the patrons.

5. Ending Remarks

Just as the begging bowl of the monk or a nun has no direct relationship with his or her goal of awakening but is essential for life, Buddhism is aware of the interdependence between it and the Mountain Spirit. Despite the subversive power of *Musok*, it was simply necessary to accept it into its domain, and this ambivalent tension can be seen as a source of new possibilities and the wellbeing of both.

Terms such as the word “religion” are abstract models just as maps are, and we cannot take the maps for the real terrain. The terms great and little or popular and official or Buddhism and *Musok* are heuristic tools which we cannot take to be definitive reflections of reality. We must be wary of their reification since the dangers are apparent.

Though a cell of a living plant can be countable, its existence and the understanding of its characteristics is possible only in and through the chemical interactions with its surrounding cells. A religion or Buddhism does not exist in a vacuum either. Its existence and understanding its characteristics would be possible only through the relationship it has with its surrounding religions. Drawing boundaries only creates the illusion that religions or Buddhism exists in text books.

Key Words: temple Buddhism, Musok, Mountain Spirit shrine, syncretism, relational definition, contextualization, boundaries.

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<국문초록>

경계를 넘어서 한국불교를 재검토하기

— 사찰 불교를 중심으로 —

김 성 은

학자들은 종종 불교를 순수한 종교 혹은 전통으로 서술한다. 곧 교과서적인 불교 이해라고도 말할 수 있는 이런 경향에 따르면, 불교는 모놀리식(monolithic)하고 다른 종교와는 전혀 융합(amalgamation)이 없는 것으로 묘사된다. 불교에 대한 이러한 이해 방식 때문에 매우 경직되고 확실한 경계가 세워지게 된다.

한국 불교, 특히 현실에서 실천되는 불교의 경우에는 이처럼 순수한 형태는 쉽게 보이지 않는다. 예컨대 불교와 무속 간에는 뚜렷한 경계를 긋기 애매한 경우가 많다. 이것이야말로 한국 불교의 특징이라고 할 수 있다. 그런데 한국 불교와 무속 간에 많은 습합이 있음에도 불구하고, 승려와 심지어 학자들까지도 이 현상을 본래의 순수함을 잃어버린 타락된 불교의 모습이라고 보며, 극단적으로는 그것이 불교가 아니라고 주장하기도 한다.

이런 단언은 현실에서는 존재하지 않는 이상형을 전제하는 것인데, 그와 같은 이상형이 불교에 대한 우리의 이해를 강하게 좌우하고 있는 상황이다. 일본의 젠(Zen)을 예로 들자면, 젠을 이상적인 불교로 보는 왜곡된 이해는 현재의 불교에 대한 학문적, 상식적인 이해 전반에 영향력을 발휘하고 있다.

이 논문은 “사찰불교”라는 현상을 중심으로 하여 현실의 불교와 무속을 대표하는 산신신앙의 결합에 대해 논의하고자 한다. 불교 사찰은 공식불교의 자리임에도 불구하고 역설적으로 불교와 민간 종교의 습합이 가장 많이 일어난 장소이기도 하다. 따라서 이 논문에서는 현실을 반영하는 관계론적 불교 이해를 제시하고자 한다. 결국 본고는 현실 사회의 배경과 다종교 문화 안에서 불교에 접근하는 것이 중요하다는 것을 주장하고 있다.

주제어: 사찰불교, 무속, 산신각, 습합, 관계론, 문맥화, 경계.