Seeking the Colonizer’s Favors for a Buddhist Vision: The Korean Buddhist Nationalist Paek Yongso˘ng’s (1864-1940) Imje Sŏn Movement and His Relationship with the Japanese Colonizer Abe Mitsui (1862-1936)

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ABSTRACT
In this article, I will challenge the widely accepted, yet one-dimensional, image of Paek as a staunch nationalist and argue that he prioritized his modern Buddhist vision over the all-encompassing nationalist goal, and thus was willing to curry favor with the politically and religiously powerful Abe Mitsue. In a desperate effort to unify Korean Buddhism under the Imje Zen lineage, Paek deemed Abe an ally and approached him to seek influence on the colonial government in favor of Paek’s version of institutional reform. The fact that Paek sought political favors from Abe not only contradicts the immaculate nationalist status devoutly attributed to him by some scholars of modern Korean Buddhism, but also attests to the complex colonial realities that prompted Koreans and Japanese alike to employ multiple visions and identities, including religious, around which they could build personal and group networks. Equally importantly, their collaboration also reflects a larger religious landscape of colonial Korea in which Zen Buddhism emerged as a modern, alternative religion for Japan and Korea.

Keywords: colonialism, Zen Buddhism, Paek Yongsŏng, Abe Mitsue, Buddhist modernity

Paek Yongso˘ng 白龍城 (1864-1940) is one of the two most revered Buddhist monks in the historiography of colonial Korean Buddhism. Through 2002, more than fifty percent of contemporary scholar works focusing on figures in colonial Korean Buddhism were about Paek and Han Yong’un 韓龍雲 (1879-1944), the latter being the uncontested national hero of the two (Yi Tŏkchín 2006, 46). In scholarship, both Paek and Han have been described as uncompromising nationalists at a time when most Korean monks did not eschew the thought of collaborating with the Japanese colonizer. The two men were the only Buddhists among the thirty-three leaders who mobilized the March First Independent Movement of 1919.

However, when it comes to preserving the identity and tradition of Korean Buddhism, Paek overshadows Han. In contrast with Han’s support of clerical marriage and his openness to Japanese Buddhist influence, Paek vigorously safeguarded clerical celibacy and rejected the Japanese form of Buddhism (Kim Kwangsik 2008). Thus, Paek is believed to be the defender of both Korean nationalism and the true Korean Buddhist identity (Kim Kwangsik 2002; Han Pogwang 2010). This ethno-centric interpretation has been a leitmotiv in examining
Paek’s life and activities, despite the fact that there was a lack of congruence between Korean nationhood and Korean Buddhism in the wake of the modern era. That is, the Korean nation that was emerging in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was still slow to integrate Korean monastics as legitimate members of society after centuries of marginalization under the Neo-Confucian Chosŏn regime. At the same time the monastics themselves were slow to recover and lagged in reasserting their relevance in society and culture. To expect a full-fledged national allegiance from these formerly stigmatized Korean monastics is anachronistic. The lack of congruence that Korean monks experienced and the same distress that the Japanese colonizer quickly exploited were a motivation to develop multivalent political and religious networks throughout the colonial period. Thus, trying to explain the diverse behaviors and thoughts of Korean monks through the lens of the nation-centered paradigm is to inevitably overlook more than half of their life stories.

This paper offers a reexamination of Paek, a monk who witnessed the demise of the Neo-Confucian Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910) and prioritized the recovery of his own Buddhist tradition over others. Paek’s primary concern was not to fight against Japanese colonialism and Japanese Buddhism but instead to restore Buddhism to prominence in center of the country by disseminating his version of modern Korean Buddhism, namely Imje Sŏn (Jp. Rinzai Zen or Ch. Linji Ch’an), one of the five major Ch’an schools. If analyzed from this viewpoint, Paek’s life exhibits a much richer drama centered on his Buddhist vision. The promotion of Imje Sŏn-centered Buddhism and his tireless efforts to unify institutional Buddhism under the Imje lineage can be exemplified in his 1913 interactions with the visiting Sri Lankan Buddhist leader Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) and the influential though non-governmental official Japanese Buddhist Abe Mitsuie 阿部充家 (1862-1936), as well as the colonial authorities. With Dharmapala, Paek clearly exhibited his belief that the Imje Sŏn was superior to other Buddhisms. Abe, also a devoted Rinzai practitioner with political influence, was considered an ally by Paek. Abe abetted Paek in keeping alive his institutional vision for Korean Buddhism and, as a result, Paek actively sought Abe’s assistance.

Relying on untapped primary materials including Abe’s collections (Abe Mitsuie kankei bunsho 阿部充家関係文書, hereafter AMKB) of the letters he exchanged with Korean monks including Paek, as well as journals and newspapers, I seek to prove that Paek was a much more flexible figure than previously believed. By using a wide network of relationships, even with the colonizer, he opened the door to other options in an effort to accomplish his Buddhist vision. Paek might have detested Japanese colonial rule but did not shy away from working with socially and politically influential Japanese Buddhists. Paek’s case attests to the complex colonial realities that prompted Koreans and Japanese alike to employ

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1 Two leading scholars on Paek are Han Pogwang and Kim Kwangsik.
2 The whole collection is available in microfilm at Japan’s National Diet Library.
3 I would like to express appreciation to Ellie (Yunjung) Choi, an assistant professor of modern Korean literature and intellectual history at Cornell University, for kindly sharing this source with me.
multiple visions and identities, including religious affiliation, around which they could successfully build personal and group networks, however perilous and short-lived these networks might have been.

**Colonial Seoul as a Contentious Site for Buddhism**

Colonial Seoul in the early 1910s and 1920s was a city of opportunities and challenges for Korean monastics. The centuries-old denial of access to the capital city imposed upon them during the Chosŏn era (1392-1910) was officially lifted. Thus, Korean monastics finally flocked into the center of the city to reaffirm the presence of their religious tradition and also to pursue personal interests and group visions. Their dreams and institutional visions, however, had to be compromised and negotiated due to a new political reality. After opening Korea through gunboat diplomacy in 1876, Japan pushed China and Russia out of Korea during two modern wars in 1894-1895 and 1904-1905, which transformed Japan into the only non-Western empire in the modern era (Myers and Peattie 1984, 6). Korea became a victim of this transformation and, as a result, was made a Japanese protectorate in 1905 and a formal colony in 1910. Korean Buddhists readjusted their survival tactics to deal with Japanese colonial rule (Tikhonov 2004).

Despite the upheaval, the situation of Korean Buddhists was better than under the previous Neo-Confucian government (1392-1910), as the colonial government considered Korean Buddhism an important asset for effective rule over Korea and took a conciliatory policy toward Buddhism. In addition, Korean monastics quickly realized that Buddhism fared much better in Japan, and Japanese Buddhist priests enjoyed greater political, social, and economic prestige compared with Korean Buddhists. Not a small number of Korean monastics turned to Japanese Buddhists, who had the ability to provide access to modern education and opportunities.

At the same time, Korean monks used the Japanese to leverage Korean officials, who denigrated their own monks and were still reluctant to bring monastics to the center of the capital city. In 1908, two years prior to Japan's official colonization of Korea, Korean Buddhist leaders Yi Hoegwang 李晦光 (1862-1933), Kang Taeryŏn 姜大蓮 (1875-1942), and others established the first modern Korean Buddhist institution, called Wŏnjong 圓宗. Together, they strove to bring the physical presence of Korean Buddhism back to Seoul. Lacking political capital, they were forced to turn to a Japanese Buddhist Sōtōshū 曹洞宗 priest, Takeda Hanshi 武田範之 (1863-1911), in an effort to influence the Korean and Japanese governments to permit a modern Korean Buddhist institution to be installed in central Seoul. In mid-1910, Yi succeeded in building a temple, Kakhwangsa 覺皇寺, there, which was a watershed moment in modern Korean Buddhism. However, his effort to receive state recognition for the Wŏnjong ran into major roadblocks. In late 1910, Yi and other Buddhist leaders decided to form an institutional alliance with the Sōtōshū to push forth their goal more aggressively. This attempted alliance prompted Korean monks in opposition to Yi to form their own sect, Imjejong (Linji Sect). The Japanese Buddhist traditions, divided into thirteen sects and fifty-six branches at the time, also reacted to this alliance negatively. More importantly, the
colonial government did not welcome internal Buddhist conflicts in addition to the Koreans’ brewing resistance and bitterness over Japan’s annexation of Korea (Kim Hwansoo 2013). The colonial government brought Korean Buddhism under direct government control through the 1911 Temple Ordinances (Kim Sunso˘k 2003). Bypassing both the Wônjong and the Imjejong, the government brought the thirty head temples of Korean Buddhism under its direct control under the same institutional title that the previous Chosôn government had used, namely Sôn Kyo Dual Sect (Sôn Kyo Yangjong 禪敎兩宗). As a result, debates over lineage and power struggles surrounding this new institution soon intensified. Paek emerged as one of the most ardent dissenters from this Dual Sect arrangement since it put the Kyo (sutra study) on par with the Sôn (Zen practice). Japanese Buddhists were not mere bystanders but were deeply involved in changing the course of these debates, thereby complicating the configuration of modern Korean Buddhism. Thus, a tripartite relationship of Korean monastics, colonial authorities, and Japanese Buddhists defined many Korean Buddhist reformers’ behaviors and thoughts, and Paek was at the center of this complex triangle.

**Paek as a Buddhist Propagator**

When Paek came to Seoul in November 1905, at the age of 42, he had already been known among Buddhist monastics and lay believers as a Sôn master who was also well versed in Buddhist sutras. Born in 1864 to a Confucian family in the Chônnam province in southern Korea, Paek grew up learning the Confucian classics. He started his monastic training at age 16 under the guidance of Master Hwawo˘l at the Haein temple and, at 21, received the Bhikṣu ordination at the T’ongdo temple. He undertook a series of meditation retreats at Sôn monasteries around the country, exchanged his spiritual experiences with Sôn masters, and perused major Sôn classics. At age 40, he commenced his teaching career and wrote his first book on Sôn, *The Essentials of the Ch’ an Tradition* (Sônmun yoji 禪門要旨), which is no longer extant. When Paek taught at the Mangwol temple in northern Seoul, the court ladies, aware of his fame, visited the temple to have an audience with him (Han Pogwang 1998).

In 1907, less than two years after Korea became a protectorate of Japan, Paek seized the opportunity to visit China. During this six-month trip, he met many Chinese Ch’ân practitioners and Buddhist leaders and engaged in Ch’ân dialogues. In early 1908, he returned to central Seoul and, staying at a lay Buddhist’s house, resumed his teaching (Han Pogwang 1998). Less than a year later, however, Paek left Seoul, most likely due to his inability to

*Figure 1*  Paek Yongsöng (Maeil sinbo, February 1, 1914).
raise the funds needed to establish a temple. He took residence in the Haein temple and organized an Amitabha Association (Mit’ahoe 彌陀會) for lay members and monastics and taught them a combination of Sôn and yŏmbul (recitation of the name of Buddha) practices. In 1910, he wrote another book, The Return to the True Teachings (Kwiwŏn chŏngjong 归源正宗), to counter criticism of Buddhism by other religions, especially Christianity (Han Pogwang 1999, 16-17). Four months after Japan colonized Korea in August 1910, determined to disseminate his version of Buddhism to Seoulites, Paek came back to Seoul and resumed his Sôn teaching at the house of lay Buddhist Kang Yonggyun 康永勻 (Kim Kwangsik 2000, 68).

At this time, Paek’s activities were primarily religious and did not exhibit any overt nationalist commitment. When he returned to Seoul and observed the religious landscape there, he was deeply saddened by the popularity of other religions, namely Christianity, and the lack of presence of his own religion. As he later wrote, he faced palpable discrimination against monks and was resolved to open a preaching hall to undertake Buddhist propagation. Yet again, although he gained hundreds of members, he failed to muster enough financial support to build a center (Kim Kwangsik 2000, 67-68).

It was in May of 1912 when Paek entered the public scene as he joined the Imje movement to counter the aforementioned Wŏnjong-Sŏtō alliance. Han Yong’un and others had established the Imje Sect in southern Korea and then moved the headquarters of the Imjejong, The Central Preaching Hall of the Imje Sect of Korea (Chosŏn Imjejong chungang p’ogyodang 朝鮮臨濟宗中央布敎堂), to Seoul. Paek was nominated as its propagation director (Kim Kwangsik 2000, 68). In a sense, it was a win-win situation for both men. Han, in order to undermine the Wŏnjong Sect, needed somebody like Paek, a charismatic Imje Sôn teacher and an ardent propagator, who could challenge the stature of Yi Hoegwang. Paek for his part finally gained an already established temple to serve as a more stable environment for propagating Buddhism. In addition, the argument made by Han and others that Korean Buddhism derived from the Imje lineage fit perfectly with Paek’s own position. From this time forward, Paek’s teaching of Imje Sôn became more direct, and he forcefully presented Imje Sôn as the unifying tradition for Korean Buddhism and its institutions. However, in July of the same year, as stated earlier, the colonial authorities nullified both sects and established the Sôn Kyo Dual Sect. Thus unable to claim Imjejong as a sect, Han and Paek had to rename their institution Central Preaching Hall of Korean Sôn (Chosŏn Sŏnjong Chungang P’ogyodang 朝鮮禪宗中央布敎堂). In contrast, Yi Hoegwang and others were quick to adopt the Sôn Kyo Dual Sect and, in line with the colonial government’s policy, designated the Kakhwang temple as its center. Debates over which one would be a legitimate inheritor of Korean Buddhism soon ensued. Paek was at the forefront of these debates, striving to disestablish the Dual Sôn Kyo sect and replace it with an Imje Sôn-centered institution.

**Interactions with Anagarika Dharmapala**
Paek’s staunch devotion to Imje Sôn ideology can be glimpsed in his brief interactions with Dharmapala, who, on his way from Manchuria, visited colonial
Seoul for three days beginning August 2, 1913. Dharmapala was the most representative Buddhist modernizer in Sri Lanka. In 1891, he established the Maha Bodhi (Great Enlightenment) Society in 1891 and initiated the movement to recover the Buddhist sacred temple, Bodhi Gaya, from the hands of the Hindu mahants. He had travelled around the world to galvanize the support of Buddhists to raise enough money to purchase the temple properties. When Dharmapala arrived in colonial Seoul, a special party at a Japanese restaurant, Kagetsuro 花月楼, was arranged to welcome him. Paek, eager to meet him, did not mind joining the party even though it was organized by the Sŏn Kyo Dual Sect. Through an interpreter, Paek asked two questions of Dharmapala. Typical of the way in which Sŏn practitioners would identify their legitimacy, Paek inquired how many generations Dharmapala was removed from Śākyamuni. Dharmapala replied, “For the past several centuries, Buddhism in India has undergone both extinction and revival. Thus, I don’t know.” Seemingly disappointed by the fact that Dharmapala was unaware of his own lineage, Paek moved to the next question, “How many years have passed since the birth of Śākyamuni?” To this question, Dharmapala confidently answered, “It has been 2,500 years.” “It is not true!” retorted Paek, explaining, “It’s been 2,940 years. There are conflicting theories in sutras surrounding the birthday of the Buddha, but the historical evidence is obvious and it also complies with the contents of the sutras. Even though there exists the theory that you have just mentioned, that theory cannot be trusted” (Kim T’aehŭp 1941, 27).

This uncomfortable exchange did not deter Paek from re-engaging with Dharmapala. The next day, Yi Hoegwang and other incumbents of the thirty head temples held a special dinner at another Japanese restaurant called Keisenkan 惠泉館. Paek again approached Dharmapala with more pointed Sŏn-style questions: “Could you tell me the most essential phrase in the eighty-thousand teachings of the Buddha?” Dharmapala replied, “Be constantly diligent and mindful. If one’s mind is not idle but vigilant, one can accomplish everything. All businessmen of past and present have accomplished great works since they were mindful.” Further disappointed by this lackadaisical, un-Zenlike answer by “an insignificant monk,” Paek threw a Zen koan that was entirely unfamiliar to Dharmapala, who had been trained in the Theravada tradition. Paek suddenly clenched his fist and pushed it out toward Dharmapala asking, “What is this?” Totally befuddled and struggling to respond to this unintelligible question, Dharmapala answered, “Don’t you see the light [in the room]? You should know how to turn the light on and off!” To this answer, Paek laughed out loud and left the dinner (Kim T’aehŭp 1941, 28). This rather comical account of their interaction was written by a Korean monk who was present at the scene and who later compiled a collection of Paek’s writings. While it is difficult to picture the detailed exchanges in its entirety, these episodes provide us a sense of Paek’s personality and his style of teaching.

For more detail on Dharmapala’s life and activities, see Blackburn (2010).
A few months after Dharmapala’s visit, Paek articulated his Sŏn-centered position in a letter to a Korean newspaper in early 1914. He argued that although Buddhism had spawned hundreds and thousands of scriptures and branches, Sŏn Buddhism had existed outside of doctrinal teachings and had been also directly transmitted to Mahākāśyapa, a chief disciple of Buddha Śākyamuni. As if excoriating Dharmapala’s lack of understanding of the undisrupted lineage of Buddha, Paek continued to maintain that all twenty-eight generations in India and the six generations and the subsequent five branches, along with all the following masters in China derived from the Sŏn lineage. In Paek’s opinion, the Imje School is the only legitimate lineage for Korean Buddhism. He claimed an unbroken lineage for the Central Preaching Hall in Seoul, where he was teaching as propagation director. He criticized those monks from the Sŏn Kyo Dual Sect for obstructing his effort to bring Korean Buddhism back to its legitimate origin (Maeil sinbo, February 1, 1914).

**Rumor over Paek’s Sex Scandal**

As he publicly criticized his opponents, a striking newspaper article on Paek’s sex scandal was featured in the Maeil sinbo (The Korea Daily News, hereafter the Maeil sinbo). His case was included as part of a series of scathing newspaper articles attacking Korean monks for violating the precepts and having sexual relationships with women in Seoul. In a sense, these kinds of public revelations and criticisms were not surprising, given that an increasing number of monks took residence and intermingled with women in central Seoul, where they had formerly been denied entry during the Chosŏn dynasty. Court ladies who had lost their jobs with the demise of the Chosŏn dynasty turned to Buddhism for solace, and they were the key supporters of the monks, such as Yi Hoegwang and Kang Taeryŏn (1875-1942), who sought success in the city. Many court ladies frequented two newly established preaching halls in Seoul, and personal interactions between monks and these women increased. Paek’s name was mired in this scandal.

The Maeil sinbo published an editorial on July 26, 1914, titled “Sexual Scandals of the So-Called Buddhist Masters, the Exemplars of the Itinerant.” The author lamented the pervasiveness of monks’ sexual scandals in the city and introduced a case of a prominent monk who was brought to the attention of police: “Paek Yongsŏng … was a monk from the Bŏmŏ temple,” and was “working at the Central Preaching Hall.” “Filled with afflictions,” the article continued, Paek “fell in love with” a woman called Pŏphwail 法華日 and the two “deepened their affection in secret.” However, the relationship soon became known. Undisturbed, both made “a lifelong commitment to living together forever.” Whenever she came to the Hall, she was “visibly more active without minding others’ eyes.” However, their relationship soured when Paek’s love shifted towards a court lady, Ko. When Pŏphwail discovered this, she was enraged and caused incessant commotions at the Central Preaching Hall. Realizing the seriousness of the situation, Paek fled the hall and hid himself at the Chikchi temple in southeastern Korea for several months. When he returned to Seoul, the local authorities arrested him and released him only after a stern warning that he should not repeat such unlawful behavior.
Hwansoo KIM

(Maeil sinbo, June 26, 1914).

However, this accusation was refuted by a short reader’s letter in a later newspaper issue. Under the pseudonym Paekpyōnsaeng, he wrote, “When I read about Paek’s sexual scandals in your newspaper, I was enraged and determined to punish Paek with my own hands.” However, upon further investigation, the author realized that the whole thing was untrue. He continued, “A certain suspect took umbrage with Paek and must have created these vicious words.” Paekpyōnsaeng confirmed that he was right to believe that “there is no exemplary monk like Paek” and that the episode was nothing more than “temporary bad luck” [befallen on Paek] (Maeil sinbo, July 3, 1914). Most likely, animosity between Paek and the Dual Sŏn Kyo Sect might have motivated somebody to discredit Paek’s leadership through spreading an unwarranted rumor.

Initial Meetings with Abe

Regardless of the allegations, Paek continued to push forward the Imje Sŏn movement. Yet, his and Han’s effort to defeat the Sŏn Kyo Dual Sect, led by Yi Hoegwang and Kang Taeryŏn, did not fare well. First of all, the colonial authority sided with the Dual Sect. When Han attempted to establish two different lay associations that would operate institutionally independent of the Dual Sect, the government authorities quickly denied them permission and even arrested Han for investigation. The options possible for Han and Paek were dwindling. Emboldened, Yi and Kang pushed forward their attempt to absorb Han and Paek’s Central Preaching Hall into the Sŏn Kyo Dual Sect. Desperate, Paek turned for help to Abe Mitsuie.

Among the Japanese living in colonial Korea, Abe stands out not only as one of the most influential figures in the colonial government but also the most respected Japanese among Korean intellectuals.5 As a close associate of the journalist and historian Tokutomi Sohō 徳富蘇峰 (1863-1957), Abe was invited by Governor-General Terauchi Masatake 寺内正毅 (s. 1910-1916) to become the president of the Maeil sinbo, an organ of the colonial government, in August

Figure 2 Abe. Figure 3 Abe (second from left) with Terauchi (center), Maeil sinbo, November 4, 1914.

5 For Abe’s life, see Kim Hwansoo (2009); Sim Wŏnsŏp (2011a).
1914. From that point on, Abe served as a personal advisor to Governor-Generals Terauchi and Saîtō Makoto 斎藤 実 (s. 1919-1927) (Uchida 2011, 154) and mediated between the colonial government and Koreans. With his conciliatory approach towards many Korean intellectuals, such as Ch’oe Namso˘n 崔南善 (1890-1957) and Yi Kwangsu 李光洙 (1892-1950), and entrepreneurs, such as Kim Sŏngsu 金性洙 (1891-1955), Abe built friendships, or at least acquaintanceships. These supporters believed that Abe’s intention to help Koreans was sincere, and they trusted what he said about the “harmony between Korea and Japan” (Naise n yūwa 内鮮融化) (Sim Wŏnsŏp 2010, 163). He was often called “the devoted supporter of Koreans” (Sim Wŏnsŏp 2011a, 288) and also developed amicable relationships with Christian leaders such as Yun Ch’ı-ho 尹致昊 (1864-1945) and Confucian scholars such as Chang Chiyŏn 張志淵 (1864-1922) (Sim Wŏnsŏp 2010; 2011a, 258).

Abe’s popularity among Korean Buddhists was enhanced by his personal piety. He was a long-time Zen Buddhist in the Rinzai tradition; his dharma name, Mubutsu 無佛 (or Ko. Mubul) was granted by the prominent Rinzai master Shaku Sŏen 釋 宗演 (1860-1919) (Nakamura 1969, 54; Sim Wŏnsŏp 2011b, 259; 264-65). Due to his personal interest in Zen Buddhism, as soon as he came to Korea he started to engage with Korean Buddhist monks and visited temples around Seoul. In the next few years, so many Korean monks approached or were approached by him that later the Japanese Buddhist Sōtōshū priest Sōma Shōei 相馬勝英 (1904-1971), who was practicing at Korean monasteries in colonial Korea, said that wherever he went, Korean monks recognized Abe’s name (Chōsen Bukkyō 119 [March 1934]: 50).

Interestingly, Paek was not an exception. According to one record, Paek’s first encounter with Abe was less than three months after Abe began his job as the president of the Maeil sinbo. The Korean baron Kim Sŏnggŏn 金聲根 (1835-1919), who recently had become a Buddhist (Maeil sinbo, January 15, 1913), invited Abe to a Buddhist event organized by Paek at the Central Preaching Hall. It was a ceremony for the installation of an embroidered Buddha. After the opening rituals, Paek gave a sermon that, according to the Maeil sinbo, was the first dharma talk in Korean that Abe heard. Abe was impressed by Paek’s stature as a great speaker. After the sermon, Kim invited Abe and others to his home, adjacent to the Central Preaching Hall, and threw a party (Maeil sinbo, November 2, 1914). In fact, Abe’s house was in the same Insadong district, within walking distance from the Hall where Paek taught (Maeil sinbo, November 12, 1916). Although it is unclear whether Paek also attended this party, one can assume that the men must have established a rapport. From this time on, Abe considered Paek as a major Zen master in Korea from whom he could learn, while Paek regarded Abe as one who shared his belief in Imje Sŏn. More importantly, in Paek’s eyes, Abe could be an ally for his institutional vision to unify Korean Buddhism under the Imje ideology. Apparently, Abe also gained a favorable impression of Paek. The following month, Abe invited the abbots of the thirty head temples to the headquarters of the newly built Maeil sinbo. Even

6 For more detail, see Sim Wŏnsŏp (2011b).
though Paek was not one of the incumbents, he was included among the invitees and, when, after touring the building the group moved to a Japanese restaurant, Paek was seated along with Yi and Kang, his key opponents. (Han, notably, was not invited.) (*Maeil sinbo*, December 27, 1914)

**Yi and Kang's Attempt to Annex the Central Preaching Hall**

In 1911, Korean Buddhism was divided into two factions, with Yi and Kang attempting to nullify Han and Paek’s movement. It was quite obvious to Yi and Kang that the opposing movement was not viable, especially because, as previously mentioned, the colonial government sided with the Sŏn Kyo Dual Sect. In late 1914, Yi mounted pressure on the colonial government to disestablish the Central Preaching Hall.

Without political capital to counter this pressure, Paek turned to Abe and sent him a desperate letter:

…I today, the incumbents of the thirty head temples came to the Department of Local Affairs in the Internal Ministry and we had a legal battle against Yi Hoegwang, the head of the incumbents. But it is decided that the authorities will implement the measure of enforcement [against the Central Preaching Hall]. This is such an urgent and pressing matter. Could you possibly help and save us by all possible means? (AMKB #348–4)

Although the details as to how Abe could help Paek were not specified, it is quite clear that Paek was asking Abe to influence the government to block Yi’s attempt. A later record indicates that Abe must have intervened in postponing the enforcement.

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7 I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Tong-ch’un Pak for translating from Classical Chinese to Korean the letters exchanged between Abe and Korean monks, including those of Paek.
In the same letter, Paek also attached the list of the thirty head temples in Korea to prove they all originated from the Imje lineage, as transmitted by Ch’ônghŏ Hyujong 淸虛休靜 (1520-1604) and Puhyu Yujŏng 浮休惟政 (1543-1615). He then accused the incumbents of twenty-nine of the temples of following the movement that Yi and others orchestrated. Paek charged them with “losing the spirit of our tradition, running after small streams, and thereby falling into the status of lineage-lessness.” With mounting anger, he continued “…[they] don’t even know why Korean Buddhism was called Sŏn Sect” and that “[they] don’t even know which sutra in the Eighty-thousand canons is what Bodhidharma transmitted outside of sutra teachings directly pointing at the mind” (AMKB #348-4).

But in April 1915, Kang, the new head of the Dual Sect, intensified Yi’s earlier push, garnered consensus from other incumbents of the thirty temples and submitted a proposal to the government (Maeil sinbo, April 3, 1915). At this time, Paek already realized that he would not be able to accomplish his vision within the shaky existence of the Central Preaching Hall. As for Han, his activities were significantly limited due to repeated warnings by the government authorities. In early 1915, it is most likely that Abe informed Paek of the ultimate fate of the Central Preaching Hall. It is possible that Abe promised to assist Paek in promoting Imje Sŏn if Paek were to set up a new center. In consultation with Abe, Paek relocated his residence to Changsadong and established a new center called The Research Institute for the Imje Branch of Sŏn Sect (Sŏnjong Imjep’a kangguso 禪宗臨濟派講究所, henceforth the Research Institute).

In a 1915 letter to Abe, Paek expressed his frustration and appreciation:

…the monks at the Kakhwang temple see the two words Imje as if facing an enemy. What kind of mindset is this? The descendants of the Imje lineage are all the same. I don’t know why they oppose us like this. (AMKB #348-3)

Then, Paek criticized the government authorities for being partial:

What do the government’s words mean that one should not breach the public order? The level of the government’s dislike for the Imje Sect is as such. Relying on the government,
those monks [at the Kakhwang temple] are pressuring our sect. What kinds of thousands of
eons of resentment do they have with our Imje sect? I regret being born in this world! (AMKB
#348-3)

Nevertheless, Paek did not forget to thank Abe for assisting him amidst these
challenges:

In retrospect, fortunately, the Research Institute for the Imje Branch of Sŏn Sect will prepare
to establish the Imje Sect in the future. I bow and celebrate all your utmost effort and help [my
emphasis]… (AMKB #348-3)

This remark indicates that Paek parted with Han with the knowledge that the
Central Preaching Hall was doomed for disbandment. In a sense, Paek established
the Research Institute as a third sect that, if the conditions were right, could grow
into the unifying institution for Korean Buddhism.

After he took residence in Changsadong and commenced teaching Imje Sŏn
at the Research Institute, Paek had lay-member Chôn Yongnak 全龍洛 transcribe
his talks and sent them to Abe (AMKB #348-1; 348-2). Possibly Abe had requested
that Paek provide him with the transcriptions. The collaboration of Paek and Abe
depthened from this point on.

An End to Paek's Vision for the Imje Movement
Less than a year after Paek settled into the new establishment, Paek had to give up
his four-year long effort to create an Imje-centered institution of Korean Buddhism.
Various obstacles hindered his goal. Most obviously, the government authorities did
not heed his argument. In addition, Abe's relationship with Korean monks was not
confined to Paek. Soon Yi and Kang aggressively approached Abe and built their
own friendships. Equally damaging to Paek's effort was the landscape of Buddhism
in central Seoul. Paek had rivals even among those who promoted the Imje lineage.
Even the Sŏn Kyo Dual Sect fully embraced the very argument that Paek had been
pressing, namely that Korean Buddhism derived from the Imje Sŏn branch. Worse,
there was a Japanese Rinzai (=Imje) branch temple, located close to Paek’s research
center, promoting the very same form of Buddhism in its Japanese manifestation,
which further rendered Paek’s program moot and superfluous. Suddenly, Paek felt
wedged between many powerful players and, lacking political and economic capital
to counter them, had to give up his vision and retreat from the public scene for a
while.

Yi Hoegwang's and Kang Taeryŏn's Approach to Abe
Yi’s relationship with Abe predated Paek’s. Soon after Abe was nominated as the
president of the Maeil sinbo in 1914, Yi sent a congratulatory letter in which he
said, “While reading the Maeil sinbo the other day, I came to know that you were
appointed [to be the president of the newspaper] and was so happy that I felt like
dancing. I sincerely congratulate you!” (AMKB #183). The letter indicates Yi had
already known Abe even before Abe came to Korea. Yi visited the main office of
the *Maeil sinbo* in early November, two months before Paek was invited to the same place (*Maeil sinbo*, November 7, 1914). Later, Yi closely interacted with Abe as well.

Kang's relationship with Abe had a similar trajectory. In January 1915, Abe visited the Yongju temple where Kang was the abbot. Abe's visit was timely since Kang replaced Yi as the leader of the Sŏn Kyo Dual Sect in the same month. Three months after Abe's visit to Kang's temple, Kang invited Abe to a special dinner at the Kakhwang temple, the headquarters of the Dual Sect. Abe gave a talk in the presence of the incumbents of ten head temples and other lay Buddhist leaders (*Maeil sinbo*, April 3, 1915). When Abe planned a research tour to temples on Kŭmgang Mountain and asked for institutional assistance, Kang gladly guaranteed full support, saying that “Your plan will contribute to the development of our Korean civilization, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that this is a golden opportunity to introduce to the world the glory of the mountains famous throughout the empire.” Kang even recommended that the tour become an annual event (*Maeil sinbo*, May 5, 1915). Interestingly, it was around this time that Kang and other incumbents were insisting on annexing the Central Preaching Hall and other Buddhist facilities that existed outside the control of the Dual Sect. Abe's rapport with Yi and Kang indicate that in spite of his regard for Paek, Abe also believed that Korean Buddhism would be better off under the sole leadership of the Sŏn Kyo Dual Sect.

In his efforts to make Paek and Han's Imje movement redundant and futile, Kang succeeded in recruiting a key teacher from Han's camp. In 1915, Kang invited to the Kakhwang temple the Sŏn Master Kyŏngun 擎雲 (1852-1936), who gave a series of dharma talks on Sŏn Buddhism. Kyŏngun had been nominated by Han to be the patriarch for the Imje Sect in late 1910, five years prior. Although Kyŏngun declined the offer due to his old age, leaving Han to serve in that position temporarily, it was without doubt that Kyŏngun was the symbolic head of the Imje Sect movement which Han and Paek had initiated. Upon Kyŏngun's arrival in Seoul, groups of monks and lay people greeted him at the Namdaemun train station and even prepared a special carriage for him (*Maeil sinbo*, March 30, 1915). From this time on, Kyŏngun resided in the Kakhwang temple, teaching Imje Sŏn for the Sŏn Kyo Dual Sect.

*The Rise of the RinzaišuTürkiye Branch Temple*

Another blow to Paek's program was the 1915 emergence of a Japanese Rinzai branch temple as an influential player in the Seoul Buddhist world. Rinzai had been the last of the major Japanese Buddhist sects to establish a missionary post in colonial Korea (Shimazaki 2005, 89). The first missionary of the Rinzai Sect was Furukawa Taikō 古川太航 (1871-1968), who came to Korea in 1908 but mostly stayed at the Pohyon temple in northern Korea. He later took up residence in Seoul at a small house which served as a preaching office. Gotō Zuigan 後藤瑞巖 (1879-1965) had replaced him by April 1915 and officially called the house a Rinzai branch temple, Myōshinji 妙心寺 (Hagimori 1930, 34). The prominence in Seoul of Abe, who was also a member of the Rinzai sect, elevated Gotō's status and influence.
as a Buddhist missionary in Seoul. From mid-1915, Gotō began to give regular talks at the Myōshinji to promote Rinzai Zen.

With the emergence of the Myōshinji, central Seoul became a hotbed of Imje (Rinzai) Sōn. The Kakhwang temple of the Sōn Dual Kyo Sect and the Central Preaching Hall of Han were in Susōngdong and Insadong respectively, and were therefore in close proximity to each other. The Myōshinji and Paek's Research Institute were in the same district, Changsadong, almost directly across the street, with the house numbers of 183 (Hagimori 1930, 34) and 142 respectively (see Figures 7 & 8 above). In addition, Susōngdong, Insadong, and Changsadong were located within half a mile of one another. These four religious places were a chorus promoting the Teachings of Master Imje/Rinzai. At one point, Gotō, Kyōngun, and Paek lectured on Imje Sōn on the same day (Maeil sinbo, July 20, 1915). Two days later, Im Hyebong also lectured on the Teachings of Master Imje at the Central Preaching Hall (Maeil sinbo, July 22, 1915). Moreover, Gotō and Paek often taught Imje Sōn at their temple and hall at the same time and on the same days. In the second half of 1915, it looked as if there was a major boom of Imje Sōn in Seoul. Gradually, Han and Paek were losing ground in their efforts to use the Imje Sōn as a major source for institutional reform.

Further troubling to Paek was the transformation of the Myōshinji temple. Not only did Gotō become a major engine for the promotion of Rinzai Zen, but he also planned a construction project to build a Japanese Zen-style temple in the same complex. Gotō officially announced the project and maintained that a new Zen training temple would “revitalize a dilapidated Chosŏn Buddhism” (Maeil sinbo, November 11, 1915). Abe was a key member of the Myōshinji and assisted Gotō in every possible way. He established a Zen lay group called the Gateless

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8 Available at http://gis.seoul.go.kr.
Association (Mumonkai 無門會), which was comprised of influential Japanese leaders in colonial Korea and used the Myōshinji temple as a gathering place (Maeil sinbo, August 22, 1916; Sim Wŏnsŏp 2011b, 278-79). He also served as an executive committee member for this building project (Maeil sinbo, March 21, 1918). The future construction of the Myōshinji temple would certainly dwarf Paek’s Institute, devastating him.

Another Desperate Plea for Help
In a deteriorating situation, Paek visited Abe, most likely in late 1915, and made a last plea to realize his own institutional vision for Korean Buddhism. Ironically, Paek met him at the Myōshinji temple next to his own research institute. At this late evening meeting, Paek poured out his frustration and despair in the current circumstances, and possibly even criticized Abe for not offering his cause enough support.

The next day, Paek sent a letter of apology:

…I am terribly sorry and don’t know what to do about my rambling last night and about disturbing your ears. I beg you a thousand times to generously forgive me. After receiving your compassionate instruction, I feel like hundreds of thoughts were unraveled. I am going to do my duty and am not going to be attached to the idea whether or not the Imje sect will be accomplished or whether or not it will prosper.

The prosperity or demise of our sect depends on the fortunes of times. How can it be saved with human’s hands? I will just follow the cause and effect of the world and will be satisfied just with a cane, several sutras, and a table. Please forgive me for my discourtesy last night.

P.S. What I said at the Myōshinji temple last night was just to eliminate many evils. But this is also an illusion and I have decided that I will never [again] receive or ask a favor. (AMKB #169)

As evidenced in the letter, the conversation with Abe must have been quite a difficult one. There is no way to reconstruct the exact contents of the conversation, but one can conjecture that Abe might have persuaded Paek to accept the political reality and cooperate with the Dual Sect. Furthermore, Abe might have recommended that Paek also work with the Rinzai Sect to champion the Imje movement.

While sympathetic to Paek’s reform ideas, Abe had a different idea about how to unify Korean

Figure 9 Paek’s Letter to Abe (AMKB #169).
Buddhism. Abe’s fundamental position was that Korea should assimilate with Japan. No matter how conciliatory he might have been to Koreans, Korean culture and religion, Abe, like many other Japanese, believed that Koreans should learn from the Japanese. In his first talk to Korean Buddhist leaders in April 1914, Abe emphasized that Korean monks should know the political and social situations of the entire world and exceed laypersons in knowledge and quality (Maeil sinbo, April 3, 1915). To Abe, Japan was where Korean monks could accomplish this goal.

Later, in a late 1920s work titled “A Personal View on Korean Buddhism” (Chōsen Būkkyō ni taisuru hiken 朝鮮仏教に対する卑見), Abe articulated his vision for Korean Buddhism. He expressed his determination not to become involved in political matters but to dedicate his life to resolving the religious problem in Korea. Abe elaborated the five major steps that needed to be taken right away. First, Korean monks studying in Japan should be supported. Next, Korean monks in Korea should be helped to develop effective propagation methods. Third, prominent intellectuals such as Suzuki Daisetsu (1870-1966) should be invited to help improve and reform Korean monks. Fourth, monastic-training centers in Japan should be open to Korean monks, who should be encouraged to reside in these centers. Finally, young Japanese priests should be selected and sent to Korean monasteries to learn the Korean language and promote the lineage of Korean and Japanese Buddhism, and to instruct, guide, and protect Korean monks (AMKB #251). Although these five steps were written almost ten years after the period under discussion here, they are indicative of Abe’s underlying attitude towards Korean Buddhism. At times, Abe also acknowledged that Korean Buddhism possessed some qualities that were better than those of Japanese Buddhism, for example, the idea of keeping precepts. But he believed that Japanese Buddhism had much to offer Korean Buddhism and that instruction should come from Japan to Korea (Sim Wŏnsŏp 2011b, 270). In this sense, Abe’s support of Paek’s ideas, along with his broad network of relationships with other Korean monks, including Yi and Kang, were all predicated on Abe’s own agenda, namely to induce these leaders to embrace the influence of Japanese Buddhism.

Without doubt, Abe, like Paek, envisioned popularizing Zen-centered Buddhism in colonial Korea. For example, to this end, Abe often circulated classical Zen texts to Korean monks, who later thanked him via letters.9 Like other monks, such as Kang and Kim Poryun 金寶輪,10 Paek believed that Abe was committed to advancing Imje Sŏn. However, while Paek sought to establish the Korean branch of the Rinzai/Imje lineage for Korean Buddhism, Abe fundamentally regarded the Japanese branch of Rinzai/Imje as the form of Zen/Sŏn that should be popularized in colonial Korea.

Abe’s talk at the Engakuji in Japan in 1917 provides a further clue about his distinct position. He declared that Korean Sŏn Buddhism derived from the Rinzai

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9 See Abe’s letters to Korean monks in Abe’s collections (Abe Mitsue kankei bunsho).
10 See Kim’s letter to Abe in which Kim thanked Abe and rearticulated the prominence of Imje Sŏn in Korean Buddhism (Maeil sinbo, March 25, 1915).
lineage. Yet, due to the centuries-old marginalization of Korean Buddhism during the Chosŏn era, monks were stigmatized as one of the eight outcasts; but thanks to Governor-General Terauchi, Korean Buddhism began improving. Abe then turned to the Rinzaishū mission in Korea. He praised Gotō for bringing about a Zen boom in Korea and Shaku Sōen for having visited colonial Korea a number of times and disseminating Rinzai Zen. Abe concluded, “Thus, not to mention in Japan, the popularity of Rinzai Zen came to reach as far as to the lands of Korea and China and I cannot help feeling greatly happy and pleased” (Zendō [August 1917], quoted from Sim Wŏnsŏp [2011b] on 293-94). Here, Abe ostentatiously stressed the counter-flow of Zen from Japan back to Korea and China. It is therefore no wonder why Abe assisted or instructed Paek to move to Changsadong and establish the Research Institute next to the Myŏshinji temple. For Abe, Paek was a potential ally for achieving his own vision. Was it naive of Paek to let himself be drawn into this hidden agenda? I don't have any textual evidence for such a claim, but it is clear that Abe and Paek interacted with both converging and diverging interests in mind.11

At any rate, from the overall tone of his letter of apology, it is clear that Paek now understood the futility of putting forth his own institutional idea and also realized the incompatibility of Abe's agenda with his own. With bitterness and despair, Paek gave up his vision, and resolved not to seek Abe's support but to go his own way.

Foray into Mining and Completion of the Myŏshinji Temple Building

In early 1916, a distraught Paek closed his institute in Changsadong, ending his five-year program, and moved to Pongiktong, closer to Insadong. With Abe's political and financial clout no longer available, Paek realized that he would need to earn money to accomplish any future projects. He was determined to start a business and soon approached the former mayor of Pukch'ŏng in northern Korea, Kang Hongdo 康洪道. Kang enticed Paek into taking over a gold mining business that had recently been deserted. With no business skills or experience, Paek, out of desperation to make money, put on lay clothes, jumped into the business and poured himself into it for three years, beginning in 1916. By 1918 he had lost everything, and it was apparent that his business had failed (Kim T'aehu˘p 1941, 24). In fact, he was not alone. Many people were wrapped up in the fever of the gold rush and their businesses failed miserably. Rarely a lucky person found gold. For example, Satō Sōtetsu 伊藤宗喆, a Rinzaiishū missionary in P'yŏngyang, found a gold mine and sold it to the Japanese Mitsui Company for an enormous amount of money (Maeil sinbo, July 20, 1916).

While Paek was in despair with another failure, Gotō at the Myŏshinji expanded his influence and, as the leading promoter of Rinzai Buddhism in Seoul, invited the head of the Eigenji 永源寺 temple Ashizu Jitsuzen 蘆津実全 (1850-1921) to visit and lecture in May 1917. Gotō even arranged a special talk for Korean monks including Kim Kyŏngun and Pak Hanyŏng, who used to participate in Han's

11 I have not also found any textual evidence that Paek interacted with Gotō.
The Eigenji head priest expressed his desire to spread Rinzai Zen and suggested that young Korean monks should be trained at Zen monasteries in Japan. After his talk, the head priest asked Pak Hanyōng about whether Korean Buddhism was Rinzai or Sōtōshū. Pak quickly answered, “Korean Buddhism is entirely Imje and there is no Chodong (Jp. Sōtō)” (Maeil sinbo, May 8, 1917). In September, another prominent Rinzai priest Shaku Sōen, Abe’s teacher, visited Seoul and gave a talk at the Myōshinji temple (Maeil sinbo, September 12, 1917). Later, Gotō and Abe arranged a series of talks at the Maeil sinbo headquarters and other places (Maeil sinbo, September 22, 1917).

Seizing this momentum, Gotō, abetted by Abe, was able to raise enough funds for the construction project (ten thousand yen) and started to build a 2200 square foot temple in March 1918. The temple was completed in August of the same year (see above). In contrast, the Central Preaching Hall, led by Han, lost its function as the center of an Imje movement and by 1916, had become a mere preaching hall of the Bōmō temple. Han went his own way by that same year (Han Pogwang 2001). Now, the Sŏn Kyo Dual Sect and the Rinzai shū dominated the scene.

Starting and Ending a New Religion

Bankrupt, Paek returned from Pukch’ŏng to Seoul in April 1918 and resided in his old house in Pongiktong to which he had moved in 1916 (Han Pogwang 2002, 38). That same year, Abe resigned his position as the president of the Maeil sinbo and went back to Japan for several years. Paek restarted his teaching on a small scale. In March 1919, Han visited Paek and persuaded him to participate in the March First Independence movement with him. Paek was fully in agreement with Han that Korea should gain independence. As a result of his participation in the movement, Paek was sentenced to one year and six months in prison. During his prison term, he read a broad range of books, including the Christian bible translated into Korean, and was inspired to translate Buddhist sutras from classical Chinese. At this time he also envisioned establishing a new religion. He lamented that the centuries-old marginalization of Korean Buddhism, as he later wrote, instilled “a fixed, bad habit in the minds of people” against Buddhism and that “monks were discriminated against by people simply because they were following Buddhism” (Pulgyo [January 1931]: 16). He concluded that he would not be able to revitalize
Buddhism with ease under its own name. When Paek finished his prison term in March 1921, he went back to his house in Pongiktong and launched a translation project. Due to chronic financial difficulties, though, he had to leave Seoul in 1923 and engaged in training young monks at local monasteries, though he was not satisfied with this life. A debate over clerical marriage in 1926 forced him back to Seoul. The incumbents of the major head temples petitioned the colonial government to allow married monks to assume the abbotship of head temples. Paek vehemently opposed this attempt and sent his own two petitions to both the Japanese colonial and imperial governments (Pulgyo sibo, July 15, 1940). In the first petition, he strongly demanded that the authorities not accept the incumbents’ petition but continue to ban clerical marriage, arguing that there had been a clear distinction between monastics and lay people throughout Buddhist history. When he received no response from either government, he softened his tone in the second petition, claiming that the government should allocate at least several head temples to celibate monks like himself so that they could continue to practice without worrying about being driven away by the married monks. The governments ignored his repeated petitions and adopted the incumbents’ petition, thereby officially allowing clerical marriage. Paek lost confidence in Korean Buddhist institutions, indignantly left Buddhism, and finally opted to create a new religion, the Great Enlightenment Teaching (Taegakkyo 大覺敎) (Paek Yongsŏng, “My Confession” [1936]: 85), emulating Dharmapala’s Maha Bodhi Society (Masŏng [Yi Such’ang] 2010).

Paek’s house in Pongiktong became the headquarters of his new religion, and he turned much of his attention to the foreign mission in northern Korea and Manchuria. This endeavor rekindled the Imje monastic spirit, which centered on the dual practice of working and meditating. Even after the establishment of the new religion, he did not entirely separate himself from Korean Buddhism but rather continued to work with like-minded monks. However, as he consolidated the institutional, ritual, and doctrinal structure of the new religion, he did not feel it necessary to continue his registration as a monk with the institution that he held responsible for the legalization of clerical marriage and for other corruptions. He officially abandoned his affiliation with institutional Buddhism in 1933 (Han Pogwang 2002, 47).

Once again, after an initial success, Paek’s new venture did not last long. It was categorized as a “pseudo-religion,” and thus did not gain much legal protection. When Japan occupied Manchuria, established the Manchukuo state in 1932 and planned to go to war against China in 1937, the colonial government tightened its control over Korea for war mobilization. As part of this move, the government began cracking down on “pseudo-religions,” including Paek’s. He was given two options: either disestablish the temples that belonged to his religion in Korea and Manchuria or annex them to the Korean Buddhist institution. Eventually, Paek opted for donating the center in Seoul to the Pōm’ŏ temple. But under pressure

12 For more detail, see Kim Kwangsik (2008).
from the colonial government, Paek had to close the temple and farm that he had founded in Manchuria. The members of this temple accused Paek of deceiving them to gain their investment in building the temple and running a large farm. They asked for compensation, and Han Ikson 韩益善, representing forty-seven households and 326 members, went to Seoul to demonstrate in front of a police office (Maeil sinbo, December 27, 1939), but their protest was in vain.

After this disconcerting setback, Paek restored his affiliation with the Korean Buddhist institution that he had left. Now, he had to be content with saving the center in Pongikton, where he continued to teach until mid-1937 (Han Pogwang 2002, 61). Interestingly, his center donated 50 yen as a contribution to Japan’s war effort, as if to avoid the wrath of the colonial government (Maeil sinbo, August 5, 1937). However, Paek was a tenacious monk. Although he had faced countless difficulties, this new setback did not prevent him from rekindling his life-long vision for promoting Imje Sôn. He replaced the Great Enlightenment Teaching and instituted another new organization called The Monastery of Korean Sôn Buddhism (Chosôn Pulgyo Sônjong Ch’öngnim 朝鮮佛教禪宗叢林) in 1938 (Pulgyo sibo, July 15, 1940; Han Pogwang 2002, 63; Kim Kwangsik 2013). Nevertheless, age and illness overtook Paek’s indefatigable zeal, and he passed away on February 24, 1940.

Conclusion

In a eulogy, the Korean monk Kim Taehûp 金泰洽 (or Sôk Taeûn 釋大隱, 1899-1989) remembered Paek as somebody whose life-long desire was to eliminate the social stigma imposed on Buddhist monastics and thereby improve and modernize Korean Buddhism. Kim wrote that people often called Paek “a man of ambition” and that Paek suffered from rumors and the criticism of others (Pulgyo sibo, July 15, 1940).

It is true that Paek was a man of ambition and charisma. In 1910, he came to Seoul at the age of 42 with the clear goal of promoting Sôn Buddhism and, as of 1911, Imje Sôn in particular. And the trajectories of his ideas and activities for the next thirty years until his death were consistent: to put forth his own institutional vision for Korean Buddhism. The lay members who knew him respected Paek so much that at one point the ointment that Paek made to treat his illness sold well among the members, who believed that it contained special healing power (Maeil sinbo, October 1 1925). Apparently, though, he was not that well received by his fellow monks, most likely due to his intransigent personality. As a result, his path was rocky and filled with challenges, frustrations, and plenty of trials and errors. However, his inflexibility did not preclude his openness to working with potential allies, including even the Japanese. To maximize his chances of fulfilling his own visions, he turned to Abe; this implies that Paek’s Buddhist identity and vision were just as important to him as his political and ethnic identity, so that his identity and vision moved beyond the colonial paradigm. Paek saw Abe as somebody who shared the same Buddhism and as someone who could assist Paek to promote Imje Sôn in particular, but Abe had a different vision for Korean Buddhism, one in line with colonial objectives. At the same time, it is important to know that Abe’s respect for Paek was sincere, for he considered Paek somebody who could promote
Zen Buddhism in colonial Korea. Later, when Suzuki Daisetsu’s visit Korea in 1934 was imminent, Abe sent a letter notifying Paek of the visit and reported on Suzuki’s visit to China (Chosŏn Bukkyo 104 [1934]: 8). Abe must have intended to introduce Suzuki to Paek, though extant sources do not tell us whether such a meeting took place. Despite Paek’s emotionally charged conversation with Abe in 1915, their friendship was not entirely severed.

Paek’s active engagement with Abe also indicates that Paek tried to use Abe as leverage to influence the colonial authorities. Although Paek disliked colonial rule, it was inevitable that he had to engage with it and participate in the space and arena it controlled. Rather than displaying outright resistance and rejection, Paek’s engagement with the colonizers can be observed by his actions: his heated encounters with Dharmapala, whose visit was partly facilitated by the colonial authorities; his petitions to both the Japanese colonial and imperial governments; and his organization’s donation for Japan’s war effort.

Do these new findings in Paek’s life story undermine the recent endeavor among Korean Buddhists to canonize Paek’s legacy? There is no conclusive answer. But one can at least state the following: if anti-Japanese nationalism and anti-Japanese Buddhism continue to be the leitmotifs for evaluating Paek’s thoughts and activities, our understanding of him will be seriously distorted and will not accurately reflect the historical reality in which he lived. Without doubt, if these new aspects of Paek’s life are incorporated into the highly binary narratives about Paek, his unquestioned image as a staunch national and Buddhist hero will be inevitably undermined. However, if one views Paek’s life from the point of view of his own priorities, namely resituating, modernizing, and retraditionalizing Korean Buddhism through Imje-centered teachings and institutional structures, his somewhat questionable actions are not problematic at all but are instead a natural dimension of life for someone who had to navigate multiple ethnic, political, and religious spaces.

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