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The South Korean Buddhist Military Chaplaincy:
Buddhist Militarism, Violence, and Religious Freedom

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Asian Languages and Cultures

by

Jonathan Carl Feuer

2023

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The South Korean Buddhist Military Chaplaincy:
Buddhist Militarism, Violence, and Religious Freedom

by

Jonathan Carl Feuer

Doctor of Philosophy in Asian Languages and Cultures

University of California, Los Angeles, 2023

Professor Robert E. Buswell Jr., Chair

Studies have shown the lasting impact of militarism and violence on gender, class, the economy, and religion in Korea during the 20th century. My dissertation seeks to explain Korean Buddhism's place in these developments through a study of the Buddhist military chaplaincy. I center the chaplaincy because it represents a point of continuity in the long history of Buddhism's involvement in war and state-supported violence in Korea, while bridging the colonial, early South Korean, and contemporary periods of modern Korean history. Though the U.S. and South Korean Christian military chaplaincy might seem to be the most obvious analog to the institution, I argue the Buddhist chaplaincy was more influenced by the history of Buddhism and war in Korea and the Korean Buddhist experience during Japanese colonization. Additionally, transnational ties between South Vietnamese and South Korean Buddhist leadership in the 1960's—not merely South Korea's entrance into the Vietnam War—shaped the early development of the chaplaincy. Furthermore, in order to justify the need for a Buddhist

chaplaincy, Buddhist leaders had to position themselves as pro-military and anti-communist, entangling themselves in President Park Chung Hee's authoritarian military regime. I argue, however, that Buddhist leaders were chiefly motivated to secure their version of religious freedom, one in which the majority religion is privileged by the state. Nonetheless, the chaplaincy deepened ties between the major Buddhist order and the government. State violence received a form of justification from the involvement of the Buddhist community. This relationship between the state and the Buddhist Order, reinforced by the military chaplaincy, continues to influence the trajectory of Korean Buddhism still today.

The dissertation of Jonathan Carl Feuer is approved.

Namhee Lee

Sung-Deuk Oak

Hwansoo Kim

Robert E. Buswell, Jr., Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2023

Dedicated to my grandfather, Vinny.

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Jonathan Carl Feuer received his B.A. in English from Manhattan College in 2014 and his M.A. in Religion from Rutgers University in 2017. His work has been published in the *Journal of Korean Religions*.

“The Aimless Bullet” (*obalt'an* 오발탄)

Tidying up bedding, extraneous work, walking boots, cleaning the barracks
get some sleep on the double!
Even though [I know it's] useless, it's too much for me,
early in the morning I'm told 'run six kilometers!' Then 'run eight kilometers!'
Half of us fell behind, maybe that's called comradery.
I'm crying through my clenched teeth.
I'm embarrassed.
They say we must arm ourselves to the teeth within ten minutes.
I'm getting dizzy.
Of the 88 people why did I fall behind? It's laughable,
when the corn is ripe you can come eat it.
Can faith solve these problems?
Finally I'm surrounded by doubt.
Even if I clench my teeth this way
my teeth become so hot I'm drooling
I even feel suffocated and I can't breathe.
I feel honored that I haven't blacked out.
But to my fellow soldiers I'm an embarrassment.
someone said "knowledge is power" but
this is completely wrong.
Like the definition of selfishness, 'power is power'
That power speaks to all ability.
But I can't have that kind of power.
Like a bald-headed Samson I can't use my strength.
Power is today's justice, but
maybe I'm closer to injustice.
Power, energy, and justice are all the same.
Sunset at the infantry school brings no rest.
A field aglow in the setting sun
From the time we wake up to the time we go to sleep, from month to month, it's the same from
beginning to end.
Of all the aimless bullets, one falls on the infantry school's seventh barracks.
And there's no freedom to be seen in the field aglow in the setting sun.
Sŏn master Manhae said he liked obedience but
there must be a deeper meaning there; I need to be free.
It could be said I have no time for freedom or obedience, but ah! So frustrating.
A deep-sea fish is itself luminescent.
So the military is that which creates something from nothing.
Therefore, I must find freedom in order and obedience.
I must find freedom in restraint.

-from first-generation chaplain Kwŏn Oh-hyŏn's 1968 journal *Yukkun pobyŏng hakkyo 10 chugan ũi suyagnok* (Record of Cultivating Moral Character for 10 weeks at the Army Infantry Academy) 41-43.

Introduction

Militarism and violence dominate Korea's 20th century history. Studies have shown their lasting impact on gender, class, the economy, and, on my focus here, religion. My dissertation seeks to understand and explain Korean Buddhism's place in these developments through a study of the South Korean Buddhist military chaplaincy. As a modern institution, the chaplaincy bridges the colonial, early South Korean, and contemporary periods of Korean history; yet, it is also the newest incarnation of Buddhism's historical relationship with war and violence on the Korean peninsula. Establishing the chaplaincy prompted Korean Buddhist leaders to confront their religion's changing identity in the modern nation. Chaplains also have a direct impact on young South Korean men, since they often are their first point of contact with Buddhism. In these ways, the chaplaincy has exerted powerful influence over the modern trajectory of Korean Buddhism, while deepening the connections between Buddhism, the military, and the broader issue of religious violence. A military chaplain is most simply a clergy member who is employed by the military to provide religious instruction for soldiers. In English, the originally Christian term "chaplain" has been standardized to refer to clergy in any faith that holds a similar position. As in many other countries, in South Korea there are Buddhist prison, police, and hospital chaplains. However, only South Korea, Thailand, the United States, and United Kingdom have official Buddhist military chaplains. In Korean, the term for Buddhist chaplains is *kunsŏng* (軍僧) or *kunbŏpsa* (軍法師), literally "military monk" or "military dharma teacher." In the South Korean military today, Buddhist (viz., Chogye Order 曹溪宗), Wŏn Buddhist, Protestant, and Catholic chaplains serve nominally similar functions. According to an official military history, the duties of all chaplains can be summed up in five categories: establishing correct

views of life and death, offering a moral justification for war, establishing correct values, preventing non-combat losses, and cultivating qualities of democratic citizens.¹ Buddhist chaplains teach the basic beliefs of Buddhism, like karma, compassion, and generosity, but interpreted in a way that will help support the five purposes of the chaplaincy. Though Buddhism is often presumed to be a pacifist religion, chaplains see no apparent contradiction between their pastoral function and their Buddhist beliefs.

Chaplains instill such values, views, and morals through special weekly religious services. They perform conversion, marriage, and funeral ceremonies for soldiers and their families. They also work in military hospitals. As of 2022, the South Korean military has 257 Protestant chaplains,² 128 Buddhist chaplains, 103 Catholic chaplains,³ and 3 Wŏn Buddhist chaplains.⁴ Like all Korean men, male monks have to complete mandatory military service; conscientious objection has a minimal but fraught place in South Korea and there are no exemptions for religious clergy.⁵ The chaplaincy is often an alternative kind of service for monks. Also, in recent years, becoming a monk in order to serve as a chaplain is a choice some have made to avoid regular military service.⁶

The idea of a Buddhist military chaplaincy can be traced back as early as the Japanese civil war of 1331-1333.⁷ Monks belonging to the Japanese Pure Land sect were placed in military units to recite the name of Amida Buddha ten times at the time of a soldiers' death to

¹ Kunjong Kamsil (2003), 56-59.

² *Haptong heraltŭ*, "Ko Yŏng-ki Ch'ongmu 'Kunsŏngyo hoebok-kunjongbyŏng kwa changsŏng chedo chŏlsil." October 22, 2022.

³ Buddhist and Catholic numbers provided by Buddhist chaplain Yi in a meeting on October 10, 2022.

⁴ *Munhwa ilbo*, "Chonggyo tanch'e, hagwon-p'yŏnŭijŏm-k'ap'e poda to manta," January 10, 2019. Verified by chaplain Yi, December 5, 2022.

⁵ See Kuk Cho (2007) for a fuller treatment of conscientious objection in South Korea.

⁶ Taken from a conversation with current chaplain Yi on October 10, 2022.

⁷ Thornton (1995), 441.

ensure their rebirth in the Pure Land. Eventually, the scope of their activities grew to performing funerals, providing medical support, and procuring supplies.⁸ Various iterations of Buddhist chaplains followed the ebbs and flows of military conflict and official Buddhist political support throughout the proceeding centuries in Japan.

Buddhism and war have a long relationship in Korean history, however. Buddhism was an integral part of the first dynasty to unite the entire Korean peninsula in the 7th century, the Silla dynasty (57-935). Elite soldiers (*hwarang* 花郎) were taught five precepts developed by the Buddhist monk Wŏn'gwang (圓光 542-640), which included “never retreat in battle” and “be selective in the taking of life.” In the late 16th century, Buddhist monk Sŏsan Hyujŏng (西山 休靜 1520-1604) and his disciple Samyŏng Yujŏng (四溟 惟政 1544-1610) famously led thousands of monk-soldiers (*sŭnggun* 僧軍) to oust invading Japanese armies during the Imjin War (1592-1598). Monk-soldiers were commissioned to protect fortresses and government archives across the peninsula until the late 19th century. In histories written in the 20th century, Korean Buddhism is often referred to as “state-protection Buddhism” (*hoguk pulgyo* 護國 佛教) because of its long history of supporting the state spiritually and militarily.

The modern Buddhist military chaplaincy began in the Japanese empire as early as the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895). It then took on an increased importance during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) as Buddhism was mobilized as a religious force against the perceived Christian enemy. These early positions were somewhere in-between chaplain and missionary: their purpose was to serve Japanese troops but also to convert and “pacify” the lands they were conquering. Korea, as a Japanese colony from 1910-1945, became a key hub for these

⁸ Victoria (2016), 160.

missionary chaplains. By the second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) and into World War Two (1939-1945), the Buddhist military chaplaincy was a large-scale institution.

In the early 20th century, Japanese Buddhism became increasingly tied to the Japanese state. Under “imperial-way Buddhism” (*kodo Bukkyo*), Japanese Buddhist institutions were subsumed under the laws of the state and became a political arm of the government.⁹ Though not all schools of Japanese Buddhism or Japanese Buddhists blindly followed state demands, adherence to government policy was key for patronage and propagation. Under Japanese colonization, Korean Buddhist orders, acting both together with and independent of Japanese Buddhist orders, were often similarly subjugated by nationalist government policy. While Korean Buddhists constantly pushed for administrative autonomy from the state, and modernization was often leaders’ chief goal, they “never imaged their religion as totally independent from the state.”¹⁰ The institutionalism and state-order relationship that deepened during the colonial period resulted in many Korean Buddhist leaders vehemently supporting the Japanese war effort in World War Two. Buddhist leaders produced viewpoints on modern warfare and nationalism that remained influential in the post-liberation period. Though the late 1940’s were a time of upheaval in Korean Buddhism, ultimately the Chogye Order’s relationship with the South Korean government retained similar characteristics to that of the state-order relationship during the colonial period. That is, relying on the state for patronage and supporting nationalist causes, including warfare, seen in the Korean War (1950-1953), the ideological struggle against communism, and the Buddhist military chaplaincy.

⁹ Victoria (2006), 79.

¹⁰ Hwansoo Kim (2018), 284.

After liberation in 1945, and the division of the peninsula into North and South Korea, Christian and Buddhist leaders began a push to add a chaplaincy to the South Korean army upon its founding in 1948. With the outbreak of the Korean War on June 25th, 1950, the Christian-dominated South Korean government recognized a need for Christian chaplains and allowed a few Korean pastors to join the mainly American chaplains on the battlefield as volunteers. Protestant Christians dominated the early South Korean government and now were the only ones with representatives of their faith in the military. This development stirred a sense of urgency among some Korean Buddhist leaders. In 1951, the Association of Buddhist Military Propagators (*Chonggun P'ogyosa Hoe*) made the first attempt to systematize a Buddhist chaplaincy in the South Korean military to serve the soldiers who were majority Buddhist. They succeeded in sending some monks to the battlefield to serve troops in the Korean War, though they were not yet officially institutionalized by the military. In the years following the end of the Korean War in 1953, Buddhist youth groups, Buddhist soldiers, politicians, and leaders of the Buddhist order worked to establish an official military chaplaincy.

This lobbying continued until South Korea joined the U.S. in the Vietnam War (1955-1975) in 1965. With the original Association of Buddhist Military Propagators as an example, Buddhist leaders and military officials designed a training program and institutional structure for a Buddhist chaplaincy from 1965 to 1968. The chaplaincy was finally officially created in 1968 and five chaplains were sent to serve troops stationed in South Vietnam. Twelve Buddhist chaplains served in Vietnam until the end of South Korea's participation in 1973. In the following decades, the Buddhist chaplaincy would continue to grow, becoming the large-scale institution it is today.

This dissertation will focus mainly on the early years of the formation and establishment of the Buddhist chaplaincy in the 1960's and 1970's. The Buddhist military chaplaincy was certainly a product of Park Chung Hee's (Pak Chŏng-hŭi, 1917-1979) leadership. The militarism, authoritarianism, and developmentalism that Park espoused had a great impact on the chaplaincy and the Buddhist community as a whole. On militarism, I will follow Insook Kwon's definition of the term as "a wider set of beliefs firmly based on the presumed necessity of vindicating hierarchy and discipline, the effectiveness of constructing a strong masculinity, and the legitimacy of using group violence as a solution to conflict in the name of the interests of groups, nations or allies in the modern era."¹¹ Furthermore, Lee Byeong-Cheon's description of Park's regime as a "developmental dictatorship" is helpful here. Lee defines it as "a highly discretionary and strategic dictatorship pursuing statist-nationalist modernization while seeking national integration and mobilization through the suppression of political liberty and public participation in the name of national interests and development."¹² Park championed soldiers as leaders of society, using war and violence to solidify a South Korean identity. As Tilly and Giddens show, "the process of state formation is embedded in war making and the attempt to monopolize the means of organized violence."¹³ In early South Korea, "the military played the role of a modernizer."¹⁴ Park was also a self-described Buddhist and did much to benefit institutionalized Buddhism (mainly the Chogye Order). The Korean military of the 1960's and 1970's was extremely demanding with twenty-four-hour daily routines and rare opportunities to leave the

¹¹ Insook Kwon (2000), 32.

¹² Lee Byeong-Cheon (2006), 9.

¹³ Quoted in Moon (2006), 11.

¹⁴ Moon (2006), 57.

base.¹⁵ A first-generation chaplain described his military training as “not a joke” (*changnan aniõtta*); the majority of chaplaincy candidates did not pass the required military training.¹⁶

There has been minimal scholarly attention on the pre-modern and modern history of the South Korean Buddhist military chaplaincy. In English, Vladimir Tikhonov has done the most extensive study on the history of the South Korean military chaplaincy system and Buddhism’s place in it. He mainly compares the Buddhist chaplaincy to Christian chaplaincies, and frames much of the history as a competition between the chaplaincies for resources and followers.¹⁷ In Korean, Kang In-chõl has written a few articles on the Buddhist chaplaincy as well, but his 2017 book *Chonggyo wa kundae (Religion and the Military)* is certainly the most detailed academic study of the South Korean military chaplaincy in recent years. Kang chiefly focuses on the Christian chaplaincies, but his conclusions about propagation, religious competition, and the institutional “mechanisms” that support the chaplaincies and their theological and philosophical underpinnings are comprehensive (and very relevant to my discussion here of the Buddhist chaplaincy).¹⁸

There has been more written about the 21st century contemporary South Korean Buddhist military chaplaincy. These studies are usually focused on the successes and failures of the chaplaincy and its impact on young Buddhists. Tikhonov, similarly to his study on the history of the chaplaincy, discusses the chaplaincy in terms of Korea’s “free market” of religion. He argues that, while South Korea’s pluralistic society creates competition among religions, the chaplaincy is one way the government interferes in this free competition, permitting only certain religions

¹⁵ Sung Kyung Kim (1984), 67.

¹⁶ Kwõn Oh-hyõn (2012), 118.

¹⁷ Tikhonov (2017).

¹⁸ Kang (2017).

the opportunity to propagate in the military. Thus, the “free market” becomes a limited market in which religions fiercely compete within the military.¹⁹ In this system, Buddhist chaplains preach “masculine virtues” that align Buddhist teachings with military ethics like order, discipline, and bravery.²⁰ Ham Hyōn-chun, a current chaplain, reminds us, however, that the Buddhist chaplaincy, with its lesser facilities, lower funding, and deficient “practical training,” is still seen as inferior to the Christian chaplaincies in the military market.²¹

In 2007, Kim Ch’angmo conducted a survey of 283 soldiers and chaplains, concluding that soldiers generally appreciated being introduced to Buddhism in the military and were likely to continue their religious faith after discharge. Ninety-three percent of respondents said they want to participate either devoutly or at least occasionally in Buddhist religious activities after their military service. Among soldiers who had received the Buddhist precepts and initiated into the religion, eighty-five percent of them received them in the military. Kim points out that in civilian lay Buddhist life, there is not much place for young people to participate in Buddhist services or monastery life. But in the military, they can intimately engage with chaplains regularly, an interchange that soldiers greatly enjoy.²²

These recent studies on the contemporary chaplaincy reveal how significant the military chaplaincy is in the overall project of Buddhist propagation in South Korea. The military is often the first place that young Korean men experience Buddhism and interact with Buddhist clergy. These studies also importantly remind us that there is an inherent gendered aspect to the chaplaincy and military Buddhism. Since the 1970’s, when the military displayed a

¹⁹ Tikhonov (2015), 9, 24-25.

²⁰ Tikhonov (2015), 27.

²¹ Ham (2016), 175.

²² Kim Ch’ang-mo (2007), 131, 151-154.

“spectacularized military masculine image, with its close linkages to the state, race, anticommunism, and developmentalism,” the military, with its mandatory conscription, continues to embody gendered issues in contemporary South Korea.²³ As of 2019, though steadily increasing, the percentage of female soldiers in the military was 6.8%.²⁴ Buddhist propagation reflects this gendered disparity, as the doctrine taught by chaplains, as Tikhonov shows, has a notably “masculine” edge. The first female chaplain for any religion was commissioned in 2014.²⁵

The issues of celibacy and monastic marriage have also pervaded the history of the Buddhist military chaplaincy since its inception, similarly to the broader history of modern Korean Buddhism.²⁶ Celibacy has been required for monks in the Chogye Order since the 1950’s. However, from 1968 to 1980, whether Buddhist chaplains could marry or not was not officially determined by the Order; similarly to rules on meat-eating, consumption of alcohol, and appearance (i.e. unshaven hair, monastic attire, etc.), they allowed for ambiguity in the rules surrounding marriage in order to enlarge the pool of new applicants and ease integration into military life. In 1980, the Chogye Order officially passed a “marriage exception clause” for military chaplains in the Order’s constitution. Marriage among chaplains became the norm for almost three decades until the Chogye Order revoked the marriage clause in 2009.²⁷ Though chaplains married and employed by the military prior to 2009 were “grandfathered in” and allowed to remain at their post, today all Buddhist chaplains (excluding Wŏn Buddhist) are fully ordained, celibate, unmarried monks.

²³ Jin-kyung Lee (2009), pp. 660.

²⁴ *Yonhap News Agency*, “Female soldiers account for 6.8 percent of S. Korea’s armed forces,” January 29, 2020.

²⁵ Kang (2016), 71.

²⁶ See Jeongeun Park (2022) and Su Jung Kim (2022).

²⁷ Kyungrae Kim and Cheonghwan Park (2020), 5-6.

In the following chapters, I will examine the key influences, figures, and moments that have guided the South Korean Buddhist military chaplaincy's history. This dissertation, however, is not meant to be an exhaustive history of the chaplaincy. There are multiple official histories of the chaplaincy already written by military and chaplaincy organizations, which I do not intend to duplicate here. Rather, this dissertation seeks to fill some of the gaps in those official histories by placing the development of the chaplaincy in the wider context of both modern and pre-modern Korean history, Buddhist philosophy, Korean Buddhist history, and South Korean politics. I heavily rely on Buddhist media to represent the myriad of voices that contributed to the chaplaincy. Through case studies, like the South Korean and Vietnamese Buddhist relationship during the Vietnam War and the Mass Military Faith Promotion Movement (*Chǒngun Sinjahwa Undong*), I show how the military chaplaincy worked as a conduit for the South Korean Buddhist community to work within Park Chung Hee's domestic political order, the international Cold War order, and the burgeoning world Buddhist community.

I draw on Meredith B. McGuire's important work on "lived religion" in order to understand the diversity of ways the chaplaincy's function, purpose, and justification were understood.²⁸ Though supported by the Chogye Order and the South Korean government, the chaplaincy, in its early years, was highly improvised and influenced by the individual relationships between chaplain and soldier. "Lived religion" reveals how chaplains were blazing their own path of religiosity, adapting Buddhism to their experiences and creating new forms of Buddhism. Though my research was not strictly ethnographical, my conversations with chaplains greatly inform and contextualize my study here. I have tried to reference a myriad of voices that

²⁸ McGuire (2008).

offer insight into the reality of the chaplaincy on the ground. Chaplains' admonitions to violence, especially, may seem like, in McGuire's words, "inconsistencies" in a Buddhist belief system that puts no-harm and no-killing at the forefront of its moral code. This apparent inconsistency may be why scholars such as myself are so drawn to this subject of Buddhism and violence. But, as McGuire reminds us, and I believe my research reveals that, for most people, their beliefs feel consistent despite what scholars or doctrine may say otherwise.²⁹

Cases of war and violence are not an aberration in Buddhism but were tightly intertwined with the religion throughout its history. Both doctrinal and social justifications have been offered for centuries to circumvent the first of the seminal five precepts of Buddhism—not to kill living beings.³⁰ Thus, it is more correct to discuss war and violence in Buddhism not as a circumvention of a religious structure but as a legitimate characteristic of Buddhism in practice. Michael Jerryson explains that violence in Buddhism, like most religions, takes on a "prima facie" dimension in that the precept of nonviolence is taken to be true until a situation arises that challenges it.³¹ Most commonly, when there is an existential threat to Buddhism or a Buddhist society, violence is justified or even necessary. Recently, Thai and Sri Lankan Buddhists have used this logic to attack Muslims whom they say threaten their Buddhist civilization.³² Brian Victoria has shown in *Zen at War* that Japanese Buddhists under the Japanese Empire used similar logic to promote violence. For these Buddhists, not only did Western empires pose a threat to Buddhism, but Japan needed to be the arbiter of a new Buddhist world that ended suffering even if violence was a necessary prerequisite.³³ In the earliest incarnation of the South

²⁹ McGuire (2008), 16.

³⁰ Demiéville (2010).

³¹ Jerryson (2018), 35.

³² Jerryson (2010); Kent (2010); Nilsen (2012).

³³ Victoria (2006).

Korean Buddhist chaplaincy during the Korean War, the Association of Buddhist Military Propagators, Buddhist leaders used similar logic; they framed the war as a “holy war” against a communist enemy that sought to rid the world of Buddhism and all religion; thus, violence was necessary to stop them.³⁴

In Buddhism, the term usually translated to “non-violence” is “*ahiṃsā*,” which, based on its root word *hiṃsā*, meaning “injury or harm,” may be better translated to “non-injury” or “non-harm.” Treating “violence” as synonymous with “injury” or “harm” allows us to complicate the term further. We have to consider that violence has not strictly carried a negative connotation in Buddhism; it can also have a positive connotation. If we accept this idea of violence as having no inherent positive or negative ethical implication, but rather as referring to an act of harm that’s ethical or soteriological effect is judged contextually, we can move away from the idea that violence need always be “justified” in Buddhism to the idea that violence is an inseparable aspect of Buddhism. In Buddhist philosophy, “compassion” or “intention” are often the yardsticks by which an instance of violence and its soteriological implications are judged.

Rather than framing violence as a universal concept that needs justification or an excuse, I endeavor to explain the development of the Korean Buddhist military chaplaincy through the specific experiences of the Buddhists dealing most directly with the issues to better understand violence from a particular Korean Buddhist perspective. This involves historical memories of Buddhism and violence, colonial and decolonial violence, anti-communism and the Cold War, and militarized modernity. Buddhists negotiated these issues through both contemporary understandings of politics and foundational Buddhist doctrine.

³⁴ Yi I Yong (1986), 58-59.

I will also make clear the distinction between the perspectives purported by official denominational organs, like the Chogye Order, and the chaplains who actually experienced militaristic violence.³⁵ Korean Buddhism’s specific brand of modernity is tightly intertwined with Buddhist institutionalism and the Buddhist Order’s relationship with the state. As Adam Lyons eloquently states, “Buddhist modernism is not necessarily deinstitutionalized, romantic, and individualist—it is just as modern for Buddhism to become hyperinstitutionalized, didactic, and statist.”³⁶ This is certainly the case for Buddhism in early South Korea. During the “Purification Movement” (*Chŏnghwa Undong*) of the 1950’s and 1960’s, a small group of celibate, traditionalist monks allied with the government to turn debates over Buddhist precepts and temple land management into fierce nationalistic fighting. By labeling married monks as “pro-Japanese,” celibate monks succeeded in ousting them from the Chogye Order while deeply entrenching that institution in South Korean politics. Through the following three decades, the Chogye Order’s close relationship to authoritarian regimes went virtually unquestioned.³⁷ The Chogye Order became the chief, and often the only, conduit through which monks, temples, and lay organizations could secure government patronage and public influence. Concurrently, the Chogye Order also provided legitimacy to the government. The religious authority vested in the leaders of the Chogye Order, supported by their perceived nationalist credentials and adherence to Buddhist traditions, was extremely influential. As we will see, two Executive Heads (*Ch’ongmuwŏnjang*) of the Chogye Order during the 1960’s and 1970’s, Master Ch’ŏngdam (靑潭 1902-1971) and Master Kyŏngsan (京山 1917-1979), championed the Buddhist military chaplaincy and shaped the discourse around it within their larger visions of modernization,

³⁵ Auerback (2012), 155.

³⁶ Lyons (2021), 10.

³⁷ Pori Park (2007), 143.

expanding propagation, and asserting religious freedom. Their “religious cultural authority” helps explain how Korean Buddhism has changed in the late 20th century and how the Buddhist chaplaincy became a fixture in South Korea.³⁸

I also look at how the history and memories of Korean Buddhism have contributed to the ideology and identity of the Buddhist military chaplaincy. I have considered Carol Gluck’s four aspects of “public memory” in investigating the cultural milieu and historical memory that shaped the early chaplaincy. First, “official memory,” such as “commemorative rituals, public monuments and museums, national textbooks,” relating to Buddhist history abounded during the 1960’s and 1970’s as Park Chung Hee embraced Buddhism during his rule. Second, “vernacular memory,” which I mainly glean through Buddhist media, often followed “official memory” during this time, but also challenged it in significant ways, as seen in discourses on Vietnam and Buddhist warfare. Third is “each individual’s personal past,” which can also be affected by “vernacular memory,” which I have tried to capture through building my own relationships with former and current chaplains. Fourth, “meta-memory,” such as debating memory and changing memory because of new historical facts, is significant in the tumultuous period of the 1960’s and 1970’s when Korean national history, and Buddhism’s place in it, was constantly being defined and redefined by scholars and Buddhist leaders through an explosion of interest in Korean Buddhist history.³⁹ I try to challenge Pierre Nora’s dictum that “history is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it” by bridging the gap between official histories of the chaplaincy, the history of Korean Buddhism, and individual and popular accounts of the chaplaincy.⁴⁰

³⁸ Jerryson (2018), 196.

³⁹ Gluck (2007), 55-58.

⁴⁰ Nora (1989), 9.

As I mentioned previously, terms such as *hoguk* Buddhism, *hwarang* (花郎), monk-soldiers, violence, and no-killing/harm come up throughout this dissertation. They are integral to understanding the Buddhist military chaplaincy. I am not, however, trying to follow certain categorizations of Korean Buddhism that have essentialized it, like *hoguk* Buddhism, and I am also not trying to create a new essentialism—that Korean Buddhism is, and has always been, explicitly violent. I discuss these essentialisms because they abounded in the Buddhist community in early decades of South Korea, and still hold some sway to the present. These essentialisms were also integral in the establishment of the Korean Buddhist chaplaincy. I explore them to reveal their impact; however, I also do not completely disavow the use of essentialisms or categorizations of people, events, and concepts in the history of Korean Buddhism. Thomas Tweed argues that scholars must refrain from essentializing a religion or seeing it as “static,” but rather see it is an organic, ever-changing entity.⁴¹ Mark Nathan adds that we must, however, recognize the networks of individuals that have actively adapted and changed their religion. They have an eye on both the present and the past, and are acutely aware of the broader tradition of which they are a part.⁴² I would add that essentialisms can provide a system within which a religious actor can alter the mechanisms of that system. By working within the system, they can make changes while retaining the identity of their religion. As I will show in this dissertation, essentialisms about Korean Buddhism, I believe, are still helpful in understanding Korean Buddhism, as long as we recognize that these essentialisms are ever-changing, except in name. Nonetheless, a lack of fixed meaning does not devalue a term all together. By using an essential term to evaluate a religion, we can reveal paramount changes that

⁴¹ Tweed (2015).

⁴² Nathan (2022), 64-65.

occur over time through a diverse range of individuals and networks that are aware of their place in their religious tradition. We will see these processes at work in the way Korean Buddhism has been essentialized as “state-protection Buddhism.” Though the term has endured in scholarship, its meaning has fluctuated, and tracking these fluctuations reveals some interesting developments in the history of modern Korean Buddhism. Furthermore, we will also see similar fluctuations in discussions of violence, war, and killing in Korean Buddhism.

I argue in this dissertation that, for Buddhists in modern South Korea, the justification for breaking the paramount Buddhist precept of no-killing for the sake of either Buddhism, the state, or both, is central to Korean Buddhist identity. However, the meanings, justifications, and promulgations of such violence have constantly changed, especially over the last five decades, evidenced in the institutions of the Buddhist military chaplaincy.

In Chapter 1, I outline the history of the South Korean Buddhism military chaplaincy and the variety of influences that have contributed to it. The first comprehensive telling of the chaplaincy’s history in English, this chapter serves to introduce the critical issues that will be addressed in depth in later chapters. I begin with the influence of late 19th and early 20th century Japanese Buddhism, and the Japanese colonization of Korea. Though there were no Korean Buddhist chaplains alongside Japanese Buddhist chaplains in the Japanese Empire’s military, Korean monks often encouraged lay Buddhists to serve in the Japanese army and many of these same monks remained in power post-liberation. The ideology promulgated under the “total war” system in the late colonial period specifically infiltrated the Korean Buddhist community. The influence of the colonial period continued post-liberation in 1945. The United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) and the Korean War catalyzed a Christian chaplaincy in the newly formed South Korean military. An informal, yet influential, Buddhist

chaplains worked in South Korean military camps, laying the foundation for the official establishment of the Buddhist chaplaincy in 1968. But the years from the end of the Korean War in 1953 and the chaplaincy's official establishment in 1968 saw political upheaval, ruptures in the Buddhist community, and the beginning of South Korea's entry into the Vietnam War. These developments all greatly impacted the Buddhist chaplaincy and are integral to understanding both its early years and current condition.

In Chapter 2, I take a detailed look at the impact of South Korea's participation in the Vietnam War on the Buddhist military chaplaincy. Official histories of the chaplaincy always emphasize the Vietnam War, and the Vietnamese people being majority Buddhist, as the final catalyst for the establishment of the chaplaincy. The South Korean government and military believed Buddhist chaplains could greatly contribute to "civic activities" (*taemin hwaltong*) with their shared knowledge of Buddhism. I show in this chapter, however, that the close relationship between Korean and Vietnamese Buddhists began in 1963, two years before South Korea's entry into the war and five years before Korean Buddhist chaplains were sent to Vietnam. Leaders of each nation's Buddhist Orders frequently met and Korean lay Buddhists spiritually and financially supported their "Buddhist brothers" in Vietnam who were suffering persecution. When chaplains were dispatched in late 1968, they were only deepening the bond between the two countries' Buddhisms that had been developing for years. And, in turn, this bond is crucial to understanding the early formation of the chaplaincy.

In Chapter 3, I present the Mass Military Faith Promotion Movement (*Chŏn'gun Sinjahwa Undong*) as the primary reason for the growth and stability of the South Korean Buddhist military chaplaincy. While the Vietnam War was the original catalyst for the chaplaincy's establishment, the Mass Military Faith Promotion Movement, from 1971 to 1974,

built the Buddhist chaplaincy from a small, improvised, and poorly organized institution into a flourishing and permanent fixture in the South Korean military. With significant government support and unprecedented ability to propagate among soldiers, the Buddhist chaplaincy saw exponential growth in its number of chaplains, military dharma halls, and Buddhist soldiers. This massive growth also facilitated the standardization of chaplains teaching philosophy. During the Faith Movement, Buddhist chaplains, supported by leaders of the Chogye Order and scholars of Buddhism, taught of Korean Buddhism's "state-protection" history, connecting almost 2000 years of Korean Buddhist history to the contemporary Buddhist chaplaincy and Buddhist soldiering. As I show in this chapter, while most scholarship on Korean Buddhism since the 1970's has moved past broad characterizations such as "state-protection" Buddhism, the Buddhist chaplaincy has not, marking the Faith Movement as an integral moment in the chaplaincy's history.

In Chapter 4, I build off my arguments in Chapter 3 to place the South Korean Buddhist military chaplaincy, and South Korean Buddhist soldiering, in the wider scholarly discourse on Buddhism and violence. How can Buddhists, whose five foundational precepts begin with "refrain from killing living creatures," participate in the military where death and killing are inevitable? In the case of the Korean Buddhist chaplaincy, the answer is two-sided. First, as introduced in the previous chapter, the historical relationship between Korean Buddhism, war, and violence is extremely significant. Especially in the early decades of the chaplaincy, monks, scholars, and chaplains have centralized the "monk-soldier" in Korean Buddhist history, connecting modern Buddhist soldiers to centuries of sacrifice and killing justified in the name of national defense and the survival of Korean Buddhism. This reasoning for Buddhist chaplains' participation in the South Korean military has been widely discussed by those in the institution

and scholars alike. However, in the second part of this chapter I look at a previously little-known discourse on “compassionate killing” among Korean Buddhist monks, chaplains, and scholars of the 1960’s and 1970’s. Similar to Buddhists across the Buddhist world, Korean Buddhists referenced foundational Buddhist doctrine and philosophical concepts to justify the chaplaincy and Buddhist soldiering.

Chapter 1: The Origins of the South Korean Buddhist Military Chaplaincy

This chapter serves as an overview of the history of the South Korean Buddhist military chaplaincy. It draws almost completely on primary and secondary source materials in the Korean language. The goal of my dissertation is not to give a completely detailed summary of the history of the chaplaincy. However, I believe the value of this chapter is twofold; (1) there has not yet been a history of the chaplaincy written in English to this degree of detail, using a wide range of source materials. (2) this chapter introduces some of the themes, developments, and processes that I will examine in much more detail in later chapters. My look at the history of the chaplaincy here provides context for the remainder of this dissertation.

Influences on the South Korean Buddhist Military Chaplaincy

Japanese Buddhism and Colonized Korean Buddhism

The modern Buddhist military chaplaincy began in the Japanese empire as early as the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895) with a few chaplains. However, as the central battlefield of the war, Korea became an experimental field for Japanese monks to work as pseudo-chaplains. The Soto Zen sect sent monks to Korea to spread teachings to Japanese officials and residents, comfort Japanese soldiers, proselytize Koreans and work with Korean monks, and establish schools. According to Nam-lin Hur, these Soto monks followed Japanese government orders centering around three tasks: provide “Buddhist services for the Japanese military, promotion of the so-called *kominka* (transforming [the colonial peoples] into imperial subjects) policy, and the

pacification of colonial subjects.”¹ By the turn of the twentieth century, Buddhist sects were lobbying the government for chaplaincy positions, and the chaplaincy took on an increased importance during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) as Buddhism was mobilized as a religious force against the perceived Christian enemy. These early positions were somewhere in-between chaplain and missionary; their purpose was to serve Japanese troops but also to convert and “pacify” the lands they were conquering. Korea, as a Japanese colony from 1910-1945, became a key hub for these missionary chaplains. By the second Sino-Japanese War and into World War Two, the Buddhist military chaplaincy was a large-scale institution, providing medicine, education, and spiritual support to Japanese soldiers.² Though there seems to have been no Korean Buddhist chaplains in the Japanese imperial army, Korean monks often encouraged lay Buddhists to serve in the Japanese army and many of these same monks remained in power post-liberation.³ Their relationship with Japanese Buddhism helped set the stage for Korean Buddhist leaders’ understanding of what their religion’s relationship with the military and state could be.

Im Hye-bong’s seminal 1993 study, *History of Pro-Japanese Buddhism (Ch’inil Pulgyoron)*, exposes the harsh reality of the Korean Buddhist leadership’s cooperation with Japanese Buddhism and the Japanese government during the colonial period. Support for the Japanese military and imperial wars was a significant dimension of this cooperation. Im’s insights are useful in understanding the institutional structure and ideology that systemically promoted Korean Buddhism’s complicity with Japanese militarism. Firstly, Im defines “pro-Japanese Buddhism” as “Buddhism that had blind disregard for the independence of Korea and

¹ Hur (1999), 108-112.

² Ibid, 126.

³ Tikhonov (2017), 236.

toadyistic admiration and support for Japan. Furthermore, Buddhism that went against their own country or denomination and actively collaborated with Japan's colonial control."⁴ Im's definition is couched in politics. Though he admits there were "gray areas," he is drawing a strict line between nationalists and collaborators. Hwansoo Kim importantly stresses that such strict dichotomies imposed on colonial Korean Buddhist reduce the complex religious situation simply to "political terms," ignoring the diverse perspectives of individuals and groups.⁵ While I agree that Im's characterization may be reductive when investigating issues such as temple land management, monastic precepts, and the organization of Buddhist denominations, especially in the pre-colonial and early colonial period, it is hard to deny that the fervent support that Korean Buddhist leadership gave to the Japanese war effort from 1937 to 1945. It is also true, however, that dissent was particularly fraught during the "total war" years of the Japanese Empire, and Korean Buddhist leadership had to weigh the risks they were willing to take. But the evidence proving that collaboration with state violence and war during the colonial period was not an aberration or coping mechanism lies in post-war history. Though the nation that Korean Buddhists were protecting changed, and the enemies they were fighting against changed, the vocabulary and structure of the discourse did not. Such is often the case with remnants of Japanese colonialism post-liberation in Korean society. These remnants may be best seen, as will be discussed later, in the South Korean Buddhist military chaplaincy.

On the eve of the Second Sino-Japanese War, the Governor-General of Korea, the highest authority in colonial Korea, announced new ideological provisions for Korean subjects on April 20, 1937. This included "cultivating unwavering belief in the nation" with specific order to

⁴ Im (1993), 24-25.

⁵ Hwansoo Kim (2012), 7.

religious leaders, demanding “a concrete plan to deeply root the people’s beliefs [in the nation] and discipline their religious convictions to be correct.”⁶ In response, Yi Chong-uk (1884-1969), as leader of the united Korean Buddhist Order, decided that all branch temples and propagation centers will recite the national anthem on July 25th and August 1st to support the war effort. The Chosŏn Alliance for Supporting the Military was also formed with the help of the Central Office of Chosŏn Buddhism to organize farewell ceremonies for soldiers, help soldiers’ families, collect donations for the war efforts, and conduct funerals for deceased soldiers.⁷ The Order then organized “Buddhist Services for National Prestige and Good Fortune in War” at each major branch temple, holding ceremonies for dead soldiers and their families, and collecting large war funds from local residents. Even the Buddhist Youth Organization, that began as a reform group in the 1920’s, expressed their support for the war, justifying it as a good step in reform. They published a treatise proclaiming they will “stop at nothing to help the war effort.” Across the country, monastery abbots were working pro-war/pro-Japanese sentiment into their teachings, conducting special ceremonies and prayers for soldiers, and doing door-to-door donation drives for the war.⁸

Korean monks’ pro-war efforts were not confined domestically; the Governor-General and Buddhist Order also sent some monks to conduct pro-Japanese and pro-imperial dharma services to Buddhist Koreans and soldiers living in Japan and Manchuria. Three Japan-educated young Korean monks—Ch’oe Yŏng-hwan (d. 1979), Yi Tong-sŏk (n.d.), and Pak Yun-chin (1905-?)—were sent in December 1937 on a “support mission” to soldiers in northern China. Before departing, the three monks received training on military life at the Chosŏn Military

⁶ Quoted in Im (1993), 175.

⁷ Im (1993), 177-180.

⁸ Ibid, 193-202.

Headquarters and the Japanese Army base at Yongsan, Seoul. They then spent over a month traveling to many cities in northern China.⁹ Details of their activities are very limited, but they seem to mirror some of the activities done by Japanese Buddhist chaplains during the Second Sino-Japanese War comforting soldiers. We may consider these three men proto-Korean Buddhist military chaplains.

After returning home, Ch'oe Yŏng-hwan seemingly had a change of heart, joining a secret Buddhist independence movement with the famed Buddhism reformer Han Yongun (1879-1944) until Han's death in 1944. After liberation, Ch'oe became abbot of Haein-sa (海印寺) and eventually a National Assemblyman in South Korea. Pak Yun-chin, however, became a staunchly pro-war, pro-Japanese advocate upon returning to Korea in January 1938. He encouraged monks to "self-annihilate for the public good" (*myŏlsa ponggong*). He wrote a treatise in 1944 encouraging Korean students to become soldiers. After liberation, Pak held posts in the government of South Korea and leadership positions in the Buddhist Order.¹⁰

Beginning in 1938, the Governor-General promulgated further cultural laws under the guise of *nissen ittai* (k. *naesŏn ilch'e*. Japan and Korea as One Body). Buddhists, as well as other religious groups, were required to worship at state shrines. All citizens were indoctrinated with nationalist songs, slogans, and ceremonies. Buddhist temples especially became sites of war propagation. Countless prayers, ceremonies, events, lectures, holidays, and funding drives were conducted at monasteries by Korean monks. After Emperor Hirohito called for a "total war" effort in 1938, Buddhist leaders played a large role in spreading the news of war mobilization in all corners of the Korean peninsula. The Buddhist Order called for (1) Japanese shrines installed

⁹ Ibid, 210-213.

¹⁰ Ibid, 215-222.

at all temples; (2) prayers for the nation every day; and (3) posting the motto *naesŏn ilch'e – sinang poguk* (Japan and Korea as One Body – Serving the Nation by Faith) in each temple.¹¹

Three mottos were made for temples and Buddhists: (1) “Without the emperor’s grace, the Buddha’s grace cannot be attained.” (2) “Attaining Buddhahood lies in the ideals of the nation.” (3) “Heaven does not lie in the Western paradise, but in the Greater Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere.”¹² And with the following announcement of the Emergency Standards for the Improvement of the National People’s Life (*pisangsi kungmin saenghwal kaesŏn kijun*), the Governor-General gave Buddhist temples three new orders: (1) “daily prayers towards the imperial palace,” (2) “on ceremony days, raise the imperial flag and bow to Japan,” and (3) “whenever possible, recite the Imperial Citizen’s Vow.”¹³ These mirrored the orders to all citizens, but had added legitimacy from the Buddhist Order.

Im Hye-bong argues that the modern Chogye Order, the most prominent Buddhist Order in South Korea, was founded in 1941 based on the Governor-General and Korean Buddhist leaders’ desire to consolidate power and bring Korean Buddhism closer to the state. Yi Chong-uk on becoming the first Head of the Executive Office, vowed support for “the spirit of patriotic martyrdom,” serving “national protection and national policy.” The Chogye Order’s establishment only gave Buddhist leaders greater ability to propagate their pro-war, militaristic ideology. The Chogye Order’s origins in the Pacific War era of the colonial period may be the most obvious remnants of Japanese influence on Korean Buddhism in terms of state-Order relationship and institutional influence.

¹¹ Ibid, 244.

¹² Ibid, 247.

¹³ Ibid, 292-293.

But on the popular level, individual Buddhist leaders were spreading a violent, militaristic Buddhist ideology to the masses during the colonial period. And for some of these individuals, liberation in 1945 brought little to no reckoning with their past. This may be best seen through the work of Kwŏn Sangno (1879-1965). Kwŏn began publishing articles in the 1910's entitled *The Reform of Korean Buddhism*, highlighting engagement with laypeople and modern education as the basis of religious modernization.¹⁴ Later, he supported Korean Buddhist social engagement as editor-in-chief of the *Korean Buddhist Monthly* and *Pulgyo* magazines.¹⁵ In his writings, Kwŏn emphasized Korean Buddhism's historical relationship to the state. In his reading of history, he saw Korean Buddhists both working for the state, such as during the Imjin War, and pushing back against the state, such as fighting for recognition during the Silla dynasty. In any case, according to Kwŏn, it had never been the position of Korean Buddhists to divorce themselves completely from state or secular affairs. Kwŏn took this position to legitimize Korean Buddhism under the gaze of Japanese colonialist discourse that claimed Korean Buddhism had little social base and had been a pawn of feudal dynasties.¹⁶ But into the later decades of the colonial period, it became increasingly clear that Kwŏn saw Korean Buddhism's path to legitimacy and modernity only through the stewardship of Japanese Buddhism and the colonial state.

As abbot of one of the main branch temples of Korean Buddhism, Taesŭng-sa (大乘寺), Kwŏn used his national leadership role to support the Japanese war effort in the 1930's and 1940's. He continued publishing books and articles for the learned communities. But he also began giving pro-war lectures in villages around Korea, spreading propaganda and collecting

¹⁴ Hwansoo Kim (2018), 302-304.

¹⁵ Pori Park (2009), 60-62.

¹⁶ Tikhonov (2010), 177-178.

donations for the war. Importantly, the vast majority of Koreans did not read the newspaper or listen to the radio at the time; the only way they heard about the war was from such local connections.¹⁷ As Japanese state bureaucracy often faced difficulties spreading into rural areas of the Korean peninsula, Buddhist temples in the countryside were often mobilized to disseminate state information. Kwōn used his position to filter pro-war ideology through a Buddhist lens and onto the people.

By 1941, Kwōn was teaching at Dongguk University (the main Buddhist university of Korea) and at Central Buddhist University, and becoming a highly influential academic. He often encouraged young Buddhist monks and laypeople to join the Japanese army to die for the sake of their country, citing historical Korean monk-soldiers as the “special characteristic” of Korean Buddhism.¹⁸ In his publications, he strongly supported the Pacific War as a “great holy war of the Buddha,” calling the United States and England “tigers and vipers” trying to enslave Asia. He called for “liberation” of China from Western powers who turn religion into “goods and commodities.”¹⁹

The day after the Pearl Harbor attacks on December 7, 1941, the Chogye Order released a government Great Proclamation (*Taejobongdaeil*) ordering all temples and propagation centers to train their monks and followers for victory in war, fully mobilizing all of their community resources. These government proclamations became monthly fixtures from January 1942 to the end of the war. By March 1942, Buddhist temples were included in a nationwide collection of metals for military use. Some important ritual materials were excluded, but most was taken, including centuries-old temple bells (*pōmjong*). The Chogye Order sent out a bulletin that temple

¹⁷ Im, 182.

¹⁸ Ibid, 289-299.

¹⁹ Ibid, 329-331

artifacts were used to make weapons towards a great cause, saying “four hundred years of our history is being used for a truly meaningful purpose, to eradicate British-American rivals and liberate Asians.”²⁰ Kwōn Sangno was right at the center of this pro-war propaganda machine, calling for all temples to become “battlefields” and all prayers and ceremonies to be for the “holy war.”²¹

From 1943 on, the Governor-General and Buddhist leadership began to aggressively emphasize “state-protection Buddhism” (*hoguk pulgyo*) as historical basis for Buddhist support of the war. I will discuss this concept in great detail later in this dissertation. For now, it would suffice to say that “state-protection Buddhism” was first argued to be one of the defining characteristics of Japanese Buddhism in the late 19th century, and then argued to be one of the defining characteristics of Korean Buddhism soon thereafter. For the study of Korean Buddhism, “state-protection Buddhism” remained a ubiquitous term well into the 1980’s, mobilized to support (and rarely refute) state power. During the colonial period, it saw its greatest application during the Pacific War in rallying support from the Korean Buddhist community. Kwōn Sangno also wrote on “state-protection Buddhism” and the “state-protection spirit” (*hoguk chōngsin*) in 1943, arguing that fighting in the war was “a chance to attain Buddhahood.” Kwōn and other leaders of the Chogye Order vehemently encouraged young monks and students to join the military, traveling around the country giving lectures and distributing pro-war publications until the end of the war in 1945.²²

Though Kwōn Sangno was only one of many Korean Buddhist leaders that supported Japan and Japanese militarism, his case is special because of the reach his voice had, almost

²⁰ Ibid, 343-344, 367-370.

²¹ Ibid, 404.

²² Ibid, 422, 433, 440.

uninterruptedly, for the entire colonial period and into early South Korea. After liberation in 1945, he remained a professor at Dongguk University but was eventually arrested due to his pro-Japanese activities in May 1949.²³ His indictment was quickly suspended, however, and he went on to serve as the dean of Dongguk University in 1952, and became the university's first president in 1953. Before his death in 1965, he received an honorary doctorate from Dongguk in 1962. In one of his last publications, he summarized the history of Korean Buddhism, highlighting its special features and defining moments. His analysis is fairly standard, going over the philosophical contributions and Korean monks while also comparing history of contemporary realities such as "freedom of worship." He also gives "special mention," however, to the Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1897) monk-soldiers who organized militias against Japanese and Manchu invasions in the 16th and 17th centuries.²⁴

The purpose of examining Korean Buddhism admonitions for violence during the Japanese colonial period is not to judge whether or not certain people or groups were "nationalist" or "collaborators." I am trying to show the dissemination of violence in all its forms. The violence supported by the Korean Buddhist community shown here was a colonial type of violence—a violence of empire. The Japanese, British, and French empires all encouraged their colonized subjects to join the military and use violence for some combination of nationalism, modernization, civilization, and subjugation. Violence can also be an integral part of decolonization and forming an identity of resistance, as Francis Fanon famously argued.²⁵

Colonized Korean Buddhists also emphasized propagation and modernization throughout the

²³ *Kyŏnghyang sinmun*. "Kwŏn Sangno tŭngp'ich'e," May 16, 1949.

²⁴ Kwŏn Sangno (1964), 13-14

²⁵ Fanon (2004), "On Violence."

colonial period, and supporting state violence was certainly an inroad to more opportunities to propagate and modernize. Thus, the Korean situation, and the Korean Buddhist situation is not historically unique. It is also not unique in the Buddhist world. However, the violence that was targeted at the United States and others by Kwŏn Sangno and his fellow Buddhists was simply redirected at other enemies after liberation in 1945. The source, meaning, and target of the violence has been questioned since liberation—this is how we end up with the continuing debates over who pro-independence nationalists were and who were pro-Japanese collaborators. But the violence itself, or the necessity of violence to solve problems, has not been questioned. The rhetoric that supported the Japanese empire’s militaristic conquest was simply redirected at other enemies.

Post-Liberation Developments

As was the case in many facets of Korean society, Buddhists were also dealing with questions of collaboration and resistance following liberation from Japanese rule. Almost seventy years of Japanese influence in Korea and thirty-five years of Japanese colonial rule created deeper ties between Korean Buddhists, Japanese Buddhists, and the Japanese government. Compared to other Korean religions, such as Christianity and Chŏndogyo, Buddhism received relative favor from the Japanese colonialists. Almost all monks adopted parts of the Japanese monastic lifestyle, including but not limited to eating meat, marriage, and temple organizational structure. There were seven thousand married monks compared to six hundred

celibate monks at the end of colonial rule.²⁶ The Chogye Order leadership, abbots of major temples, and prominent Buddhist scholars extensively supported the Japanese Empire.

Liberation was an opportunity for Buddhism to either further entrench its pro-government tendency from the colonial period or free itself from it. Four days after liberation on August fifteenth, 1945, leaders of the Chogye Order convened to see the resignation of Executive Head Yi Chong-uk and some of his closest allies. No effort was made, however, to have the abbots of the thirty-one head branch temples resign, who, throughout the colonial period, worked closely with the Japanese government. Even Yi Chong-uk soon went on to head the Chogye Order office in Kangwŏn Province.²⁷ As had often been the case during the colonial period, the purpose of restructuring the Order seems not to have been to get rid of collaborators, but to focus on modernization and popularization of Buddhism. In the years immediately following liberation, the celibacy question had not yet come to the fore. Both celibate and married monks were split in their pro- or anti-Japanese credentials.

The clearer split was between traditionalism and reformism/modernization, as it had been through much of the colonial period. Kang In-chŏl argues we must see the traditionalists as truly “traditionalist,” wanting to protect a certain asocial or above-social standing of the monkhood. In this sense, they would never understand the idea of “popularizing” or “modernizing” Buddhism.²⁸ In 1946, the Chogye Order’s Executive Office (*Ch’ongmuwŏn*) failed at implementing reform policies and getting rid of Japanese-era policies. This exacerbated the conflict between factions, as a majority of the reformist monks, all married monks, and a majority of traditionalist monks, except for the Executive Office leadership, supported socialist-

²⁶ Pori Park (2007), 132.

²⁷ Kang (2000), 86.

²⁸ Ibid, 90-91.

leaning parties. The Executive Office, at this point made up of married monks with much leadership experience from the colonial period, allied with Syngman Rhee's (Yi Sŭng-man 1875-1965) Korean Democratic Party (KDP). Monk Kim Pŏm-rin (1899-1964) became the Buddhist representative to the KDP. Thus, Buddhist leadership, represented by the Chogye Order, became intertwined with the tumultuous political situation of early South Korea.²⁹ They began to accuse reformist Buddhists of being communists, putting themselves in a high position of power with the emerging KDP-United States alliance. This rivalry resulted in two violent clashes. The first in May 1947 when leaders of the traditionalists, who were beginning to consolidate power, resorted to "attempted murder," and "destruction of schools and precious objects" against the reformist monks. Later that year, reformist monks were labeled suspected leftists and expelled from the Order, and responded by breaking into the Chogye Order's Executive Office. They held the Executive Head hostage and tried to force his resignation, but they were eventually arrested.³⁰ As the traditionalists in the Chogye Order's alliance with the KDP further strengthened, more of these previously pro-Japanese monks became celibate and claimed the Korean Buddhist tradition as their own.

Concurrently, the USAMGIK was not attentive to the Buddhist situation. The U.S. mainly decided to retain Japanese governing policies over Buddhism. Syngman Rhee, after officially attaining the presidency in 1948, was also not keen on broaching the Korean Buddhism question as long as he kept allies in the Chogye Order who snuffed out supposed dissenters or communists. Both he and new South Korean government could argue that they were upholding the principle of "religious liberty" since Buddhists were able to own land, practice, and

²⁹ Ibid, 93.

³⁰ Kim Kwang-sik (2006), 291.

propagate. In reality, however, Christian groups were given special treatment by the government, especially through special privileges to reclaimed Japanese property.³¹ By the time the Korean War began in 1950, Korean Buddhist leaders lacked any sort of internal unity and had limited influence in political matters. The Japanese influenced monks were still in power at this point and had a “corporatist” type of relationship with the government “exchanging mutual recognition and support in return for preferential treatment.”³² Reformist monks were deemed communists and enemies. The old, celibate, anti-Japanese monks were in grave danger in their mountain temples. The Chogye Order leadership thus strengthened its position, and groups like the Buddhist Nation-Saving Alliance (*Pulgyo kuguk ch’ongyŏnmaeng*) and the Anti-Communist Monk Association (*Sŭngnyŏ pangongdan*) formed. Concurrently, the new South Korean government filled military leadership positions with officers with Protestant backgrounds.³³ Under an extremely favorable political situation, Protestants and Catholics began pushing for their own military chaplaincy in 1950.

The U.S. and South Korean Christian Military Chaplaincies

The origins of the South Korean chaplaincy begin with the Office of Korean Civil Service and Civil Service Training Academy established by the USAMGIK immediately after liberation. The Military Language School, which, by its third round of recruiting, had two hundred Korean recruits, provided the foundation for Korean officers becoming interested in a

³¹ Nathan (2018), 84.

³² Kang (2000), 100.

³³ Paek (2014), 58.

Korean chaplaincy system similar to the United States'.³⁴ Their first request to the UN Forces was denied because of a lack of knowledge and funding. The First Regiment Captain of the South Korean army, Kang Munbong (1923-1988), was instrumental in allowing chaplaincy activities in the military. Born in Manchuria and educated in Japanese, English, and Chinese, Kang studied the U.S. chaplaincy at a military training school under Japanese rule. He and fellow officers met with Protestant, Catholic, and Buddhist civilian religious leaders to organize a South Korean chaplaincy.³⁵

Though colonial developments influenced the Buddhist chaplaincy, both the Korean and U.S. Christian chaplaincies were also an important influence. The modern military chaplaincy structure is mainly rooted in the U.S. and British chaplaincy of World War One. The USAMGIK from 1945-1948 and the UN Forces led by U.S. command from 1950-1953 were instrumental in shaping the first Christian chaplaincies in the South Korean military. Though the U.S. military has a chaplaincy system dating back to the U.S. Revolutionary War, it was during World War One that the U.S. military command focused on "professionalization," turning the military into a respectable, ethical arm of the government. The chaplaincy was a significant instrument in making this change as chaplains were tasked with teaching "respectable conduct" "for the benefit of commands" to soldiers both within and outside of the chaplain's faith.³⁶ During World War Two, the U.S. military chaplaincy coalesced around "moral monotheism" to unite Protestant (divided into white and "Negro"), Catholic, and Jewish chaplains under a uniquely American ethic-religious belief system. Chaplains were evaluated based on their "correct opinions:

³⁴ Kunjong Kamsil (2003), 63-65.

³⁵ Hwang (2008), 192-193.

³⁶ Stahl (2017), 20, 41.

acclaiming democracy, applauding ecumenism, praising capitalism, tolerating difference, and accepting military force as necessary.”³⁷

By the end of World War Two, chaplains’ religious differences collapsed in the eyes of military command, as they believed all U.S. religions had a “shared moral code.” Chaplains became propagators of a supposed American lifestyle, promoting individual morality, traditional family life, and anti-communism. Character guidance sessions taught soldiers that patriotism was a religious act. Propagation became an indelible part of the chaplaincy. From 1945 to 1953, Korea became a “mission field” for U.S. chaplains expounding these beliefs.³⁸ U.S. chaplains then catalyzed the South Korean military’s Christian chaplaincies with the help of American missionaries and military chaplains working in Korea. In 1948, generals in the newly formed South Korean military began scouting the religious work of U.S. missionaries in Korea. By January 1949, about four hundred Korean soldiers were attending services at a U.S. military chapel in Inchön, Kyönggi Province.³⁹ Concurrently, evangelical preachers such as Dr. Bob Pierce (1914-1978) were leading “crusades” around South Korea, supposedly converting tens of thousands of people with the help of the U.S. military. Pierce was then sent to preach to the South Korean military in early 1950.⁴⁰

At the start of the Korean War, American Methodist pastor William E. Shaw (1922-1950), Catholic priest George Carroll (1906-1981), and U.S. Eastern Command chief pastor Ivan L. Bennet (1892-1980) supported the idea of a chaplaincy in the Korean military. When the UN and South Korean forces retreated to Pusan, Kyöngsang Province in August 1950, Carroll met

³⁷ Ibid, 76-78.

³⁸ Ibid, 145, 149, 160.

³⁹ Kunjong Kamsil (2003), 67-68.

⁴⁰ Haga (2012), 96-97.

with Syngman Rhee to discuss the chaplaincy. Carroll proposed classifying Korean chaplains as U.S. military officers, but the U.S. military rejected the idea. In September 1950, Presbyterians, Methodists, the Salvation Army, the Holiness Church, and the Roman Catholic church organized the “The Committee for the Implementation of the Military Chaplaincy” (*Kunjong Chedo Ch’ujin Wiwŏnhoe*) and elected 3 representatives: Presbyterian Pastor Han Kyung-jik (1902-2000), Methodist Pastor Ryu Hyŏng-ki (1897-1989), and Catholic Priest Carroll. The three met with Rhee on September 19th, stressing that the “enlightened thought” of the chaplains’ teaching can aid in the “anti-communist thought war.” Rhee thought it was a good idea, but there was no funding. The three men came back with a more detailed plan on September 25th, and it was approved on the basis chaplains would be civilian workers, not officers. The South Korean Christian military chaplaincy was officially established in February 1951 with pastor Kim Dŭk-sam (n.d.).⁴¹ By the end of 1951, there were fifty-six Protestant chaplains and twenty-one Catholic chaplains; 139 in total at the end of 1952.⁴²

The First Buddhist Proto-Chaplains and the Korean War

Buddhists were denied any official chaplaincy by the USAMGIK and South Korean government. But Chogye Order leadership began lobbying military officials with Buddhist leanings. Yi Pŏphong (n.d.) and Tŏg’am (n.d.) went to Colonel Ch’oe Honghŭi (1918-2002) and Lieutenant General Sin T’aeyŏng (1891-1959) who did not like the favoritism towards Christianity in the military.⁴³ On March 7, 1951, a group of fifteen monks from the Chogye

⁴¹ Kunjong Kamsil (2003), 69-70.

⁴² Yi I Yong (1986), 54-55.

⁴³ Tikhonov (2017), 242.

Order met at Myogak-sa (妙覺寺), in the temporary capital Pusan, to found an unofficial chaplaincy that would last to the end of the war in 1953. This “Association of Buddhist Military Propagators” (*Chonggun P’ogyosa Hoe*) made the first attempt to systematize a Buddhist chaplaincy in the South Korean military to serve the soldiers that they claimed were majority Buddhist. But, according to their founding by-laws, the Association was meant to “naturally dismantle once the fatherland is completely unified, and the people achieve absolute freedom.”⁴⁴ Though they were not recognized by top military or political leaders, military branch commanders allowed them to work alongside Christian chaplains in some units. They even established one short-lived military dharma hall at Towŏn-sa (道原寺) in Yanggu, Kangwŏn Province.⁴⁵ Their statement of purpose clearly shows the ideological justification behind this temporary Buddhist chaplaincy:

This large-scale war is a fight between Communism and Democracy. Communism denies humanity and regards religion as an opiate of materialism, and democracy supports human dignity and protects great spiritual faith. We of the Buddhist community, together with the consistent assistance of the global Buddhist community and other religious communities, must actively cooperate and accomplish this holy war to defeat Communism. Considering the current situation, however, there are Buddhists soldiers among those in the bloody fighting on the frontlines, and who fight in the spirit of the fifth of the Five Precepts of the *Hwarang* Way given by Master Wŏn’gwang (be discriminating in the taking of life, 殺生有擇). The Buddhist community who inherited the true dharma takes no action, has no plan, no concern, and no contribution to this holy war. With crying demands for the revival of Buddhism growing louder in all places, and the central leadership of the Buddhist order idly looking on, how can we face deceased Masters, and how can we face future generations? ...who will console the spirits of those who passed away for the protection of the father land, and who will console those people who are wandering in the battlefield? We Buddhists should deservedly be ashamed, and apologize for our complacency to our 30 million countrymen. The Association of Buddhist Wartime Propagators is organized by us comrades to belatedly serve in the holy war, to undeterredly represent our religious community in consolation of the deceased spirits, to become mental comforters of the suffering people, to contribute to the unification of the father land by eradicating communism, to revive

⁴⁴ Yi I Yong (1986), 58.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 59-65.

Korean Buddhism and take firm steps in the movement toward the Buddhification of the whole world. We organize this association with the belief in the cordial cooperation of all Buddhists.⁴⁶

The themes here reflect the militaristic bent of Buddhist leadership that still remained just six years after liberation from Japanese rule. Communists have now become the primary enemy, but concepts such as “holy war” and fatalism are still prominent. To be sure, defeating communism was also a significant pro-war sentiment during the colonial period. We can compare to an anonymously published treatise by a Korean monk during World War Two that stated, “this holy war is about punishing those who still boast of anti-Japanese sentiment and have any remnants of pro-communist beliefs.”⁴⁷ Importantly, in the Association’s eye, the war is not defensive but offensive. The threat that communism poses cannot just be subdued, but totally defeated.

Though the Association was small, unofficial, and financially constrained, according to their “Front Line Inquiry Reports,” their impact was fairly substantial. From August 1 to September 17, 1952 (forty-eight days), monks gave seventy-nine lecture meetings on “lifting up and praising soldiers’ bravery, Buddhist [beliefs], and moral character” to a total audience of 80,000 soldiers. They distributed 100,000 images of the buddha of compassion Avalokitesvara, 10,000 rings of the buddha of the Pure Land Amitabha, and 10,000 amulets of Avalokitesvara to soldiers in the fifth and ninth army divisions who they claimed were sixty-five percent Buddhist. Over three hundred days from September 1952 to June 1953, the Military Propagators gave three hundred lectures from “the eastern to the western front line” to a total audience of 300,000. They continued distributing images and amulets of Avalokitesvara and rings of Amithaba numbering in the millions, but also distributed images of Admiral Yi Sunsin (李舜臣 1545-1598) and

⁴⁶ Ibid, 59-60.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Im (1993), 252. Treatise entitled “Ch’onghu puguk e taehaeso.”

Samyŏng Yujŏng, heroes of the 16th century Imjin War.⁴⁸ As a sign of these early proto-chaplains' success, all three military academies had a Buddhist Student Association by the end of the war.⁴⁹

Post-Korean War and the Purification Movement (Chŏnghwa Undong)

With the end of the Korean War, however, the Buddhist chaplaincy disappeared. The years from 1953 to the end of the decade saw the Korean Buddhist community embroiled in a “Purification Movement” (*Chŏnghwa Undong*). A small minority of traditionalist monks had succeeded in lobbying Syngman Rhee’s government to help them reestablish a “pure” Korean Buddhism free of Japanese influence. The Chogyŏ Order leadership of mostly former pro-Japanese monks that had consolidated power in the late 1940’s finally came under intense scrutiny. Beginning in May 1954, Rhee issued presidential messages highly critical of clerical marriage and pro-Japanese Buddhism.⁵⁰ The small group of old, celibate monks’ opportunity finally arose and on August 12, 1955 they passed a new, government backed constitution of the Sangha.⁵¹ Some scholars argue that Syngman Rhee used the fight against married monks to bolster his political position, trying to rally people around de-colonization, as well as purging political opponents who were related to married monks.⁵² Nevertheless, together they carried out a campaign of removing, sometimes violently, monks who were seen as Japanese collaborators or Japanese influenced, including the Chogyŏ Order leadership. Now infamous stories, however,

⁴⁸ Yi I Yong (1983), 61-62.

⁴⁹ Hwang (2008), 200

⁵⁰ Nathan (2018), 86.

⁵¹ Pori Park (2007), 138.

⁵² Ibid, 134; Kang (2000), 104-105.

of bloody fights at temples, often aided by police, tainted the image of the newly coalescing Buddhist order. Kim Kwang-sik importantly reminds us that such violent actions had precedent in the recent past. Kim argues a “culture of violence” had already developed within Korean Buddhist leadership and temple life since the colonial period. Examples include fist fights between top Buddhist leaders Yi Hoegwang (1862-1933) and Kang Tae-ryŏn (1875-1942) in the 1910’s, destruction of temple property due to issues with the 1911 Temple Ordinance, and consistent scums between young and old abbots over allocations of temple funds. In each case, the police had to get involved.⁵³

A series of legal cases from 1956-1967 that favored the celibates and protected them brought much of the violence of the Purification Movement to an end.⁵⁴ The Purification Movement, however, stands as an extremely impactful event in modern Korean Buddhism. Recent scholars see the movement mostly negatively, though, at the time, public opinion was on the side of the celibate monks. Pori Park sums up this sentiment:

[The monks] overlooked investigating the broader issues of de-colonization, such as probing the religion’s independence from political intervention, reassessing Buddhists’ relationships with the colonial regime, and reinventing ways to restore the sense of community after enduring the common plights of colonialism. Instead, Buddhist clerics planted a seed of distrust and confusion by distorting the real issues of de-colonization and handed down the legacy of violence and unreasonableness...the celibates denied their own past, that is, all the accomplishments of the Sangha during the colonial era, including the human resource.⁵⁵

I’d like to present the argument here that the Buddhist chaplaincy was yet another remnant of the Purification Movement’s inability to probe the more complex issues of de-colonization, mainly the “legacy of violence.” As we’ve seen above, during the colonial period Korean Buddhist

⁵³ Kim Kwang-sik (2006), 289-290.

⁵⁴ Pori Park (2007), 139.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 143.

leadership were indoctrinated in state violence and militarism. After liberation, this leadership largely stayed in power; their nationalistic and pro-military bent simply redirected towards a new enemy, communists and/or North Koreans. After almost ten years in power, the Purification Movement finally brought criticism upon their leadership. However, rather than probing the horrible violence they had supported, the more simplistic identifier of their pro-Japanese credentials—marriage—was emphasized. Thus, the minority, celibate inheritors of the purified, re-traditionalized Order retained the colonial era “legacy of violence.” Even though the first unofficial Buddhist chaplaincy during the Korean War was lobbied for, organized, and carried out by married, formerly pro-Japanese monks, it would be remembered as the grand first effort to assert Korean Buddhism’s religious liberty and establish a military chaplaincy. Importantly, the Japanese colonial period is certainly not the only influence on the South Korean Buddhist military chaplaincy. However, the chaplaincy symbolizes another node of continuity in Korean Buddhism from the colonial period into early South Korea as Buddhist institutions, leadership, and ideology retained their support of their nation’s military. Studies on the Buddhist purification rarely, if ever, mention the Buddhist chaplaincy; but I believe it should be recognized as another “failure” of the Purification Movement to meaningfully assess influences of the colonial period and colonial Japanese Buddhism on modern Korean Buddhism.

Park Chung Hee and the Beginnings of the Buddhist Chaplaincy

Promises and Delays

As the South Korean military grew rapidly from 1954, Buddhist soldiers began grassroots movements to meet their religious needs. Buddhist officers organized within military academies,

inviting Buddhist monks to teach to cadets as early as 1954 in the Army Academy, followed by the Marine Academy in 1959 and the Navy and Air Force academies in 1960. By 1960, Buddhist activities in the military were quite common, and private temples sprouted up around military bases.⁵⁶ Joint dharma services for soldiers from all three branches of the military began in 1959, and were held two to three times a year at Chogye-sa (曹溪寺), headquarters of the Chogye Order, until the official institutionalization of the chaplaincy almost ten years later.⁵⁷

Park Chung Hee's military coup in 1961 and his subsequent commandeering of the presidency significantly changed the political landscape for Buddhist leadership. According to Henrik Sørensen, Park "considered himself a devout Buddhist, an image he strove to bolster throughout his presidency," and saw Buddhism as "an important tool in creating a solid moral and spiritual foundation for his government."⁵⁸ Park would quickly prioritize reforming government policy on Buddhist monastery property, which hadn't been altered since the colonial period.⁵⁹ Though the Buddhist Purification Movement wouldn't officially end until 1968, it had been relegated mainly to drawn out court battles by the 1960's. After the married monks' contingent won some court cases during the short-lived Second Republic from 1960-1961, Park Chung Hee helped usher in a new unified Chogye Order, forcing married monks into it.⁶⁰ Thus, the Chogye Order, made up of traditionalist, celibate monks, was firmly established as Korean Buddhism's medium to political affairs. Park's attentiveness to Buddhist affairs gave the order new financial power. Monasteries were renovated, Buddhist education facilities were expanded, and temples and artifacts were continuously put on the list of national cultural properties for

⁵⁶ Yi I Yong (1986), 67-70.

⁵⁷ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Pöpdang sullye," October 3, 1965.

⁵⁸ Sørensen (2008), 196.

⁵⁹ See discussion of the *Pulgyo chaesan kwalli pop* (Buddhist Property Management Law) of 1962 in Nathan (2018), 90-94.

⁶⁰ Tikhonov (2017), 247.

protection. Park's New Village Movement (*Samil Undong*) paved roads around Buddhist monasteries in rural areas and installed electricity in monastery buildings.⁶¹ Buddhism was on the national stage in 1974 at the funeral of Yuk Young-soo (Yuk Yŏng-su 1925-1974), Park's First Lady who was accidentally killed in an assassination attempt on Park Chung Hee. The Buddha's birthday was designated a national holiday in 1975. Scholarship on Korean Buddhism, though often of a nationalistic, anti-communist bent, flourished in this period. The Chogye Order showed their support by endorsing Park in all of his presidential campaigns.⁶²

With their newfound power, the Chogye Order and their supporters once again brought up the Buddhist chaplaincy issue. By establishing a chaplaincy and monopolizing it as the only Buddhist sect in the military, the Chogye Order could further claim its sole legitimacy to state-Buddhist affairs in South Korea. A law on the chaplaincy, which included dispatching "Buddhist monks of great virtue," along with pastors and priests, was actually written on January 20th, 1962, but there was no real plan to implement the Buddhist chaplaincy. According to the Buddhist Chaplaincy Organization's 2008 publication on the history of the Buddhist chaplaincy, the 1962 law seemed to slip past the Chogye Order and military officials, who made no mentions of it. The Chogye Order seemed to lack understanding of the new Park government at the time, and were too focused on winning the Purification Movement court cases.⁶³

In 1963, the Buddhist University Student Association (*Han'guk Taehaksaeng Pulgyo Yŏnhap Hoe*) began organizing more unofficial Buddhist activities in the military while pushing the government to establish a Buddhist chaplaincy. In October 1964, the Ministry of Defense and Chogye Order set up a training academy, military propagation office, and research team for a

⁶¹ Paek (2014), 88

⁶² Ibid, 91.

⁶³ Hwang (2008), 205.

six-month investigation into the chaplaincy at Dongguk University. They directly investigated Buddhist history and the relationship between Buddhism and communism to vet Buddhism for any communist sympathies.

The investigation resulted in four points supporting the chaplaincy. First, Buddhism was anti-communist because it disagreed with communism on “law, nation, private property, class, labor.” Secondly, Korean Buddhism’s “*hwarang* and *hoguk* Buddhism” character ensures its loyalty to the state. Thirdly, “historical materialism and Buddhism” are not in agreement. Fourth, Buddhism’s ideas of “war, freedom, and peace” were antithetical to communism. Some also wanted to address Christians claims that Buddhism was “atheistic,” but the head of the order didn’t find it necessary.⁶⁴ These four points would become the backbone of the Buddhist chaplaincy in the years to follow. Notably, a 1965 *Pulgyo sinmun* (Buddhist Newspaper) article argued that, in truth, issues such as “historical materialism, determinism, worker’s rights, class warfare” had no place in the historical Buddhist worldview.⁶⁵

Another 1966 article was aghast at the implications that Buddhism could be sympathetic to communism. In January of that year, a reverend at the Christian Leaders’ Association (*Kidokgyo Chidojahoe*) expressed his disdain for the prospect of Buddhist chaplaincy, saying: “[c]onsider the issue of putting Buddhist monks in the military to bolster anti-communism. Buddhism is pantheistic (*pömsinron*), which is really atheism (*musinron*), so it is connected to communism.” The article’s author responded, saying,

[accusations of] communism cannot spoil our devotion to the fatherland...Our attitude always has the duty and willingness to defend our country and go to the forefront of protecting the fate of our country in accordance with the fundamental spirit of Buddha...I can’t understand this theory that says, because Buddhism doesn’t recognize gods, it is communism. But I can understand the current situation on the battlefield in Vietnam. It is

⁶⁴ Ibid, 215-216.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 216.

not an understatement to say Buddhism is the national religion of Vietnam. So then can you say all Vietnamese are communists?

In this current situation we are living in, we are all Koreans. Before we are Buddhist, Protestant, or Catholic, we are all Koreans. Patriotism is not lessened based on one's religious belief. Patriotism is greater than [just] sacrificing oneself.⁶⁶

In December 1964, the Executive Office of the Chogye Order filed an official petition to the government advocating for a Buddhist chaplaincy. The petition clarified five reasons for “rapid implementation” of the chaplaincy:

1. Buddhism, which is completely purified, is deeply rooted in the spirit of the majority of soldiers except heathens (*igyodo*), and it also has a shining tradition of sacrifice, so it can make the spirit of soldiers more complete.
2. Buddhism is the only thing that can give soldiers a much-needed [proper] view of life and death (*saengsagwan*).
3. Other religions are faith-based religions (*sinang chongyo*) but Buddhism is a faith and practice based religion (*sinhaeng chongyo*) so it develops military capability.
4. Other religions reject heathenism (*igyoo*) and thus undermine unity in the military, but Buddhism is a principled doctrine that can be harmonized with any religion or denomination, which can be a smooth facilitator for military command.
5. Many Buddhists in the military can strengthen their Buddhist beliefs if a [chaplaincy] system is established.”⁶⁷

The Executive Office continued to make populist arguments about the necessity of the chaplaincy: because a majority of Koreans are Buddhists, they must have religious representation in the military. Furthermore, The Executive Office argued that Buddhist chaplains will not change the culture of the military, but only increase its power and effectiveness. Points three and four are direct attacks on Christianity, arguing that practicality and “unity” are unique hallmarks of Buddhism, which mesh with military ethics.

In June 1965, the Ministry of Defense and Chogye Order agreed to implement the Buddhist military chaplaincy system in 1966. An amendment was made to Article 12 of the

⁶⁶ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Tasi kunjong chedo silsi rül ch’okgu ham,” February 6, 1966.

⁶⁷ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunjong chedo silsi.” December 20, 1964.

Military Personnel Management Law (*Kuninsabŏp*) on the definition of chaplains, which would now read: “A pastor, priest, or *monk of great virtue (taedŏk sŭnim)* with a bachelor’s degree may be dispatched as a chaplaincy officer.”⁶⁸ Furthermore, over the following year, the Chogyŏ Order’s Executive Office would need to establish a “chaplaincy education center” (*kunjongsŭng kyoyukwŏn*) and choose four to five graduates of a Buddhist university as candidates. The Executive Office also needed to make plans for building military dharma halls, decide on chaplains’ attire, and design Buddhist military religious services. In the interim, however, the Ministry of Defense would allow ten monks to work in the military as “military propagators” (*kunp’ogyosa*). Of these ten monks, two were graduates of Japanese universities. Little is known of these short-lived pseudo-chaplains. They received some military training but seemed to simply be monks allowed to provide religious services to soldiers inside the military.⁶⁹

In September 1965, the Chaplaincy Candidate Training Academy (*kunsŭng hubo kyoyugwŏn*) was established at Dongguk University. Following the new requirement of Article 12 in the Military Personnel Management Law, thirty-seven monks and Buddhist studies students applied, thirty were accepted. In 1966, twenty candidates were chosen for five weeks of education and military training from March 14 to April 16.⁷⁰ The education curriculum centered around the newly minted (wordy) mission statement of the Buddhist military chaplaincy: “mental guidance, including on religious faith based on the Buddhist mentality, for the Armed Forces, which protects free Korea (*chayu Taehan*) and its free allies from the aggression of communist groups, whose ultimate goal is globalization.” Their curriculum at the training center was organized as follows:

⁶⁸ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunjong sŭngje silsi e ttarŭn hyŏnanjŏm,” July 4, 1965. My italics.

⁶⁹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunjong chedo 66 nyŏn put’ŏ silsi.” June 13, 1965.

⁷⁰ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunsŭng hubo kyoyugwŏn kaewŏn,” March 20, 1966.

1. Ideology: Buddhism's political values and Buddhism's socio-economic values.
2. Nationhood: Buddhism's view on nation (*kukka kwan*)
3. Military: Military Personnel Management Act (*kun insabŏp*), Buddhism and the *hwarang* mentality
4. Buddhism: the Buddha's life, Indian Buddhist history, Chinese Buddhist history, Korean Buddhist history, Buddhist views on life, Purpose of the Chogye Order, Buddhist services/rituals, Buddhist faith.
5. Leadership methods
6. General Education: Religious studies, Comparative Religious Studies, Philosophy, Ethics, and topics on law.⁷¹

After five weeks of training, seventeen candidates passed. Of the seventeen, fourteen were expected to be commissioned into the chaplaincy.⁷² There were still extremely pressing issues surrounding the Buddhist chaplaincy. There were still no definitive plans for building military dharma halls or providing clothes and supplies for chaplains. The Chogye Order and Ministry of Defense continuously blamed budgeting problems. The *Pulgyo sinmun* called the lack of funding and support from the Buddhist community “embarrassing,” imploring the Chogye Order not to stand idly by while the chaplaincy struggles to develop.⁷³ They had not even decided on what food chaplains would eat (vegetarian or non-vegetarian) or how they would cut their hair.⁷⁴

In May 1966 the Army Headquarters announced seven Buddhist chaplains would be called up in the middle of July.⁷⁵ But July came and there was no word from the Army. So the seventeen candidates still in the running continued their training with a two week stay at a temple, Chŏngbŏp-sa (正法寺), to “firmly establish the mentality of a monk and to master all Buddhist rituals.” The Order now put their dispatch date in August or September.⁷⁶ The Ministry

⁷¹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunjongsŭng kyoyuk kwajŏng punsŏk,” April 3, 1966.

⁷² *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunsŭng hubo 17 myŏng paech'ul,” April 24, 1966.

⁷³ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kyosehwagjang chŏggŭksŏng ŭl poija,” March 6, 1966.

⁷⁴ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunsŭng hubo 17 myŏng paech'ul,” April 24, 1966.

⁷⁵ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunsŭng 7 wŏlmyŏngjung e sojip,” May 15, 1966.

⁷⁶ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunsŭng hubosaeng suryŏn,” July 17, 1966.

of Defense blamed the delay on “defense ministers being on trips abroad” and promised a final decision on the chaplaincy “any day now.”⁷⁷

At this point, General of the South Korean forces in Vietnam, Chae Myŏng Shin (1926-2013), would enter the conversation on the Buddhist chaplaincy. Though not a Buddhist, Chae was one of the Buddhist chaplains’ strongest advocates. What he had seen in two years on the battlefield in Vietnam convinced him of the Buddhist chaplains’ possible utility. On a trip back to Korea in July 1966, he met with leaders of the Chogye Order, declaring “we need Buddhist chaplains dispatched to Vietnam.” He talked about “civic activities” (*taemin hwaldong*) and “our two counties’ friendship through the shared consciousness of religious exchange.”⁷⁸ He also discussed the scorn with which Vietnamese often look at American soldiers but treat Koreans with respect. He emphasized that the army could not be successful without the influence of religion, especially Buddhism. Chae recalled the situation in an interview in 2004:

At least 60% of Vietnamese were Buddhist. Therefore, for public engagement, chaplains even bought Vietnamese Buddhist robes. The Buddhist chaplains cut their hair, wore robes, and did volunteer service to begin to close the gap with the Vietnamese people. Isn’t it religion that transcends nationality and skin color? The most precious thing to the Vietnamese was Buddhism.⁷⁹

Even Chae’s intervention, however, could not bring the chaplaincy’s dispatch to fruition. The summer came and went, and frustration was growing in the Buddhist community. In late September, at a joint dharma service for the three military academies, Buddhist students met with Chogye Order leaders and complained about the lack of chaplains. They argued that there was significant interest in Buddhism among young cadets, especially senior students. They

⁷⁷ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunsŭng 14 myŏng kot ch’aeyong,” July 24, 1966.

⁷⁸ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Wŏllam e kunsŭng p’agyŏn p’ilyo,” July 31, 1966.

⁷⁹ Hwang (2008), 220.

complained of no dharma halls and minimal dharma services. They mentioned that a Dongguk University professor was periodically visiting the Army Academy to act as a chaplain, as well as an Air Force Academy instructor who also led some dharma services and counseling.⁸⁰



(left to right) Chogye Order Executive Head Monk Kyōngsan, General Chae Myōng-shin, Chogye Order Vice Executive Yi⁸¹

In November 1966, the Ministry of Defense finally spoke up, now pushing the dispatch date to early 1967. Secretary of Defense Kim Sōng-ūn (1924-2007) said the delays were due to the tensions between Catholics and Buddhist in Vietnam. The Ministry was not settled on the impact Korean Buddhist chaplains would have if sent into the situation. National Assemblymen Han Sang-jun (1921-1986) and Han Kōn-su (1921-1994) responded by accusing the Ministry of violating “the constitutional spirit of religious freedom” by only allowing certain religions to participate in the chaplaincy. Buddhism being the majority religion of Korea and historically “dominating the spiritual life of Koreans” made the delays especially apprehensible.⁸²

⁸⁰ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Samgun pulgyobu haksaeŋ hwaltong i ttūthanūn kōt,” October 2, 1966.

⁸¹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Wōllam e kunsūng p’agyōn p’ilyo,” July 31, 1966.

⁸² *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Naenyōnch’o kunsūngje silsi,” November 27, 1966.

On January 25, 1967, the Committee for the Implementation of the Buddhist Military Chaplaincy (*Kunsŭng Ch'ujin Wiwŏnhoe*) was launched, comprised of monks and laypeople. To expedite the implementation of the chaplaincy, the Committee (1) worked to build temples at chaplain training grounds; (2) petitioned the Korean government and Korean forces in Vietnam to dispatch chaplains; (3) organized chaplain support activities with the Chogye Order; (4) lobbied military agencies to “postpone issuance of conscription warrants for [chaplaincy] graduates”; and (5) worked to develop a direct relationship with the Executive Order.⁸³ The Korean University Student Buddhist Alliance (*Han'guk Taehaksaeng Pulgyo Yŏnhabhoe*), however, became the most outspoken advocates for the chaplaincy. Their frustrations over delays were directed at both the Chogye Order and the government, and they decided to be the agents change when the larger institutions failed. In March 1967, they sent an official request to the Chogye Order, demanding implementation of the chaplaincy system, writing:

1. Implement the military chaplaincy system so that young Buddhists who faithfully carry out their national defense duties can devote themselves to self-completion and national defense.
2. We desperately request the military chaplaincy system to secure the military's mental armament (*chŏngsin mujang*).
3. The government cannot ignore the constitution while forcing people to obey the law.
4. In the absence of a government policy that meets our legitimate demands by April 15, we declare, on behalf of the whole nation and all Buddhists, that we will fight to the fullest.⁸⁴

The Buddhist Student Alliance used the two lines of argument we have seen thus far: Buddhist ideological consistency with military goals (1 and 2) and the chaplaincy as an issue of religious freedom (3).

⁸³ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunsŭng chedo ch'ujinwi paljok,” February 12, 1967.

⁸⁴ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Han'guk tachagsaeng pulgyoyŏnhabhoe ch'ong 2 paek 26 manwŏn ch'aegjŏng 67 nyŏn to yesanaek,” March 26, 1967

Interviews with Buddhist citizens published in the *Pulgyo sinmun* revealed that the chaplaincy issue influenced their vote in the presidential election of April 1967. Voters most commonly referenced the right to freedom of religion as justification for the Buddhist chaplaincy. While they blamed the government for the delays, they also criticized the Chogye Order for allowing the implementation of the chaplaincy to get bogged down by politicians.⁸⁵ Some voters even thought that the military had already dispatched chaplains based on all the talk about it by the Chogye Order and *Pulgyo sinmun*.⁸⁶

To this point, we have seen the main arguments that Buddhist leaders and sympathetic politicians used to push for the chaplaincy. First, Buddhism's ideology is both conducive to the military spirit, specifically due to its historic "*hwarang*" and "*hoguk*" mentality. Concurrently, Buddhism is solidly anti-communist and nationalistic. Second, the religious freedom guaranteed by the constitution demands the implementation of the Buddhist chaplaincy. These two arguments were fluid and contingent upon the changing contours of South Korean society during the formative years of the chaplaincy. During the 1960's and 1970's, Buddhist leadership was negotiating its place in a South Korean society that was jostling with authoritarianism, militarism, and developmentalism couched in the Cold War world. The steady erosion of democracy over the decades into the 1980's brought the definitions of basic freedoms, such as religious freedom, into serious question. As the so-called majority religious believers of Korea, Buddhists struggled with protecting their place in a volatile religious marketplace. The development of the chaplaincy is a microcosm of wider issues facing Korean Buddhism in early South Korea. Following chapters

⁸⁵ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Obaekman pulgyogye nŭn chusihanda," April 2, 1967, "Obaekman pulgyogye nŭn chusihanda," April 9, 1967.

⁸⁶ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Obaekman pulgyogye nŭn chusihanda," April 16, 1967.

will look in detail at how the two arguments for the Buddhist chaplaincy were informed and reformed during the 1960's and 1970's.

After a year of promises by the government and military, suspected reasons for the delays were now arising. An official history of the Buddhist military chaplaincy published in 2008 argues that the delays were because of Christian opposition.⁸⁷ Christians monopolizing the chaplaincy since 1951 gives obvious credit to this argument. Furthermore, as shown above, questions about Buddhism's affinities to communism played perfectly into Christian claims that they were the sole religious bearers of fierce anti-communist ideology. Both liberal and conservative Christians, had ritualized and "religionized" anti-communism and ingrained it in the community.⁸⁸ Indeed, a counter-movement arose among Christian students when the Buddhist Student Alliance began aggressively pursuing the implementation of the chaplaincy.⁸⁹

An April 9, 1967 editorial in the *Pulgyo sinmun* summarizes three central points made by Christian groups against the Buddhist chaplaincy, a position which the author calls "bigotry." First, "if there are two completely different religions in one army, there will be chaos." The author responds, saying first that Korea is a multi-religious country, unlike the United States, and such pluralism must be recognized. "This is saying they want our entire military to follow one religion. If what they say is true, then wouldn't a country with two religions also fall into chaos?"...only 5% of the [South Korean] population is Christian." "A special feature of democracy is that there is no single religion, so I hope they recognize diversity." The second point Christians have supposedly made is that "there is no non-Buddhist country in the world that has a Buddhist chaplaincy." In reality, in 1967, only Thailand and South Vietnam had

⁸⁷ Hwang (2008), 213.

⁸⁸ Kang (2007), 118.

⁸⁹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Pandaecundong chŏnggae, kidokkyo sŏ kunsŭng chedo silsi e," April 2, 1967.

Buddhist chaplaincies, and only the former is a self-declared Buddhist country. The author responds, pointing out “they [Christians] don’t establish the logic for why all non-Buddhist countries should have only Christian chaplaincies. What do you think about humans’ basic right to religious freedom?” Again, these first two points reference the right to religious freedom, which, the author believes, Christians are attempting to violate. Finally, Christians supposedly contend that it is “contradictory for a Buddhist chaplain to support victory in war (*sŭngjŏn*) because Buddhism prohibits killing.” Here, the Buddhist philosophical angle is brought forward. For the author, Buddhism’s historical credentials of fighting in nationalistic wars is so obvious, he chooses to answer with a question: “[i]f that’s the case, then isn’t it contradictory for Christians to support victory in war because it goes against Moses’ Ten Commandments that prohibit killing?”⁹⁰

In light of Christian opposition to the Buddhist chaplaincy, the *Pulgyo sinmun* interviewed three Christian chaplains (two Catholic, one Protestant) on the issue. Father Chang Byŏng-ryong (n.d.) takes a neutral stance, saying priests and those in the military are “instructed to have a completely detached position.” But Father Kim Nam-su (1922-2002) bluntly states, “of course there should be a Buddhist chaplaincy,” and his logic is fairly simple; there are a lot of Buddhists in the military who are passionate about their religion, and Buddhism has a special place in Korean history. He accounts for opposition to the Buddhist chaplaincy as some people “wrongly trying to hold on to their power in the military out of greed.” Reverend Hong Hyŏn-sŏl (1911-1990) flatly denounces the anti-Buddhist chaplaincy movement, imploring “please do not portray the actions of a very small number of Christians as the will of all Christians.”⁹¹

⁹⁰ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Sasŏl,” April 9, 1967.

⁹¹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kidokkyo kak chidoja tŭl kunsŭngje silsi e ōngŭp,” April 9, 1967.

Though there clearly was a small group of outspoken Christians critical of the Buddhist military chaplaincy, it seems this was not the primary reason the Buddhist chaplaincy was delayed from 1965 to 1968. Placing the blame on Christians may have been a strategy to divert responsibility from the Chogye Order. Discrimination against Buddhist chaplains by Christian chaplains and officers *after* Buddhist chaplains were finally dispatched may explain why authors of the official Buddhist military chaplaincy histories of 1986 and 2008 retrospectively blamed Christians for delays. However, criticisms of the Order's handling of the chaplaincy's implementation are scattered throughout contemporary issues of the *Pulgyo sinmun*. The Chogye Order's general disarray in the 1960's, mainly due to the Purification Movement, gives credit to such criticisms. While it was the government who needed to officially approve the dispatch of chaplains, if there was no funding or support for chaplains, how could they function? By law, financial support for the chaplaincy was required to come from non-military and non-government sources. The Christian chaplaincy gathering resources since 1951 undoubtedly gave them an advantage, but state resources could not be used for the chaplaincy based on separation of religion and state enshrined in the South Korean constitution. Thus, the Chogye Order and Buddhist community at large needed to provide support, specifically in the form of military dharma halls and study materials, which, by 1967, they still had not been sufficiently capable of.

The Final Implementation

As 1967 progressed, however, support for the chaplaincy was finally becoming a reality. April 15 came, and the government did not meet the Buddhist Student Alliance demands for an official response about the chaplaincy. Thus, the alliance decided to initiate a "struggle" (*t'ujaeng*)

involving protests.⁹² Eighteen days of strikes and protests outside the Ministry of Defense and Chogye-sa led to police arresting some students.⁹³ The Ministry of Defense acquiesced to a meeting with leaders of the Buddhist Student Alliance, producing a short-term plan. By April 30, two representatives from the Buddhist Order would be sent into the military to prepare for chaplains. By May 30, the Ministry of Defense and the Buddhist Order would set up a Committee for Preparation of the Buddhist Chaplaincy (*Kunsŭng Chunbihoe*).⁹⁴ The Order was tasked with recommending non-government laypeople or monks to sit on the committee with Ministry of Defense representatives.⁹⁵ In June and July, news came out that the Ministry denied the Order's two most promising candidates for the Committee. Kim Hyŏn-gi (Principal of Yŏngch'ŏn Girls Middle School) was denied because they claimed he couldn't be an educator and a civilian military personnel at the same time, and he is too far away working in the provinces. Kim Sam-hyŏn (Chogye Order Executive Office) was denied because he was not currently a soldier or public worker, so there is no place to add him in the budget.⁹⁶ These initial denials are indeed curious; it seems the Ministry was nitpicking to avoid pushing the chaplaincy question along. By November, however, both men were accepted to sit on the Committee.⁹⁷ The Ministry again blamed delays on "budget issues."⁹⁸

With the Committee set up, the Buddhist chaplaincy began to take shape. In March 1968, the Committee and the Order drafted the "rules of propriety" (*yebŏb*) for Buddhist military

⁹² *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Kukpangbu hwakdap obsi," April 16, 1967.

⁹³ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Pulgyogye 68 nyŏn chŏmgŏm chalhanil mot hanil," December 22, 1968.

⁹⁴ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Kukpangbu kunsŭngje silsi hwagyak," April 23, 1967.

⁹⁵ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Kunsŭngje chosok silsi wihae pulgyoch'ŭk kunjong wiwŏn tugi ro," May 7, 1967.

⁹⁶ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Kim Hyŏn-gi ssi kunjong wiwŏn e kunsok 1 myŏng ūn sŭngin an toe," June 11, 1967; "Kunjongje silsi tangye sŏ yesan iyu ro chch'um," July 23, 1967.

⁹⁷ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "16 il kunjongwi hoeŭi," October 22, 1967, "Kukpangbu, Kim Sam-hyŏn ssi rŭl kunsŭng chunbiyowŏn e immyŏng," November 26, 1967.

⁹⁸ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Kunsŭngje chosok silsi halt'ŏ," November 12, 1967.

chaplains and made final revisions to it in April. Though further revised in the future, these would become the basis for the chaplains' training.⁹⁹ The original seventeen candidates chosen in 1966 were still in limbo. Some were completing their degrees at Dongguk University, while others were simply waiting for the call to service. In August 1968, the Order announced that now only seven recruits would be sent to Kwangju Infantry School for ten weeks of training: Yi Sang-tae (n.d.), Kim Pong-sik (1936-2021), Yi Chi-haeng (1941-2019), Chang Man-su (1940-2021), Kwŏn Oh-hyŏn (1944-), Kim Yŏng-il (n.d.), and Kwŏn Ki-jong (1940-).¹⁰⁰ Their date for dispatch to a unit was set for mid-September.¹⁰¹ For unknown reasons, however, the candidates were not sent to Kwangju Infantry School until September 16, and two candidates, Yi Sang-tae and Kim Yŏng-il were removed from the roll.¹⁰² Their ten week training lasted to November 28.

The First Years of the Chaplaincy

On November 30th, the five chaplaincy trainees graduated from Kwangju Infantry School and became the first Buddhist chaplaincy officers. Kim Pong-sik and Kwŏn Ki-jong graduated with special distinctions—rank two army chief of staff and an award for exceptional conduct, respectively. Their graduation was capped off with a special “welcome dharma service” from the

⁹⁹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunjongsŭng yebŏp kamsu,” April 14, 1968. 1. Morning and Evening services (*chosŏk yebul*); 2. Precept Ceremony (*sugyosik*); 3. Regular Dharma service (*chŏngrye pŏbho*); 4. Commemorative Dharma services (*kinyŏm pŏbho*); 5. Offering of goods (*hŏngong*); 6. Engagement ceremony (*yakhonhoe*); 7. Celebration of Longevity (*suyŏnsik*); 8. Farewell Ceremonies (*yŏngsong pobhoe*); 9. Unveiling Ceremony (*chemaksik*); 10. Ceremony of putting up the ridge beam (*sangnyangsik*); 11. Inaugural and Retirement Ceremonies (*ich'wiimsik*); 12. Funeral Services (*changnyesik*), including military funeral (*kunjangnyesik*), regular funeral (*ilban changnyesik*), and Ceremony of lowering the coffin (*hagwansik*); 13. Memorial service (*ch'udosik*); 14. Alms giving (*sisik*); 15. Reference Notes (*ch'amgo sahang*)

¹⁰⁰ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunsŭng hubo 7 myŏng ch'uch'ŏn,” August 4, 1968.

¹⁰¹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunjongsŭng silsi e chŭum hayŏ,” August 11, 1968.

¹⁰² *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunsŭng changgyo 5 myŏng sŏnbal,” September 8, 1968; “Kunsŭng changgyo ibgyo,” September 22, 1968.

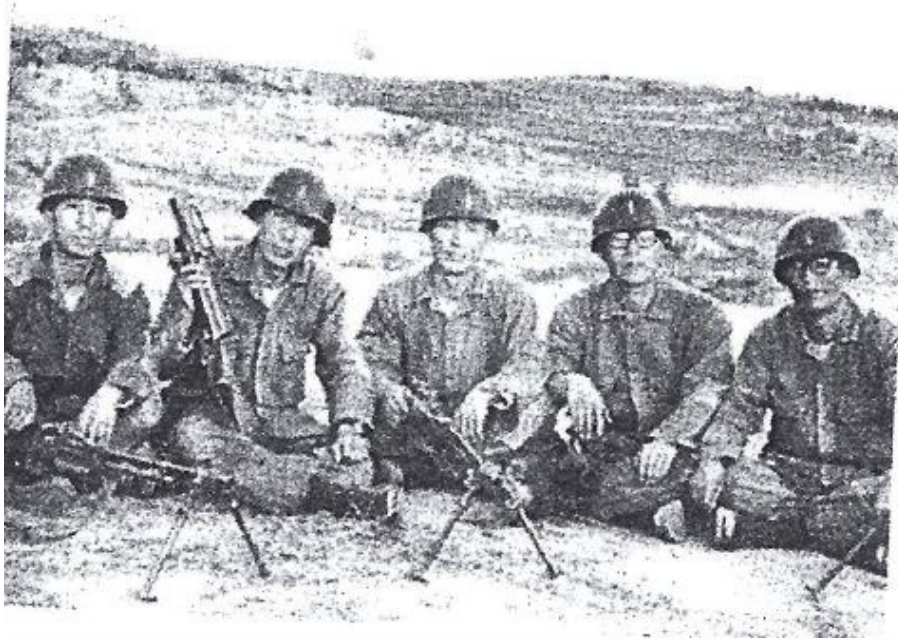
Order's Executive Office. A military general made a speech placing the monks in a millenia-old tradition of Korean Buddhists fighting for the nation, from the *hwarang* of Silla, monks protection royal archives during the Koryŏ dynasty (918-1392), to monk-soldiers during Chosŏn.¹⁰³ Kwŏn Ki-jong, the new leader of the Buddhist chaplains, proclaimed, "under the ideology of *hoguk* (state-protection) I will devote my body and mind without reservation to the Buddha."¹⁰⁴

In January 1969 the first five chaplains were sent to Vietnam, and a total of sixteen served to the end of South Korea's participation in the war in March 1973. To be sure, these were not ordained monks; they were students of Buddhism and trained soldiers first and foremost. The Buddhist Order, and Dongguk University, the central Buddhist university and site of their training, bestowed upon them a unique position. Though they could teach like monks, their physical capabilities, secular education, and leadership skills were most important. About a month into the job, chaplain Kim Pong-sik described the Buddhist chaplains' purpose as "supporting military functions," "guiding soldiers' faith and personal character," "promoting an ethical lifestyle," "boosting soldiers' morale," "leading problematic soldiers down the right path and nurturing superior soldiers" and "fostering democratic and anti-communist spirit in soldiers." They had to be able to answer questions like "how can I fight well, live well, and die well?" Finally, they must "promote understanding of human dignity, while awakening the sense of national subject, and making a good soldier who can fulfill his duty with a sense of national development."¹⁰⁵ His description closely follows official descriptions of the chaplains' role, and these described duties can virtually fit for any religious chaplain in the South Korean military.

¹⁰³ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Kunsŭng chaggyo t'ansaeng," December 8, 1968.

¹⁰⁴ Hwang (2008), 230

¹⁰⁵ Kim Pong-sik, "Kunsŭng ūi sori," *Pulgyo sinmun*, February 16, 1969.



The first five Buddhist military chaplains (left to right):
Yi Chi-haeng, Kwŏn Ki-jong, Kim Pong-sik,
Kwŏn Oh-hyŏn, Chang Man-su¹⁰⁶

However, the Buddhist chaplains' mission in Vietnam was quite different from that of Protestant and Catholic chaplains. The latter were almost completely involved in working with South Korean troops in camps and barracks. According to an official history on the chaplaincy, Buddhist chaplains' mission also included continually developing harmony and friendship with the local religious groups," "improving civilian engagement methods," and "maintaining friendship and service in civilian relationships." This often meant working with Buddhist soldiers to restore temples and shrines damaged by war and create "relief shelters" for Buddhist who lost their temples. They built orphanages, collected food for donations, and gave medical support to locals. They were also tasked with "acquiring valuable information to the Korean forces through ceaseless support and contact with locals."¹⁰⁷ Buddhist chaplains conducted

¹⁰⁶ Hwang (2008), 231.

¹⁰⁷ Yi I Yong (1986), 90.

frequent “Korean-Vietnamese Joint Dharma Services” (*hanwŏl haptong pŏbho*) together with Vietnamese monks, chaplains, and civilians. They even built Korean-style Buddhist temples in South Vietnam, bringing materials from Korea.¹⁰⁸ Pulgwang-sa (佛光寺), Paekma-sa (白馬寺), and Maengho-sa (猛虎寺) were built in Nha Trang, Ninh Hòa, Quy Nhon respectively.¹⁰⁹ The leader of the first class of chaplains sent to Vietnam, Kwŏn Ki-jong, later recounted that, although “internal duties such as religious guidance, morale promotion, and counseling” were important, “if you don’t maintain a close relationship with the residents of Vietnam, it can result in a failed battle.”¹¹⁰ The Protestant and Catholic chaplains did some similar “civilian engagement,” but not to the extent that Buddhist chaplains did.¹¹¹ Furthermore, Buddhist chaplains ability to do such civic activities was at the heart of the implementation of the Buddhist chaplaincy system.

Contrary to their success in civic engagement, however, was their relative difficulty in Korean camps. They were discriminated against by their largely Christian commanders. They also had to conduct many services outdoors because they had no dharma halls early on. A second-generation chaplain called their training grounds a “wasteland.”¹¹² There was a lack of understanding and support from the soldiers. One former chaplain recounted, “The perception of Buddhism in the army was ignorance itself, and it was a time when monks were regarded as shamans.”¹¹³ With a lack of precedent, being forced to align with Christian services, and no monks to help them, the chaplains had to make up their own teaching curriculum.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 90-94.

¹⁰⁹ Yi I Yong (1986), 89.

¹¹⁰ Kwŏn Ki-jong, “Ch’ogi kulp’ogyo, Wŏllam esŏ ūi kunbŏpsa hwaltong (Early Military Propagation, [Buddhist] Chaplains’ Activities in Vietnam).” *Kŭmgang sinmun*. July 7, 2017

¹¹¹ Kunjong kyogu sap’yŏnch’an wiwŏnhoe (2002), 90-100. Pak Ch’ang-hyŏn (2015), 245-251.

¹¹² Kim Sŏn-gŭn, “Kunsŭng hubosaeng t’ongsin,” *Pulgyo sinmun*, June 1, 1969.

¹¹³ “Kwŏn Ki-jong, “Dongguk dae myŏngye kyosu,” *Pŏppo sinmun*. January 2, 2019.

¹¹⁴ Hwang (2008), 237-238.

Though the Vietnam War catalyzed the beginning of the Buddhist chaplaincy, the chaplaincy was still extremely small, their limited time and manpower split between dealing with the Vietnamese population and working with South Korean soldiers. The Buddhist chaplaincy was still searching for an identity, respect from their fellow chaplains and soldiers, and, of course, funding. But the first-generation of chaplains at least succeeded in beginning the Buddhist chaplaincy institution that would significantly grow into the 1970's and beyond. By February 1969, eleven candidates were selected to train as the second-generation of chaplains.¹¹⁵ In March, seven were dispatched to the Army and one, Yi In-su (n.d.), became the first Buddhist Air Force chaplain.¹¹⁶

Upon graduating, Yi reflected on the difficulty of being the first Air Force chaplain, “although I graduated [from training school], I feel like I'm walking alone in the middle of nowhere.”¹¹⁷ Other first and second-generation chaplains expressed their occasionally humorous hardships they'd experiences in their early days of training and work in a 1969 interview. During training, their commanding officers would ask them to do things like “palm reading” (*songŭm*) and “predicting fate” (*sajugwansang*) because they believed this is what Buddhist monks (though these chaplains weren't monks) should do. There were basic oversights by military command, such as not recognizing Buddhist soldiers or Buddhist chaplains during the entrance ceremony (*suyongyŏndae*) at Nonsan Training Facility, where they trained. Protestants, Catholics, and even some unnamed smaller religions were recognized, but not Buddhists. Furthermore, Christian chaplains were allowed to distribute publications at the ceremony, but Buddhists were not. In truth, as one chaplain demurred, there wasn't even a standard religious book for Buddhist

¹¹⁵ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunjongsŭng hubo 11 myŏng ch'uch'ŏn Ch'ongmuwŏn,” February 2, 1969.

¹¹⁶ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunsŭng hubo habgyŏgja,” March 30, 1969.

¹¹⁷ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunsŭng hubosaeng wimun,” June 22, 1969.

chaplains yet, so they didn't have much to give out. First-generation chaplain Kim Pong-sik found it amusing, but disheartening, that soldiers and officers didn't even know what to call Buddhist chaplains at this point. Though "military dharma teacher" (*kunbōpsa*) would be standardized in the coming years, in the early days Kim was called "Great Teacher Kim" (*Kim taesa*), "Monk Kim" (*Kim sūngryō*), and "Venerable Kim" (*Kim sūnim*), all names reserved for fully ordained monks, which Kim, and all Buddhist chaplains, technically were not. Finally, the most common and pressing need was raised by multiple chaplains: dharma halls.¹¹⁸

This final need would be addressed in August 1969 when a central Army Chaplaincy Center was completed in Yongsan, Seoul. The Center included a dharma hall and chapels. The budget for outfitting the dharma hall was heavily supported by the independent lay group, Avalokitesvara Club (*Kwanūm K'ūllōp*). President Park Chung Hee unveiled his personally dedicated monument on the grounds.¹¹⁹ The chaplains and monks from the Buddhist Order celebrated their wishes for a military dharma hall finally coming to fruition. They had a tangible mark of their impact and future growth in the military. The celebrations, however, were dampened with the reality of their situation as neophytes. A reporter for the *Pulgyo sinmun* attended the first dharma service given in the new center and could only call what they saw "a violation of the right to religious equality." Their dharma hall was much smaller than the chapels. There was no carpeting, just concrete and old chairs, poor heating, and limited lighting. Christian chaplains complained that the Buddhist services "give off a bad smell" and their "text

¹¹⁸ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Kunsūng silhyo rūl kōduryōmyōn," August 10, 1969.

¹¹⁹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Yukkun kunjong sent'ō chungongsik," August 17, 1969. The monument read: "Now that we washed off the stains of bloody battles, we put our two hands together and pray, that the suffering and anguish of the battlefield disappears; warriors of belief! The light is truth and life, so we march with our strong will." "혈전의 얼룩 씻고 두손 모아 기도하니 싸움터의 번민 고뇌 사라져 없어지네, 믿음의 용사들이 빛은 진리요, 생명이니 우리들 빛을 향해 굳세게 전진하리."¹¹⁹

reading is too loud,” so military commanders allowed Buddhist chaplains to conduct services only in specific time slots after Christian services. The head of the Army Chaplaincy Group accounted for the differences based on budget. Christians received a lot of monetary support from outside sources and Buddhists did not.¹²⁰

The Buddhist military chaplaincy steadily grew in 1970 and 1971. The military dispatched the third generation of chaplains in early 1970, including the first Buddhist Navy chaplain.¹²¹ Laypeople and monk volunteers established the Buddhist Chaplaincy Support Association (*Kunsŭng Huwŏnhoe*) in April 1970, holding regular meetings and trying to amass funding for the chaplaincy.¹²² For the fourth generation of chaplains, set to be chosen for training in late 1970, the Executive Order tightened requirements and increased competition for candidates as interest was burgeoning. Candidates would now be tested in three areas. First was an exam on Buddhist doctrine, specifically the Three Aspects of the Dharma (*sambŏb*), Four Kinds of Sages (*sasŏngch'e*), Eightfold Path (*p'aljŏngdo*), and Differences between Mahayana and Hinayana thought (*taesŭng kwa sosŭng kwa ũi ch'ajŏm*). Second, they took an oral exam in which they had to expertly discuss “refinement and faith” (*kyoyang, sinang*), give a sample dharma talk on “war and Buddhism,” perform mock ceremonies, and discuss proper character (*inp'um*). Third, they took an English reading exam (which was published in the *Pulgyo sinmun* and was *extremely* difficult).¹²³

The Executive Order also changed their constitution to centralize management of the chaplains under the Order and away from the Ministry of Defense. The Executive Head would

¹²⁰ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Sijŏngdaeya haljŏm manhŭn yukkun kunjong sent'ŏ,” August 31, 1969.

¹²¹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Haegun kunsŭng t'ansaeng,” June 7, 1970.

¹²² *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunsŭng huwŏnhoe palgich'onghoe,” April 19, 1970.

¹²³ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunjongsŭng 4 myŏng sŏnbal,” December 6, 1970.

become their so-called commanding officer. Every month, meetings would be held at the Executive Office to discuss chaplains' activities and all the official paperwork would be submitted through the Executive Office to the military. The requirements that chaplains must be graduates of Dongguk University's Buddhist studies department and must be a monk of great virtue was put into the Order's constitution. It read, "if a person who serves as a chaplain gets married, or damages or violates the honor of the Order, the Executive Head can order their discharge from the military." It was not clear, however, what would happen to those who had already been commissioned and were married.¹²⁴ In reality, chaplains were allowed to marry, and they retained the ability to marry until 2009.¹²⁵

With the growth of the chaplaincy came increased attention to its role in propagating Buddhism and recruiting new converts. Kwŏn Ki-jong, leader of the first class of Buddhist chaplains, recounted that, at least initially, "The military's position was not to encourage various religions to come and propagate, but to strengthen the military's power through religion."¹²⁶ But by 1971, Kwŏn declared, "because all men in Korea have to go to the military, military propagation is equivalent to propagating to the whole nation," evidencing the massive duty that Buddhist chaplains put on their shoulders.¹²⁷ Already in 1969, the Chogye Order established the Social Work Support Association (*Sahoe Saŏb Huwŏnhoe*) to support and organize propagation activities seven arenas, including the military.¹²⁸ The changes the Executive Office made to the chaplaincy organization discussed above were also done with propagation in mind, as the Order

¹²⁴ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Kunsŭng chagyŏk tŏuk kanghwa," December 20, 1970.

¹²⁵ Tikhonov (2015), 12.

¹²⁶ Kwŏn, Ki-jong. "Ch'ogi kunp'ogyo, Wŏllam esŏ ūi kunbŏpsa hwaltong (Early Military Propagation, [Buddhist] Chaplains' Activities in Vietnam)." *Kŭmgang sinmun*. July 7, 2017.

¹²⁷ Kwŏn Ki-jong, "Pulgyo kunjong hwaltong," *Pulgyo sinmun*, February 7, 1971.

¹²⁸ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Sahoe saŏp huwŏnhoe paljok," February 9, 1969.

moved power away from military authorities.¹²⁹ In 1971, “skills in propagation” was added to the evaluation of chaplaincy candidates.¹³⁰ And by late 1971, “propagation in the military skyrocketed.”¹³¹

The reason for this new emphasis on propagation was the Mass Military Faith Promotion Movement (*Chŏn ’gun Sinjahwa Undong*; from here on Faith Movement), a military-wide, multi-faith, government supported movement which massively increased the number of religious believers in the military from 1971 to 1974. This will be discussed at length in Chapter 3. The Faith Movement was the solution to many of the problems the Buddhist military chaplaincy was facing in its early years, such as lack of funding, lack of dharma halls, and lack of personnel. By the time the Faith Movement ended in 1974, the number of active chaplains increased from seven to twenty-nine, the number of dharma halls increased from two to twenty-six, and the number of declared Buddhists in the military increased from 9,588 to 41,392, compared to 1970 numbers.¹³² Thus, by the end of the Faith Movement, the Chogye Order, Ministry of Defense, and a host of lay associations succeeded in making the Buddhist military chaplaincy a permanent, dynamic institution. And it only grew over the coming decades.

The first generation of chaplains played an integral part in the chaplaincy’s continuing development. Kwŏn Ki-jong led the chaplaincy from its inception, when it was still managed under the umbrella of the Ministry of Defense, from 1968 to 1972. His role was fairly small; his biggest influence was working in the Vietnam headquarters of the armed forces and sitting on early organizational boards as precursor to the chaplaincy’s institutional divorce from the

¹²⁹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunsŭng chagyŏk tŏuk kanghwa,” December 20, 1970.

¹³⁰ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunp’ogyo ūi ilgun 6 myŏng sŏnbal,” November 14, 1971.

¹³¹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunnae p’ogyo e poda k’ŭn kwansim ūl,” December 19, 1971.

¹³² Yi I Yong (1986), 158-159, 163-164.

Ministry of Defense. When the Executive Order took command of the chaplaincy and set up the Buddhist Chaplaincy Group (*Kunbŏp Sadan*) in June 1972, Kwŏn Oh-hyŏn, another first-generation chaplain, took the reins. His term as leader lasted from June 26, 1972 to March 11, 1974. He oversaw a chaplaincy education center established at Dongguk University. He codified four central guidelines for the Chaplaincy Group: securing consistent funding, establishing close relationships with laypeople, maintaining finances, and promoting the cause of the chaplains. And to maintain funding and support from the Order, he fostered a closer relationship with temples across the country, securing Buddhist books, statues, and host locations for funerals and other ceremonies.¹³³

Buddhist chaplains' celibacy was an issue the Order had not clearly dealt with since the chaplaincy's inception. Though revisions to the Order's constitution in 1970 claimed a chaplain could be dismissed for violations against the order, including marriage, almost all chaplains were married and none were dismissed by the Order. In 1977, the stance on marriage finally came to the forefront. While some chaplains were married and some were not, they all technically had to be ordained as a monk in the Chogye Order. After Chaplaincy Group and Executive Office debates, they decided it was the choice of the chaplains because (1) their work didn't require celibacy; and (2) a celibacy requirement would limit the already small pool of candidates.¹³⁴ Thus, the Executive Order revised their constitution in 1980 to read, "for monks who are part of this order and are given a special duty (military chaplain), the rule of celibacy is not applied; at completion of their duty there will be a reexamination—those who maintain the precept of celibacy will be certified [as monks], and those who do not, will have their monk status

¹³³ Ibid, 98-99.

¹³⁴ Ibid, 106.

nullified.”¹³⁵ This rule remained in effect until 2009, when the constitution was once again revised to require celibacy for all chaplains. However, those who were married before the revision were allowed to stay on. According to an official history of the chaplaincy published in 1986, the decision about celibacy was made with social engagement and modernization in mind. To hold chaplains to the same precepts as monks would have hindered their ability to propagate and relate to soldiers.¹³⁶ We can see here that by the late 1970’s, propagation had become central to the military chaplaincy, and allowing chaplains to marry was a small price to pay for greater access to Korean youths.

Conclusion

Due to a lack of time and space, there are two issues brought up in this chapter that I will unfortunately not be able to cover in more detail. First is the influence of the Japanese Buddhism and colonial Korean Buddhism on the South Korean chaplaincy. The difficult history of Japanese colonization in Korea has made discussing continuities between the colonial period and the early years of the South Korean somewhat controversial. But these continuities are key to understanding the development of South Korea as a nation, and the Buddhist chaplaincy is an important example of such continuity. I have looked at the colonial period and its lasting influences in brief here, but the topic deserves much more attention. Korean Buddhism’s complicity in state violence during the colonial period was complex and multifaceted. I would

¹³⁵ Ibid, 112.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 112.

like to look at more primary source materials that can corroborate the information given here that is mostly gleaned from secondary source materials.

Second, the right to religious freedom in the South Korean constitution was frequently brought up by the Buddhist community when arguing for the Buddhist chaplaincy in the 1960's. But how exactly was Buddhist religious freedom understood in Cold War South Korea under an authoritarian military dictatorship? And, how does it compare with contemporary and preceding understandings of Buddhist religious freedom within and outside South Korea? Again, this issue has been touched upon in this chapter, but it requires more thorough, well-rounded investigation. Recently sociological scholarship on religion and politics in order to complicate standard Christian or "Western" notions of how religious freedom could or should have worked in mid-20th century South Korea. Also, debates on religious freedom in other modern Buddhist communities are nodes of comparison for the South Korean Buddhist situation.

In the proceeding chapters, I will delve more deeply into some of the themes and topics brought up in this chapter. I will look at the two developments in the early history of the chaplaincy: the Vietnam War and the Faith Movement. They are, in my opinion, what defined the chaplaincy in its early years and have a lasting impact on both the chaplaincy and Korean Buddhism as a whole. Furthermore, I will explore the issue of Buddhism and violence and how it relates to the chaplaincy. Though referenced in this and other chapters, I will look at the specific philosophical, historical, and doctrinal justifications given by the Buddhist community for Buddhist chaplains and soldiers to serve in the South Korean military.

Chapter 2: Korean Buddhism and the Vietnam War: Exploring the Foundations of The Chaplaincy during the Vietnam War

The Vietnam War was the final catalyst for the establishment of the South Korean Buddhist military chaplaincy in late 1968. While it was important for Buddhist chaplains to work within Korean military camps, teaching and counseling Buddhist soldiers, Buddhist chaplains had a grander purpose compared to their Protestant and Catholic comrades. Military commanders, politicians, and Buddhist leaders alike recognized the need for military officers who could understand the religious beliefs of the Vietnamese people. Thus, Buddhist chaplains were tasked with carrying out extensive civilian outreach, working with both South Vietnamese Buddhist clergy and laypeople, to improve the image of the Korean military and possibly obtain covert intelligence.

However, the establishment of the Buddhist chaplaincy and the chaplains' dispatch to Vietnam was also the fruits of a relationship between South Korean and South Vietnamese Buddhist leadership since the South Vietnam Buddhist Crisis of 1963. The Buddhist Crisis of 1963, famously marked by the self-immolation of Thich Quang Duc (1897-1963) in protest of the war and Ngo Dinh Diem (1901-1963) government, captured global attention and brought unprecedented interest in Vietnamese Buddhism. For the first time, United States' leadership, and the world, recognized the significance of Buddhism in the conflict. In Korea, burgeoning interest in Vietnam from this point on was termed the "Vietnam Boom" (*wöllam bum*). Korean Buddhists also became increasingly interested in their Buddhist "brothers" in Southeast Asia. With the 1963 Buddhist Crisis, South Korean Buddhist South Korean Buddhist leaders, soldiers, and authors ardently sided with the Vietnamese Buddhists, whom they viewed as victims of religious discrimination and political suppression. Tensions between Vietnamese Buddhists,

South Vietnamese governments, and the United States only increased throughout the 1960's. For Korean Buddhists, South Vietnam represented the frontlines of Buddhists fighting for religious freedom in the modern world—confronting dictatorship, war, colonialism, and communism—and they believed the Vietnamese Buddhists were setting a remarkable example for Korean and world Buddhists.

Until the end of the war in 1975, the relationship between South Korean Buddhists and South Vietnamese Buddhists would cut across wider political and economic issues that marked South Korea's participation in the Vietnam War. South Korean soldiers have often been called “mercenaries” fighting alongside American soldiers for economic gain. The South Korean military has been deemed partners in the Cold War, neo-colonialist project of the United States. Much has been made of South Korea's role as “savior” to Vietnamese, who were seen as suffering in the same poverty and conflict as Koreans had during the Korean War; South Korea, now more developed and stable, could aid their less developed allies in the global fight against communism. Vladimir Tikhonov argues, “the Korean Buddhist chaplains—who saw Vietnam being ‘just as poor as we were in the 50s’—were performing there the same repertoire of ‘benefitting the backward locals’ that the US Christian chaplains used to perform in Korea during the Korean War, in an act of that we can define as sort of semi-imperialist self-assertion.”¹ In this chapter, I will argue that a closer look at the relationship between South Korean and South Vietnamese Buddhists, and the Korean Buddhist military chaplaincy that it helped produce, defies such characterizations.

If the common depiction of the relationship between South Korea and South Vietnam places the former as the paragon for what the latter could be, the opposite was true from the

¹ Tikhonov (2017), 251.

Buddhist perspective; South Vietnamese Buddhists were models for Korean Buddhist leadership. South Vietnamese Buddhists showed that Buddhism could be a political force that rallies both domestic and international support. They set a standard for modern Buddhist social participation as they established a military chaplaincy in 1964, had influential national Buddhist organizations, and ran hospitals, orphanages, and schools. When looking at these aspects of Vietnamese Buddhism, Korean Buddhism was severely lacking. Korean Buddhism was still embroiled in controversies over the lasting impact of the Japanese colonial period on the religion. The Chogye Order was still trying to unite a severely fractured Buddhist community, and the Syngman Rhee regime (1948-1960) did not do much to help. Park Chung Hee's coup was a positive change for Buddhist leadership, but progress was still slow through the 1960's.

The purpose of this chapter is to trace the transnational exchange between Korean and Vietnamese Buddhists during the Vietnam War in order to challenge mainstream depictions of Korean attitudes toward Vietnamese in this period. I will also show how Vietnamese Buddhism influenced modern Korean Buddhist history. From 1968 to 1973, Buddhist military chaplains were the main intermediaries for the exchange between the two countries' Buddhisms. The relationship that developed between South Vietnamese Buddhists and South Korean Buddhists would push the latter to assess its own identity in the modern world. The relationship cut across geographic and political boundaries. As "Buddhist brothers," leaders from the two countries' Buddhisms bonded over the similar standing of their homelands, divided under Cold War ideologies and often at the mercy of foreign powers. Buddhist efforts in South Vietnam would ultimately wane in the late 1960's, and North Vietnam's unification of the country in 1975 came with a strict containment of Buddhist political activity. However, during the war years, South

Vietnamese Buddhists' brave adherence to ethics of peace, freedom, and compassion inspired Korean Buddhists.

When Korean Buddhist chaplains were finally dispatched to Vietnam in January 1969, they represented the product of a years-long transnational Buddhist relationship. Though Korean and Vietnamese Buddhist leaders had been visiting each other's countries throughout the 1960's, Buddhist chaplains were the only ones with consistent, intimate access to everyday Vietnamese Buddhists. Their support from each countries' Buddhist leadership and the work they did with their counterparts in the South Vietnamese military meant their role was not simply militaristic or limited to Korean Buddhist issues. They were representatives in an exchange of ideas between two nations trying to carve out a place for Buddhism in the violent reality of the modern world.

Background: Korea and the Vietnam War

South Korea entered the Vietnam War in late 1964 to aid in the U.S. and its allies' war effort until the last troops were pulled out in March 1973. Recent scholarship has well documented the impact that the Vietnam War had on modern South Korea, which helps to properly contextualize the Buddhist dimension of the war. First, the over \$4.5 billion of earnings and \$8.1 billion in aid that accrued from South Korea's participation in the war were a huge factor in Korea's economic growth from the 1960s to the 1990s, which brought it from a country with ubiquitous poverty to one of the richest nations in the world.² These gains were by no means a coincidence; they were at the center of Park Chung Hee's war plan from the very beginning.³ Tae Yang Kwak notes that

² Armstrong (2001), 531.

³ Kwak (2006), 87.

the economic terms of South Korea's agreement to bolster the United States' war effort were "open-ended and potentially unlimited."⁴

It is important also to understand the impact of the war on individuals in South Korea. Over 300,000 soldiers and over 100,000 civilian employees were sent to Vietnam over Korea's nine-year involvement in the war. Average soldiers made much more than the average worker in South Korea, and many would return home and go on to start small businesses; this impact was particularly significant in rural areas where the majority of soldiers and workers came from.⁵ Studies have framed these soldier and workers as either proud nationalists,⁶ or "surrogates" of the upper-middle class.⁷

Such characterizations reflect Park Chung Hee's official stance on participation in the Vietnam War. Park publicly framed the war as an opportunity to raise South Korea's international reputation as a developed, modern nation with powerful military capabilities. Soldiers, including Buddhist chaplains, were given grand farewell and welcome ceremonies to instill in them a sense of national purpose and to present them to the public as symbols of national pride.⁸ It must be noted there is an inherent gendered aspect to this development as strictly male soldiers and mostly male civilian workers were tasked with advancing the nation under Park's policies. Jin-kyung Lee shows how the public image of these soldiers, especially in the grand ceremonies culminating in their final welcome in 1973, displayed a "spectacularized military masculine image, with its close linkages to the state, race, anticommunism, and developmentalism."⁹

⁴ Ibid, 115, 128

⁵ Se Jin Kim (1970), 522.

⁶ Jo (2014), 64.

⁷ Jin-kyung Lee (2009), 662.

⁸ Jin-kyung Lee (2010), 42.

⁹ Jin-kyung Lee (2009), 660.

This imagery of national reconstruction and masculinity gave Park Chung Hee great political clout when he most needed it.¹⁰ The South Korea public was largely behind the country's involvement in the Vietnam War, believing in Park's characterizations of the war and furthering his grip on power. Without the war, Park most likely could not have won the 1967 elections and could not have run for a third term.¹¹ Possibly the most tangible post-Park political remnants of the Vietnam War were future presidents Chun Doo Hwan (1931-2021) and Roh Tae Woo (1932-2021), the successors to Park's regime in the 1980s who continued oppressive military rule. Both served as military officers during the Vietnam War and their battle experience expedited their rise through the military ranks, eventually becoming mainstays in Park's higher administration.¹²

The Vietnam War also became a "proxy war" in the North-South Korean conflict. With South Korea supporting the South Vietnamese, North Korea decided to support the North Vietnamese. Back on the Korean peninsula, provocations on the DMZ increased due to Vietnam War participation. The massive military-industrial growth of South Korea spurred by the war initiated a "peninsular arms race" as North Korea sought to keep up.¹³

However, it must be remembered that the details of the war were mostly hidden from the public from 1965 to the 1990s. Only a few novels reflected some of the horrific sides of the war.¹⁴ The lasting impact of PTSD, physical wounds, and herbicide poisoning on war veterans is only beginning to be recognized in South Korean society. The few histories that bring to light the

¹⁰ Min Yong Lee (2011). 407.

¹¹ Kwak (2006), 254, 256.

¹² Armstrong (2001), 533.

¹³ Kwak (2006), 137-152.

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 260.

atrocities committed by South Korean soldiers on Vietnamese civilians has only recently been recognized by the government and public.¹⁵

Thus, it is the historian's duty to investigate all aspects of Korea's participation in the Vietnam War because of its significant and misunderstood role in shaping modern South Korea. Without ascribing inherent negative or positive valuation, we must study the Vietnam War in its economic, political, social, and, I believe, religious impact. Outside of short discussion of the Buddhist military chaplaincy in Vietnam, Korean Buddhism's response to the Vietnam War has received little scholarly attention.

Korean Christian Churches' view on the war, however, has received some attention. Ryu Dae Young shows how Park Chung Hee's pro-war propaganda was supported by mainstream churches and conflated with biblical concepts. Park's rhetoric on the war as "the great battlefield of the Free World and communism," fighting the "ringleaders of the destruction of peace" to stave off the "threat of invasion" from communism was picked up by Christian leaders and applied to ideas of "holy war," "crusades," and "the duality of good and evil."¹⁶ Korean church leadership broke with international church leadership as the latter promulgated anti-war statements throughout the 1960's. The World Council of Churches (WCC) had supported the United Nations' military actions during the Korean War for the sake of maintaining "the principles of world order;"¹⁷ however, by the 1960's, the WCC began to view war chiefly through the lens of nuclear containment and non-proliferation. They believed nuclear proliferation was not a major aspect of the Vietnam War.¹⁸ Conversely, minority anti-war voices

¹⁵ Lee Kim (2001), 621.

¹⁶ Ryu (2004), 78-82.

¹⁷ Heung Soo Kim (2011), 137.

¹⁸ Ibid, 89.

in the Korean Christian community couldn't stop leadership in organizations, such as the usually liberal leaning Korean National Council of Churches (NCC), from defying global church leadership by vehemently supporting the war. They felt Christian leaders from other countries did not understand the direct threat of communism to Christianity as they did on the Korean peninsula. This rhetoric continued into the 1970's, even as global Christian anti-war ideology grew.¹⁹

The Korean Buddhist position had similarities to the Korean churches' position. Buddhist leadership also used the term "holy war" and emphasized the incompatibility of communism and religious belief. The Chogye Order often sided with Park Chung Hee because of his sympathetic attitude towards Buddhism, which certainly influenced their support for the war. Yet the situation facing Vietnamese Buddhists was the most powerful factor motivating Korean Buddhists' support for the war. Throughout the 1960's, the Buddhist dimension of the Vietnam War was increasingly visible not only to the Korean Buddhist community, but Buddhists throughout Asia. The World Federation of Buddhists (WFB) rallied support for Vietnamese Buddhists and urged peace in their annual meetings. The plight of Buddhist soldiers in the Vietnamese, Korean, and Thai militaries on the ground fostered unprecedented bonds in the modern world Buddhist community. Vietnamese Buddhist monks, politicians, students, and soldiers were demonstrating the power of mass Buddhist social and political participation.

Korean and Vietnamese Buddhist Exchange, 1963-1969

¹⁹ Ibid, 93-97.

The 1963 Buddhist Crisis in South Vietnam revealed to the world the significance of Buddhism in Vietnam's political affairs. After the Vietnamese successfully ousted France in the First Indochina War (1946-1955), President Ngo Dinh Diem took power in 1955 through a rigged referendum upon the Geneva Accords decision to divide Vietnam into North and South. Diem, a Catholic supported by the United States, gave significant benefits to Catholics in public service despite the South Vietnamese population being at least 70% Buddhist. He gave Catholics benefits such as establishing Catholic chaplains in military, considering Catholics first in government jobs and military jobs, giving them land, tax reduction, and favorable business benefits.²⁰ Buddhist leadership in South Vietnam was frustrated by Diem's continuation of pro-Catholic French colonial political practices since the beginning of his presidential tenure. Diem's constant marginalization of the Buddhist community severely weakened his base, so he ramped up his emphasis on anti-communism to keep his U.S. support intact.²¹ By the late 1950's, popular resentment for Catholics in South Vietnam further grew due to preference given to Catholic refugees when hundreds of thousands of refugees came from the North.²²

Political tensions between the Diem regime and Buddhists eventually manifested in the Buddhist Crisis of 1963. In May 1963, during Buddha's birthday celebrations, the government invoked a rarely enforced law that banned the display of religious flags, leading to confrontations between civilians and the police. Just a week earlier, however, the government allowed Catholics to fly Vatican flags for a celebration of Diem's brother, the highest Catholic cleric in the country. Responding to this hypocrisy, Buddhists protested the ban on religious flags; the government responded by sending in the police and army to fire into the crowds, killing protestors. As Jessica

²⁰ Pak Kyum Pyo (2010), 562.

²¹ Ibid, 571.

²² Chapman (2012), 217.

M. Chapman notes, the 1963 Buddhist Crisis was not just about opposition from Buddhists but from a “broader range of individuals dissatisfied with the regime” and “public opinion both within South Vietnam and internationally sided squarely with the Buddhist plight and against Diemist oppression, callousness, and intransigence.”²³

The international community included the Korean Buddhist community. For the first three years of publication retained in archives, the *Pulgyo sinmun* ran no articles on Vietnam or Vietnamese Buddhism. However, on July 1, 1963 an article responding to the crisis in Vietnam on the Buddha’s birthday began a surge of interest in Vietnamese Buddhist affairs that would last until the end of the Vietnam war in 1975. The article called Diem a “modern day Nero,” conducting “tyranny,” and creating “a stronghold of Buddhist oppression.” The article framed the crisis in terms of “religious freedom,” which would be one of the most significant political concepts that Korean Buddhists and South Vietnamese Buddhists bonded over for the next decade. The article claimed that “for eight years, not only has President Ngo discriminated against other religions [besides Catholicism], but he has unjustly interfered in religious events.” The events on the Buddha’s birthday resulted in 12 protestors killed, whom the author calls “martyrs.” In response, a reported ten million Vietnamese Buddhists held a rally for “religious freedom and social justice,” quoting protest leaders.²⁴

As the summer went on, news of Thich Quang Duc’s “self-immolation martyrdom” (*sosin sungyo*) and other murdered protestors reached Korea.²⁵ The *Pulgyo sinmun* emphasized the impact the events in Vietnam were having on the world.²⁶ Reports from Saigon claimed that

²³ Ibid, 218.

²⁴ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Hyōndaep’an ‘nero’ ūi p’okjōng,” July 1, 1963.

²⁵ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “T’ich’I k’wang t’uk sūnim ūi kyōn,” September 1, 1963.

²⁶ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Wōllam sat’ae e puldūng hanūn segye yōrūn,” September 1, 1963.

the government wouldn't agree to any more of the Buddhist's requests in negotiations and would try to split the Buddhist community to crush their resistance.²⁷ Thus, on August 26th, a memorial service was held at Chogyesa, hosted by the Executive Office of Korean Buddhism, attended by 150 monks and 250 lay Buddhists, for "Vietnamese Buddhist martyrs for human freedom and human rights." The head of the Executive Order, Master Ch'ongdam spoke: "In Buddhism there is no distinction or differentiation, but what is happening in Vietnam is brutality." Furthermore, he said:

religious freedom is the basis of all freedom... These martyred Buddhists were sacrificed by the violence caused by infringing upon human freedom. All the world's Buddhists clearly love world freedom. We respect human rights and even in our sadness for these [deceased], we know the spirit of martyrdom is one that does not submit in the face of injustice or violence and protects freedom.²⁸

The Executive Order also relayed these sentiments to the Vietnamese Buddhist Association in a "support message," confiding that "we hope your government will immediately halt all of its oppressive actions toward Buddhists."²⁹ A newspaper columnist also pleaded: "For the sake of peace in Asia and world peace, Korea's five million Buddhists resolutely denounce the actions of the Vietnamese government."³⁰

The Korean Buddhist Youth Association and Dongguk University Student Government also denounced the events. The former responded to the situation with a list of demands:

1. In the name of all humanity, we religious freedom-loving Korean Buddhists support the Vietnamese Buddhists' holy war to defeat the devil (*hangma sŏngjŏn*).
2. The Vietnamese government should immediately stop trampling the name of our free allies with their cruel actions.
3. The Korean Buddhist Youth Association actively supports the brave martyrdom resistance movement of the Vietnamese Buddhists youths and students.

²⁷ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Wŏllam chŏnggyo pulgyo t'anap kyesok," August 1, 1963.

²⁸ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Wŏllam sungyo pulgyodo ch'udosik," September 1, 1963.

²⁹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Wŏllam pulgyodo hyŏbho e kyŏngnyŏ chŏnmun," September 1, 1963.

³⁰ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Wŏllam sungyoja rŭl wihan kido pŏbho," September 1, 1963.

4. We are certain that the Vietnamese Buddhists' holy war is a democratic struggle.
5. The United States' government should certainly help in Vietnam's crisis with every possible diplomatic measure.
6. Until the Vietnamese Buddhists' holy war in the spirit of martyrdom is accomplished, The Korean Buddhist community will continue to pray before the Buddha for its success.³¹

These demands and the previous statements by Executive Order leadership reveal the ways Korean Buddhists began to envision their bonds with Vietnamese Buddhists. In the Buddhist Crisis of 1963, Korean Buddhist leaders, youths, and reporters witnessed the real threats to modern Buddhism that demanded action. They recognized that the Vietnamese Buddhist struggle transcended religious and geographic boundaries, uniting communities under universal values like religious freedom, democracy, and peace. From 1963 forward, the Buddhist conflicts in Vietnam brought Korean Buddhist thought leaders closer to international Buddhist leaders over a common struggle, and also provided a stage for them to voice their concerns for their own political struggles at home.

By the end of the summer of 1963, it was clear that the Buddhist-led campaign against the Diem government was succeeding.³² Finally, in November the Diem regime was brought down in a coup and Diem was assassinated. Robert Topmiller writes that the Buddhists' "impressive victory" established them as "a potent political force and the only significant non-Communist opposition group in South Vietnam from 1963 to 1966. Their message of nationalism, peace and neutralism, moreover, carried so much weight that for a short time they gained the ability to bring down governments, veto appointments to high office and call thousands of followers into the streets."³³ To this point, however, Vietnamese Buddhists lacked a

³¹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Pulgyo ch'öngnyöŋ hoe Wöllam sat'ae e söngmyöng," September 1, 1963.

³² Roberts (1965), 247.

³³ Topmiller (2002), 4.

unified political organization. The Unified Buddhist Church was established under the leadership of Thich Tam Chau (1921-2015) and Thich Tri Quang (1940-), the two most influential Buddhist leaders over the following years of the conflict.³⁴ Upon their success in toppling the Diem regime, Chau sent a thank you letter to Korean Buddhists, thanking them for their support.³⁵

The Buddhists' success, however, was short-lived. A succession of short-term presidents and coups followed over the next few years, each having their own conflicts with Buddhist leadership. Increasing U.S. involvement in South Vietnamese politics created further tensions. And, at the top of Buddhist leadership, Chau and Quang had a "personal rivalry" over the proper direction of their political movement.³⁶ In 1964, the religious dimensions of the political conflicts once again came to the forefront. The Uprisings of 1964, characterized by violence and rioting in cities and Buddhist-Catholic tensions, were a sign to observers of South Vietnamese society breaking down. The new president, Nguyen Khanh (1927-2013), refused to interject as not to make the same mistakes Diem did a year earlier.³⁷ For Vietnamese Buddhist leadership, especially Tri Quang, Catholicism was a symbol of French colonialism, with which he also associated United States influence. Quang demanded Khanh remove all Catholic chaplains from the military and establish a Buddhist chaplaincy, which Khanh agreed to.³⁸ Khanh's refusal to interject in Buddhist-Catholic tensions and his capitulation to Quang's demands proved Buddhists' burgeoning political capital, which the U.S. and Catholic leadership resented.³⁹

The Korean Buddhist community, however, stood by Vietnamese Buddhists. The *Pulgyo sinmun* reported that Buddhists have been misrepresented by the foreign media and Catholics are

³⁴ Topmiller (2002), 7.

³⁵ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Wöllam pulgyodo tasi ch'ajün chayü Han'guk pulgyodo e kamsa p'yönji," December 1, 1963.

³⁶ Topmiller (2002), 8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

³⁸ McAllister (2007), 759; Moyar (2004), 755.

³⁹ Topmiller (2002), 24-25.

continuing to persecute them. In an interview with a Vietnamese Buddhist Leader, monk Domū Chak’ū, an article claims that, if Catholics continue to be powerful in South Vietnam, “there is no hope for recovering free Vietnam.” It is also explained that the United States are “Christian people,” “whose attitude reminds them of French rule.” The article tells of monks being robbed, having their clothes stolen, left out in the heat with bugs and animals because they have no place to go. “The majority of Vietnam’s Buddhists want religious freedom, for the government to quickly become a democratic system, and pray for all Vietnamese people to be united in peace.”⁴⁰ However, the Catholic military government was continuing to persecute Buddhists because they are protesting for a civilian government. The South Vietnamese Buddhist Executive order thus closed its doors and stopped all contact with outsiders.⁴¹

Early 1965 saw the first deployment of South Korean combatant troops to Vietnam. Temples across Korea held prayers for the departing soldiers. The Chogye Order hosted large-scale farewell events, presenting protection amulets (*hosinbul*) to soldiers.⁴² For Korean Buddhist leadership, it was not only a national war, but a war for the sake of Buddhism. 1965 was also a year of relative peace among Buddhist activists in South Vietnam. Relations with Americans became positive as Buddhists spoke more openly against communism and the Vietcong.⁴³ Thich Tam Chau spoke in March, calling for peace, “noninterference from foreign countries” and “the communists and Vietcong to retreat north.”⁴⁴ Through 1965, the Buddhist struggle in Vietnam was no longer documented in the *Pulgyo sinmun* through secondhand accounts; reports from Korean soldiers in Vietnam, communication with Buddhist leadership in

⁴⁰ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Chayu Wöllam ūi silsang ūl salp’inda,” November 15, 1964.

⁴¹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Wöllam pulgyo ch’ongmuwōn chōngbu e hangūi,” December 6, 1964.

⁴² *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Wöllam p’agyōn hwansong chōnguk sindohoe sō,” February 14, 1965; “Hosinbul chōnansik,” February 21, 1965; “Wöllam p’agyōn hosinbul,” February 28, 1965.

⁴³ McAllister (2007), 775.

⁴⁴ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “P’yōnghwa undong chōngae,” March 14, 1965.

Vietnam, and Vietnamese Buddhist leaders visiting Korea became increasingly common. Concurrently, the *Pulgyo sinmun* was distributed among Buddhist Korean soldiers in Vietnam, helping them learn about their fellow Buddhists.⁴⁵ Though Korean Buddhist leaders reiterated Vietnamese Buddhists' calls for peace and freedom, they believed the situation had gotten so bad that these ideals were unachievable without the use of military force.

The first reports from a Buddhist Korean soldier in the war came from an An Pyŏng-sik. He discusses spending time with Vietnamese Buddhist monks and laymen, going to temples, and celebrating the Buddha's birthday. From his experiences he concludes "we get the feeling that the Buddhists here are not free," bringing further urgency to the war as a means to give freedom to Buddhists. He notes that Vietnamese monks are "completely different" from Korean monks, wearing yellow robes, having no paintings on the walls of temples, and mainly worshipping Sakyamuni, Avalokitesvara and Ksitgarbha buddhas. Nonetheless, they were very kind to the Korean soldiers.⁴⁶ An also notes, "when we speak of Buddhism flourishing in Korea, the cold gaze that Vietnamese usually give to Westerners goes away and we become close to one another."⁴⁷ From the early stages of Korea's participation in the war, the religious dimension was clear to the soldiers. Shared Buddhist heritage allowed Korean and Vietnamese to bond in ways Americans could not. It was constantly emphasized that Buddhism is everything to Vietnamese people.

The first time a Vietnamese monk visited Korea during the war was in May 1965 to "strengthen the bond between Korean and Vietnamese Buddhists." Monk Thich Pam Tri (n.d.)

⁴⁵ An Pyŏng-sik "Wŏllam t'ongsin," *Pulgyo sinmun*, June 6, 1965; An Pyŏng-sik, "Ttaihan choahanŭn Wollamin," *Pulgyo sinmun*, September 12, 1965. In reports from soldiers, they are thankful for the newspaper helping them learn about Buddhism within and outside of Vietnam.

⁴⁶ An Pyŏng-sik "Wŏllam t'ongsin," *Pulgyo sinmun*, June 6, 1965.

⁴⁷ An Pyŏng-sik, "Ttaihan choahanŭn Wollamin," *Pulgyo sinmun*, September 12, 1965.

discussed the hardships of Vietnamese Buddhists such as terrorist acts by Vietcong, including the destruction of temples.⁴⁸ However, the intimate relationship between Vietnamese and Korean Buddhist leaders truly began when Thich Tam Chau visited Korea in November of 1965. His visit was part of a wider tour of East Asian countries, namely Japan and Taiwan, to promote a “World Buddhist Church” organization as well as a “World Buddhist Youth Conference” in Saigon the following year. His visit included tours of the famous Buddhist temples Haein-sa and Pulguk-sa (佛國寺). Though Thich Pam Tri had visited earlier in the year, Chau’s visit garnered exponentially more attention. As opposed to Chau’s visits to Japan and Taiwan, however, his visit to Korea carried greater significance as his South Vietnam was now allied with South Korea in his homeland’s civil war. His visit included a “Joint Korean-Vietnamese Ceremony for the War Dead” in which Chau gave “thanks to the Korean Buddhist [soldiers] who died for the sake of protecting freedom.”⁴⁹ For Korean observers, he represented the humanity of the Vietnamese Buddhist struggle. He marveled at his gift of Buddhist sutras in *han’gŭl*, Korean rice cake-making, and Korean arts as he toured the country.⁵⁰

But his message of unity, emphasizing the global struggle for Buddhist freedom, stirred urgency among Korean Buddhists. Responding to Chau’s visit, a Hwang San-dŏk penned an editorial in the *Pulgyo sinmun* laying out his take on the Korean-Vietnamese Buddhist relationship. For Hwang, Korea and Vietnam had many similarities. Both countries were split between North and South, oppression and freedom, and were heavily influenced by the United States. Both countries developed under Chinese influence, practicing Mahayana Buddhism. Both countries were colonized. He compares past South Korean president Syngman Rhee with

⁴⁸ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Wŏllam pulgyodo nŭn malhanda,” May 9, 1965.

⁴⁹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Han Wŏl haptong wiryŏngjae,” November 28, 1965.

⁵⁰ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Chaŭisik kanghan Wŏllam sŭng,” November 28, 1965.

recently deposed Diem. They were both “dictators,” and both overthrown by student demonstrations; “just like our young soldiers rose up to establish a new political regime (Third Republic of Park Chung Hee), Vietnam’s soldiers are desperately trying to build a people’s regime.” “Because of all these similarities, how can we not feel as if we are brothers?” The Buddhist communities of each nation were facing this similar situation, but for Hwang, Vietnamese Buddhists were dealing with it much more appropriately. He opines that “Korean Buddhism is indifferent to politics” while Vietnamese Buddhist are active politically, struggling for survival; he credits Buddhists for bringing down the Diem regime. He accounts for these differences with historical evidence. He notes, “while our [Korean] Buddhism has reacted to foreign control in emergency situations, we have had an aloof attitude toward domestic political struggles.” His example is that during the Chosŏn dynasty, monks did fight in the Imjin War, an international struggle, but did not resist the anti-Buddhist policies of the government. “Not putting up resistance against an improper regime or improper governance...can be said to be the character of our Buddhism.” Thus he concludes that Korean Buddhists need to develop a better relationship with Vietnamese Buddhists and learn from each other.⁵¹

To complete Chau’s visit, he, as representative of the Unified Vietnamese Buddhist Church, and leaders from the Chogye Order wrote a joint statement, committing to working together towards truth, hope, happiness, and freedom in the name of Buddhism.⁵² It was the first official document jointly signed by the largest Buddhist organizations of each country. It laid the foundation for their deepening relationship throughout the war years. It also preceded the next and final Buddhist Crisis in South Vietnam by only a few months.

⁵¹ Hwang San-dŏk, “Han Wŏl pulgyo ũi kwaje,” *Pulgyo sinmun*, November 28, 1965.

⁵² *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Han Wŏl kongdong sŏngmyŏng,” November 28, 1965.

Since the Buddhist Crisis of 1963, relations between Buddhist leadership, the South Vietnamese government, and the United States government had not improved significantly. The latter two increasingly saw Buddhists as a problem, and while almost all Buddhist organizations were anti-war, promoted neutrality, and demanded democratic governance, different factions disagreed with how to achieve this. After three years, and with none of their aims achieved, some leaders turned to more aggressive measures. It was in 1966 that Thich Tam Chau's counterpart Thich Tri Quang became well-known to the South Vietnamese government, U.S. government, and the world, and he and Chau's split fractured the United Vietnamese Buddhist Church beyond repair. In March 1966, Quang became increasingly outspoken against President Nguyen Cao Ky (1930-2011), leading protests demanding final transition to democratic governance that almost brought Ky down.⁵³ Dubbed the "Struggle Movement," Quang and his supporters in central Vietnam became increasingly anti-American and called Ky an American puppet. On the other side, Chau decried anti-American sentiment, supported Ky, and did not support the Struggle Movement. This turned many against him, leading to his temporarily leaving the country for safety.⁵⁴

In the Spring of 1966, amid growing, and occasionally violent, protests from the Struggle Movement in Da Nang, the South Vietnamese military's I Corps split from their command and supported the Buddhists. The Ky government and United States military saw this as Buddhists fomenting the possible downfall of all South Vietnam. They also accused the Buddhists and I Corps of being infiltrated by communists. Thus, they responded with force, killing over one hundred protesters. The South Vietnamese and United States military succeeded in pacifying Da

⁵³ Topmiller (2002), 38-39.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 48, 57.

Nang and Hue, the two hotspots of Buddhist protest. For the remaining war years, Buddhists would never recover such mass organizational strength.⁵⁵

In scholarship, much has been made of the political motivations on each side of the 1966 Buddhist Crisis. The question of whether Thich Tri Quang was allied with communists or not has perplexed and divided government agents, scholars, and reporters since the mid-1960's. Robert Topmiller, in the most extensive work on the topic, presents Quang and his Struggle Movement as devoted to neutralism and peace, representing the majority view of the Vietnamese population. Topmiller debunks any claim that they were communist or militaristic.⁵⁶ Mark Moyar vehemently criticizes Topmiller's argument and claims Quang was working with communists and his talk of peace was a façade. Moyar sees the results of the 1966 Buddhist Crisis as freeing the government from "harmful Buddhist pressures" and making "possible a greater degree of national cohesion in South Vietnam from then onwards."⁵⁷

James McAllister takes a different tack in emphasizing the religious dimension of Quang and his movement. He argues that Quang "viewed everything in South Vietnam through the prism of a fundamental religious conflict between Buddhism and Catholicism."⁵⁸ Pak Kyum P'yo then makes the important point that the Buddhist issue and the Vietnam War as a whole should not simply be judged from a United States' and/or Cold War perspective.

Whether or not some Communists participated in the Buddhist uprising, or whether some Buddhists supported the Communist Party, is not a key factor that defines the nature of the Buddhist uprising. The Buddhist uprising was not formed in the ideology of the Cold War but was the result of the infringement of the basic rights of religious freedom.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Ibid, 130-147.

⁵⁶ Ibid, x, 4-5.

⁵⁷ Moyar (2004), 784.

⁵⁸ McAllister (2007), 755-756.

⁵⁹ Pak Kyum Pyo (2010), 588.

Indeed, this is a remarkably similar position to that of contemporaneous Korean Buddhist leaders, reporters, and soldiers viewing the events of 1966. Though communism blanketed many discussions in South Korea of the Vietnam War, the Buddhist community recognized how religious issues can usurp political ones. The rivalry between Quang and Chau did not stop Korean writers from supporting both men. Quang was not a radical political activist, but a humble man who represented the best of Buddhist monasticism. South Vietnam was worth protecting for the sake of Buddhist and religious freedom alone, and on those issues, Korean Buddhists recognized their commonality with their Vietnamese brothers.

The closest comparative point of reference is Thai Buddhist leadership's response to the Buddhist Crises in Vietnam. Thailand had a similar role to South Korea in the Vietnam War, sending troops to support the United States and South Vietnam. Though the number of Thai troops that served in Vietnam was much smaller (about 40,000), their role as Buddhist interlocutors was quite similar. The United States mainly turned to Thai leadership as their experts on Buddhism. The Thai foreign minister Thanat Khoman (1914-2016) put together a delegation of Buddhist and political leaders that closely followed American perceptions of the Vietnamese Buddhist political movements. Whereas Korean Buddhist leadership asserted the anti-communist and pro-peace credentials of figures like Quang and Chau, Thanat, at the White House in 1964, told U.S. leadership the "so-called Buddhist movement" of South Vietnam was "heavily political and was indeed infiltrated by Communists to some degree."⁶⁰ So, with U.S. support, Thanat and his delegation of Buddhist leaders met with Quang and Chau, as well as Thich Thien Minh (1922-1978), to urge moderation and convince them to cease anti-government

⁶⁰ Ford (2017), 200.

activities.⁶¹ The U.S. and Thai leadership's plan to pacify Buddhist resistance in Vietnam was futile.⁶²

The Korean Buddhist community seemed to pick up on the insufficient and improper actions of U.S. leadership. In March 1966, the *Pulgyo sinmun* began to report on the developing Buddhist Crisis in Vietnam. A discussion with a Vietnamese monk named Kuen Chan Thi revealed that the Ky government was silencing Buddhists for demanding civilian rulership.⁶³ An April article, entitled "Vietnamese Buddhists and the United States: U.S.'s Prejudice Sows Discord" blamed the problems on the United States. The author defended the Vietnamese Buddhist community and explained the meaning behind their demonstrations against the military government: peace and demands for civilian rulership. The author argued Buddhists are not communists and the United States should be more sensitive to their distrust of "white people" due to French colonialism. Though the Vietnamese Buddhists' problems with their military government is an immediate issue, the root of the problem is the United States' lack of understanding and respect for Buddhists.⁶⁴ The author takes a notably anti-American stance considering the political situation in South Korea at the time. Buddhist freedom, however, was clearly more important than domestic politics.

A group of eight members of a Vietnamese Buddhist youth group visited Korea in April, meeting with executives of the Chogye Order. They thanked Korea for sending troops and emphasized that the war is not only about fighting communism but for protecting religious freedom.⁶⁵ Around the same time, Thich Tri Quang's name hit the presses. Though he has a

⁶¹ Ibid, 212.

⁶² Ibid, 220.

⁶³ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Pulgyodo ūi ūijung ūn," March 27, 1966.

⁶⁴ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Wöllam pulgyodo wa miguk," April 17, 1966.

⁶⁵ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Ch'insönbanghan," May 1, 1966.

major part of the Buddhists protests in 1963, he had remained relatively unknown to the international community. However, as noted above, he was well-known by South Vietnamese and U.S. leadership who saw him as a controversial figure and agitator. The *Pulgyo sinmun* introduced him for the first time as a traditional monk, leading an admirable, balanced life between monasticism and public leadership. It is noted that Quang doesn't drink alcohol, eat meat, or smoke cigarettes like most other Vietnamese monks, significant qualities to mainstream Korean monks who value these basic precepts. His day is one-third Zen practice, one-third social activities, and one-third repentance. But his time in social activities is characterized as anti-communist, and anti-military government, but not anti-American. And it's noted, "the strong administrative morals of Vietnamese Buddhists should suggest a lot to Korean Buddhists."⁶⁶ *Time* magazine featured Thich Tri Quang as the cover story on April 22, 1966. By late May, the *Pulgyo sinmun* took the Time Magazine feature and interpreted it for readers, calling Quang a "mysterious hero" who "rejects foreign interference" and takes "democratic nationhood as his ideal."⁶⁷

As the situation in Vietnam deteriorated through the summer, reports came in of temples being destroyed and soldiers occupying the remains, contrasted with "still brave, calm monks" who know they must support the people.⁶⁸ Reports of hunger strikes and protests continued⁶⁹ as Quang and his Struggle Movement were slowly stamped out by the South Vietnamese and United States' militaries. Quang receded into the fringes of South Vietnamese politics. Other leaders such as Thich Nhat Hanh (1926-2022) fled the country and became the main

⁶⁶ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "I tal ũi inmul T'ik T'uri K'wang sūnim," May 1, 1966.

⁶⁷ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Kyōgdong ũi Wōllam kwa sinbi ũi chuyōk 'K'wang' sūnim," May 22, 1966; "Kyōgdong ũi Wōllam kwa sinbi ũi chuyōk 'K'wang' sūnim," June 5, 1966.

⁶⁸ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Piet'ūnam t'ongsin," July 24, 1966.

⁶⁹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Wōllam chōngjōng tasi kinjang," September 11, 1966.

international representatives of the Unified Buddhist Church, bringing attention to horrors of the Vietnam War and spreading a message of peace and self-determination.⁷⁰ Thich Tam Chau emerged as the voice of South Vietnamese Buddhists able to bridge the domestic and international spheres seemingly because he did not take a decidedly anti-war or anti-American stance; thus, the South Vietnamese and United States governments did not see him as much of a threat.

In October 1966, Executive Head of the Chogye Order Kyōngsan traveled to South Vietnam to assess the situation for Buddhists after a grueling spring and summer. In his speech on October 8th, at the first of many future Korean-Vietnamese Joint Dharma Services⁷¹, Kyōngsan was highly complementary of the Buddhist efforts in Vietnam. He remarked that the anti-regime protests by the Buddhist community in Vietnam “are remembered deep in our hearts...they shined a light on Buddhism for the whole world to see.”⁷² For him, Koreans and Vietnamese have been put in the same fate with their country split, fighting a war of communism and freedom, with foreign forces on their land. Kyōngsan then gave his definition of freedom and equality from a Buddhist perspective:

We Buddhists’ strongest belief is freedom...a freedom between one’s life and one’s death, to live one’s everyday life with unobstructed freedom. We Buddhists want the marvelous freedom to independently participate in this social order.

The Avatamsaka Sutra (*Hwaōm-gyōng* 華嚴經) says: ‘The mind, the Buddha, and all the living—there is no difference between the three’... This means the equality of all.⁷³

From late 1966 onward, a shift of focus towards Buddhist Korean soldiers and their relationship with Buddhism on the ground in Vietnam, including the necessity of Buddhist

⁷⁰ Topmiller (2002), 150.

⁷¹ Yi I Yong (1986), 92

⁷² *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Segye p’yōnghwa wa pulgyodo,” December 11, 1966.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

chaplains, while also maintaining a relationship with Vietnamese Buddhist leadership under Chau. Buddhist Korean soldiers expressed their religious identity by working with local monks, rebuilding temples, and helping civilians in Vietnam. Their activities were supplemented by groups at home, donating rice⁷⁴ and pledging economic support⁷⁵ to Vietnamese Buddhists. The soldiers' mix of "military force" (*muryŏk*) and "pacification work" (*sŏnmu kongjak*) made them "utterly feared" by the Vietcong but "solemnly trusted" by local residents.⁷⁶ In November 1966, Korean soldiers and civilian contractors broke ground on the first of an eventually four Korean temples in Vietnam, using only imported materials from Korea.⁷⁷ The organizer, General Yi, saw his Buddhist soldiers going to Vietnamese temples to do Zen practice and study with monks. Thus, he found it necessary to have a Korean temple, but the only thing missing was Korean Buddhist chaplains whom he expected would be deployed in the coming year. Building temples, both Korean and Vietnamese, and installing temple bells and Buddha statues increased in 1967 and became a common activity for Buddhist Korean soldiers over the war years.

In the Winter and Spring of 1968, final reports of Thich Tri Quang's fate reached Korea. After further denying his ties to the Vietcong,⁷⁸ Quang was imprisoned in March.⁷⁹ That summer, Thich Minh Chau (n.d.), President of Banhan University in South Vietnam visited Dongguk University and the Chogye Order headquarters in Korea. Following fellow Vietnamese Buddhists who had visited before him, Chau made quite the positive impression on both Buddhist leaders and students, further cementing the higher Buddhist significance of the Vietnam War and the worldwide struggle for religious freedom. In his speeches Chau

⁷⁴ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Wŏllam e paengmi 100 p'al kijŭng," November 20, 1966.

⁷⁵ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Han Wŏl pulgyo hyŏbjojŭnggang," January 15, 1967.

⁷⁶ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Wŏllam chŏnsŏn ũi migŏ," October 16, 1966.

⁷⁷ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Nat'ŭrang e Han'guk sach'al," December 4, 1966.

⁷⁸ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Wŏllam 'K'wang' sŭng pet'ŭk'ong e hyŏbjo tanhohi kŏbu," February 11, 1968.

⁷⁹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Wŏllam 'K'wang' sŭng chaegusok," March 24, 1968.

emphasized that “Buddhism is the religion of freedom,” and, appealing to his audience, “Korea is the nation of smiles.⁸⁰ Furthermore, he said “Buddhism is a religion that liberates humanity’s mind from imprisonment; it is never a religion that subjugates anyone.”⁸¹ His demeanor influenced young students and the success of his Banhan University showed Dongguk University, a fellow Buddhist university, the power of Buddhist higher education. A *Pulgyo sinmun* article remarked, “we can learn a lot and receive a lot of materials from this university and this university’s president” while highlighting how Banhan was founded in the midst of war even with financial difficulties. Chao emphasized that university students and education are even more important during war to foster correct mentality of freedom and humanism.⁸²

Back in Vietnam, however, the intimate relationship between Korean and Vietnamese Buddhists lead to at least two examples of what I’d call ‘proto-chaplains’ in the South Korean forces. Beginning in 1967, two soldiers with the rank of major began carrying out activities in Vietnam that were remarkably similar to those of later, official Buddhist chaplains. A Major Ryu, previously a monk in Kyōnggi-do before being deployed to Vietnam as a soldier, worked with Vietnamese monks at a Vietnamese temple named Pori-sa to “strengthen relations.” Ryu, along with Buddhist Korean soldiers, did a plethora of “religious activities to strengthen relations” including donation drives, hospital visits, dharma services, and events at army headquarters.⁸³ Twice a month, General Yi, Ryu’s commanding officer, allowed him to put on monk’s robes and practice among Vietnamese monks.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Han Wōl pulgyo ch’insōn taebōbhoe,” June 30, 1968.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Panhan Taehak ch’ongjang ch’yau paksa rül ponaego,” June 30, 1968.

⁸³ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Wōllam t’ongsin,” March 26, 1967.

⁸⁴ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Chōn chuwōl Han’guk kun,” July 16, 1967.

Another major named Pak Hong-su, a former monk, and soldier since at least 1964,⁸⁵ began working with Vietnamese Buddhists in 1967. Pak had always kept the monk's precepts even while in the military, not drinking, smoking, or "giving in to lust," and being vegetarian to the point of not even eating fish broth.⁸⁶ While waiting for the dispatch of official Buddhist chaplains, Pak built a temple in Vietnam called Ch'önsöng-sa (天城寺) "to protect the freedom of faith of two thousand Buddhist soldiers and provide them with a place of worship," funding its construction by "begging for alms" (*t'akbal*).⁸⁷ From 1968, Pak often stayed at Pulgwang-sa, the recently completed Korean temple in Vietnam.⁸⁸ By November of that year, the *Pulgyo sinmun* referred to Pak as the abbot of Pulgwang-sa and a "*kunsöng*," or "soldier-monk," the same term occasionally used for future Buddhist chaplains. Though his credentials as a monk are not documented, he became the *de facto* leader of Korean Buddhism in Vietnam, living and working with Vietnamese monks at Pulgwang-sa.⁸⁹ In his conversations with Vietnamese monks, Pak reflected on the different perspectives of Vietnamese and Korean monks on social participation. In an article sent to the *Pulgyo sinmun*, Pak responded to hearing then National Assemblyman and Presbyterian Kim Yong-ki (1909-1988) making disparaging remarks towards Buddhism. He shared the story with his befriended Vietnamese monks, upon which he was "ashamed and embarrassed" that Korean Buddhist leadership had no response to Kim's comments. Finally he answered, "there are many great monks [in Korea] but they don't get into disputes over the secular world." This exchange led Park to reflect on the political activities of Vietnamese monks, whose power was respected and for them, "a solid spiritual foundation is more important than

⁸⁵ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "T'akbal hanün hyönyök yukkun taewi," February 1, 1964

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Sasöl," September 17, 1967.

⁸⁸ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Pak Hong-su soryöng i ponaeon Wöllam sosik," September 8, 1968.

⁸⁹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Pak Hong-su soryöng i ponaeon Wöllam t'ongsin," November 10, 1968.

even their home or food.” This inspired Pak to implore the *Pulgyo sinmun*, on behalf of himself, to tell Assemblyman Kim that he is “disgraceful to Korea.”⁹⁰

Indeed, conflict over the dispatch of the Buddhist chaplaincy was brewing in the National Assembly. Some, criticizing Vietnamese Buddhists in their ongoing rivalry with Vietnamese Catholics, demanded the chaplaincy be delayed.⁹¹ Assemblymen sympathetic to the Buddhist cause came to the defense of the Buddhist chaplaincy. Han Kŏn-su (1921-1994), referencing the efforts Korean Buddhist soldiers and leadership had been making to support Vietnamese Buddhists, stated “the Vietnamese people” who are “80% Buddhist,” “want Buddhist chaplains dispatched in the Korean army.” The conflict between Buddhist and Catholics was all the more reason to have chaplains as they would foster more cooperation. For Han, it was an issue of religious freedom.⁹² For Assemblyman Yi Pyŏng-chu (1912-1996), the importance of the Buddhist chaplaincy also lied in their role as representatives of Korean Buddhism as a whole. Though Yi criticizes some Vietnamese monks for eating meat and standing by as followers committed violence during the war, Yi sees Vietnamese Buddhists in a positive light. He says monks are more powerful than local governments and have “absolute power” in a country where there is “almost no village without a temple.” He was very impressed at how monks actively participate in “charitable works” like children’s education and help run orphanages. He laments that Korean temples can’t do such charitable works because of their “economic condition,” but he is “very envious” of Vietnamese: “I think, isn’t this something Korean Buddhists should learn?” Yi’s conclusion is that “Korean Buddhists need to send more support and have more

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Hwang (2008), 223.

⁹² Ibid, 223.

exchange with Vietnamese Buddhists” and learn from Vietnamese Buddhists. The best way to achieve this was through Buddhist chaplains.⁹³

Korean Chaplains’ Dispatch: The Culmination of the Korean-Vietnamese Buddhist Relationship

As debates in the National Assembly went on, candidates for the Buddhist chaplaincy had been in training since 1965 while proto-chaplains worked in Vietnam and soldiers and Buddhist leadership engaged with Vietnamese Buddhists. Chaplains in the South Vietnamese military were also making an impression on them through their work in promoting the proper Buddha Dharma, boosting morale, and supporting civilians in the war.⁹⁴ By late 1968, the dispatch of chaplains was assured. Fittingly, just a few months before their departure to Vietnam, the newly minted chaplains got their blessing from Thich Tam Chau. Chau was visiting Seoul in September 1968 for the WFB conference when he got news of the chaplaincy training program. After once again leaving positive impressions on the Korean Buddhist community for his “global religious leadership” and emphasis on “social participation,”⁹⁵ Chau traveled to Kwangju, Chōlla Province to visit the chaplains’ training school.⁹⁶ He encouraged the cadets and asserted their significance to each country’s Buddhist community.⁹⁷

The first Buddhist chaplains were finally dispatched on December 30th, 1968, and sixteen chaplains served over the remaining four years of the war. Five chaplains, Kwōn Ki-jong, Kwōn

⁹³ Yi Pyōng-ju “Wōllam pulgyo ūi insang,” *Pulgyo sinmun*, May 18, 1969.

⁹⁴ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Wōllam ūi pulgyo sōnwi sagun,” April 9, 1967.

⁹⁵ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Han’guk ūl pangmunhan Wōllam Ch’au sūnim,” December 1, 1968.

⁹⁶ Kwōn Oh-hyōn (2012), 122.

⁹⁷ Hwang (2008), pp 232.

Oh-hyŏn, Kim Pong-sik, Chang Man-su, and Yi Chi-haeng traveled down to Pusan and boarded a 28,000-ton American battleship. After a four-day journey, changing from their winter uniforms to their summer forms, they arrived in Nha Trang on January 3rd. Almost fifty years later, Kwŏn Oh-hyŏn recalled, “It was strange. It was the first time I felt how big the world is.”⁹⁸ Kwŏn explained soon after his return to Korea in 1971 the details of his deployment:

D-Day, January 1st, 1969. It was so cold at Pusan’s third wharf the water seemed like it would completely freeze over. As the farewell ceremony ended, the boat horn sounded for our departure. We disembarked at Nha Trang in Vietnam’s central region of Balletho(?); the sounds of guns and the rain falling through the fog-wrapped harbor were as if there was a ferocious battle nearby. My first steps onto Vietnamese soil were not at all unfamiliar. I thought it looked familiar because of the news I had read. Palm trees and the procession of motorcycles were wonderful. The Paekma (白馬) Company’s location was twenty kilometers from Nha Trang down a mountainous region... As soon as I arrived at the company headquarters I received training. For two days and one night of realistic ambush training, I felt the fear and danger of ambush operations and for the first time, I felt the horrors of war in my skin.⁹⁹

The department of the military chaplaincy would specifically say that the mission of the Buddhist chaplains was different and more difficult than that of Protestant and Catholic chaplains.¹⁰⁰ Buddhist chaplains placed great importance on “activities for civilians (*taemin hwaltong*), working with Buddhist soldiers to restore temples and shrines damaged by war and create “relief shelters” (*wianch’ŏ*) for Buddhist who lost their temples. Even though there were more Christian chaplains, the “Buddhist environment” and “Buddhist mental and spiritual life” of Vietnam made the Buddhist chaplain’s activities especially important.¹⁰¹ The official mission statement for the Buddhist chaplaincy includes “continually develop harmony and friendship

⁹⁸ Kwŏn Oh-hyŏn (2012), 129.

⁹⁹ Kwŏn Oh-hyŏn, “Ch’angjo ūi poram,” *Pŏmnyun*, February 1971.

¹⁰⁰ Hwang (2008), 235.

¹⁰¹ Yi I Yong (1986), 88-89.

with the local religious groups,” “improve civilian engagement methods,” “maintain friendship and service in civilian relationships,” and “acquire valuable information to the Korean forces through ceaseless support and contact [with locals].”¹⁰² Chaplains regularly visited Vietnamese temples, orphanages, and hospitals. They had counseling sessions at temples for Vietnamese and events for seniors.¹⁰³

Each chaplain was deployed to a different army unit in different parts of South Vietnam. Kwōn Ki-jong was placed at the military headquarters Saigon, where there were no temples yet built for Koreans. So, he used local temples, mainly the most famous one in Saigon named Kuk-sa (國寺), and a Chinese temple named Manbul-sa (萬佛寺), and helped start the Korean-Vietnamese Joint Dharma Services.¹⁰⁴ These would become a mainstay of the relationship between Korean and Vietnamese Buddhists throughout the war years. One major site of these Dharma Services was Pulgwang-sa, where they were held on the first and fifteenth of every month.¹⁰⁵ According to an official history of the Buddhist chaplaincy, these services “spread the original word of the Buddha of freedom and peace” and “provided the foundation for Korean-Vietnamese cooperation.”¹⁰⁶ At these services, monks, chaplains, soldiers, and civilians from each country participated in basic Buddhist prayers and rituals such as *yebul* chanting, chant to Sakyamuni Buddha (*sōkgamonibul chōnggŭn*), the 108 Prostrations of Repentance (*paekp’al ch’amhoe*), and sitting meditation (*chwasōn*).¹⁰⁷ They also hosted large events such as the Buddha’s birthday celebration and ceremonies honoring the fallen soldiers from each military.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² Ibid, 90.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 94.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 92.

¹⁰⁵ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Yi Chi-haeng kunsŭng Wōllam sō Wōllamō kyoyuk taehak suryo,” May 4, 1969.

¹⁰⁶ Yi I Yong (1986), 93.

¹⁰⁷ Mugak, “Haewae t’ongsin,” *Pulgyo sinmun*, January 31, 1971.

¹⁰⁸ Yi I Yong (1986), 93.

Korean-Vietnamese Joint Dharma Services became increasingly common and were often attended by visiting Korean Buddhist leaders. Even as the war began to wind down beginning in 1972, Joint Dharma Services remained frequent.¹⁰⁹ Through these services, chaplains felt a “special sense of comradeship and faith between two peoples beyond nationality.”¹¹⁰

Other chaplains, like Kwŏn Oh-hyŏn and Yi Chi-haeng, were put with units on the front lines. Both Kwŏn and Yi learned Vietnamese for an additional 3 months (all Buddhist chaplains took a required three months of classes during training)¹¹¹ and got an increase in pay for learning the language. Yi recalled “at the time, the Vietnamese were not living well, just like Korea of the 1950’s” so they helped provide food, medicine, and education at temples.¹¹²

Kwŏn Oh-hyŏn underwent three days of “ambush combat” training and within two weeks of his arrival, he was with a platoon doing ambush operations. On the night of January 13th, his platoon engaged with Vietcong, trading gunfire through “the scorching sounds of exploding claymores and grenades.” When the battle finally calmed, Kwŏn saw his platoon commander, second lieutenant Ch’oe, brutally killed by a grenade. Kwŏn recalled thinking, “Is war truly this horrible and merciless? All at once I became aware of all my fury (*punno*) and sadness I had never known before.”¹¹³ But this did not deter him from his work and only made him more motivated to help the Vietnamese people.

After his ambush training, Kwŏn was given orders to deal directly with Vietnamese soldiers, monks, and laypeople, and help found the second Korean Buddhist temple in Vietnam,

¹⁰⁹ Reported in *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Han Wŏl hapdong pŏbhoe sŏnghwang,” June 18, 1972; “Han Wŏl hapdong pŏbhoe,” October 22, 1972; “Han Wŏl hapdong pŏbhoe sŏnghwang,” January 1, 1973; Han Wŏl hapdong pŏbhoe sŏnghwang,” January 28, 1973; “Han Wŏl hapdong pŏbhoe,” February 11, 1973.

¹¹⁰ Yi I Yong (1986), 95.

¹¹¹ Kwŏn Oh-hyŏn (2012), 137.

¹¹² Hwang (2008), 239.

¹¹³ Kwŏn Oh-hyŏn, “Ch’angjo ūi poram,” *Pŏmnyun*, February 1971.

Paekma-sa.¹¹⁴ His first major project was to organize events for the commemoration of the Buddha's enlightenment (*sōngdojōl*) on January 25th. This involved his first meeting with Vietnamese monks, named Thich Hanh Hai and Thich Tūk Chō, which he describing as "like meeting old friends."¹¹⁵ The service for the Buddha's enlightenment holiday was his first time seeing a Vietnamese service. Though there was some unfamiliarity, he stated, "I knew their recitation of the *Heart Sutra*'s (*Panyasim-gyōng* 般若心經) three refuges were only different in pronunciation." When he went to give his service to Korean troops, Vietnamese were very surprised to see a Buddhist clergyman who worked exclusively with the military. Vietnamese chaplains lived a dual life as military chaplain and abbots of temples and were not stationed with military units exclusively. After the services, he went with monk Thich Tūk Chō to visit a military hospital and give gifts.¹¹⁶ Because of the success of the event, he was given a special mission by his commander to do more Vietnamese language education.

For Kwōn, a typical day in February 1970 included Vietnamese language study in the morning, visits to nearby temples in the afternoon, and doing rounds with his company doing character, or "believer understanding" (*sindo p'aak*), education.¹¹⁷ Kwōn particularly emphasized Korean-Vietnamese relations through Buddhist activities, such as engaging with soldiers in battle and visiting field hospitals. By March, he had finished his language education and was communicating directly with monks, translating for Korean commanders, and doing local funerals in Vietnamese. He worked in Ninh Hòa, Nha Trang, Cam Ranh, and Thới Hòa at temples with monks and laypeople, talking frequently with leaders of the United Vietnamese

¹¹⁴ Kwōn Oh-hyōn (2012), 129-130.

¹¹⁵ Kwōn Oh-hyōn, "Ch'angjo ūi poram," *Pōmnyun*, February 1971.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Buddhist Church “strengthening bonds.”¹¹⁸ He even helped run a Vietnamese kindergarten for a short time.



Kwōn Oh-hyōn stands with Vietnamese students.¹¹⁹

In my conversations with Kwōn over fifty years later, some of his best memories from his service were the relationships he developed with Vietnamese Buddhist monks, chaplains, and civilians. His numerous photo albums document the friendships he made with them, bonding during the horrors of war.¹²⁰ He organized Korean-Vietnamese Joint Dharma Services at Paekma-sa and Vietnamese temples. He fondly recalls fraternizing with Vietnamese monks, smoking cigarettes together, and becoming good friends.¹²¹ Even at the time, he recalled that the

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Courtesy of Kwōn Oh-hyōn.

¹²⁰ Based on my conversation with him on November 21, 2021.

¹²¹ Kwōn Oh-hyōn (2012), 139.

Vietnamese were “so loving” to him, and he thoroughly enjoyed the many conversations they had about culture and Buddhism.¹²²



Korean, Vietnamese, and American Buddhists pray at Paekma-sa.¹²³

Kwōn’s most significant experience related to civic outreach in Vietnam occurred in October 1971 in the southernmost area under his Paekma Company’s control. A monk and nine laypeople were killed at a temple called “Nōnsyōn-sa”¹²⁴ in Cam Ranh during early morning prayers. The attack was carried out by Vietcong wearing imitations of Korean troops’ uniforms, and Kwōn recalled that the Vietcong’s powerful propaganda machine blamed it on the Korean military. The incident was further exacerbated by the account of an old woman, who, while chanting with monks at the temple, said she saw suspicious Korean soldiers at the time of the

¹²² Kwōn Oh-hyōn, “Ch’angjo ūi poram,” *Pōmnyun*, February 1971.

¹²³ Courtesy of Kwōn Oh-hyōn.

¹²⁴ Transcription of Vietnamese in han’gŭl: 년선사. Original Vietnamese unknown.

killings.¹²⁵ The Paekma Company then investigated. Their battalion's records showed all soldiers were out on patrol, away from the temple, at the time of the killings. They then brought the old woman in to point out the suspects, and she confirmed it was none of them. However, it didn't stop locals from continuing to blame the deaths on Korean soldiers. Meanwhile, news of the attack reached Tri Quang in Saigon and he sent the news out to temples nationwide, sparking demonstrations against the Korean military. Kwŏn recalls, however, that fortunately Quang also told all temples not to act individually until his next orders were given. Because the more politically radical Quang took the lead in reporting this event, rather than his more moderate, and pro-Korean counterpart Thich Tham Chau, the situation was much more volatile. So Kwŏn often met with Cam Ranh United Buddhist Church chairman Thich T'in P'uk, who was loyal to Quang and "undoubtedly" believed Korean soldiers did it. But, according to Kwŏn, Thich T'in P'uk had control over local news, so Kwŏn kept at him. In one of their final meetings, Kwŏn took out a pen and paper, and wrote in Chinese characters "not to commit wrongs, but to do all that is good" (諸惡莫作 諸善奉行) and Thich T'in P'uk laughed and wrote "to keep one's thought pure, this is the teaching of all the Buddhas" (自淨其意 是諸佛教) finishing the line from the Verse of the Shared Morality of the Seven Buddhas (*Avavādapraṭimokṣa* 七佛通戒偈). Thanks to this camaraderie, Thich T'in P'uk began listening to Kwŏn as he explained the false testimony of the old woman and the lack of evidence. They then decided to have a joint funeral service for the five murdered monks.¹²⁶

It took to the end of the year, however, for tensions between Vietnamese Buddhists and the Korean military to truly ease. Two large joint precept ceremonies (*haptong sugyesik*) were

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

held in November and December, organized by Kwŏn to deepen ties between Koreans and Vietnamese. He made a point of treating the Vietnamese monks well and invited reporters from all the major newspapers to attend. He gave the Vietnamese monks a formal welcoming with the Korean army band, provided nice meals, and left plenty of time for building camaraderie. A leading Vietnamese monk, Chi-ŭm, spoke about the piety of Korean Buddhists and assured them that Vietnamese knew the truth of the incident in Cam Ranh.¹²⁷ The next morning, Kwŏn recalled, all the newspapers said the Nŏnsyŏn-sa incident was the Vietcong's fault and the image of the Korean military was restored.¹²⁸

For chaplains like Kwŏn, Vietnamese Buddhists were not simply people to be helped or saved; their common religiosity made life in a distant, war-torn country more familiar. The people left a lasting, positive impression on him; "To this day, I can still speak some Vietnamese so if I see a Vietnamese person, I always share greetings."¹²⁹ The welcoming atmosphere Vietnamese monks, chaplains, and civilians presented affirmed to the chaplains that their wish to be dispatched for years had not been in vain. The relationship that had developed between Korean and Vietnamese Buddhist leadership since 1963 made the chaplains' entrance into the war natural and effective.

Prior to the chaplains' dispatch, visiting Korean Buddhist leaders and occasionally Buddhist soldiers, such as the proto-chaplains, represented the Korean Buddhist community in meetings with Vietnamese and international Buddhist leadership in Vietnam. With the chaplains on the ground, they became the easy choice to fill this role. On June 28th, 1969 head of the Buddhist chaplains, Kwŏn Ki-jong, along with Kwŏn Oh-hyŏn, Chang Man-su, Yi Chi-haeng

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Kwŏn Oh-hyŏn (2012), 140-142.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

and a civilian contractor named Hong Sun-man, put on improvised monks' robes and represented Korean Buddhism at the WFB Conference in Saigon.¹³⁰ The conference was attended by 300 monks and Buddhist leaders from around the world as well as the president of South Vietnam.¹³¹ For the Korean Buddhist chaplains, who were young, inexperienced students of Buddhism, acting in a nebulous role between monk and layperson, the WFB conference opened their eyes to the diversity and vibrancy of world Buddhism. Kwŏn Ki-jong recalled that it was his "first shocking experience" in Vietnam.¹³² Juxtaposed with the horrors of war, the multiformity of world Buddhists uniting with common goals was truly significant.¹³³ Korean chaplains were not simply bringing something to Vietnam, they were bringing back knowledge of Vietnamese and world Buddhism.



Kwŏn Oh-hyŏn dons Korean monks' robes for the WFB conference in Saigon, 1969.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Kwŏn Oh-hyŏn (2012), 136.

¹³¹ Hwang (2008), 239-240.

¹³² Kwŏn Ki-jong. "Ch'ogi kunp'ogyo, Wŏllam esŏ ūi kunbŏpsa hwaltong (Early Military Propagation, [Buddhist] Chaplains' Activities in Vietnam)." *Kūmgang sinmun*. July 7, 2017

¹³³ Kwŏn Oh-hyŏn (2012), 136.

¹³⁴ Courtesy of Kwŏn Oh-hyŏn.

Following one of their stated goals, to “acquire valuable information to the Korean forces through ceaseless support and contact,” chaplains were able to have talks with Thich Tri Quang, the embattled Vietnamese Buddhist leader who had been in and out of house arrest since 1966. For this, they were sent special thanks by President Park Chung Hee.¹³⁵ Judging by the timeline of event, a 1971 *Pulgyo sinmun* article publishing an interview with Tri Quang may have been the evidence of the chaplain’s work. The interview was not done by a chaplain, but by the general secretary of the Korean National Buddhist Organization (*Chönsindohoe*) Pak Cho-il. The National Buddhist Organization had been working closely with chaplains and Buddhist soldiers in Vietnam to help support them and Vietnamese Buddhists. Pak and the organization had recently donated a copy of the Haein-sa Tripitika to the South Vietnam embassy and Korean military headquarters. These connections may have made Pak a logical, neutral interviewer. In the interview, Pak stands behind Tri Quang after he was previously accused of sympathizing with communists. Pak says Tri Quang is truly a nationalist leader. He quotes Quang as saying, “we cannot even think about Buddhist coexistence with, or toleration of, communism.”¹³⁶ Even in the later years of the war, when Tri Quang and some of the more radical Buddhists had little influence, the Korean Buddhist community was coming to their defense. By 1971, Korean and Vietnamese Buddhist leadership had been developing a relationship for eight years, Korean soldiers had been in Vietnam for six years, and chaplains for two. With all this experience, Korean Buddhists stood firmly behind their Vietnamese brothers at war.

¹³⁵ Yi I Yong (1986), 95.

¹³⁶ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Wöllam pulgyo chidoja T`ürik`wang sünim ül malhanda,” September 19, 1971.

Conclusion: The Impact of the Chaplaincy, the Impact of Vietnam

In terms of civic activities in Vietnam by Korean Buddhist chaplains, the only other comparative case is that of Thai Buddhist chaplains and soldiers. Thais certainly felt the Buddhist context of the war; for them, “Buddhism seemed to be at war.”¹³⁷ They also did similar civilian outreach like repairing temples and aiding orphans. Thai soldiers felt the South Vietnamese liked and trusted them because of shared culture and tradition, and Thais felt they were the most honorable and respectable among the troops there. However, while Thai soldiers saw Laos and Cambodia as very similar culturally, they saw Vietnam as “Chinese” because of its “Confucian principles, Mahayana Buddhism, Chinese script, and the classics of Chinese literature.”¹³⁸

As seen above, these points of difference that Thai Buddhists felt were exactly the nodes of similarity that Korean Buddhists felt. Though there was a shared Buddhist connection between the three countries, only Korean and Vietnamese Buddhists came from the Chinese/Chinese Buddhist culture sphere. Comparatively, this fostered a closer bond between Korean and Vietnamese Buddhists. Possibly the most dramatic example of these bonds is when twenty-five soldiers from the Korean army’s Paekma Company were given the Buddhist confirmatory precept ceremony by a Vietnamese monk. Chaplain Kwŏn Oh-hyŏn helped organize it as “a sign of mutual respect and bond through religion.” According to the *Pulgyo sinmun*, this was “the first case of Koreans ever receiving precepts from a foreign monk.”¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Ruth, (2011), 206.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 141-142, 189.

¹³⁹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Chuwŏl paengma pudae changbyŏng i Wŏllam sŭnim ũro put’ŏ sugye,” January 25, 1970.

In line with the Paris Peace Accords, all South Korean troops withdrew from Vietnam by March 1973. On March 16th, the *Tong'a ilbo* interviewed Thich Tam Chau, reflecting on the ceasefire, South Korean troop withdrawal, and the state of Vietnamese Buddhism. Chau communicated his wish for lasting peace in Vietnam. He stood firm to his anti-communism, pro-independence, and desire for freedom for Buddhists. Though Buddhist groups had become divided politically, he believed they are all united in their “Buddhist spirit” and should come together to back the government against the Vietcong. He concluded the interview by sincerely thanking the South Korean military for helping the war effort.¹⁴⁰ With the Fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975, North Vietnam won the war and united Vietnam. Buddhists activities were strictly controlled. Thich Tam Chau fled to Montreal, Canada. It was an unfortunate ending to the Vietnamese Buddhist struggle that lasted for over twenty years and that had inspired many in the Korean Buddhist community.

Vietnamese Buddhism and the Vietnam War have certainly influenced Korean Buddhists and Korean society in other ways. Robert Buswell recounted that, in his experience as a monk in Korea from the mid- to late 1970's, the most common reason for young Korean men ordaining as monks was their military experience during the Vietnam war. They cited the camaraderie, structure, and brotherhood of monastic life to be familiar. Monastic life was a kind of “halfway house” between a soldier's life and civilian life, helping them readjust after experiencing horrific human suffering.¹⁴¹ Since the 1980's Thich Nhat Hanh's books have been extremely popular in South Korea.¹⁴² Monks such as Toböp (道法 1949-) and Pomnyun (法輪 1953-) have built off of

¹⁴⁰ *Tong'a Ilbo*, “Wöllam ongönp'a pulgyo chidoja Ch'au sünim hoehyön 'Wöllam ttang e yönggup'yöngghwa kanüng,” March 16, 1973.

¹⁴¹ Buswell (1992), 70-71.

¹⁴² Joo (2011), 623.

the Engaged Buddhism tradition, pioneered by Vietnamese monks such as Thich Nhat Hanh, and spread the teachings throughout the Korean Buddhist community.

I have argued in this chapter that the transnational relationship between the Korean and Vietnamese Buddhist communities during the Vietnam War was a major factor in the establishment of the South Korean Buddhist military chaplaincy. While official histories of the chaplaincy mainly highlight the Buddhist culture of Vietnam and the “activities for civilians” as reasons for sending Buddhist chaplains to Vietnam, I show that the relationship between Korean and Vietnamese Buddhists was much more complex. Since the Buddhist Struggle of 1963, the Korean Buddhist community became heavily invested in the plight of Vietnamese Buddhists. For the next six years, until Buddhist chaplains were finally dispatched in 1969, Korean and Vietnamese Buddhist leadership, South Korean soldiers, and everyday people from each nation collaborated through their shared Buddhist faith. Thus, once chaplains hit the battlefield, they continued to facilitate this close relationship. Furthermore, the transnational relationship between Korean and Vietnamese Buddhists helps challenge common depictions of South Korea’s participation in the Vietnam War. The Korean Buddhist community often saw Vietnamese Buddhists exemplifying the tenets of modern Buddhism—heavily involved in politics, propagating effectively, and organizing social welfare programs. Thus, the war was worth fighting.

Chapter 3: The Korean Buddhist Chaplaincy and the Mass Military Faith Promotion Movement¹

From 1971 to 1974, the Park Chung Hee regime and the three branches of the military instituted the Mass Military Faith Promotion Movement (*Chŏn'gun Sinjahwa Undong*; from here on Faith Movement), attempting to convert all members of the military into Protestants, Catholics, or Buddhists. The motivation behind the Faith Movement was to root out communist affinities, decrease unwanted incidents, and increase unity among soldiers—all through the guidance of religion. This movement irrevocably changed the South Korean military chaplaincy, particularly the Buddhist chaplaincy. Still in its infancy, the Buddhist chaplaincy would burgeon into a prominent institution by the end of the Faith Movement. The Buddhist chaplaincy became an unquestioned part of South Korea's influential and authoritative military, and the ideology that underpinned it was solidified and massively disseminated through the Faith Movement. The chaplaincies' growth transformed military Buddhism into a major node of propagation for the modern Chogye Order of Korean Buddhism.

The South Korean Buddhist military chaplaincy continues to play a critical role in contemporary Korean Buddhism. The Buddhist chaplaincy celebrated its 53rd anniversary in November of 2021. Though the COVID pandemic put a slight damper on the celebrations, the institution is vibrant and influential. The Buddhist monks, present and former chaplains, and military advisors who spoke at the event opined that “Buddhist propagation would be nothing without military propagation” and that Buddhist chaplains “are the future of Korean Buddhism.”ⁱ

¹ A modified version of this chapter was published in the *Journal of Korean Religions*; Feuer, Jonathan C. 2022. "The Korean Buddhist Military Chaplaincy and Modern "State-Protection" Buddhism: A Study of the Mass Military Faith Promotion Movement." *Journal of Korean Religions* 13, no. 2, 117-147.

Mandatory military service for all able-bodied South Korean men ensures a steady flow of young followers for chaplains to proselytize, counsel, and teach. Today, the Buddhist chaplaincy is an unquestioned part of both modern Korean Buddhism and modern South Korean society.

But this was not always the case. As shown earlier in this dissertation, the Buddhist military chaplaincy traces back only to 1968. The South Korean military has existed since 1948, and the Protestant and Catholic chaplaincies since 1951. Factors both internal and external to the Korean Buddhist community can help account for this discrepancy. Buddhism's usefulness to military affairs was not understood by the South Korean government until its entrance into the Vietnam War in 1964. Vietnam's image as a Buddhist nation to South Korean leaders facilitated a need for Korean Buddhist 'experts' on the ground to deal with the Vietnamese population. Buddhist chaplains would boost morale and fighting spirit in Buddhist soldiers fighting in an unprecedented foreign war. They were trained and finally given official military status in November 1968; five were then sent to Vietnam in January 1969.

Though the Vietnam War was certainly the final catalyst for the Buddhist chaplaincy's foundation, the chaplaincy was still in its infancy in those first few years. Initially, it only served those soldiers deployed to Vietnam; the domestic chaplaincy was almost non-existent. It lacked significant manpower, and its main facilities—military dharma halls—were mainly being built in Vietnam. The Buddhist chaplaincy still needed to firmly entrench itself in the all-important domestic military of South Korea. If the Vietnam War catalyzed the chaplaincy's beginning, it was the Faith Movement from 1971 to 1974 that made the Buddhist chaplaincy into the institution it continues to be today.

I argue that the Buddhist chaplaincy was permanently changed because of the Faith Movement and the current form of the chaplaincy owes itself to the developments made during

the Faith Movement. Not only did the institution's scale and influence grow massively during the Movement's four years, but the chaplaincy also became the modern incarnation of Korean Buddhism's militaristic history, namely that of *hoguk* (state-protection) Buddhism. The Faith Movement is an under-researched part of the history of the chaplaincy as well as the history of religions in 1970's South Korea. The movement is evidence of Korean Buddhists' larger shift to lay propagation for "survival and social viability" in the modern period.² The Faith Movement also evokes issues related to the South Korean constitution's guarantee of religious freedom. Kang In-ch'öl judges that the unprecedented, state-backed growth in the number of Protestant, Catholic, and Buddhist believers in the military due to the Faith Movement was a "blatant violation of religion freedom."³ He also writes that the Faith Movement was "one of the most representative examples of the state's direct sponsorship of specific religions in modern Korean history."⁴

Though religious freedom is a significant issue in the politics of the Faith Movement, I intend to look at the specific impact the Faith Movement had on the Buddhist chaplaincy and modern Korean Buddhism. Its historical impact is threefold. First, it helps us better understand why the South Korean military chaplaincy became, and still is, an influential and permanent fixture in modern South Korea. Second is the closely related point that the ideological underpinnings of, and justification for, the chaplaincy were concretized during the Faith Movement and have remained generally accepted for over fifty years. Third, the impact of Park Chung Hee's anti-democratic policies of the 1970's on the political history of South Korea, such as the emergency declaration of martial law in 1971 and promulgation of the Yusin Constitution

² Nathan (2018), 2.

³ Kang (2016), 70.

⁴ Kang (2012), 71.

in 1972, are well understood in scholarship; however, the role of the Faith Movement in supporting these policies and practices has received little attention to date in scholarship. I believe it helps us better understand religion's place in the deepening anti-communist authoritarianism of the 1970's and its legacy in contemporary South Korea.

The Faith Movement was initially motivated by North Korea's military growth since 1968 and North Korea's 1968 assassination attempts on Park Chung Hee. Park wanted to "make all soldiers into religious believers in order to become anti-communist soldiers."⁵ The impetus of the Faith Movement was simple: pressure every soldier to choose one religion, Protestantism, Catholicism, or Buddhism. Chaplains from the three faiths held massive Christian baptism and Buddhist precept ceremonies (*sugyesik*) to initiate soldiers into their religions. Christian chaplains taught of the Christian fighting spirit in events such as the Crusades, as well as Korean Protestantism's *kuguk* (nation-saving) character and modern "anti-communist martyrs."⁶ Buddhist chaplains taught of their own glorious history of fighting spirit in *hoguk* (state-protection) Buddhism, the *hwarang* way, and premodern monk-soldiers. Scholars have written extensively about the popularity of these concepts in 1970's-era Korean Buddhist studies; Park Chung Hee's military ideology certainly played a role in driving their popularity. In this chapter, I do not attempt to argue whether or not *hoguk* Buddhism properly or improperly describes a uniquely "Korean" Buddhism. However, I do wish to show that the scholarly, political, and monastic attentiveness to *hoguk* Buddhism in the 1960's and 1970's saw its most tangible application in the Buddhist military chaplaincy. The idea that Korean Buddhism exists, and has always existed, to serve the needs of the state no matter how violent that need may be, was first

⁵ Hwang (2008), 255.

⁶ Kang (2007), 125-127, 173.

drilled into an entire generation of young men because of the Faith Movement. Just as it did fifty years ago, the contemporary chaplaincy emphasizes *hoguk* Buddhism as its chief principle, and, for chaplains, the will to sacrifice oneself for the nation and the greater good is an unambiguous aspect of Korean Buddhism.

Outline of the Mass Military Faith Promotion Movement

The Faith Movement was initially motivated by North Korea's military growth since 1968, North Korea's January 21st, 1968 assassination attempt on Park Chung Hee, and the October 30th, 1968 Uljin-Samch'ök Landings.⁷ Protestant reverend Kim Chun-gon (1925-2009) claims to have first suggested the idea of the Faith Movement to Park in 1969 in response to Park's worries about communists in the military, to which Park "happily agreed."⁸ Park wanted to "make all soldiers into religious believers in order to become anti-communist soldiers."⁹ The president coined the term "strengthening military power through faith" (*sinang chöllyök hwa*) to describe the goal of the movement. This neologism became a defining term for the military chaplaincy and remains so today.¹⁰ The official history of the Catholic chaplaincy claims General Han Sin (1922-1996), commander of the first army corps, together with the Protestant chaplain in his unit, suggested a kind of Faith Movement in late 1969 in response to fighting communism, but more so helping soldiers who were in poverty, had psychological issues, or behavioral issues. He felt religion, Christianity in particular, was the answer.¹¹

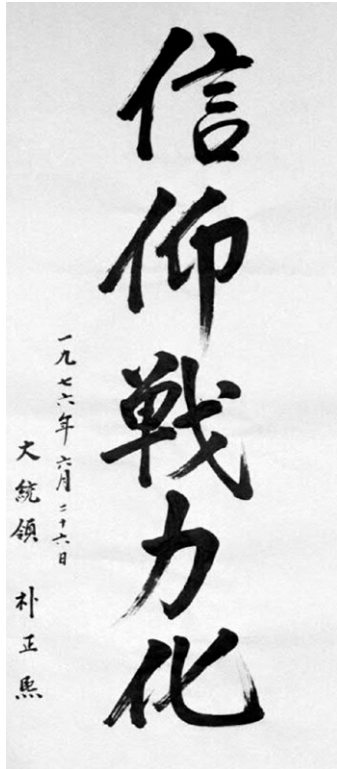
⁷ Kunjong kyogu sap'yönch'an wiwönhoe (2002), 100.

⁸ Kang (2007), 360

⁹ Hwang (2008), 255

¹⁰ Kim Ch'ang-mo (2007), 142.

¹¹ Kunjong kyogu sap'yönch'an wiwönhoe (2002), 101.



Park Chung Hee's 1976 "*sinang chölyökhwa*" calligraphy.¹²

An Army Headquarters publication on the army chaplaincy published in 2003 defines the Faith Movement as follows: “the Mass Military Faith Promotion Movement was a movement to carry out the religious activities of the three religions in the military, Protestantism, Catholicism, and Buddhism, by having all soldiers, if possible, select one of the three religions that they would like to follow and live a religious life according to that religion.”¹³ The same publication claims the motivation behind the movement was fairly simple: to increase believers and decrease

¹² Downloaded from The Park Chung Hee Presidential Library, “信仰戦力化 (박정희 대통령 휘호).” Accessed April 17, 2023.

¹³ Kunjong Kamsil (2003), 87.

“accident rates” in the military such as gun incidents, fights, and other crimes. It certainly did achieve these goals, seen in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1: Number of Religious Believers in the South Korean Army (1963-1974)¹⁴

	Buddhism	Protestantism	Catholicism	Other	Total
1963	8,245	60,416	10,864	8,520	88,045
1964	9,697	58,554	12,959	6,195	87,405
1965	8,513	68,708	12,082	7,067	96,370
1966	9,322	53,371	15,530	6,138	96,638
1967	8,513	68,708	17,025	3,340	97,586
1968	8,465	72,204	18,617	2,802	102,088
1969	10,438	77,301	11,690	3,048	109,277
1970	9,588	76,349	15,492	2,262	103,695
1971	21,956	128,782	22,908	908	174,354
1972	28,678	181,000	32,121	1,547	243,346
1973	38,678	199,623	39,136	1,829	279,102
1974	41,392	208,553	40,038	848	290,831

Table 2: Number of Religious Believers Compared to Number of Reported Violent Incidents in the South Korean Army (1970-1973)¹⁵

	1970	1971	1972	1973
Number of Religious Believers	110,033	174,354	243,346	279,102
Number of Incidents	19,248	14,708	11,200	9,041

The huge rise in the number of religious believers beginning in 1971 with the start of the Faith Movement is clearly shown in Table 1. The number of believers almost tripled from 1970 to 1974, from 103,695 to 290,831. The number of Buddhists more than quadrupled, from 9,588 to

¹⁴ Yi I Yong (1986), 158-159

¹⁵ Kunjong Kamsil (2003), 89.

41,392, and the number of Protestant Christians almost tripled from 76,349 to 208,553. Inversely, the number of believers in the “Other” category fell dramatically in the same period. Representatives of those “Other” religions, mainly “New Religions” and small Buddhist sects, did take issue with the clear discrimination they faced in the military under the Faith Movement.¹⁶ Protestants were speaking of turning Christianity into a “state religion like the Roman Empire” and converting all 600,000 soldiers into Christians.¹⁷ And Buddhists were calling for “all 600,000 soldiers to hear the words of the Buddha.”¹⁸

The Faith Movement greatly expanded the opportunities for chaplains to propagate. Prior to the movement, chaplains were confined to their respective churches or dharma halls and could only work with soldiers on weekends. They also submitted to the commanding officers they worked with, meaning they had to yield to all regular military activities. But the Faith Movement broke down their spatial and temporal restrictions. Sixth army commander Yi So-dong (1926-2014), upon announcing the Faith Movement in 1971, explained:

under various conditions, such as military chaplains with limited movement in their current unit, the time and place of religious services and religious guidance should be adjusted to suit the situation of the unit. For example, in a unit that is doing tactical training in the field, or emergency operations, chaplains can, at the most convenient time and place, use various methods such as entering barracks or drill grounds to work with soldiers, so there are no missed opportunities in the Faith Movement...this project should be carried out under the responsibility of the commander, but as the specialized field [of religious work] is under the jurisdiction of military chaplains, we should fully accept their intentions and provide convenience so that internal and external activities are not disrupted.¹⁹

¹⁶ Kunjong Kamsil (2003), 92.

¹⁷ Kang (2007), 356-357.

¹⁸ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “60 man kukkun ege purūm ūl chōnhaja.” June 25, 1972.

¹⁹ Kunjong kyogu sap’yōnch’an wiwōnhoe (2002), 102-103.

With their newfound freedoms to propagate, the three religions' chaplains were able to initiate so many new believers through joint baptism and joint Buddhist precept ceremonies (*haptong sugyesik*), in which hundreds, if not thousands, of soldiers were given initiation or conversion ceremonies into their respective religion. Protestants specifically made great gains this way.

Table 3: Protestant Chaplaincy Joint Baptism Ceremonies and Regular Baptisms²⁰

	Joint Baptism Ceremonies		Regular Baptisms	Total Baptized
	Number	Participants Baptized		
1971	6	4,377	2,943	7,320
1972	39	23,405	18,954	42,359
1973	43	26,803	17,880	44,683
1974	15	6,390	19,506	25,896
Total	103	60,975	59,283	120,258

Catholics and Buddhists would also take great advantage of the new opportunity presented joint baptisms and joint precept ceremonies. The Catholic chaplaincy's joint baptisms began in December 1971, and the largest one may have been in March 1972 when 780 soldiers were baptized and 1,060 were confirmed.²¹ Statistics on Buddhist joint precept ceremonies will be shown in more detail below, but they too began in 1971.

In light of the huge increase of religious believers, chaplains and military officials began to have doubts about the sincerity of belief in their new converts. According to a former Buddhist chaplain from the period, the military almost forced soldiers to go to a church or dharma hall on Sundays, even though Sundays were a day off from military obligations. Free

²⁰ Pak Ch'ang-hyŏn (2015), 120.

²¹ Kunjong kyogu sap'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe (2002), 113

food also helped chaplains attract soldiers to their faith; soldiers often took advantage of this by attending multiple services on Sundays to get multiple meals.²² Catholic chaplains noted there were instances when some new soldiers were baptized five times.²³ In an April 25th, 1972 “mass joint baptism ceremony” in which eighty-eight officers and 3,390 soldiers were baptized, Protestant chaplains instituted a new policy when baptizing soldiers. In the past, including the first year of the Faith Movement, everyone was baptized without question. However, from this point on, soldiers first had to prove their devotion through study, prayer in the barracks, and working with the chaplain beforehand. They had to apply for a “believer card (*kyoin k’adū*).” Then, when they returned to their hometowns, they had to get a letter from a local pastor attesting to the continued “fruits of their belief.”²⁴

A meeting was held in July 1972 by chaplains to clarify the meaning of the movement and the chaplaincy as a whole. The meeting resulted in a new “mission statement” for the chaplaincy that argued the “absolute majority” of soldiers are Protestant, Catholic, or Buddhist, so only those religions need be represented in the chaplaincy. Furthermore, this new mission statement also codified the fact that only religions deemed “wholesome” and large enough could be represented in the chaplaincy, those only with a total number of members of 100,000 or more in the South Korean population.²⁵ This statute was altered in 2002 to match the ratio of members in the military, not general society;²⁶ only Won Buddhism has succeeded in sending a small number of chaplains to the military from this change.

²² Based on my conversation with former chaplain Kwōn, January 11, 2022.

²³ Kunjong kyogu sap’yōnch’an wiwōnhoe (2002), 120.

²⁴ *Christian Home and Family Life Association of Korea*, “Chōngun sincha hwa undong e ddarūn haptongseryesik” June 6, 1972.

²⁵ Kunjong Kamsil (2003), 93.

²⁶ Kang (2016), 71.

This new mission statement helped the chaplaincy continue on with the Faith Movement for the following two years. Christian chaplains held numerous mass joint baptism ceremonies, and Buddhist chaplains held “mammoth” precept ceremonies.²⁷ These officially lasted until March 25th, 1974, when the government responded to protests by other religions about the preference given to Christians and Buddhists.

Freedom of faith is stipulated in our Constitution, so the government and the military should remain strictly neutral. The military is carrying out a campaign to eradicate violent crimes, but supporting a specific religion will affect other religions, so joint baptisms, and similar ceremonies, should be prohibited.²⁸

It seems, however, the Buddhist chaplaincy was excluded from this policy. There continued to be joint precept ceremonies conducted by Buddhist chaplains throughout 1974 and beyond.²⁹ Thus, the Faith Movement continued on. In fact, it may have become more discriminatory. From the beginning of the Faith Movement, Christian chaplains began moving bible study and counseling into the soldiers’ barracks, where these activities had previously been forbidden, and this only increased after joint baptisms ended. This was called the “movement for the churchification of the barracks” (*naemuban kyohoehwa undong*) and it gave chaplains unprecedented intimate access to soldiers. The official history of the Protestant chaplaincy defines it in these words: “In short, this movement means that there is no separate church, and all private barracks in the unit are churches. In other words, not only do soldiers go to the designated military church to have religious service, but they think of all the buildings, even private barracks where soldiers live, as churches.”³⁰

²⁷ *Pulgyo sinmun*. “26 sa 6 paek 24 changbyōng haptong sugye.” May 14, 1972.

²⁸ Kunjong Kamsil (2003), 94.

²⁹ *Pulgyo sinmun* “Changbyōng paek 64 myōng sugye” April 21, 1974; “Kun pōphoe haptong sugyesik” May 12, 1974; “Changbyōng paek 10 myōng haptong sugyesik” June 9, 1974; “Konggun haptong sugyesik,” November 10, 1974.

³⁰ Pak Ch’ang-hyōn (2015), 124.

The Protestant chaplaincy claims the “movement for the churchification of the barracks” was actually motivated by a January 8, 1971 incident in the first infantry corps, in which soldiers revolted against their superiors, threatening to kill their commander. It was a Protestant chaplain who was able to persuade the troops to surrender. From then on, the military felt it was a good idea to have chaplains in the barracks to quell any problems before they arise.³¹ From 1973 on, the “movement for the churchification of the barracks” became the basis of the Faith Movement.³² Though Buddhist chaplains were slow to participate, they too began to hold dharma services inside barracks. One specific case was the 6202nd army corps where, beginning in late 1973, chaplains held services every night from 9:30 to 10 o’clock with about one hundred and fifty soldiers attending.³³

The Faith Movement saw a massive shift in the mission of the chaplaincy. Kwŏn Ki-jong, leader of the first class of Buddhist chaplains, recounted that, at least initially, “The military's position was not to encourage various religions to come and propagate, but to strengthen the military's power through religion.”³⁴ Since 1964, however, the Executive Head of the Chogyŏ Order, Ch’ŏngdam, did frame the chaplaincy in terms of modernization and increasing propagation.³⁵ It had taken a few years, but the Faith Movement finally made the chaplaincy into a powerful vehicle of religious propagation. The changes that the Faith Movement brought are most acutely seen in the Buddhist chaplaincy.

³¹ Ibid, 124.

³² Kunjong Kamsil (2003), 96.

³³ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Naemuban e puch’ŏ nim mosiko changbyŏng baek 50 myŏng chŏnggipŏphoe” November 11, 1973.

³⁴ Kwŏn, Ki-jong. “Ch’ogi kulp’ogyo, Wŏllam esŏ ūi kunbŏpsa hwaltong (Early Military Propagation, [Buddhist] Chaplains’ Activities in Vietnam).” *Kūmgang sinmun*. July 7, 2017.

³⁵ Kim Kwangsik (2022), 141.

Buddhism and the Faith Movement

The Buddhist chaplaincy was still in its infancy at the beginning of the Faith Movement in 1971. The institution had little manpower, infrastructure, or publications. Though the first chaplains went through formal training, much of their work in Vietnam was improvised and underfunded. The 1986 official publication on the Buddhist chaplaincy relates that Buddhist chaplains had a “handicap” going into the Faith Movement because of their late start in the chaplaincy.³⁶ On the eve of the Faith Movement, Buddhist chaplain Yi In-su published an article in the *Pulgyo sinmun* complaining of a lack of facilities for Buddhist chaplains to carry out their work, specifically propagation activities.³⁷ In the same edition, Protestant Chaplain Kwön Hyön-ch’an expressed his regret at how long it took for the military to establish a Buddhist chaplaincy. He also regrets that Buddhist chaplains are seen as lower status than Christian chaplains.³⁸ A former chaplain recounted that many soldiers, even from Buddhist families, did not know much about the religion.³⁹

In 1972, navy Buddhist chaplain Kim Chōng-gil wrote an emotional article about the “lonely existence” and “desolation” of his life on a navy ship. In discussing the monotony, stress, and depression he and the soldiers experienced, he adds that being the only Buddhist chaplain is a specific hardship. He says he gets no support or cooperation from Christian chaplains. There is also a severe lack of funding. For example, when building a church or dharma hall, the funding does not come from the military budget but from outside supporters. As opposed to Christians

³⁶ Yi I Yong (1986), 158.

³⁷ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunsūng ūi koch’ung,” February 7, 1971.

³⁸ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunjongōpmu ūi ōche wa onūl,” July 7, 1971.

³⁹ Based on my conversations with former chaplain Kim, January 17, 2022.

who have strong financial backing, Buddhists had almost nothing; “every year in the navy, Christians distribute 30,000 bibles compared to Buddhist chaplains who can’t even give out one [prayer book];” “we can only give out about 10 copies of the *Pulgyo sinmun*.”⁴⁰ In fact, Protestant chaplains even had international funding; the Korean Bible Society secured 50,000,000 won from the World Bible Society to support military propagation. Chaplains used this money for various publications as well as “pocket money.”⁴¹ Gideons International also donated 450,000 copies of the New Testament to the South Korean Army from 1964 to 1971.⁴²

As the Faith Movement got into full swing, the demands of the movement exposed the deficiencies of the Buddhist chaplaincy further. Joint precept ceremonies were previously unheard of for Buddhist chaplains, and they were unprepared for the large responsibility.⁴³ In May 1972, chaplain Ch’oe Myōng-jun complained about the insufficiency of Buddhist chaplains in the military. He agreed with the mission of the Faith Movement to solve problems in soldiers’ mentality but argued that it can’t be solved by Buddhist chaplains if they are not given more resources. “The heart and soul of Protestants and Catholics has been nurtured here [in the military], but the Buddhist community’s activities have been lackluster and more actual results are needed.”⁴⁴ Buddhist chaplains were indeed working at a disadvantage throughout the Faith Movement, seen in Table 4.

⁴⁰ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Öddöke halkka,” July 7, 1972. Chaplain Kim is most likely referencing the first edition of the *Essential Teachings for the Armed Forces (Kukkun pöbyo chip)*, used by chaplains and distributed to some soldiers. None of the very limited number of original copies survive.

⁴¹ Pak Ch’ang-hyōn (2015), 123.

⁴² Oak (2020), 309-312.

⁴³ Yi I Yong 1986), 193.

⁴⁴ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Chōngun sincha hwa undong kü munchejōm,” May 14, 1972.

Table 4: Ratio of Chaplains to Religious Believers in Three Branches of Military (Army, Navy, Air Force), 1973⁴⁵

	Total Believers	Number of Chaplains	Ratio
Buddhism	43,306	29	1,493:1
Protestantism	214,299	301	712:1
Catholicism	44,493	48	926:1
Other	2,726	0	-
Total	304,824	378	806:1

At a rate of one chaplain for every 1,493 believers for each chaplain, Buddhist chaplains were spread very thin compared to Christian chaplains. Their workload increased significantly as well.

They went from about two dharma services per week to six or seven.⁴⁶

Table 5: Number of Dharma Services Held by Buddhist Chaplains and Number of Attendees 1969-1974⁴⁷

	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974
Dharma Services	25	784	986	2,331	3,422	4,010
Attendees	354	37,855	90,635	138,828	251,062	352,951

Furthermore, increased religious education activities and counseling sessions took up even more of the chaplains' time.

⁴⁵ Yi I Yong (1986), 159.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 190.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 189.

Table 6: Number of Religious Education Sessions and Related Activities 1970-1974⁴⁸

		1970	1971	1972	1973	1974
Character Guidance Sessions	Number	26,776	40,300	45,121	44,576	45,890
	Attendees	2,912,809	4,593,797	5,488,983	6,604,392	6,737,573
Religious Classes	Number	15,533	15,710	21,644	30,081	33,942
	Attendees	1,732,357	2,153,857	2,799,878	3,688,622	3,616,991
Religious Lectures	Number	1,218	1,447	2,175	1,782	1,623
	Attendees	228,303	403,877	642,968	570,828	570,869
Total	Number	43,527	57,457	68,940	76,439	81,445
	Attendees	4,873,469	7,151,531	8,931,829	10,863,842	10,925,433

Though these burgeoning responsibilities put a strain on Buddhist chaplains, they are also indicative of the successes they were having in attracting new believers despite their lack of resources. The number of Buddhists in the army from 1970 to 1974 more than quadrupled, from 9,588 to 41,392, the largest relative increase of any religion. Protestants, however, gained the largest sheer number of believers. From 1971 to 1974, the number of Buddhists in the navy went from 874 to 9,306. In the air force, the increase was 1,311 to 2,618.⁴⁹ Certainly the Faith Movement helped push more soldiers into one of the three religions, but these large increases may substantiate the claims by Buddhist leaders since the Korean War that there were huge numbers of undeclared Buddhist soldiers that needed to be found.⁵⁰ President Park Chung Hee and his wife Yuk Young-soo being Buddhist also contributed to Buddhism's growth in the military. According to a former chaplain, though more low-ranking soldiers were Protestant, the majority of generals were Buddhist. Buddhism helped them gain favor with Park Chung Hee and his military regime.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ibid, 196.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 161.

⁵⁰ Based on a "Front Line Inquiry Report" by the "Association of Buddhist Military Propagators" in 1952, who concluded "65% of soldiers are Buddhists." In Yi I Yong (1986), 61.

⁵¹ Based on my conversation with former chaplain Kwön, January 11, 2022.

Furthermore, even though the number of Buddhist chaplains may not have increased at a sufficient rate, there was a boom in construction of military dharma halls for chaplains to carry out their activities. While there were only two built in 1969 and 1970 respectively, there were seven built in 1971, three in 1972, eight in 1973, and six in 1974. By 1978, the total number of military dharma halls reached fifty-three.⁵² The significance of opening a new military dharma hall for the Buddhist community cannot be understated. The opening ceremonies were attended by hundreds of military officials, soldiers, monks, and leaders of the Chogye Order. To supporters, they were tangible signs of the vitality of Buddhism in the military; it was finally gaining the recognition it deserved. A Protestant publication remarked that Buddhists were making huge strides, especially in building dharma halls, even though Buddhist chaplains had only been in the military for a short time. They added that the construction of churches was lagging behind.⁵³ Former chaplain Kim, a common presence at dharma hall opening ceremonies and joint precept ceremonies, also recalled the “jealousy” of Protestants at the advances Buddhist chaplains were making.⁵⁴

But if the opening of dharma halls were one sign of Buddhists’ gains, it was the joint precept ceremonies that further entrenched the Buddhist chaplaincy and Buddhism in the military. Such ceremonies were not a part of chaplains’ duty prior the Faith Movement, but in 1971, they began with two small-scale ceremonies, one in the army and one in the navy, giving the precepts to 209 soldiers in total.⁵⁵ The *Pulgyo sinmun* reported on two in 1972, four in 1973,

⁵² Yi I Yong (1986), 163-164.

⁵³ *Christian Home and Family Life Association of Korea*, “Chöngun sincha hwa undong kwa OCU chunhoewön hwaltong” January 11, 1973.

⁵⁴ Based on my conversation with former chaplain Kim, January 17, 2022.

⁵⁵ Yi I Yong (1986), 193.

and six in 1974.⁵⁶ The 1986 official publication on the Buddhist chaplaincy attests that, in the army, 1,030 soldiers were given the precepts at joint precept ceremonies in 1972, 2,468 in 1973, and 4,569 in 1974. The biggest one ever was in 1973 at the 3rd army academy, when chaplain Kwŏn Myŏng-jun gave the precepts to 1,295 students and soldiers.⁵⁷

At these ceremonies, converts received the typical five precepts of a lay Buddhist: not to kill, not to steal, no debauchery, no false speech, and no consumption of alcohol. But, because they were soldiers, they also received the Five Precepts of the *Hwarang* Way developed by the Silla Buddhist monk Wŏn'gwang.⁵⁸ These are loyalty to the king [or leader], filial piety, trust among friends, never retreat in battle, and be selective in the taking of life. Newly initiated Buddhists then had to prove their faith, just as Christian converts did. Their initiation into Buddhism was confirmed only if they attended at least three hours of Buddhist lectures each week over the two months following the precept ceremony.⁵⁹ The 2008 official publication on the Buddhist chaplaincy states, “the mass joint precept ceremonies [that started in the Faith Movement] have continued to be the most important Buddhist event in the military to today.”⁶⁰

The Faith Movement also spurred the creation of the Buddhist Chaplaincy Group (*Kunbŏpsadan*) in June 1972, which has led the Buddhist chaplaincy to today.⁶¹ But one of the

⁵⁶ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Samgun t'ŭkbyŏl cholŏp pŏphoe 163 myŏng sugye,” April 2, 1972; “26 sa 6 paek 24 changbyŏng haptong sugye.” May 14, 1972; “Haegun changbyŏng 2 paek 46 myŏng haptong sugyesik” February 4, 1973; “Kun min paek 26 myŏng haptong sugyesik chŏngun sincha hwa undong matchwŏ,” February 11, 1973; “Kunpuleha haptong sugyesik changbyŏng paek 50 myŏng” October 28, 1973; “Changbyŏng paek 20 myŏng haptong sugyesik kunjong ŭi nal” December 16, 1973; “Changbyŏng 80 myŏng haptong sugyesik,” January 13, 1974; “Sapyŏng paek 40 myŏng haptong sugyesik,” January 20, 1974; “Changbyŏng paek 64 myŏng sugye” April 21, 1974; “Kun pŏphoe haptong sugyesik” May 12, 1974; “Changbyŏng paek 10 myŏng haptong sugyesik” June 9, 1974; “Konggun haptong sugyesik,” November 10, 1974.

⁵⁷ Yi I Yong (1986), 193.

⁵⁸ *Pulgyo sinmun* “26 sa 6 paek 24 changbyŏng haptong sugye.” May 14, 1972; Yukkun Chungang Pŏptang, *Puch'ŏnim osinnal*, May 2, 1971.

⁵⁹ *Pulgyo sinmun* “26 sa 6 paek 24 changbyŏng haptong sugye.” May 14, 1972.

⁶⁰ Hwang (2008), 255.

⁶¹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunbŏpsadan paljok chŏnwŏnmoyŏ sŏlbulgyoan t'ongil k'i ro nyŏnnae kigŭm 5 ch'ŏnmanwŏn hwakbo,” July 2, 1972.

most unique fruits of the Faith Movement for Buddhists in the military was the creation of the “*Hwarang* Company,” an all-Buddhist army company in 1974. Commander Shin Mal-öp created the company with the backing of the Central Buddhist Administrative Headquarters to “complete his wish of fortifying soldiers’ mental strength through faith” in accordance with the Faith Movement.⁶² The Buddhist Administrative Headquarters’ Executive Head, the monk Kyöngsan, took a special interest in the group, speaking at the ceremony to mark its founding and visiting them frequently.⁶³ The unit was 85% Buddhists at the start and the remaining 15% eventually converted to Buddhism. They had their own special dharma services on Wednesdays and Sundays. Instead of standard army roll call, they did roll call with “a Buddhist chant” and faithfully “kept the Five Precepts of *Hwarang*.” Apparently, “they had no bad incidents and were awarded as a model unit.”⁶⁴

The *Hwarang* Company became the embodiment of the ideology that justified the burgeoning Buddhist presence in the military. They represented a combination of historic Buddhist militarism, Korean Buddhist modernity, and contemporary Korean militarism. As we have seen, the Faith Movement catalyzed a huge increase in Buddhists soldiers and an explosion of activity for the Buddhist chaplaincy. But what were these Buddhist soldiers learning from Buddhist chaplains, monks, scholars, and commanders? What did it mean to be a Buddhist in the military? I argue that the answer to this was standardized and widely disseminated during the Faith Movement.

⁶² Hwang (2008), 255.

⁶³ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Hwarangchungdae ch’angsöl yukkun 2379 pudae t’ongil wihae,” August 18, 1974.

⁶⁴ Hwang (2008), 255.

Korean Buddhism's Military Ideology: *Hoguk*, *Hwarang*, and Soldier-monks.

The July 7th, 1972 edition of *Hwarang* magazine, a publication for soldiers by the Army's Buddhist Officers' Club (*Taehan Pulgyo Yukkun Changgyohoe*), featured a special column by the central Buddhist order on the Faith Movement:

In the military, a movement to make all six-hundred thousand soldiers into religious believers is unfolding. Religious devotion will bring an increase in understanding of individual differences within a military society that requires cooperation and unity. This voluntary cooperative system will promote camaraderie in the spirit of martyrdom. When we look at this movement from the standpoint of Buddhism, and if we consider that Buddhism's 'Five Precepts of *Hwarang*' are a model for the nation's military, we have a weightier responsibility to this movement compared to other religions. Additionally, consider that the most outstanding individual to fit modern society's needs is the soldier. He is trained in systematic organization and administration in the military and understands the realities of daily life. Once he is discharged from the military and enters society, his propagation [of Buddhism] to soldiers not only helps him carry out his military mission, but is also directly connected to propagating in general society.⁶⁵

Of particular significance here is understanding why the central Buddhist order believes Buddhism has a "weightier responsibility to this movement compared to other religions." The answer can be summarized fairly easily: *hoguk* Buddhism. This term has come up throughout this dissertation. The concept of state protection stems from the idea that during the early dynasties of Korea, Silla and Koryŏ, Buddhism was in a symbiotic relationship with the state; the state supported Buddhism financially and as its official ideology, and Buddhism supported the state through rituals, which spiritually defended the state, but also in full-scale violent military conflict. Even when Buddhism was harshly persecuted by the Chosŏn dynasty government, Buddhists still rose up to defend the nation in times of war.

⁶⁵ *Hwarang*, "Siron: chŏngun sincha hwa undong" July 7, 1972.

The earliest and possibly most significant evidence of Korean Buddhism's "state-protection" character is five precepts developed by the 7th century Silla monk Wŏn'gwang for the *Hwarang* Way, mentioned above. Monk-scholar Wŏn'gwang codified his five secular precepts (*sesok ogye* 世俗五戒) for the elite group of male soldiers called *hwarang* (flower boys), based on Buddhism.⁶⁶ These *hwarang* played a significant role in uniting the Korean peninsula under the Silla dynasty and they remain integral to the history of Korean national identity along with Korean Buddhist identity. This is the root of the diverse application of the term "*hwarang*" to modern Buddhist soldiers and temples. Park Chung Hee wrote on the *hwarang* in his 1964 book *Our Nation's Path*, saying:

The *hwarang* are the Silla youth, beautiful like flowers. They were groups which trained with discipline and treasured courage and a peculiar wisdom with bravery and a pure spirit. Therefore, their actions and their abilities were the driving force which contributed constantly to the support of Silla. It is also thanks to their wisdom that Silla could achieve the unification of the Three Kingdoms and develop such a splendid culture. They sacrificed themselves for the sake of the nation and our people.⁶⁷

Possibly the most oft cited example of Korean Buddhists engaging in "state-protecting" activities is the monk armies that fought in the 16th century Imjin Wars against Japanese invaders. Buddhist monk Sŏsan Hyujŏng and his disciple Samyŏng Yujŏng led thousands of monk-soldiers to oust invading Japanese armies. From June 1592 to April 1593, the monk-soldiers truly led an effective campaign against the Japanese. Today, Yujŏng is often called "Great Sage of National Protection" (*hoguk taesŏng*).⁶⁸

Throughout the final centuries of the Chosŏn dynasty and into the turn of the 20th century, public work, including in the military, was by and large the most prominent way

⁶⁶ Loyalty to the king [or leader] (事君以忠), filial piety (事親以孝), trust among friends (交友以信), never retreat in battle (臨戰無退) and be selective in the taking of life (殺生有擇).

⁶⁷ Quoted in Walhain (2005), 89.

⁶⁸ Yi Pong-ch'un (2015), 696-701.

Buddhist monks could be active in state matters. Within the Buddhist community, monks certainly kept up publication activities despite persecution from the government. But their work as soldiers was the best way they could show their worth to the state, and it played a significant role in Buddhism's survival into the modern period.

Recently, scholars have moved away from describing pre-modern Korean Buddhism as “state-protection Buddhism” because its meaning was standardized only by modern scholars. Kim Tong-hwa, in 1956, was the first South Korean scholar to argue “state-protection Buddhism” in Koryŏ laid the groundwork for Korean nationalism. Japanese scholars had discussed it since the Meiji Restoration as a way to legitimate Buddhism's role as its influence diminished in favor of state Shinto. Korean scholarship on the subject then flourished in the 1970's.⁶⁹ Though its meaning shifted over the centuries, it has been used as a catch-all to describe pre-modern Korean Buddhism in modern times. It is also used pejoratively by some scholars, reflecting the support of despotic kings, Japanese colonial power, and anti-democratic regimes.⁷⁰

Though I agree that “state-protection Buddhism” should not be the only frame for interpreting pre-modern Korean Buddhism, we should not dismiss it as a framework for understanding *contemporary* memories of Korean Buddhism. As we will see, the idea is still frequently and proudly referenced by Buddhist chaplains as justification for their role. Militarism and state-sanctioned violence have been an ever-present factor in Korea's modern history from the first Sino-Japanese War at the turn of the 20th century down to the Vietnam War in the 1970s, as well as in mandatory military service for all young men. And, of course, the war between

⁶⁹ Vermeersch (2008), 16-18.

⁷⁰ Jin (2005).

North Korea and South Korea still continues under an armistice. “State-protection Buddhism” has helped modern Buddhists understand their place in their militarized society. My goal here is not to demonstrate whether or not pre-modern Korean Buddhism was truly *hoguk* Buddhism. However, as we will see, chaplains, and their supporters in the Buddhist order and beyond, have no doubt that it was.

Outside the chaplaincy, nationalist biases pervaded 1960’s and 1970’s scholarship on Korean Buddhist history. Contemporary social needs were often imposed on these histories, especially in an attempt to form a South Korean national identity. Scholars drew parallels to the modern goal of unification of North and South Korea, just as the Silla dynasty, and the Buddhists that supported it as a state religion, unified the Korean peninsula in the 7th century.⁷¹ Monks from the Imjin wars were held up as national heroes and models for the modern Buddhist community. According to Henrik Sørensen, Park Chung Hee saw Buddhism as “an important tool in creating a solid moral and spiritual foundation for his government” and “he played on the role of Buddhism as protector of the nation in order to formulate a new Korean cultural identity steeped in nationalism.”⁷² Pankaj Mohan adds that “numerous works of research on the nation-protecting tradition of Korean Buddhism published in the 1970s were financed by Korea’s Ministry of Education.”⁷³ I certainly agree that scholarship on Korean Buddhism was not at its most rigorous when assessed chiefly through a nationalist lens. For at least the last three decades, however, scholarship on Korean Buddhism has improved greatly in this respect. Although scholarship has moved past using state-protection Buddhism and the modern nationalism applied to it as a primary concept in studying Korean Buddhism, popular understandings of Korean Buddhism

⁷¹ Eunsu Cho (2004), 35, 45-51.

⁷² Sørensen (2008), 196.

⁷³ Mohan (2006), 55.

largely has not. I argue that the method by which to teach and disseminate the modern state-protection Buddhism ideology to a mass audience was concretized during the Faith Movement, and this ideology continues on through the chaplaincy and all those it has touched.

The concepts *hoguk* Buddhism and the *Hwarang* Way, and their related historical figures and historical events, have certainly been used by the Buddhist chaplaincy since its inception; however, chaplains' and politicians' discussion of them was limited in scope. Such terms were used to help justify the Buddhist chaplaincy and shape the ideology of the first chaplains, but they weren't yet widely disseminated and concretized. As shown above, the first informal chaplaincy during the Korean War, The Association of Buddhist Military Propagators, mention in their founding document that "there are Buddhists soldiers among those in the bloody fighting on the frontlines, and who fight in the spirit of the fifth of the Five Precepts of the *Hwarang* Way given by Master Wōn'gwang."⁷⁴ Also shown above, the history of Korean Buddhism's "*hwarang* and *hoguk* Buddhism" character was used as one of four main points to convince the government that a Buddhist chaplaincy could legitimately support the state and military.⁷⁵ And, at the ceremony for the first dispatch of chaplains to Vietnam in November 1968, leader of the newly minted chaplaincy, Kwōn Ki-jong, declared, "under the ideology of *hoguk* I will devote my body and mind without reservation to the Buddha."⁷⁶

At one of the earliest joint precept ceremonies held in July 1971 at Haein-sa, one of the most historically important temples in Korea, monk Paekta spoke to the newly converted forty Buddhist soldiers. He specifically discussed the key precept for soldiers, taken from the Five Precepts of *Hwarang*: "be discriminating in the taking of life." He explained its meaning that "it

⁷⁴ Yi I Yong (1986), 59-60.

⁷⁵ Hwang (2008). 215-216.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 230.

is only immoral killing that must be refrained from” and “[t]he duty of a Buddhist soldier is to take the precept of no-killing as having no craving, to have a merciful heart that realizes the truth of *ahimsa* [no destruction of life/nonviolence], to make a small sacrifice for the sake of the many, and be devoted to peace for all mankind.”⁷⁷ Here, Paekta is following a fairly standard logic on Buddhism and violence: it is acceptable to kill the few to save the many, killing must be done with proper intention, and it must be done with the goal of peace. This logic could fit in just about any historical or geographical context in Buddhism, or most religions for that matter. Therefore, it is imperative to look at how exactly this logic applies to the context of South Korea.

At a joint precept ceremony in March 1972, the presiding monk, Yi Un-hö, discussed both taking the precepts as a promise to do the right thing in your “human life” generally, and emphasized the “Five Precepts of *Hwarang*” and “*hoguk*” because the new converts were soldiers. Monk Ko Kwang-dök expounded on these themes, speaking of the Korean people as “one community of individuals who exercise their freedom through patriotism” and connected the “free nation ideology” of the world community to the “honorable nation’ or ‘true dharma nation’ that the Buddha saw.”⁷⁸ From February 21st to March 24th 1972, the Chogye Order’s National Believers’ Committee dedicated a large budget towards the military, following the Faith Movement, and embarked on a lecture tour “instilling *hwarang-hoguk* thought in the soldiers.” The purpose was that “*hwarang-hoguk* thought is the basis of our national thought, and every time there is a national crisis, we courageously rise up to protect the nation.” Lectures were given to twenty-one different military corps from all three branches of the military. Lecturers focused on “harmonizing national ethics through Buddhist thought” and emphasized that “overcoming

⁷⁷ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Pulgyo hwaranghoe sugyesik.” July 18, 1971.

⁷⁸ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Samgun t’ükpyöl choröp pöphoe 163 myöng sugye.” April 2, 1972.

this national crisis is especially on the backs of the national military who should receive and carry out *hoguk* thought based on the Buddhist mentality.” One particular sermon on “Buddhist faith and *hoguk* thought” drew 20,000 people. They distributed propagation books and pamphlets. These included both writings by the Buddha and writings on national development.⁷⁹

These activities were certainly making an impact, and the number of Buddhist believers in the military was rapidly growing. Monks and chaplains were indeed mixing historical Korean Buddhist concepts with contemporary socio-political issues. They emphasized that Buddhist faith “instils the mentality of martyrdom and comradeship in war” and, as such, Buddhists are a “role model” with their Five Precepts of *Hwarang*.⁸⁰ In July 1972, chaplains held a prayer meeting entitled “Defeating Communism and State-Protection (*hoguk*) Prayer Meeting,” “inspiring faith and *hoguk* thought in Buddhists in the military.”⁸¹

In November 1972, Park Chung Hee established the Fourth Republic under the new Yusin Constitution, greatly curtailing freedoms and making himself *de facto* president for life. In February 1973, the navy laid out its plans for the new year, including to “bring Buddhist propagation activities in line with the Yusin mission,” Park Chung Hee’s newly minted political ideology.⁸² At a spring 1973 military-school graduation ceremony, monks, chaplains, and military leaders’ sentiments were summed up as follows: “All of you graduates, cherish the Buddha mind in your hearts and use your strength to accomplish the national Yusin mission.”⁸³ Through 1973, the term “*hoguk Yusin*,” literally “state-protection restoration,” came up frequently in *Pulgyo sinmun* articles as well as in *Hwarang* magazine. The conflation of

⁷⁹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Chōngun sincha hwa undong e hoŭng hoguk sasang koch’wi.” April 9, 1972.

⁸⁰ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Chōngun sincha hwa undong kwa p’ogyo.” May 14, 1972.

⁸¹ *Hwarang*. “Che 2 hullyōnso chihoe,” July 1972.

⁸² *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Saenyōn saōp kyehoek t’o ūi haegun pulgyochunganghoe hoejibalgan.” February 11, 1973.

⁸³ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Kunnae pulgyo hwaltong.” April 1, 1973.

historical state-protection Buddhism and contemporary political needs was especially on display in July 1973 when the military broke ground on a new temple, Ŭisŏn-sa (義誦寺), at the base of Samyŏng mountain named after Samyŏng Yujŏng, who, as shown earlier, fought the Japanese at the location during the Imjin War. Military generals remarked at the symbolism and importance of this project: “It will awaken [us] to the glorious national spirit of the past.” “Ŭisŏn-sa has been built for this brave patriotic spirit of the fatherland to live on in today’s Yusin mission.”⁸⁴

Monk Kyŏngsan, the chief of the executive branch of the Chogye Order, was himself involved in spreading this ideology. He attended joint precept ceremonies, military school graduations, and founding ceremonies for military dharma halls. He provided the highest legitimacy to the teachings disseminated throughout the military. He backed the appropriation of concepts such as state-protection and the *Hwarang* Way with contemporary political needs tied to the Yusin Resoration, fighting communism, and national unification. At a joint dharma service for all three branches of the military, he said, “I pray that you will carry on your shoulders, through the calling of the *hwarang* mentality, the mission to unify the fatherland and achieve world peace.”⁸⁵ At a special support visit to the Ministry of National Defense, Kyŏngsan gave the special address, saying:

That which views birth and death as one and sees the completion of oneself by serving the nation and society is Buddhism. We must practice *hoguk* thought, passed down since Silla, that the correct view of the nation is through the concept that causes and effects are concomitant in their retribution.⁸⁶

Here, we see the convergence of contemporary social needs in “serving the nation and society” with the historical idea of *hoguk*, then undergirded by a root concept in Buddhism that “causes

⁸⁴ *Hwarang*, “Ŭisŏn-sa kigong,” September 1973.

⁸⁵ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Samgunsagyŏ pulgyobu saengdo haptongbŏphoe sŏngnyo.” September 30, 1973.

⁸⁶ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Isŏn kunbangbu wimun Kyŏngsan sŏnim tŭng 30 myŏng 5 kaepanp’yŏnsŏng.” April 28, 1974.

and effects are concomitant in their retribution.” The latter simply means “a good cause has a good effect, and a bad cause, a bad effect.”⁸⁷ He gives an extremely simple moral justification here for the violence that the military perpetuates; but, for him, this is all legitimized by Korean Buddhism’s history. Working on behalf of the state has been and always will be what Korean Buddhists do. In the past, *hoguk* thought was used by the Silla dynasty to unify the peninsula, or by monk-soldiers to fight off foreign invaders. Now, for Kyōngsan, Buddhist soldiers represent the “*hwarang* mentality passed down from Silla that will carry out the mission of unification of the nation and world peace.”⁸⁸ Historically, Korean Buddhist militarism, and the inevitable violence that it perpetuated, is completely justified by its subjectively positive results in creating and retaining the modern idea of a Korean nation. Seemingly, the “proper view of nation”⁸⁹ that Kyōngsan also emphasizes is one in which the modern idea of the nation has been present since the Silla dynasty and must be preserved. This is despite a history that is much more complex, especially in the 20th century. But, his rhetoric is clearly a part of building the South Korean national identity that was so important in his time. And Kyōngsan, Buddhist chaplains, and Buddhist soldiers had support in their ideology from the highest political authority, Park Chung Hee, who was proud of how Buddhists in the military had worked to reestablish their state-protecting ideology.⁹⁰

The legitimacy these teachings were gaining from the highest religious authority in Korean Buddhism and the highest political authority in South Korea already hint at how the military was only the beginning of a larger development in propagating these beliefs to all South

⁸⁷ Digital Dictionary of Buddhism, “因果應報.”

⁸⁸ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Samsagyo hapdong pōphoe pulgyobu 8 paekyō saengdo ch’amsōk pult’a chōngsin ūro hoguk tachim.” September 29, 1973.

⁸⁹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “*Hwarang chungdae ch’angsōl yukkun 2379 pudae t’ongil wihae.*” August 18, 1974.

⁹⁰ Based on my conversation with former chaplain Kim, January 17, 2022.

Korean Buddhists. The Faith Movement brought propagation both inside and outside the military to the forefront, whereas such mass propagation was previously an ancillary goal of the chaplaincy. Recall the statement of purpose of the Faith Movement given by the Buddhist order, including the line when a soldier “is discharged from the military and enters society, his propagation [of Buddhism] to other soldiers not only helps him carry out his military mission, but is also directly connected to propagating in general society.”⁹¹ From this, we see the motivations behind the Faith Movement specifically for the Buddhist chaplaincy and Buddhist soldiers. It also helps us understand how the Faith Movement came to shape both the Buddhist chaplaincy and contemporary Korean Buddhism. One clear observation is that the Faith Movement led to equating Buddhism for the military with Buddhism for general society. The implication here is that the Buddhism that is taught in the military is not simply a situational teaching but one that can be applied throughout one’s life.

Conclusions and the Faith Movement’s Lasting Impact

On November 30th, 2021, the 53rd anniversary of the Buddhist chaplaincy was held at Hoguk Wŏn’gwang-sa (護國 圓光寺), the central military temple next to Yongsan military base in Seoul. Above the podium in the dharma hall hung a commemorative banner reading “By the Strength of State-Protection – Dharma-Protection! New Hope in Military Buddhism.” At the podium, between traditional Buddhist prayers, specially written military Buddhist prayers, and commemorative slideshows, a procession of monks, chaplains, and military officials gave short speeches on the chaplaincy. Speech after speech brought up familiar topics on military

⁹¹ Hwarang, “*Siron: chŏngun sincha hwa undong*” July 7, 1972.

Buddhism, the same ones spoken of again and again during the Faith Movement. The leader of the Buddhist Propagation Office, a senior monk, discussed Silla Buddhism, the *Hwarang* Way, and the Five Precepts of *Hwarang*, saying that chaplains are their modern incarnation. Another monk from the Central Buddhist Office also discussed the meaning of “state-protection” (*hoguk*) and “dharma-protection” (*hobŏp*). Even monk and former chaplain Yi Yang-gil, who was originally trained during the expansion of the chaplaincy under the Faith Movement, gave a speech remarking on these themes. He was joined in attendance by other former chaplains from the early days; their presence still pervaded the current chaplaincy. Finally, a prayer for the chaplaincy was chanted by the COVID-restricted, yet still formidable audience of about seventy-five, about the “pride in our state-protection Buddhism tradition,” and thanking the Buddha for it.⁹²

The South Korean Buddhist military chaplaincy, and the Faith Movement of the 1970’s that shaped it, are certainly not the only context in which state-protection, *hwarang*, and related concepts have been championed in Korean Buddhism. Rather than try to understand or debate the actual applicability of this history in abstract terms, my aim in this paper is to concretely show how it was disseminated and legitimized in practice. When the Buddhist chaplaincy took firm root in the South Korean military thanks to the Faith Movement, it was concurrently justified with a systematized state-protection Buddhist ideology fit to the contemporary socio-political context. And, despite significant debates and reformations in the Korean Buddhist order since then, including *minjung* Buddhism of the 1980’s and a new “purification” movement in the early 1990’s, as well as liberalization in South Korean society more broadly, the Buddhist military chaplaincy and the ideology that undergirds it have gone almost unquestioned. The only

⁹² Based on my own attendance of the event in November 2021.

true criticisms of the Buddhist chaplaincy have come in recent years, but they have pertained to chaplains' ability to get married and to the right of smaller sects of Buddhism, other than the Chogye Order, also to have chaplains in the military.⁹³ Chaplains and scholars, however, have recognized that the Faith Movement, and the coercive tactics it promoted in converting soldiers, violated rights to religious freedom.⁹⁴

On the one hand, the persisting state-protection ideology of the Buddhist chaplaincy is yet another legacy of the authoritarian dictatorship of Park Chung Hee. But, on the other hand, it helps us better understand modern Korean Buddhism and the historical memory that shapes it. While the ideology of the chaplaincy has its most recent roots in the Park Chung Hee era, it also lays claim to a centuries-long history of Buddhism in Korea. The entire history of Buddhism in Korea should not be reduced to the catch-all term “state-protection Buddhism,” but the utility of the term should not be dismissed entirely, either; rather, its meaning should be understood in the context of each historical period in which it is referenced. In the case of the modern period, the Buddhist chaplaincy, and the zeitgeist created during the Faith Movement to support it, are our best references for understanding what is entailed in a modern form of state-protection Buddhism.

⁹³ Kyungrae Kim and Cheongwan Park (2020), 6-7.

⁹⁴ Based on my conversation with former chaplain Chŏn, March 1, 2022. See discussion of Kang In-ch'ŏl's work in the introduction.

Chapter 4: “A true soldier should be Buddhist:” Korean Buddhism and Compassionate Violence

In the previous chapter, we saw how the history of Korean Buddhism was mobilized to justify the establishment of the chaplaincy and how modern Buddhist chaplains and soldiers were imagined as the successors to Korean Buddhism’s “state-protection” legacy. The *hwarang* and monk-soldiers of the Silla, Koryŏ, and Chosŏn dynasties were evidence of Korean Buddhists’ ability to work on behalf of the state, nation, and people. The Buddhist community used Korean Buddhist history to evade criticisms, mainly by Christians, that Buddhism had nothing to offer the military. This history was then used to educate tens of thousands of soldiers on their role as Buddhists in the military.

However, a significant question remains: how can Buddhists, whose five foundational precepts begin with “refrain from killing,” participate in the military where death and killing are inevitable? In my research, I have found no voice within the Buddhist community condemning or even questioning the idea of Buddhist chaplains in 1960’s and 1970’s South Korea. And, in a recent conversation with a first-generation chaplain, when I asked if he was aware of any moral or ethical apprehensions Buddhists had with the chaplaincy, he answered, “no, there were absolutely none.”¹ Why was this the case? While the “state-protection” history of Korean Buddhism that was mobilized in early South Korea gives some insight into why this was, we have to go one step further; how exactly was violence and killing conceived and explained by monks and chaplains in the early days of the chaplaincy? If a Buddhist soldier came to a chaplain, say on the battlefield in Vietnam, and asked—how can I kill and still be a Buddhist?—

¹ From my conversations with former chaplain Kwŏn, January 28, 2023.

what would the chaplain say? What kind of Buddhist moral philosophy or teachings would they draw upon?

Though it is admittedly difficult to reconstruct such a conversation from the early days of the chaplaincy, there is significant contemporary evidence that helps us answer some of these questions. The movement to establish the Buddhist military chaplaincy prompted thinkers in the Korean Buddhist community to investigate their religion's affinity to the military. They looked at specific examples in "Korean" Buddhist history that justified participation in state-violence from a Buddhist philosophical perspective. They also referenced doctrine from the wider East Asian Buddhist tradition. The *Essential Buddhist Teachings for the Armed Forces* (*Kukkun pōbyo chip*) was first published in 1968 and revised multiple times in the following decades. The first edition would be our best source for understanding the position that the chaplaincy took on Buddhism, violence, and the military. Unfortunately, however, that first edition is lost to history, and the earliest edition available is from 1983. The 1983 edition has no explicit philosophical discussion of how Buddhism's precept of no-harm or no-killing can be interpreted in the military. It simply references Korean Buddhism's "state-protection" tradition as the basis for the modern chaplaincy.² It was not until the 1990's that the Buddhist chaplaincy's official publications began to discuss "Buddhist perspectives on war" (*pulgyo ūi chōnjaenggwan*) and "Buddhist perspectives on life and death in warfare" (*pulgyo ūi chōnjaeng esō ūi salsaenggwan*) in Buddhist doctrine, evidenced by the 1997 *Essential Buddhist Teachings for the Armed Forces*. Hyein Lee has explored the 1997 *Essential Buddhist Teachings for the Armed Forces* in comparison to International Humanitarian Law, using the publication as indicative of the Korean

² Kukpangbu (1983), 115-116.

Buddhist chaplaincy's attitude toward state violence and war.³ While Lee's study gives us some important insight into the chaplaincy, and Buddhism's, relationship to violence in the modern world, her discussion is more a snapshot of the chaplaincy in the 1990's, rather than the early or recent history of the chaplaincy. The early discourse surrounding the Buddhist chaplaincy tackles the issue of state violence differently, and, interestingly, the most recent *Essential Buddhist Teachings for the Armed Forces* published in 2017 removes a discussion of Buddhism's doctrinal stance on war and violence altogether.

In this chapter, I will look at Buddhist print media from the 1960's and 1970's to see what it can teach us about the early South Korean Buddhist chaplaincy's stance on Buddhism and violence. The earliest available official publications on the chaplaincy from the 1980's make little to no mention of foundational Buddhist doctrine, such as is found in *sutras*, *sastras*, and commentarial literature, in justifying Buddhists' participation in war. There was certainly a dominant discourse from the 1960's through the 1980's that Korean Buddhism was unique in its ability to expertly negotiate Buddhist ethical restrictions on killing and violence. This discourse was based on a reading of Korean Buddhist history that centered the "monk-soldier" and "state-protection Buddhism" (*hoguk pulgyo*). For most in the Buddhist community, including President Park Chung Hee, superficial references to the *hwarang* or the Imjin War were enough to justify the Buddhist chaplaincy and Buddhist participation in military violence. I argue in this chapter, however, that Buddhist monks, media, and leading scholars of Buddhism in the 1960's and 1970's also deeply reflected on broader East Asian Buddhist doctrine relating to violence. They sought to push past cursory interpretations of Korean Buddhism's history and construct a memory of Korean Buddhist history that was in line with wider views on violence in the

³ Hyein Lee (2022). 3.

Buddhist world. Buddhist scholars and monks were certainly aware of Buddhist doctrine on violence and connected it to the military chaplaincy, Buddhist soldiering, and the contemporary reality of Buddhism in South Korea. Writers referenced core Buddhist concepts such as “no-self,” “compassion,” and “Buddha nature” as guiding principles for both historical monk-soldiers and modern Buddhist chaplains and soldiers. They also looked at Buddhist doctrine on kingship and the Buddhist Order’s proper relationship to political leadership.

On the one hand, the culture of nationalism, violence, and militarism that abounded during the Park Chung Hee era is a considerable factor for explaining the way the Korean Buddhist community read and interpreted Korean Buddhist history. As Namhee Lee notes, “Social and political conditions are...critical for cultural memory, as they provide either possibility for, or constraints on, the social capacity to narrate the past.”⁴ Buddhist leaders’ historicizing of the past fit their contemporary goals of increasing Buddhism’s patronage and influence in society. The absence of criticisms of the chaplaincy within the Buddhist community can possibly be explained by the suffocating culture of oppression that permeated society throughout Park’s eighteen years of rule, when “an able-bodied person ‘living an idle life’ was considered a criminal.”⁵

Militarism has been an integral part of Korea’s modern history and has been of particular importance in the South Korean state project. From the first Sino-Japanese War at the turn of the 20th century down to the Vietnam War in the 1970s, and in the continuing war between North Korea and South Korea, military conflict has been a mainstay on the Korean peninsula.

However, “militarism” is not simply about military conflict or the military as an institution. To

⁴ Namhee Lee (2022), 80.

⁵ Ibid, 73.

cite Carter Eckert, militarism is “a form of nationalism that privileges the military, especially in politics, and seeks to organize the nation on the basis of military ideals and models.”⁶ In this sense, militarism has been a factor in Korea’s modern state building since the late 19th century. Militarism then took on a specific character under Japanese colonial rule, which reverberated into the post-liberation period. Smaller conflicts between competing political factions began almost immediately after liberation, and the North and South Korean governments that eventually formed placed extreme emphasis on the military. Though the first government of South Korea contributed to the militarization of society in the professionalization of the military and mandatory conscription, the Park Chung Hee regime, and the succeeding military regimes in the 1980’s, embedded militarism into South Korean society. Thus, since the 1960’s, militarism has been an inseparable part of South Korean society.

Possibly no one embodied these militarized legacies of the colonial period more than Park Chung Hee. Carter Eckert argues that many of the hallmark programs and ideologies of Park’s presidency can be traced back to his experience in the Japanese military. First, army interference in Japanese politics, influenced by the initial Meiji coup, was common, especially in the 1930s. The army felt they had a duty to defend the nation from harmful political movements. Eckert argues that this was the basis for Park’s feeling that a coup was the only way to save South Korea.⁷ Second, Park’s critique of the South Korean capitalist economy only serving the wealthy upper class began in his military training. Army men, especially in the Manchurian Military Academy that Park attended, repeatedly condemned the perceived luxuries and wastefulness of politicians and the upper class, calling for military-style frugality and order in

⁶ Eckert (2016), 325

⁷ Ibid, 146.

politics.⁸ Third, Park's "can-do" attitude (*hamyŏn toe nŭn kŏsida*) that he instilled in South Korea was heavily borrowed from the teachings and "spirit" of the Japanese military.⁹ Fourth, Park saw restricted rights of citizens as necessary for development, mirroring the intense, structured nature of his military life. According to Eckert, obedience was the hallmark of the "governmentality" instilled under Park.¹⁰ According to Jin-kyung Lee, under Park's authoritarian military dictatorship, the "soldier becomes the prototype of the modern worker, and the military serves as the model for modern discipline."¹¹ Insook Kwon reminds us that militarism in South Korea is not something limited to government or the military; it pervades all aspects of society and even shapes movements and ideologies that claim to be against the system that created it.¹²

On the other hand, however, we cannot discount the available Buddhist doctrine that was a tool for Korean Buddhists to justify their place in the South Korean military and South Korean society. Buddhists were not simply victims of their social conditions; they were agents of social change. Buddhists' ability to participate in the military, and the violence that it perpetuates, is legitimately upheld in Buddhist doctrine throughout the Buddhist world. By coupling Buddhist doctrine with examples from Korean Buddhist history, leaders in the Buddhist community effectively validated the need for a Buddhist chaplaincy. Therefore, the arguments supporting the establishment of the Buddhist chaplaincy in the 1960's, and the Buddhist philosophy that undergirded military Buddhism through the 1970's, are an important example in the broader scholarly discourse on modern Buddhism and violence. These arguments reveal the uniqueness

⁸ Ibid, 181

⁹ Ibid, 235

¹⁰ Ibid, 274

¹¹ Jin-kyung Lee (2010), 11

¹² Kwon (2000), 170

of the South Korean Buddhist situation, while at the same time appealing to universal concepts related to Buddhism and violence seen throughout history.

Buddhism and Violence

Despite clear admonitions against violence in Buddhist ethics, the history of Asia is replete with examples of Buddhist rulers and societies engaging in violence that they believe is sanctioned by their religious beliefs. Such is the case with most major religions; however, Buddhism and Buddhists are often perceived to be unique in their strict pacifism. Violent Buddhists are often denounced as corrupted, mainly by socio-cultural influences, and are deemed “inauthentic.” Brian Daizen Victoria may be the most prominent scholar to put forth the argument that early Buddhism and the basic tenets of Buddhism *never* condone any violence, and later Mahayana writings that do were only seeking to please the rulers of the countries Buddhists were inhabiting. Victoria unequivocally states: “[t]o purposely inflict pain and suffering, let alone death, on one segment of beings under the guise of benefiting another part, however defined, can *never* be part of a Buddhism rooted in the teachings of its founder.”¹³ He explains that East Asian Chan/Zen Buddhism is essentially “ethics-less” and has been infiltrated over centuries by “Confucian and especially Neo-Confucian social ethics.”¹⁴ Furthermore, the Buddhist order’s close relationship to various political rulers made the religion “corrupt and degenerate,” “the *de facto* pimp and prostitute of the state.”¹⁵

¹³ Victoria (2010), 116.

¹⁴ Victoria (2020), 221.

¹⁵ Victoria (2010), 128.

Rupert Gethin has similarly put forth an argument that the mainstream Buddhist tradition, represented by the Pali Nikāyas and the Chinese Āgamas, completely prohibits any kind of killing or violence, saying that Buddhist adherents should strive to be compassionate towards all; “violence in all its forms is condemned.”¹⁶ He further argues that, while the Vinaya does recognize varying degrees of severity in killing living beings determined by “[physical] size,” “virtue,” and the “desire” and “effort involved,”¹⁷ “the possibility that an act of killing a living being can be motivated by wholesome states of mind is simply not allowed in Abhidharma Buddhist psychology; the intention to kill another being always crucially involves hatred or aversion.”¹⁸ Even in a case given in the *Prātimokṣa*, where a group of monks talks positively about death to an old, terminally ill monk, the Buddha determines their actions constitute a *pārājika* (offense involving defeat) because they were abetting the death of a human being. The explanation is deeply psychological: though the monks may have thought they were acting out of a compassionate, wholesome state of mind, deep down they were acting out of aversion to the suffering of the dying monk, “aversion” being an unwholesome state of mind. The Abhidharma chiefly discusses killing in terms of wholesome and unwholesome acts: “is [the act] motivated by greed, hatred, and delusion, or is it motivated by nonattachment, friendliness, and wisdom?” For those who may believe this leaves room for “compassionate killing,” the Abhidharma rhetorically retorts, as Gethin notes: “But are you sure? Are you sure that what you think are friendliness and compassion are really friendliness and compassion? Are you sure that some subtle aversion and delusion have not surfaced in the mind?”¹⁹ Gethin marks a turning point around 500 CE when

¹⁶ Gethin (2008), 59-62.

¹⁷ Gethin (2004). 172.

¹⁸ Gethin (2008). 67-69.

¹⁹ Gethin (2004). 190.

texts arose that explained kings can produce merit, the accumulation of positive karma towards enlightenment, by killing non-believers. Gethin's explanation for this discrepancy is not strongly polemical; rather, he believes there is a quite simple dynamic at play: the Buddha's words are ideal, but humans are flawed.²⁰

Other scholars, however, contend that the expectation that Buddhism should be strictly pacifist is a modern construction. Iselin Frydenlund argues that “nonviolence” or “pacifism” in Buddhism were privileged in the 19th and 20th centuries because of (1) “European ‘positive orientalism’ toward Buddhism, (2) “modern reshaping of ideals of violence” as part of a “modernist attempt at reformulating new Buddhism suitable for the modern world,” and (3) Buddhist pacifism being mobilized as an anti-colonial resistance in Sri Lanka which helped popularize the idea, though it was mainly a “modern, anti-colonial, and Gandhian-inspired enterprise, with little historical precedence in Buddhist history.”²¹ Although violence may be condemned in the earliest Buddhist texts, akin to Gethin and Victoria's arguments, the Buddhist tradition has changed and developed for thousands of years since the time of the Buddha. The significance of these early texts to Buddhists over diverse ranges of space and time, including the present day, is not always clear. Therefore, we must not denounce those Buddhisms that seem to stray from the “original” Buddhist scriptures.

Indeed, in Paul Demiéville's seminal 1957 study, “Buddhism and War,” he alerts us to countless examples from Chinese, Japanese, and Korean history of Buddhism being used to justify and promote violence. According to Demiéville, the most common argument used to justify violence in the name of Buddhism is that the Dharma must be protected from its

²⁰ Gethin (2008). 62.

²¹ Frydenlund (2004), 204.

enemies.²² These “enemies” could be non-Buddhists, or even Buddhists who are considered to support a heretical interpretation of the religion. In this sense, we see a similar logic applied to war across cultures and throughout human history: war is justified if it is defensive.

Yet, the issue of violence in Buddhism is even more complex than citing examples of Buddhists fighting wars. Michael Jerryson argues that the term “violence” itself must be investigated and critiqued to have an appropriate discussion of its place in Buddhism. The term usually translated to “non-violence” is “*ahimsā*,” which, based on its root word *hiṃsā*, meaning “injury or harm,” may be better translated to “non-injury” or “non-harm.”²³ Treating “violence” as synonymous with “injury” or “harm” can free the discussion of Buddhism and violence from the assumptions of the more nebulous English term “violence.” We also have to consider that such violence has not always carried a strictly negative connotation in Buddhism. Violence has no inherent positive or negative ethical implication; rather, a violent act’s ethical or soteriological effect is judged contextually. “Intention,” “nature of the victim,” and “the stature of the person who commits the violence” are three variables most often considered in Buddhist scriptures. In Mahayana Buddhism, judgments on violence are mainly interpreted through the concepts of “skill in means (*upaya*) and emptiness (*shunyata*).”²⁴ Mahayana scriptures focus chiefly on intentionality, taking into account the possibility of compassionate violence and the enlightened status of the beings involved.

Theravada, rather, focuses on the biology of the victim(s) and offender(s) in question; where they stand in the hierarchy of beings, whether god, human, animal, etc., factors greatly into judgements on the value of violence. All these determinations are undergirded by a basic

²² Demiéville (2010).

²³ Jerryson (2018), 7.

²⁴ Jerryson (2013). 44, 49.

logic that Jerryson calls the “prima facie” dimension: the precept of non-violence is taken to be true until a situation arises that contends it.²⁵ Stephen Jenkins specifically argues against those who see “compassionate violence” as an “aberration, minority opinion, or negative karma-causing act.” He claims he “not yet located an example where a compassionate killer suffers negative karmic consequences.”²⁶ He locates numerous examples of “compassionate violence” in scriptures, including Asaṅga’s *Bodhisattvabhūmi* and *Mahāyānasamgraha*, Śāntideva’s *Śikṣāsamuccaya* and *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Candrakīrti’s commentary on Āryadeva’s *Catuḥśatakam* and the widely popular *Upāyakauśalya-sūtra* and *Mahā-Upāyakauśalya-sūtra*.

The *Upāyakauśalya-sūtra* has been cited across the Buddhist world for centuries to justify violence, including in modern Korean Buddhism. Its central story is of the Buddha in a previous life as a ship captain. He identifies a thief on board the ship who is planning to kill all one hundred sailors, who are also Bodhisattvas. The Buddha decides to kill the thief out of compassion. This compassion, though, is not a simple logic of killing few to save many. While the Buddha saves the one hundred Bodhisattvas, he also prevents the thief from accruing the massive negative karma that would come from killing said Bodhisattvas. Furthermore, the Buddha’s perfected wisdom and skillful means prevent him from producing negative karma as well. After this episode, the *sutra* explains that the Buddha was born in his next life with a thorn stabbed in his foot, seemingly to punish his act of killing. However, it is made clear that the thorn is also representative of skillful means, and not actual karmic consequences, because the Buddha is perfectly compassionate and saved the others on the ship.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid, 35.

²⁶ Jenkins (2010). 300, 320.

²⁷ Ibid, 322.

The *Yogacarabhumi sastra* by Asaṅga presents a case of a bodhisattva killing a man who was about to be killed by another man. In this case, the bodhisattva is sacrificing themselves to save the would-be killer from a worse fate than the bodhisattva could have. In a third century sutra, the *Ajātaśatru-kaukrtya-vinodana*, Manjusri exonerates a criminal who killed their mother, saying that the inherent purity of the criminal's mind was not undermined by his sin. Even later texts in the Chinese and Japanese Chan/Zen tradition show typically iconoclastic Chan masters killing animals to make a point about the inherent emptiness and non-duality of existence. And, even though killing a human being is considered a *pārājika*, there are still scriptural cases of compassion and forgiveness being given to killers.

Though these texts provide reference for Buddhists to negotiate violence in this world, they are certainly not exhaustive treatises on how, when, and why violence is needed. Understanding violence in Buddhism cannot only be based on a few foundational texts or beliefs; the temporal, cultural, and Buddhist context of each case must be taken into consideration, and a valuation must not be assumed from the outset. Violence committed by soldiers and/or the military is a great example of this fluidity, especially because Buddhist scriptures are fairly ambiguous on the matter. Since its foundations, Buddhism has developed alongside the military and war, with Sakyamuni himself being from the warrior class. The middle-late Mahayana scripture, *Satyakaparivarta*, provides some guidelines for warfare. The text is mainly concerned with how a Buddhist king should wage war. First, they should try to become friends with the enemy and avoid war all together. If that fails, then they can go to war as a last resort if it means protecting their people; however, they must defeat the enemies while capturing all of them alive. If enemies are unintentionally wounded or killed, the king does not necessarily reap negative karma because he has shown his “skill in means” and “compassion.” Protecting the people is the

key determinate, and Tsunehiko Sugiki argues that the stipulation of “protecting the people” does not only allow for a “defensive” war; “the dichotomy of aggression and defense is not always a useful framework for understanding Buddhist attitudes about war in ancient India.” Additionally, the reason the enemies are killed is not simply for their sake; their karma has led them to try and kill a “righteous king” and the king has no other choice but to kill them.²⁸

As was the case in ancient India, the complexity surrounding the necessity of war has produced diverse determinations to its compatibility with Buddhism. Such is the situation with Korean Buddhism’s relationship to war and its modern incarnation in the South Korean Buddhist military chaplaincy. Though the scholarly discourse in Buddhism and violence has developed greatly in the past twenty years, the Korean Buddhist case is markedly absent from much of this discourse. This may be because, while some of the examples explored above are referenced by the Korean Buddhist community, as I will explore below, Korean Buddhism’s relationship to violence is most commonly dictated by the (imagined) extraordinary history of Buddhism in Korea.

The History of Korean Buddhism and War

The Korean Buddhist community and the Chogye Order seemingly have no qualms with the necessity of a Buddhist military chaplaincy. Their reasoning consists mainly of both historical and contemporary examples that are, interestingly, specific to the Buddhist tradition on the Korean peninsula, while appealing only briefly to some of the early doctrinal understandings of Buddhism and violence that I have outlined above. My purpose in this section is to outline the

²⁸ Sugiki (2020). 13-17.

history of Korean Buddhism's relationship to war, violence, and the military from the perspective of South Korean Buddhist scholars, monks, and media in the 1960's and 1970's. Their telling of this history was integral to how the Buddhist military chaplaincy was understood and, more importantly, how chaplains could teach their soldiers how to kill and still be Buddhist. I will weave in some details from more recent scholarship, but the narrative will follow the war-forward timeline employed by those in the early South Korean Buddhist community. This type of historicizing is a story of progress with an underlying current of nationalism. Events and people are connected through their shared characteristic of fighting for the nation (*kukka* or *nara*) or the people (*minjok*), and their patriotism (*aeguksim*). I will particularly reference Dongguk Professor An Kye-hyön's eight-part series on the history of "monk-soldiers", published in *Pulgyo sinmun* from April to June 1972. An's telling of Korean Buddhist history, with monk-soldiers as the narrative protagonist, was meant to have broad appeal. With *han'gŭl* transliterations of all literary Chinese characters, An's "History of Korean monk-soldiers" (*Han'guk sünggun sa*) applies the term "monk-soldier" to any monk who fought or worked for the nation in any loosely militaristic capacity.

Furthermore, there was clearly a broader social milieu that emphasized this progressive, nationalistic historicizing during the Park Chung Hee era, outside of simply history writing. Like the statue of Yi Sun-sin in Kwanghwamun Square that was procured by Park Chung Hee in 1968, similar monuments, statues, and ceremonies for monk-soldiers abounded during this period. In 1967, a statue of monk-soldier and Imjin War hero Samyöng Yujöng was erected in Seoul, at the behest of President Park, by the Construction Committee for Deceased Patriots' Statues (*Aeguksönyöl Chosang Köllip Wiwönhoe*).²⁹ Throughout the 1960's memorial stones and

²⁹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Samyöng taesa tongsang chemaksik yöngi," November 12, 1967.

statues were built honoring Yujǒng in his birthplace Miryang.³⁰ In June 1974, Park visited Chikji-sa (直指寺), the site of Yujǒng's enlightenment, for a special prayer, and promised to actively support the temples restoration.³¹ Scholars have previously pointed out the nationalistic bent of Korean Buddhist scholarship during the Park Chung Hee era, and have rightly connected it to Park's authoritarianism and militarism.³² But my goal here is to connect this scholarship to its real-world consequences. Much like the suffering and death that happened in decrepit working conditions under the guise of Park's developmentalism and modernization, South Korean Buddhist soldiers fought, killed, and died for the Buddhist nationalist history widely disseminated during this period. Whether or not the history told by the Buddhist community is true is not my determination here; rather, I aim to show how violence is perpetuated throughout the centuries and millennia. What makes violence and killing "just" is based on a complex confluence of factors that must influence people not only on a social level but on an individual level, as there must be someone to pull the trigger or drop the bomb. Furthermore, these Buddhists are not simply "victims" of their social situation. The telling of Buddhist history explored below turns Buddhist chaplains and soldiers into agents of social change. They are using creative ways to appeal to broader social trends. The Buddhist chaplaincy and its inherent violence are not a corruption of Buddhism from outside social forces but a religious representation of those very forces.

³⁰ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Samyǒng taesa kinyǒmbi kǒnnip," September 1, 1963; "Samyǒng daesa tongsang," October 17, 1965; "Samyǒng taesa taejae ponghaeng," October 19, 1969.

³¹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Pak taet'ongnyǒng chikjisa pangmun," June 30, 1974.

³² Sørensen (2008), 196.

The history of Buddhism in Silla Korea begins with an episode of violence. Monk Ich'adon (501-527) apparently sacrificed himself to force the court to make Buddhism the official state religion. Ich'adon has been remembered as a “martyr” and a model for modern Korean Buddhism.³³ But the earliest and possibly most significant evidence of Korean Buddhism’s affinity toward and support for violence is five precepts developed by the Silla monk Wŏn’gwang’s for the *Hwarang* Way. The 7th century Monk-scholar Wŏn’gwang codified his five secular precepts (*sesok ogye*) based on Buddhism for the elite group of male youths called *hwarang* (flower boys). These precepts included “never retreat in battle” and “be selective in the taking of life.”³⁴ This ideology has been cited as the foundation behind Silla’s eventual unification of the Korean peninsula. As these *hwarang* played a significant role in uniting the Korean peninsula under the Silla dynasty, they remain a touchstone in the history of Korean national identity along with Korean Buddhist identity.³⁵ An Hye-kyŏn in “History of Korean monk-soldiers” looks at Wŏn’gwang’s “Appeal for Military Relief” (*kŏlsap’yo* 乞師表) to elaborate on Wŏn’gwang’s ideas on killing. An notes: “Not harming others is a position of equality (*p’yŏngdŭngjŏk*). What’s written in the Appeal for Military Relief is a discriminatory position (*ch’abyŏljŏk*). Wŏn’gwang wrote it because of Silla people’s sense of duty (*samyŏnggam*).”³⁶ For An, this “discriminatory position,” the ability to interpret the rigidity of

³³ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Sungyoja Ich’adon,” September 25, 1966.

³⁴ In full: loyalty to the king [or leader] (事君以忠), filial piety (事親以孝), trust among friends (交友以信), never retreat in battle (臨戰無退) and be selective in the taking of life (殺生有擇).

³⁵ From McBride, Richard D. *Domesticating the Dharma*: “The *hwarang* are presumed to have developed out of local, village, or rural youth organizations of the Three Kingdoms era that were reformulated into the more centralized *hwarang* order to promote royal and aristocratic prerogatives.” “The *hwarang* mediated between various competing traditions and sources of power in Silla: the royal family and the aristocracy, the regional and capital aristocracies, elites and commoners, the traditions and cultures of Silla and Kaya, and Buddhism and the indigenous religious practices of Silla and Kaya.” By crossing rigid lines of the “bone-rank” system of social status by calling upon the cult of Maitreya, but not Maitreya as a “messianic figure.” They also helped support the Cakravartin king notion by connecting Buddhism to leadership. pp. 21.

³⁶ An Kye-hyŏn, “Han’guk sŭnggun sa,” *Pulgyo sinmun*, April 9, 1972.

the non-harm precept differently in different situations, would influence Korean Buddhist thought going forward, most notably in Wŏn'gwang's secular precept of "be selective in the taking of life." Though the *hwarang* of Silla were not monks, An identifies 7th century monk To'ok (道玉) (?-655) of Silche-sa (實際寺) as possibly the first monk-soldier. Influenced by Wŏn'gwang, To-ok declared, "it is better to join the army and dedicate my body to the country now because I am only myself in surface appearance and have not done any good deeds yet."³⁷ To-ok takes the Buddhist concept of "no-self," in that he is only himself "in surface appearance" and uses it to justify his sacrifice on the battlefield. Furthermore, his lack of merit, in that he has "not done any good deeds yet" implies that serving in the army is a merit-making act.

The Koryŏ dynasty is often presented as the pinnacle of Buddhism on the Korean peninsula. Buddhist monastics and institutions close relationship to the government produced a symbiotic relationship between Buddhism and politics. Monk-soldiers remained a potent force when the Koryŏ court was in turmoil. According to An Kye-hyŏn, monk-soldiers led movements to purge unfavorable members of the court and crush anti-government rebellions around the country. They also had a very complicated relationship with the Koryŏ military regime (*musin chŏngkwŏn* 1170-1270), breaking into the palace to kill General Yi Ŭi-pong's (n.d.) children, to which Yi retaliated by raiding temples and killing hundreds of monks.³⁸ Later, monk-soldiers fought against invading Khitan and Mongol armies throughout the 12th, 13th, and 14th centuries. Japanese pirate raids on Koryŏ's eastern coast were also a consistent threat to which monk-soldiers responded. Monk-soldier generals (*sŭngjang* 僧將) were then split on both sides of the

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

conflict that resulted in the fall of the Koryŏ dynasty and the start of the Chosŏn dynasty in the late 14th century.³⁹

The early to mid-Chosŏn dynasty, with its avowed Neo-Confucian ruling ideology, was still tolerant to Buddhism, and the continuation of the monk-soldier system is evidence of that tolerance. Though the late 16th century Imjin War would be the defining moment for monk-soldiers, they continued their military and corvée labor service throughout the 15th and 16th centuries. This work earned thousands of monks their official monk identification cards (*toch'ŏp*). Many scholars in the 1960's and 1970's, and even to the present day, present the rise of monk-soldiers during the Imjin War as a spontaneous development born out of humble mountain monks' desire to protect the country. However, as An Kye-hyŏn rightly noted in 1972, the infrastructure and, more importantly, the Buddhist philosophy supporting the monk-soldier system had been there for centuries prior to the Imjin War. This helps to explain how thousands of monk-soldiers, supposedly organized on a whim, were so successful in fighting the Japanese armies who were battle-hardened from years of civil war.

When the Japanese armies, led by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, were easily defeating the poorly trained Chosŏn royal armies and advancing northward, Sŏsan Hyujŏng sent a message to all Buddhist temples across the country, telling monks to take up weapons and form armies under the rallying cry “one death to protect the nation” (*ilsaboguk* 一死報國).⁴⁰ From June 1592 to April 1593, the monk-soldiers led chiefly by Hyujŏng and his disciple Samyŏng Yujŏng, truly had an effective campaign against the Japanese military. In less than a year, they succeeded in retaking lands into the northern and southern reaches of the Korean peninsula, and eventually

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Kim Tae-wŏl, “Imjin waeran kwa samyŏng taesa,” *Pulgyo sinmun*, May 26, 1968.

helped the royal family return to the capital after fleeing to Kanghwa Island.⁴¹ Monk-soldiers were also deeply involved in the adopting of new weaponry for the Chosŏn military. As monk-soldiers and royal forces captured Japanese guns, which used the newest matchlock technology, monk generals like Yujŏng and Sinyŏl (信悅, n.d.) led training sessions at monasteries on the guns' use.⁴²

The supposed “love of country and love of the people” (*aegukaejok sasang*) displayed by these monk-soldiers provided bountiful opportunity for 1960's and 1970's Buddhist media to highlight.⁴³ The monk-soldiers' apparent willingness to kill and die to protect Chosŏn was represented by monk-soldier general Yŏnggyu (靈圭 d. 1592). After getting Hyujŏng's call to form monk armies and defeat the invasion, Yŏnggyu was quickly thrust into battle at Ch'ŏngju Fortress (*Ch'ŏngju sansŏng*) in southern Ch'ungch'ŏng Province. Witnessing Japanese troops quickly advancing north. Yŏnggyu sent a message to monks in the region: “those who are afraid of death, do not come join us.” Eight hundred monks joined him, and Yŏnggyu led them in training alongside the royal army to defend the fortress. When the fighting began, the royal army ran, leaving only the monk-soldiers. Upon their last stand, Yŏnggyu said: “It's a fight that we can't win because of our disadvantage, but even if we die we must die together.”⁴⁴

The story of monk-soldiers during the Imjin War, however, is not simply one of heroically dying on the battlefield. After the war, Yujŏng was sent by King Sŏnjo (r. 1567-1608) as Chosŏn's representative during talks between Japanese and Ming diplomats. In these talks, Yujŏng made it clear that this country was waging a defensive war and their only goal was to

⁴¹ Yi Pong-ch'un (2015), 696-701.

⁴² An Kye-hyŏn, “Han'guk sŭnggun sa,” *Pulgyo sinmun*, April 30, 1972

⁴³ An Kye-hyŏn, “Han'guk sŭnggun sa,” *Pulgyo sinmun*, April 23, 1972

⁴⁴ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “8 paek sŭnggun chihŭi Ch'ŏngju sŏng t'alhwan Chohŏn changgun kwa ch'oehu kkaji ssawo,” April 23, 1967.

restore peace for the court and the people. He described the suffering and death of his people to the Japanese and Ming diplomats. Yujöng preached “the precept of non-killing” (*pulsalsaenggye*) to dissuade Japanese from continuing to fight.⁴⁵ When the Japanese diplomats retorted, citing the monk-soldiers’ killing of Japanese generals, Yujöng responds they received royal orders from the king to do it and killing was in defense of their country.⁴⁶ Indeed, Buddhist media tells us that Yujöng’s killing was different. *Pulgyo* magazine proudly tells us that Yujöng and his monk-soldiers, together with General Yu Che-dok (n.d.), “did the meritorious deed of decapitating the enemy general (*sugong* 首功)” in Cholla Province. However, Yujöng decided to go out into the secular world and become a monk general not for “wealth, fame, or gain.” He never forgot his life as a monk and did not stop living by a monk’s values; “it was all dictated by the greatness of his faith.”⁴⁷ Furthermore, “the basis of the reality of when Great Master Samyöng led a monk-soldier army and faced the enemy as ‘devil-fighting soldiers (*hangmagun*)’ is very different than [just] them bringing about indiscriminate killing and breaking the Buddhist precepts...They had clear knowledge of ‘realizing the true dharma’ [*chöngbopguhyön* 正法具現] called ‘refuting false doctrines and elucidating right teaching’ [*pasahyönjöng* 破사현정 [no hancha given].”⁴⁸ Compassion was also emphasized as part of the motivation of monk-soldiers, and we are told that monk-soldiers like Yujöng never forgot their monkhood and their commitment to the Bodhisattva ideal.⁴⁹ A May 1965 *Pulgyo sinmun* article, reflecting on the work of monk-soldiers during the Imjin War, reminds readers that:

⁴⁵ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Samyöng taesa tongsang könnip üi üüüi,” October 22, 1967.

⁴⁶ Hye Ch’o-yök, “Yujöng Samyöng taesa punch’ungsönanrok,” *Pömyun*, November 1968.

⁴⁷ Kim Tae-ün, “Samyöng taesa,” *Pulgyo*, no.32.

⁴⁸ Sök Tae-u, “Chayul sigüphan ‘hangmagun’ haengjöng,” *Pulgyo sinmun*, October 3, 1971.

⁴⁹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Samyöng taesa tongsang könnip üi üüüi,” October 22, 1967.

When a war breaks out, those who suffer the most are the common people... The people who live on the land cannot abandon it just because a war broke out.” “Religions are always on the side of the suffering common people. Whether it’s the suffering of sin or the suffering of death, religions are on the side of that suffering. When the land of Chosŏn became a battlefield, Buddhism saw the people’s suffering and had to exhibit compassion. *Defeating the Japanese invading armies would be “state-protection” (hoguk), but at the same time it was an act of compassion to relieve the pain of the common people.* When the whole country became a battlefield and the people were suffering, Buddhism, the religion of compassion, had to stand up.⁵⁰

Later in this chapter, we will look more deeply into the role of “compassion” in Korean Buddhism and war.

It is worth noting that there was contemporary criticism of these actions by monks. Two of Hyujŏng’s other disciples, Chŏnggwan Ilsŏn (靜觀 一禪 1533-1608) and Kyŏnghŏn Sunmyŏng (敬軒 順命 1544-1633), wrote negatively about Yujŏng and his monk-soldiers. They recognized the suffering the war was causing, but said that monks shouldn’t be “entering the secular world,” “wearing regular clothes,” “forgetting the original reason they ordained” and “negating their religious austerities.” They begged the monk-soldiers to return to the monkhood. They recognized the monk-soldiers’ desire to help sentient beings, but they wanted to remind them of the negative aspects of it to; mainly that they are actually “returning to lay life.” In the end, their criticisms held true in that Yujŏng never returned to mountain-monk life.⁵¹ Buddhist media noted that Hyujŏng’s poems reveal consternation about his participation in war. He recognizes that he is “producing the karma of killing” and that his true calling is to be a mountain-monk, but he cannot, according to the article, deny his deep “nationalistic love” (*minjokjŏkin sarang*).⁵² Yujŏng also lamented the fact that he and the other monk-soldiers are

⁵⁰ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “K’al ap’ esŏn chonggyo,” May 30, 1965. My italics.

⁵¹ Yi Pong-ch’un (2015), 719-721.

⁵² *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Sŏsan taesa ūi si,” April 30, 1972.

not living their appropriate lives as mountain monks, but there is was no other option than to take up weapons and kill when the nation was in such crisis.⁵³

Great Master Ch'ongdam, head of the Chogye Order's Executive Office from 1954 to 1968, wrote on the influence of the monk-soldiers during the Imjin Wars. While Silla and Koryŏ monks previous to the Imjin War also fought and died on behalf of the country, according to Ch'ongdam, their sacrifice was “dying for one's ruler” (*sunjŏl* 殉節) based on a feudal society organized by class. The royal soldiers and monk-soldiers during the Imjin War were the first in Korean history to “sacrifice themselves for the nation” (*sun'guk* 殉國) in the sense of “modern nation-states” (*minjok kukka*).⁵⁴ Recent scholarship has refuted such an interpretation of the term “*kuk*” (國) or “*kukka*” (國家) as it was used in the Chosŏn dynasty. In the early to mid-Chosŏn dynasty, the latter term usually meant “the family [that represents] the country.” Even by the late Chosŏn dynasty, it referred to “the central government.”⁵⁵ For Ch'ongdam, however, monk-soldiers set an example for contemporary Koreans sacrificing themselves for the betterment of South Korea and the people.

In recognition of their sacrifices and utility, the ideologically anti-Buddhist Chosŏn government created new official titles for monks: *ch'ongsŏp*. The title, which had multiple rankings within it (*p'alto toch'ongsŏp*, *toch'ongsŏp*, *puch'ongsŏp*) was first given to Hyujong in 1593, and solely came to mean “a monk who urgently participated in war.” But the creation of such titles was not taken lightly by the Buddhist community; it was a sign of “their existence once again being officially recognized.”⁵⁶ Yujŏng was the next to receive the title, and he helped

⁵³ *Pulgyo sinmun*, “Samyŏng taesa ūi si,” May 7, 1972.

⁵⁴ Yi Hye-sŏng, “Hoguk pulgyo sasang ūi minjogwan,” *Pŏmryun*, November 1972.

⁵⁵ Hwang (200), 8.

⁵⁶ Yi Pong-ch'un (2015), 581.

to expand the meaning of it from mainly a nominal title to one with actual official duties. The *ch'ongsŏp* led the monk-soldiers in post-war projects like “praying for the stability and prosperity of the royal family and the state” and “construction projects such as reconstruction of destroyed bridges and roads, construction of fortresses, and palace construction.”⁵⁷

Monk-soldiers also fought in the Manchu Invasion of 1627, and the war with Qing China in 1636.⁵⁸ The latter, which ended in defeat for Chosŏn, may have been the most consequential war for the Chosŏn dynasty.⁵⁹ A “devil-fighting army” of three thousand monk-soldiers fought to retake Namhansan Fortress (*Namhan sansŏng*), partially breaking the massive Qing armies’ siege of the capital. This may have saved Chosŏn from even greater human and political losses.⁶⁰ After these wars, direct fighting was not monk-soldiers’ most significant work. Their true impact came to be protecting fortresses, military equipment, royal goods, and managing and protecting farmlands. All across the country, monks defended mountain fortresses (*sansŏng*) and the military stockpiles that they contained. Thousands of monks from around the peninsula worked intermittently to build fortresses and palaces, and protect border lands. Their most memorable duty was running defense operations at Namhansan Fortress and Bukhansan Fortress (*Pukhan sansŏng*) protecting the capital until the Kabo Reform (*Kabo kyehyŏk*) eliminated the monk-soldier position toward the end of the Chosŏn dynasty in 1894. Monks from around the country worked as monk-soldiers in the fortresses, and temples were built in and around them to serve these monks.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Kim Yong-t’ae (2012), 185.

⁵⁸ Yi Pong-ch’un (2015), 510.

⁵⁹ Ji-young Lee (2017). 23.

⁶⁰ An Kye-hyŏn, “Han’guk sŭnggun sa,” *Pulgyo sinmun*, May 21, 1972.

⁶¹ Kim Yong-t’ae (2012), 201.

We can see how, during this period, temples and the monkhood became militarized. Every day, monk-soldiers at Namhan and Bukhan Fortresses would chant scriptures along with doing martial arts training. According to An Hye-kyŏn, by the time of King Yŏngjo (r. 1724-1776), the abbot of almost every major temple was a monk-soldier general, who was responsible for both “military affairs” (軍務) and “temple affairs” (寺務). However, in the final century of the Chosŏn dynasty, following widespread economic difficulties, the court began levying higher and higher taxes on monasteries, Confucian literati stole temple properties, and the number of monks dropped considerably. The monk-soldier system became extremely burdensome on monks and monasteries. Recent scholarship has argued that the Buddhist community was mainly concerned with their, and the entire country’s, poor financial situation, and their main goal was the survival of Buddhism.⁶² It was a financial strain on many of the monks who participated in the “labor force” that the Chosŏn government needed after devastating wars.⁶³ They had to provide their own food and clothes, which often meant they had to sell temple goods or land.⁶⁴

Throughout the final three centuries of the Chosŏn dynasty, public work and *corvée* labor, including in the military, was by and large the most prominent way Buddhist monks could be active in state matters. Within the Buddhist community, monks certainly kept up publication activities despite persecution from the government. But their work as soldiers was the best way they could show their worth to the state, and it played a significant role in Buddhism’s survival into the modern period.

This preceding summary is certainly not an exhaustive account of Chosŏn monk-soldiers or Chosŏn Buddhism. But this glossing of Korean Buddhist history that underscores Korean

⁶² Yi Pong-ch’un (2015), 463

⁶³ Kim Yong-t’ae (2012), 184.

⁶⁴ Yi Pong-ch’un (2015), 465

Buddhism's military activities informed the cultural memory that undergirded the early Buddhist military chaplaincy. On a somewhat tangential note, Chosŏn Buddhism has been a popular topic in scholarship recently. This scholarship has been motivated by attempts to challenge the conception that Buddhism was stagnant or defunct due to the Chosŏn dynasty leadership's official pro-Confucian, anti-Buddhist policies. While this argument is beyond the scope of this chapter or dissertation, scholars of Chosŏn Buddhism should recognize that the monk-soldier system was a significant, if not the most significant, way Buddhism survived during the Chosŏn dynasty. More importantly, the relevance of monk-soldiers had been recognized by Buddhist leaders and scholars since the 1960's, often motivated by substantiating the Buddhist military chaplaincy. In order to explain the modernization of Korean Buddhism in both the early and mid-20th century, one must always note the impact of the monk-soldier and monastic corvée labor system and how it reverberated throughout the Buddhist community.

Korean Buddhism, Compassionate Killing, and the Buddhist Chaplaincy

This telling of Korean Buddhist history through the narrative of the monk-soldier reveals Korean Buddhists' putative uniqueness in their ability to straddle the line between right and wrong. Over a millennium of Buddhists' military service, in diverse capacities, proved to writers in the 1960's and 1970's that the foundations of the Buddhist chaplaincy were always present within the tradition. Now, it was time to revive them. The nationalistic bent of this scholarship, however, was not the only reason that the Buddhist chaplaincy, and the violence and killing that it participated in, was rationalized. The "compassion" of the monk-soldiers guided their actions. Above, we saw the discourse around violence in the Buddhist world; foundational Buddhist

doctrine leaves open the possibility for violence and killing. In the history of monk-soldiers told in modern South Korea, Buddhist concepts related to violence found around the Buddhist world do indeed come up. Furthermore, Buddhist scriptures that discuss the relationship between the Buddhist community and kingship, such as the *Humane Kings Sutra* (*Inwang-gyöng* 仁王經) are also referenced. Scholars have overlooked their importance when studying the South Korean Buddhist chaplaincy and the Korean Buddhist community as a whole. Certainly, the way “compassionate killing” was referenced by Japanese Buddhists during the colonial period is an analog to similar uses in South Korea. However, Japanese Buddhists in the late 19th and early 20th century were certainly not the first or last to cite “compassionate killing” in justifying violence. Additionally, though colonial period Korean Buddhism, and the violence that it contributed to on behalf of the Japanese Empire, must be referenced in any history of the South Korean Buddhist military chaplaincy (as I did earlier in this dissertation), I point out here that it was not the only, or the most important, influence in justifying South Korean Buddhists’ participation in the military.

Buddhism and Kingship, Returning to “Hoguk Buddhism”

As explored earlier in this chapter, and elsewhere in this dissertation, leading voices in the South Korean Buddhist community have emphasized Korean Buddhism’s unique *hoguk* or state-protection character. Korean Buddhists’ activities throughout history, such as master Wön’gwang and the *hwarang* supporting the unification of Silla, and monk-soldiers fighting during the Imjin War, are brought up to support the argument for this *hoguk* character. Monks

and chaplains, however, were also aware of Buddhist doctrine that formed the basis of the “state-protection” idea in the East Asian Buddhist world.

Great Master Ch’ongdam was a key figure in espousing traditionalism and nationalism in the Korean Buddhist community. He was also an adamant supporter of the chaplaincy, especially as it pertained to propagation and modernization.⁶⁵ In Chapter 3, we saw how Ch’ongdam’s successor, Kyongsan, played an essential role in establishing the chaplaincy and disseminating military Buddhist ideology. While both monks were similar in their nationalist view of Korean Buddhist history and their consistent dissemination of the state-protection Buddhism idea, Ch’ongdam saw the history of monk-soldiers as an answer to many of the social ills effecting Korea in his time. He wrote:

You must think deeply about why those [Buddhist masters] have come down to us today? They have come to their country, to their compatriot brother and sisters. The reality that we have all been born here is prioritized over all other realities. We are Koreans. Our compatriots are going through many social ills, such as poverty, hunger, ignorance, and uncleanliness, and it is the historical mission of Korean Buddhism to come to their aid.⁶⁶

Ch’ongdam’s belief in Buddhism’s ability to serve the people of Korea was rooted in his readings of, in the words of his disciple, the *Three Sutras of State-Protection* (*Hoguk sambu-gyong* 護國三部經): the *Lotus Sutra* (*Myobop yonhwa-gyong* 妙法蓮華經), *Sutra of Golden Light* (*Kumgwangmyong-gyong* 金光明經), and *Humane Kings Sutra*. He used these sutras to devise five values that should guide Buddhists in the modern nation: compassion, freedom, progress, equality, and social welfare.⁶⁷ For him, the history of state-protection Buddhism in

⁶⁵ Kim Kwangsik (2022), 138-139.

⁶⁶ Yi Hye-song, “Hoguk pulgyo sasang ui minjogwan,” *Pomryun*, November 1972.

⁶⁷ Yi Hye-song, “Ch’ongdam taejongs wa hoguk pulgyo,” *Pulgyo sinmun*, November 21, 1971.

Korea was not simply about upholding a glorious national past or supporting political leadership; he saw it as the social glue that held together the Korean people.

Ch'ōngdam was possibly the most important Buddhist leader in early South Korea. He was an ideal monk in the post-Purification Movement Chogye Order that emphasized tradition, nationalism, and organizational strength. As shown above, Ch'ōngdam also espoused “sacrificing oneself for the nation” as an essential part of Korean Buddhist history and applied it to Buddhists in the contemporaneous South Korean military. And Ch'ōngdam didn't just preach sacrifice, he lived it. During the Purification Movement, he protested the married monks' leadership in the Buddhist Order with a “silent hunger strike sit-in” and was “unexpectedly assaulted” and “half-paralyzed,” but never gave in. He stood his ground at his monastery until leadership was bequeathed to him and his fellow celibate monks.⁶⁸ When studying Buddhism (or religion) and violence, the role of religious authority is extremely significant. As Michael Jerryson reminds us, “the role of the monk is *religious* and it is just as authoritative as scriptures and ritual.” Furthermore, “[r]eligious cultural authority helps explain the ways in which religion changes over time—and the influencers of that change.”⁶⁹ Ch'ōngdam understood that Buddhism's role in modern Korea was both grounded in Korean Buddhist history and Buddhist doctrine. He referenced sutras on state-protection as his support for Buddhists in the military. He wrote that Buddhism has the duty to serve the nation, and “when a national crisis arises. [Buddhists] pray for the safety of the nation with all our knowledge and take up arms along with the government forces.”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Yi Hye-sōng, “Ch'ongdam k'ūn sūnim ūi ingan kwa sasang,” *Pulgyo sinmun*, November 12, 1972.

⁶⁹ Jerryson (2013), 178, 196.

⁷⁰ Yi Hye-sōng, “Ch'ongdam taejongsa wa hoguk pulgyo,” *Pulgyo sinmun*, November 21, 1971.

Early Buddhist chaplains took Ch'ōngdam's lead in following the Buddhist sutras on serving the nation through the military. Shortly after his dispatch as one of the first five Buddhist military chaplains, Kim Pong-sik wrote an article in the *Pulgyo sinmun* discussing the *Humane Kings Sutra*. He quotes two lines from that sutra: first, the Buddha said “I entrust my teachings to the king,” and “of the four benefactors of kindness (the Buddha, the head of state, one's parents, all others), the ruler's kindness is the best.”⁷¹ Kim's interpretation of these teachings is very straightforward. He writes: “I've thought about why [the Buddha would say this], and my feeling is that he must have said this because there needs to be a country and a king for the people to live, as well as for Buddhism to exist.”⁷²

Second-generation chaplain Kim Tōk-su (1945-), in his 2022 autobiography *Love of Nation, Love of the Buddha*, wrote on the Buddhist sutras that inform *hoguk* thought and justify Buddhists' fighting for the nation. Kim similarly cites the *Three Sutras of State-Protection*. Like Ch'ōngdam, Kim couches Buddhist soldiering and Buddhist leadership in terms of society. He chooses quotes from these sutras that discuss the qualities of a society that are worth fighting, killing, and dying for. Without naming the specific sutra, he paraphrases a story from one of the *Three Sutras of State-Protection* about the ancient Indian Magadha Kingdom and King Ajātaśatru. Upon threats to his Kingdom and Buddhism, the Buddha spoke to the king about a nation that is allowed to be protected from invasion:

1. [One with people] that respect the law of the nation.
2. The commoners' ethics, morals, and etiquette are protected.
3. Elders and youths respect each other.
4. Parents are served filially, and teachers are respected.
5. Traditional culture is inherited.
6. The right path is put on high, and moral conduct is respected.

⁷¹ Kim Pong-sik, “Kunsūng ūi sori,” *Pulgyo sinmun*, February 23, 1969.

⁷² *Ibid.*

7. The precepts are protected and faith, understanding, practice, and realization are living.⁷³

For Kim, who served as a military chaplain for over three decades, a society that follows, or at least aspires to follow, the Buddhist teachings is worth fighting for even if it means physically breaking the precept of non-killing. He sees South Korea as the Magadha Kingdom; the Buddha allows violence if it means protecting a country that upholds the Buddhist teachings.

Interestingly, Kim also discusses the precept of “non-killing” in his autobiography. He chooses to discuss it mainly in terms of mental states. One should not kill through “harmful actions,” “actions of attachment” or “resentment” because then “the compassionate heart is lost,” and “a resentful heart is more harmful than poison. One must solve, forgive, organize and relieve problems.”⁷⁴ Of course Kim, a former chaplain but also a fully-ordained monk, does not openly support breaking the precept against killing; however, his explanation of the precept is remarkably similar to the early Abhidharma’s, which discusses killing in terms of wholesome and unwholesome acts. As explained by Gethin, and cited earlier in this chapter, the Abhidharma asks “is [the act] motivated by greed, hatred, and delusion, or is it motivated by nonattachment, friendliness, and wisdom?”

Compassion, No-self, and the Enlightened Soldier

Shortly after his return from Vietnam, first-generation chaplain Kwŏn Ki-jong published an article entitled “Buddhism and War” (*Pulgyo wa chŏnjaeng*) in 1971. Kwŏn writes on the topic

⁷³ Kim Tök-su (2022), 86-87.

⁷⁴ Kim Tök-su (2022), 323.

in very cursory terms. He states that, based on the Buddhist idea of “great compassion based on sameness in essence” (*tongch’e taebi* 同體大悲), war is generally a bad thing. Furthermore, the requirement of a “loser” in war goes against the basic principle of “no distinction between friend and foe.” “[In war] the Buddhist demand is not for victory through war, we only desire peace.” But then we begin to see Kwŏn’s recognition that there are exceptions to this rule, which he couches in the burning issue of his day: the division of the Koreas. He writes, “We must refuse a war of barbaric and indiscriminate killing that follows the ambitions of territorial expansion of North Korean puppets.” Thus, a war that Buddhism can see as positive is “a struggle between good and evil” which “began from within humanity.”⁷⁵

In the October 1968 edition of *Pŏmnyun* magazine, Kim Un-hak, assistant director of the Chogye Order’s Executive Office, published a piece on “establishing values of life and death” (*sasaenggwan hwangnip*) upon “sending off the Buddhist military chaplains,” who were finally to be deployed the following month. Like many writers at the time, Kim connects the Buddhist chaplains to the history of monk-soldiers in Korea. For most, this connection alone is enough to justify the Buddhist chaplaincy. Kim, however, explains the Buddhist philosophy behind the history of the monk-soldiers and recommends that the chaplains use it as a foundation for their work. First, Kim recognizes, unlike many, that the Buddhist precepts forbid any kind of killing, hatred, or fighting, so then “mustn’t we think that Korean monks violated the precepts by fighting and defeating others?” Kim quickly reassures the reader that “this is the uniqueness of Korean Buddhism compared to other nations’ Buddhisms”; “even though [Korean monks] slightly ignored the precepts, Korea has historically developed an active Mahayana Buddhist tradition in order to save the country...Buddhist military chaplains are continuing this great

⁷⁵ Kwŏn Ki-jong (1971), 156.

heritage.”⁷⁶ For Kim, this “active Mahayana Buddhist tradition” developed in Korea because, despite monks’ apparent breaking of the precepts, these monks did it while strictly following the core Mahayana Buddhist teachings of no-self (*mua* 無我), Buddha nature (*pulsŏng* 佛性), and compassion (*chabi* 慈悲).

He interprets the doctrine of no-self in Buddhism as a selflessness on the battlefield. No-self refers to the belief in Buddhism that there is no permanent, unchanging part of what constitutes a being that we can call our “self.” We are each constituted of a myriad of factors that produce our existence. For Kim, this applies to the military in that one can lead without thinking of oneself, boosting the morale and confidence of soldiers. He also references the related concepts of samsara, dependent origination, and non-duality that form the basis of no-self. There is no life or death that is singular or permanent. There can be no death without life, and no life without death; life and death are non-dual. If we are too attached to our own life, this is not a “right view.” However, he explains, “being attached to one’s life is not necessarily a bad thing, but we must know what a correct life is that is worth grasping onto.” Making sacrifices in life only for oneself is not a correct life, it only results in death. Life and death are only human phenomena; soldiers must remember that the Buddha transcends life and death, and this is our true nature.⁷⁷

Going “beyond life and death” is a consistent theme in the Korean Buddhist community’s teachings for the military. In 1970, Head of the Buddhist Department at the Army Academy Yi Sŭng-gwan wrote on the three Buddhist concepts that inform military Buddhism: “all conditioned things are impermanent” (*chehaeng musang*), “all dharmas are without self” (*chebŏp*

⁷⁶ Kim Un-hak, “Sasaenggwan ūi hwangnip – kunjongsŭng ūl ponae myŏnsŏ,” *Pŏmnyun*, October 1968.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

mua), and “nirvana is perfect tranquility” (*yölbán chökchöng*). For Yi, master Wön’gwang, the Silla *hwarang*, and monk-soldiers during the Imjin war were all informed by these three concepts, allowing them to “transcend life and death.” Proper Buddhist teaching in the military, which follows the Korean Buddhist tradition, is about “the establishment of a view of life and death and a view of the state that willingly gives the body and mind to the nation and people.” “These are necessary to cultivate commanding ability, leadership, and the power to influence, and to learn the spirit of personal sacrifice for cooperative unity.” “Like the *hwarang*, our soldiers should realize that they their ‘I’ [self] is that of a common destiny, so that they can break their obsession with the ‘I’ of ego, devote themselves to the nation and people, and keep in mind that their defeat is the defeat of the nation.”⁷⁸ Yi espouses a very fluid interpretation of no-self, taking it to mean something more like “selflessness.” Whether it be on the individual, group, or national level, Yi sees no-self as a way of dissolving your “ego” and sacrificing yourself for others. By understanding that “all conditioned things are impermanent,” a soldier is not attached to any personal petty desires. Because “all dharmas are without self,” one’s individuality is eradicated, and only constitutes part of the group or nation. Finally, in knowing that “nirvana is perfect tranquility,” attachment to life and fear of death are washed away. Army Captain and self-described Buddhist Kang Pöm-myöng, elaborates on this, writing “all humans feel apprehension about killing... to get rid of this apprehension, you need emotional stability. For this, religion is necessary. And among religions, specifically Buddhism’s liberation thought and thought on nirvana are the foundation that allows us to rise above the problem of killing.”⁷⁹ For these men, just as Korean Buddhists of the past followed this dictum, so too should South

⁷⁸ Yi Süng-gwan, “Chöngsin chök chaju kugbang üi chase,” *Pulgyo sinmun*, March 15, 1970.

⁷⁹ Kang Pöm-myöng, “Kunin, söngjikja, pulgyo,” *Pulgyo sinmun*, May 21, 1967.

Korean Buddhist soldiers. A similar line of reasoning was championed at a 1968 Joint Dharma Service for the three military academies, led by the Chogye Order's Executive Office. Buddhist soldiers were firmly told that "soldiers' bodies are not their own bodies...they only wait to fight on behalf of the nation."⁸⁰

However, one cannot truly understand the teachings that can "transcend life and death" without "being awakened" or "enlightened" (*kago* 覺悟) to the true Buddhadharma. This was the subject of a dharma talk from a 1967 Joint Dharma Service for the three military academies. Just like the awakening that all Buddhist strive for, the awakening of a Buddhist soldier constitutes a fundamental change in one's mental capacity and a renewed ability to act as a Bodhisattva. This transformation has significant consequences on the battlefield, as was explained to cadets at the three military academies. "When facing death right in front of your eyes, humans transcend even this life that confronts death, and find eternal meaning. And when humans are enlightened to this eternal meaning, they acquire a new awakening (*kago*) to face the fear of death calmly."

Awakened soldiers can make "extraordinary ethical decisions" instinctively. "Therefore, when facing a decisive battle, the last question a commanding officer asks to his soldiers is 'have you achieved awakening?'" "The Buddha taught the way of humans achieving enlightenment by gaining the wisdom of enlightenment and quietly crossing over the pain of life and death."⁸¹

When soldiers have achieved awakening, they possess a remarkable ability as elite soldiers.

Though we can infer that the elite Buddhist soldier with the right mental capacity can also kill properly and effectively, how exactly is this killing conceived? Rhi Ki-yong (Yi Ki-yōng), president and professor of Buddhism at Kungmin University takes up this issue. A

⁸⁰ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Samgun sagwan haggyo pulgyo pusaeng hapdong pōbhoe rūl pogo," September 29, 1968.

⁸¹ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Kunin ũi kago kwa pulgyo chōngsin," October 1, 1967.

staunch advocate for the chaplaincy throughout the 1960's, Rhi responds to "those who do not know the true meaning of the lessons of Sakyamuni Buddha" that "ask how can Buddhism and Buddhists, who cry out no-killing (*pulsalsaeng*), participate in the great work of the military and national defense?" in a 1969 *Pulgyo sinmun* article, Rhi says:

A precious life that should not be killed is one that is wise and compassionate, or at least a life that desires to be, and we don't call death that's killing a true life, [death of a] life. If a soldier sacrifices his humble self to protect compassionate and wise brothers and sisters, or to protect one on the path of self-completion, by stopping a band of thieves or a band of murders, his death is not death, but life. When Sakyamuni was in this world, a disciple expressed his intention to go to a faraway land where evil tribes lived to disseminate the truth. At that time, Sakyamuni questioned the disciple about his determination: "What if they try to take your life?" [The disciple responded,] "What would be wasted if I sacrificed this insignificant life for the truth? There could be no happier act than this." We must take careful note of this story. This is the awakening that every South Korean soldier should have.⁸²

Rhi's reasoning here is a bit convoluted and, I admit, not entirely clear. He alternates between explaining a true "life" and "death," seemingly to collapse the two, or to "transcend" them like we've seen above. He seems to reference the *Upāyakaśalya-sūtra* here in "stopping a band of thieves or a band of murders." In any case, integral to Rhi's reasoning is his discriminatory valuation of lives. Those who are "wise and compassionate" are valued more highly and secular ethical standards of death do not apply to them. They have overcome such distinctions of life and death and protecting them or dying for them is actually producing true life, possibly in a rebirth. Furthermore, if, through killing or death, one can spread the Buddhadharmā, this is also a proper course of action, evidenced by the quote from Sakyamuni. Rupert Gethin and Brian Daizen Victoria have both firmly argued that such a discriminatory valuation on different lives cannot be found in foundational Buddhist doctrine.⁸³ Rhi Ki-yong, however, disagrees. "Compassion" is

⁸² Rhi Ki-yong, "Pulgyo wa kukpang," *Pulgyo sinmun*, January 26, 1969.

⁸³ Explored earlier in this chapter. Gethin (2008), Victoria (2010).

central to his argument, which augurs much of Stephen Jenkins' scholarship on "compassionate killing."⁸⁴

Indeed, a 1965 *Pulgyo sinmun* article, commenting on the activities of Buddhist soldiers in the military, foregrounds compassionate killing in Mahayana Buddhism in order to speak to soldiers who may have doubts about the compatibility between Buddhism and the military:

There is no religion anywhere like Buddhism that, for the sake of peace of humanity, valorizes compassion over fighting, alms over exploitation, and obedience over domination. There is no motivation to conquer others, but only to promote the right enlightenment of people wandering in foolish delusion and awaken those in the dream of two vehicles (*isŭng* 二乘) and reveal their original nature of the one vehicle (*ilsŭng* 一乘). Therefore, utilize your ability to easily destroy, kill, and steal. If used wrongly, a gun or knife is simply a machine used to kill people. But Buddhism is the religion that teaches one to use that gun or knife to save [others]. Even if the same good deed is performed, the cause and effect (*in'gwa* 因果) received by the actor is different depending on one's heart (*maŭm*)... The training of soldiers who see and practice killing the right way can also be used as a motivation for entering the Buddhadharmā. A true soldier should be a Buddhist.⁸⁵

This author's opinion acts as an intriguing way to summarize the points we have looked at here. Endowed with the correct mindset, one that is awakened to their "original nature of the one vehicle," a Buddhist soldier becomes a "true soldier." They use their weapon as a tool of compassion, wielding it not to kill but to save. Because their "heart" is one of compassion, they cannot produce negative karma. Buddhist soldiers realize their nature as a Bodhisattva and cultivate their practice through compassionate killing.

Conclusion

⁸⁴ Explored earlier in this chapter. Jenkins (2010).

⁸⁵ *Pulgyo sinmun*, "Samgun sagwansaengdo dŭl ũi pulgyo hwaldong," April 25, 1965.

How can we explain the early South Korean Buddhist community's understanding of Buddhism, war, and violence? While this entire dissertation is in some ways attempting to answer this question, this chapter has specifically looked at the Buddhist, and "Korean" Buddhist, historical and philosophical underpinnings that justified Buddhism's participation in the South Korean military. The culture of militarism that abounded during the Park Chung Hee era is certainly an important factor; contemporary social conditions prompted Buddhist scholars, high-ranking monks, Buddhist media, and military leaders to evaluate Korean Buddhist history from the perspective of monk-soldiers, patriotism, and self-sacrifice. But the influence of the wider Buddhist tradition's reckoning with violence cannot be overlooked. While some scholars have argued otherwise, most voices in the early South Korean Buddhist community argued that "compassionate violence" and Buddhist kingship/leadership are integral aspects of the Buddhist tradition, even if they involve harming others.

It is also important to note that military chaplains also see the purpose of their position as recognizing but limiting the amount of harm or death in the military. On the one hand, this relates to the compassionate killing codified by Won'gwang. On the other hand, Buddhism can make a soldier further value their own life. In recent years, one of the most important duties of chaplains has been to prevent suicides.⁸⁶ The prevalence of suicide in South Korean society is a well-known issue, and the percentage of cases is much higher among men in the military. How Buddhist chaplains deal with issue of suicide is both foundational to Buddhism thought and extremely specific to the modern South Korean case, as it related to issues of mandatory conscription, mental health issues, and military culture.

⁸⁶ Kunjong Kamsil (2003), 57.

Military chaplains are certainly in a difficult position, having to both justify war yet reduce harm and violence as much as possible. In this chapter, I have explored the Buddhist ideology that chaplains can reference when dealing with difficult questions on violence; however, there is so much complexity and variance in the personal relationships formed between chaplains and soldiers that influences how a chaplain adapts their pedagogy. In times of war, chaplains react to situations as they arise, trying to say anything to their soldiers that may help them in their specific moment of need. In such cases, religious texts and official military writings alone are often insufficient. Chaplains draw upon them but must also confront the reality facing themselves and their soldiers.

In this chapter, I have tried to organize what Buddhist chaplains taught, especially in the 1960's and 1970's, to justify violence in the military from a Buddhist perspective. I have looked at a very specific time period because a chaplains' teaching method is greatly dependent on the society, military culture, and political influence of their time, as well as each individual chaplains' worldview. Yet, there is still dissidence between different chaplains, even in such short time periods as I have looked at here. But I do believe that a more microhistorical approach is most useful in the field of religion and violence. I am not attempting to show what all Buddhists believe, what all Korean Buddhists believe, or even what all Buddhist military chaplains believe. Rather I am showing the beliefs of specific individuals or groups at specific times, to show exactly what factors contributed to their understanding of Buddhism's relationship to violence.

Conclusion: The Chaplaincy in Korean Buddhist History

In this dissertation, I have shown the variety of influences that formed the basis of the South Korean Buddhist military chaplaincy and the key moments and ideas that both shaped, and continue to shape, it. I have argued that the chaplaincy is deeply entrenched in both the past 150 years of modern Korean history and a millennium of Buddhist history. Understanding the South Korean Buddhist chaplaincy enriches our understanding of both modern Korean society and Korean Buddhism. The philosophical underpinnings of the chaplaincy also add to the burgeoning discourse on Buddhism and violence. I believe my study of the Korean Buddhist military chaplaincy is valuable to scholars in a variety of fields for a number of reasons. First, the Buddhist military chaplaincy is an example of the lasting impact on South Korea of the Japanese colonial period and the USAMGIK. For scholars interested in these periods of modern Korean history, understanding the Buddhist chaplaincy, and the South Korean chaplaincy system as a whole, is key to investigating the wider impacts of militarism stemming from Japan's "total war" system to the horrors of the Korean War and over twenty-five years of authoritarian military political rule. Militarism in the modern period has significantly impacted Korean Buddhism. At the same time, however, we cannot discount the history of Korean Buddhism's relationship to war and violence. In the Silla, Koryŏ, and Chosŏn dynasties, there is a plethora of examples of Korean Buddhists engaging in or supporting state violence that served as precedents to the modern Buddhist military chaplaincy. Events like the Imjin War and institutions like the monk-soldier system are widely known in Korean Buddhist history, but they see their most practical appropriation in justifying the modern chaplaincy system.

Second, the importance of the Vietnam War in the history of the Buddhist military chaplaincy once again reveals the magnitude of the Vietnam War's significance in South Korea's history. Scholars have shown the wide-ranging economic and political impacts of the Vietnam War on South Korea's early development. Korean Buddhism was also greatly influenced by the war. I have tried to show that tracing the Buddhist chaplaincy's development in the 1960's reveals the extent to which Korean Buddhists and Vietnamese Buddhists cooperated to both support and occasionally challenge contemporary religious and political discourses. When Korean Buddhist chaplains were finally sent to Vietnam in early 1969, their mission to work with Vietnamese Buddhists was already a familiar one, as the Korean Buddhist community had been doing so through civilian and clerical channels since 1963. Furthermore, as opposed to the common scholarly narrative that depicts the South Korean military as narcissistic "saviors" of Vietnamese, or "mercenaries" for the U.S.'s semi-imperialist aggression, Buddhist chaplains worked in Vietnam with a greater sense of equality to their Buddhist compatriots. The Korean Buddhist community looked very highly upon their fellow Buddhists in Vietnam, whose country was also plagued by corrupt politicians and foreign aggressors. Buddhists from both countries embraced their shared religious history in the East Asian Buddhist world. This history, as they imagined it, now led them to a shared valorization of freedom and democracy steeped in Buddhism. For scholars studying South Korea and the Vietnam War, looking at the Korean-Vietnamese Buddhist relationship is paramount; it reveals how religion often supersedes politics, and how centuries of shared religious history can be reframed and reasserted in novel terms to bring transnational communities together.

Third, studying the Buddhist military chaplaincy in the 1970's reveals another aspect of Park Chung Hee's increasing authoritarianism following the promulgation of the Yusin

Constitution. As other scholars have noted, the Mass Military Faith Promotion Movement was a violation of religious freedom, and was one of many ways Park eradicated freedom under the guise of national security. Because of its dubious legality, the Faith Movement only lasted for four years, but its impact is still felt in the institution of the Buddhist military chaplaincy. Like many institutions built during the Park-era, the Buddhist military chaplaincy's identity is still steeped in the militaristic, anti-communist milieu of the 1960's and 1970's. Scholars, monks, and chaplains alike interpreted Buddhist history in a teleological fashion to show how centuries of Buddhist participation in war on the Korean peninsula justified the contemporary Buddhist chaplaincy and Buddhist soldiering. The Park Chung Hee-era continues to be a divisive topic in modern Korean history. I hope that parts of my dissertation can help bring further nuance to our understanding of the period.

Finally, the purpose of my discussion of the South Korean Buddhist military chaplaincy in the wider scholarly discourse on Buddhism and violence is to further establish what should be an agreed upon fact in the field: violence is never unidimensional, natural, or ahistorical. My key finding in this section of the dissertation is that the discourse on violence and killing surrounding the early South Korean Buddhist military chaplaincy matches much of the discourse on violence and killing used in the greater Buddhist world. Though Korean Buddhist leadership has often emphasized something uniquely "Korean" about peninsular Buddhists' reinterpretation of the precept against killing, I show that scholars, monks, and chaplains also appealed to universal Buddhist values that permitted violence by those with correct intention and a compassionate mind. However, my goal is not to move scholarship on Buddhism and violence in a direction of identifying a singular common cause for violence across all the Buddhist world. While the Korean Buddhist chaplaincy references universal justifications for violence, these justifications

are wielded in distinctive ways, couched in specific developments in modern South Korean society as well as in centuries of Korean Buddhist history. We must not divorce violence from its social and historical contexts if our goal is to understand its root causes and eventually live in a world free from it. This is where I believe my dissertation can have some relevance to present Buddhist chaplains working in the military. Religious teaching is often expected to be ahistorical. After all, religions are comprised of fundamental truths about the world and human existence. These truths remain inviolate even as time marches on and the world around them seems to change. When a chaplain teaches a soldier, the soldier is often looking to such fundamental truths to help make sense of the difficult situation in which they find themselves.

An historical approach to the chaplaincy and religion in the military may seem like an abstract or impractical endeavor best suited for an academic scholar. I would contend, however, that all chaplains must have an eye on the history of their religion in order to better fill their multifaceted role as religious clergy, educator, and therapist. While the centuries-long history of official Christian chaplains is well-documented, official Buddhist military chaplaincies are fairly new and isolated institutions. The South Korean Buddhist military chaplaincy is currently the second oldest continuous Buddhist military chaplaincy at fifty-four years old, as of 2022. The Thai Buddhist chaplaincy can be traced back to 1919, though it had been in flux through multiple regime changes until firmly institutionalized in the 21st century.¹ The U.S. Buddhist military chaplaincy, established in 2004, and the U.K. chaplaincy, established in 2007, the only other official Buddhist military chaplaincies, have very short histories and very few commissioned chaplains. Thus, there has not been much time, nor many examples, to reflect on Buddhist military chaplains' roles, the ideology underpinning their work, and the complex military-

¹ Jerryson (2018), 119.

political systems within which they operate. Without critical reflection, Buddhist chaplains risk rehashing the same problems of the past. As Brian Victoria has pointed out, U.S. Buddhist chaplains use very similar religious logic to endorse their place in the U.S. military as Japanese Buddhists used to justify the horrors committed by the Japanese military during World War Two.² In a recent article, Sunil Kariyakarawana, the first Buddhist chaplain in the British Armed Forces, justifies his place in the military with much of the same Buddhist philosophy as early South Korean chaplains and Japanese imperial Buddhist chaplains. He argues, “[t]here is no fundamental contradiction between adhering to *ahimsā* and working in the military. As in other professions, what is most important is how one goes about one’s work and what intentions one has.” He emphasizes “right intention,” as the basis for Buddhist military work, a very fluid and easily appropriated concept also used to justify wars in the past.³

The newness of the U.S. and U.K. Buddhist chaplaincies may contribute to this lack of critical reflection. Both chaplaincies are highly decentralized and display a diversity in teachings from chaplain to chaplain.⁴ This is where we can learn from the history of the South Korean chaplaincy. Though I have not exhaustively investigated the state of the current chaplaincy in this dissertation, the multiple official histories written on the chaplaincy, the institution’s strong organization, and its close relationship with the Chogye Order has allowed chaplains to deeply reflect upon and reform their work. The predominance of the Chogye Order in Korean Buddhism and its monopoly over the Buddhist chaplaincy also ensures the maintenance of and unified voice in the chaplaincy. While I have pointed out in this dissertation many of the ways the

² Victoria (2016), 190.

³ Ratheiser and Kariyakarawana (2022), 33.

⁴ Recently, the Chaplaincy Innovation Lab in the United States has been working to create more dialogue across faiths and generations within the United States military. More information at: <https://chaplaincyinnovation.org/>

chaplains has not changed in the past fifty years, there are many ways that it has. Conversations with current chaplains reveal the decreasing relevancy of “*hoguk* Buddhism” and historical “monk-soldiers” to today’s soldiers. They are aware of these concepts’ place in the earlier decades of South Korea, couched in the cultural zeitgeist produced by authoritarian dictatorships, and understand that today’s young men and women see history, society, and politics in new and novel ways. Similarly to the way that the entire U.S. military chaplaincy faced a crisis due to the controversy of the Vietnam War in the 1960’s and 1970’s, and restructured much of their institution in the following decades, the South Korean Buddhist chaplaincy has been in flux since democratization began in 1987.⁵ The Sunshine Policy (Haebuyŏt Chŏngch’aek), the global War on Terror, and decreasing religiosity in South Korea are just a few recent issues that have greatly impacted the South Korean military and chaplains alike. Religion is never truly ahistorical, and chaplains are often a literal medium between the religious and the secular. Chaplains must be highly conscious of their religious teachings, the socio-political context they operate in, the role of the chaplaincy in the military, and the ever-changing consciousness of soldiers. From my research, I believe South Korean Buddhist military chaplains set a good example with their willingness to critically reflect on their past and to innovate for the future. I hope this dissertation reveals just some of this attitude and will help chaplains understand the complex relationship between Buddhism and the military.

Finally, there are some facets of this topic that I did not address adequately in the dissertation, but are certainly fruitful areas for future research. First is the influence of colonial-era Japanese Buddhism, and the imperial Japanese military’s Buddhist chaplaincy, on the South Korean military chaplaincy. Though I outlined the major issues on this topic in Chapter 1, ideally

⁵ Stahl (2017), 198.

an entire chapter should be dedicated to it. I mainly used Korean-language sources to inform my research on the colonial period, but consulting more Japanese-language sources will be key to adequately investigating how exactly Korean Buddhists were involved in the imperial Japanese military and how this influenced the later South Korean Buddhist military chaplaincy.

Secondly, the military, and especially the South Korean military, is an inherently gendered space. Gender has come up sporadically throughout this dissertation in discussions of militarism and chaplain ideology, but it will be crucial to ferret out how exactly the Buddhist military chaplaincy contributes to the gendered aspects of South Korea's development. There has been much scholarship on gender as it relates to modern Korean history, and gender studies is beginning to have a greater impact in scholarship on Korean Buddhism. I believe the Buddhist chaplaincy can be a worthwhile area of inquiry for bridging gaps in scholarship between modern Korean Buddhist studies and modern Korean history, and related issues on gender are no exception.

Thirdly, when I planned my dissertation, I presumed that the right to religious freedom would come up in debates surrounding the Buddhist military chaplaincy's establishment; but after delving into primary source materials over the past few years, I came to realize just how significant of a role the issue of religious freedom played. It was not only important when the Buddhist community discussed rights in the South Korean state, it also had transnational aspects as well. As I argue in Chapter 2, when Korean Buddhist chaplains were finally dispatched to Vietnam in January 1969, they represented the product of a years-long transnational Buddhist relationship. During this period, what also brought South Korean and South Vietnamese Buddhists together was their shared value of religious freedom. Their relationship cut through geographic and cultural boundaries as they saw each other similarly fighting enemies, such as

communists, illiberal Christian groups, and corrupt politicians, that encroached on their right to be Buddhists. They also cited populist and historical arguments that Buddhism had been, and still is, the most influential religion to their nations' culture.

Furthermore, populist and cultural arguments were, and have been, the foundation of Korean Buddhist leadership's claims for representation in Korean government and society. Christian groups, especially Protestants, though the minority in terms of population and supposed "historical impact," were heavily funded by domestic organizations and overseas adherents in Europe and North America. By comparison, the Buddhist Order was quite poor until fairly recently. The military chaplaincy is one important case that reveals this wealth disparity. Chaplains are mainly reliant on outside funding, which Christian chaplains, especially Protestants, have had no problem procuring. Buddhist chaplains, especially in the early days of the 1960's and early 1970's, however, were extremely underfunded. The Buddhist Order called upon the government to close the wealth gap, and the government often answered, most notably by deeming Buddhist temples "cultural properties," opening them to vast amounts of government funding. In the military, the Faith Movement from 1971 to 1974, also greatly expanded Buddhist chaplains' access to government and military resources.

Through the present day, the South Korean government continues to allocate funds to the Buddhist Order, and this remains a significant tension in the modern religious marketplace of South Korea. Can religious freedom be upheld when it is subjected to the capitalist market? Should the government step in to protect religious freedom when money gives certain religions outsized influence in society? Can the "cultural" and "spiritual" aspects of a religion be separated? Understanding the early development of the military chaplaincy demands that we deal with such questions.

Finally, this dissertation project has had a great impact on me personally. I consider myself a dedicated pacifist, but studying these complicated topics, and speaking directly with those who have experienced the hardest times in modern Korean history, has forced me to confront contradictions and complexities in my own beliefs. Though I appreciate the polemical tone of other scholars in their works on religion and violence, I did not feel it was my place to criticize others for the difficult decisions they were forced to make amid the most trying of times. Instead, my goal has always been to tell the history as accurately and honestly as possible and let readers decide for themselves how to take it. In the fall of 2021, when I first met the Buddhist chaplains from the Vietnam War era whose lives I have detailed in this book, my view of this project entirely changed. Their friendliness and generosity completely humbled me. Who was I to judge their past? I hope readers have had a similar feeling when reading this dissertation. Without vindications or calls to judgement, I hope this dissertation can move us closer to a world without violence. As many former chaplains assured me, the goal of Buddhism is peace. Their work responds to the unfortunate realities of this violent world, yet they never, and we should never, abandon our ideal of peace.

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