religions

MDPI

Article

Re-Examining Issues in the Study of Korean Buddhism: Questions Related to Degeneration of Chosŏn Buddhism, Colonialism, and Doctrine-Based Approaches

Sung-Eun Thomas Kim [1,*] and Won-il Bang [2]

[1] Academy of Buddhist Studies, Dongguk University, Jung-gu, Seoul 04620, Republic of Korea
[2] Department of Religious Studies, Seoul National University, Seoul 08826, Republic of Korea; bhang813@empas.com
* Correspondence: tsghim@gmail.com

Abstract: When the historical past in the study of Chosŏn Buddhism is unearthed, one would discover that Buddhist studies was in fact closely tied to Korea's recent history of colonization by Japan and to the postcolonial influences of the West. This paper is an effort to re-examine the modern study of Korean Buddhism to trace the effects of past colonial forces that Korean Buddhist studies have experienced. The process of Japanese colonization of Korea was similar to the pattern of subjugation initially adopted by the early European discoverers, where academic developments synchronized with the colonizing process—the labeling of the subject culture as primitive and inferior as a basis and justification for colonization. In the past, it was claimed Korean folk religions and Buddhism were rife with cultic and superstitious practices, signs of backwardness, which coincided with the view that Korean society and people were underdeveloped and uncivilized. This paper, after discussions of the colonization process and its connection to the study of Korean Buddhism, makes an argument for a shift in the methodological approach to the study of Chosŏn Buddhism from an etic to an emic approach by taking into account how Buddhism was practiced on the ground and situated within the historical context of the Chosŏn period.

Keywords: postcolonialism; Chosŏn Buddhism; Japanese colonialism; Western-centric scholarship; Christian-centrism; doctrine-based study; etic versus emic

Academic Editors: Kevin N. Cawley and David J. Kim

Received: 15 January 2025
Revised: 21 February 2025
Accepted: 24 February 2025
Published: 27 February 2025

Citation: Kim, Sung-Eun Thomas, and Won-il Bang. 2025. Re-Examining Issues in the Study of Korean Buddhism: Questions Related to Degeneration of Chosŏn Buddhism, Colonialism, and Doctrine-Based Approaches. *Religions* 16: 299. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16030299

1. Introduction: Construction of Korean Buddhism as a Religion

It is peculiar how the history of Korean Buddhism, specifically the Chosŏn period (1392–1910), has been studied by modern scholars in Korea. It is as if modern scholars have been looking for "Buddhism" in the wrong place and the wrong time. They were looking for a certain kind of Buddhism: a sutra-based or a doctrine-based Buddhism in the historical past of the Chosŏn period when such forms of Buddhism were difficult to find. Moreover, a certain methodological perspective foreign to the Korean situation was used. In hindsight, it is apparent that how modern scholars were seeking and analyzing Buddhism was very much a product of historical events through which the field of Buddhist studies in Korea was formed. In effect, such methods have distorted the face of Chosŏn Buddhism, which requires a reconsideration.

Some of the questions this essay addresses are as follows: "how was Buddhism defined by the scholars of Buddhist studies and how was it examined?"; and "from where did such methods and perspectives originate?" We can answer these questions by unearthing

the historical past of Buddhist studies of Korean Buddhism. In doing so, one would discover that Buddhist studies was in fact closely tied to Korea's recent history of colonization by Japan and to the postcolonial influences of the West. Korea was initially colonized by Japan, which was intent on expanding its military power in East and Southeast Asia in the early half of the twentieth century. After roughly thirty years of Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945), Korea was divided into North and South Korea, where North Korea came under the control of the then Soviet Union and South Korea under American military rule from 1945 to 1948. By then, Korea was heavily under the religious and cultural influences of Western nations, including the United States, whose initial influences made inroads into Korea as early as the late nineteenth century via the Christian missionaries.[1] In the early twentieth century, Western influences continued through the active building of hospitals and universities by Western missionaries.[2]

To help peel away the layers of colonial history and its socio-cultural effects, Tatah Mentan in his *Unmasking Social Science Imperialism* (2015) provides a postcolonialist critique that brings into relief the still lingering by-products of the relatively recent colonial past in Africa. This includes the academic field of social science that perpetuates the cultural and institutional colonial influences of past European colonial ambitions in Africa. Mentan claims that though this is a description of the colonization process that took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the socio-cultural legacies of colonialism and imperialism linger in current society, albeit in different forms, including scholarship.[3]

Following Mentan's analysis of postcolonial forces in present day academe, this paper is an effort to re-examine the modern study of Korean Buddhism to trace the effects of past colonial forces that Korean Buddhist studies have experienced. More specifically, studies of Chosŏn-period Buddhism have concluded that Buddhism became degenerated, having lost state patronage from the beginning of the newly found dynasty. In addition, state-sponsored suppression of Buddhism is noted as one of the most important factors that reduced the political and societal influence of Chosŏn Buddhism. It is generally understood that the Buddhist monks of the time turned heavily to cultic practices to garner support from the masses, an effort to make up for the loss of state patronage that it once had during the Koryŏ period (918–1392).[4] The dominant model of analysis was one of conflict—"uphold Confucianism and oppress Buddhism" 崇儒抑佛 together with Confucian domination and state oppression.[5]

The rhetoric and polemics of the degeneration of Chosŏn Buddhism had been widely accepted uncritically. There have, nonetheless, been recent developments since the early 2000s that have directly challenged this degeneration thesis and have considered the Chosŏn period to be a time of maintaining of the Buddhist tradition or even of new developments.[6] While traditional scripture-focused studies on Chosŏn Buddhism have continued adding new findings,[7] recent studies have flourished in several directions, the main one being an uncovering of the ways that Buddhism has developed and became more established during that time. This includes new research based on various approaches, including religious studies, social history, art history, and archeology.[8]

We can agree that the judgement of degeneration was largely dependent on the criteria for degeneration. These notions can be traced to initial developments in the fields of scientific studies of society and culture in Europe and later in Japan. This paper is a discussion of this very process of the formation of historical, political, and conceptual elements that came together to determine the modern study of Korean Buddhism, which resulted in Chosŏn Buddhism being deemed an adulterated and degenerated tradition.[9]

The conception of what is a true religion and what is degenerated was formed when the field of the history of religions was first established in Europe. Hans G. Kippenberg (2002) explains that European comparative religious studies emerged in earnest during the

late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, propelled by colonial expansion that provided access to diverse religious traditions. In other words, early European scholars had to determine the characteristics which constituted a religion. This process was also closely driven by the juxtaposition of European states in relation to newly discovered lands and people possessing entirely different cultures and social practices. Defining what constituted a religion was an integral and strategic part of the equation in the colonizing process of new lands, the aim of which was to extract resources, both human and material, to be used and consumed back in Europe.

In his book *Savage Systems* (1996), David Chidester describes how European scholars of the comparative study of religions concluded, using their Christian-based conceptions of religion, that Africans had no religion. This led to the assertion that Africans were subhuman, having lacked a fundamental marker of humanity—religion.[10] This, in turn, led to the justification of colonialist actions that subjugated those Africans (Chidester 1996, p. 234). It was logical that patronizing ethnocentric views were generally held by colonizing powers, who considered their own culture and country as the most advanced and thus the standard to which other cultures were compared. It goes without saying that in this process, Christianity was the model to which other religious systems were compared, and the model that all had to resemble or imitate in order to be recognized as a religion.[11]

In the case of Korea, it was a similar pattern of subjugation where academic developments synchronized with the colonizing process—the labeling of the subject culture as primitive and inferior as the basis and justification for forcing colonial relationship or tutelary relationship on supposedly backwards and needy people. In a similar process, claims that folk religions and Buddhism were rife with cultic and superstitious practices were important as sure signs of Korea and its people being primitive and less developed.

This paper initially discusses the colonization process and its connection to the study of Korean Buddhism, and thereafter makes an argument for a shift in the methodological approach to the study of Chosŏn Buddhism from an etic to an emic approach. The argument is that by taking into account how Buddhism was practiced on the ground and situated within the historical context of the Chosŏn period, signs can be observed that Buddhism did not degenerate but developed and thrived.

2. Buddhist Studies Historical Background: Colonization, Religion, and Buddhism

With respect to colonialism, military power is not the only means; cultural and religious powers are effective tools with which colonization can be made easier, less apparent, and less costly. That is because culture and religion are means of justifying the actions of making another society a "protectorate nation", or a nation needing protection from more advanced, superior states. Otherwise, the colonial relationships would simply be one of obvious and brutal militaristic takeover and control, obviating the exploitation by the colonizer. This can incite resistance and even incite the people to engage in armed struggle. On the other hand, using "soft" power will make the colonization process not so obvious or overtly visible.[12] Even more, skillful use of cultural and religious persuasive powers can convince the locals to possibly become facilitators of colonization.

While Buddhism came to be part of the soft power for the Japanese imperialist government, there were also concurrent adoptions of Western notions of religion that aided and provided a rationalization for the colonization. In the early stages of the modernization of Meiji Japan (1868–1912), its technocrats and intellectuals travelled to Europe to learn about and gain insights from the scientific and industrial advances that were taking place in European countries. Japanese leaders were intent on adopting European culture and its model of modernization, including the newly developing scientific fields of study of the

late nineteenth century. Meiji scholars met with European scholars who applied scientific methods to new fields of study such as psychology, biology, sociology, and the history of religions. At the same time, Charles Darwin's theory of evolution had a great impact with respect to understanding the developmental process in various academic fields, not only in biology but also in the social sciences and humanities. An example is the casting of differences between cultures and societies in terms of being at different stages of development on a continuum from primitive to modern.[13]

Following in the footsteps of their Western counterparts, Japanese scholars kept in touch with academic pioneers in the developing field of the scientific study of religions. There were early contacts with seminal Western scholars such as Max Müller and C. P. Tiele, who are touted as the forefathers of the burgeoning field. For instance, Nanjō Bun'yū, a prominent Japanese Buddhist scholar, studied under Max Müller at Oxford University, developing a close and collaborative relationship (Wu and Wilkinson 2017, pp. 44–45). As a result, Japanese scholars adopted ideas of religion established in Europe in the latter nineteenth century (Josephson 2012, pp. 245–59).

However, not surprising but significant in the historical after-effects in the study of religions, the forefathers of this new field based their ideas of religion heavily on Christian notions of transcendence, the sacred, and the mundane. Thus, underlying ideas of religion was a consistent connection to what was considered sacred or transcendent, which were in contradistinction to what was supposedly profane or mundane. This was evident in the ground-breaking works of European pioneering scholars. For instance, in a lecture given at the Royal Institution in 1873, Max Müller (1878, p. 23), the forefather of the Western study of religions, claimed, "Religion is a mental faculty which, independent of, nay, in spite of sense and reason, enables man to apprehend the infinite under different names and under varying disguises". Here, Muller describes religion as regarding the apprehension of the infinite, which stands in opposition to the finite.

This dichotomous division came to be accepted as a fundamental and universal hallmark of religions, developing into other notions such as transcendent versus the mundane via modern scholars. For instance, Manuel A. Vasquez (2011) argues that religious studies has long been dominated by a dichotomous approach, focusing on the transcendent, and emphasizing textual interpretation as an essential aspect of religions. This led to a tendency that prioritizes texts, beliefs, and individual inner experiences while neglecting the material, embodied, and contextual dimensions of religious life. Vasquez contends that this inclination has resulted in an incomplete and often distorted understanding failing to capture the complex, dynamic nature of religions as it manifests in real-world practices. As a result, the multifaceted ways in which religion operates within society and culture are not fully comprehended.

Religion as Based on Scripture and Doctrine

Also, a significant criterion among the various indicators of being a true, bona fide religion included having a scripture of doctrine. It is a reflection of the Christian notion that religions are embodied in their sacred scriptures; i.e., the Bible in Christianity. This concept originated in the sixteenth-century Christian reformist idea that the "word" of God is where truth was located. Therefore, it was conceived that the textual meaning of scriptures was where "true religion," or its essence, was to be found. The opposite condition seems to be just as significant, if not more, whereby not having some form of a scripture was an indication of an underdeveloped religion, or even of it not being a religion at all. In this manner, instead of engaging in pursuing religious meaning and significance from sacred scriptures, rituals that focused on objects such as statues or icons were seen as adulterated

and impure religious expressions. This led to giving primacy to textual and philological studies, which also became fundamental in shaping early scholarship of Buddhist studies.

The history of the Western study of Buddhism as originating from a near obsession with texts was all the more evidenced from the founding of Buddhist studies that concurred with the creation of a chair in the study of Sanskrit, which took place in 1814 at the College de France in Paris. The chair was initially held by Antoine-Leonard de Chezy (1773–1832), who was later succeeded by Eugene Burnouf (1801–1852), known as the father of Buddhist studies in the West. Following Burnouf, it was in the twentieth century that Buddhist studies was concretely established through the founding in 1926 of a chair in "philology bouddhique", again in Paris, for Jean Przyluski (1885–1944). It follows that, as De Jong (1979, pp. 15, 22) has stated,

> The study of Buddhism in Europe has been mainly concerned with its philological aspects. Since, in the field of Asian studies, university chairs were established only for Asian languages, it was often a Sanskritist or a Sinologist who specialized in this study.

Putting primacy on textual materials is based on the idea that it was through the critical explanation or interpretation of religious texts that the essence of a religious tradition could be fully apprehended. Schopen highlights the connection between comparative religionist attempt to locate the words of God in a text and the claim of Buddhist studies scholars that the essence of Buddhism was to be found in textual sources. Schopen (1997, p. 13) notes,

> The methodological position frequently taken by modern Buddhist scholars, archeologist, and historians of religion looks, in fact, uncannily like the position taken by a variety of early Protestant reformers who were attempting to define and establish the locus of "true religion".
>
> …[T]he point at least, I think, is clear: there is a remarkable similarity between the value assigned literary sources in modern historical and archeological studies and the argument of Protestant reformers concerning the location of true religion.

This method was deeply entrenched, to the extent that texts were the main source of study, despite the fact that those texts may have had no significance to the monks or the practicing Buddhists at the time. Schopen reveals how, in the understanding of some key scholars in the establishment of Buddhology, there was an overriding primacy given to textual sources without even considering that the particular Buddhist "texts" may be entirely unknown to both the monks and the laity. There was and is an obvious blind assumption that texts were crucial to the tradition of Buddhism. For instance, early Buddhologist Rhys Davids and de la Vallee Poussin (fl. early twentieth cen.) chose to describe Indian Buddhism and Indian Buddhist practices solely based on canonical texts and ignored archeological findings and epigraphical evidence that told a different story (Schopen 1991, pp. 4–5).

This is an example of a methodology that was steeped in the history of Western conceptualizations and methods in the study of religions. In many ways, it is a gaze that is heavily eschewed towards Western religious worldviews. Such examples highlight the process where agency is usurped from local practicing monks and laity by Western Buddhist studies in defining and determining what counts as authentic Buddhism.

These examples demonstrate the formation of a power structure whereby the authority of the Western Buddhologist is placed above the local Buddhist monks and laity. The usurping of power away from the local Buddhists and establishing texts, and only certain texts, as the source of true Buddhism were critical and formative. Gomez (1995, p. 194) further articulates the curious assumptions underlying the primacy of texts and connects

Protestant models to the history of colonialism. He emphasizes that in these assumptions, "old" texts are considered as the holder of truth:

> Such claims are indeed a rare combination of Protestant models of scripture-centered theology, colonialist presumptions of cultural privilege, and a misuse of rationality as a key to understanding the non-rational. This exotic combination creates a scholarly fundamentalism that asserts that only texts, and only "old" or "primary" texts should have authority, that texts have fixed, immutable, "original" meanings which inhere in the text itself, and above all that there is a sharp distinction between textual truth and the truth of daily superstition.

While texts were accepted as the location of true Buddhism, the concurrent assumption was that rituals and objects are considered impure and adulterated expressions of Buddhism. As also noted by Schopen, such views were unwittingly similar to what had taken place in sixteenth century England when early Protestant reformists made the same argument and emphasized the Bible as the source of Christianity and not rituals and objects. Such tendencies were also accepted by late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century Japanese intellectuals and applied to Korea.

3. Buddhism and Japanese Colonization of Korea

In the same way that religion was integral to the rationalization of colonization, in the case of Meiji Japan, Buddhism was an important tool used in gaining entry into Korea as an initial step towards the end goal of colonizing Korea. Japanese monks, similar to Christian missionaries, were sent as "advance guards" into Korea. In the initial phase in the mid-1870s, when the Kanghwa Treaty of 1876 was signed and Japan started its inroads into Korea, Japanese Buddhist missionaries were sent as a method of "imperialist penetration" (Tikhonov 2010, p. 248). After the annexation of Korea in 1910, the intention of the Japanese Governor-General was to "Japanize" Korean Buddhism, and in the end, the use of Japanese Buddhist missionaries and Korean Buddhism to gain cooperation from Korean monks with respect to the aim of colonizing Korea proved to be useful.

As explained by Ch'oe (1995, pp. 315–16), Japanese Buddhism was used as an entry point into Korea in two ways. Firstly, Japanese Buddhists were initially sent under the pretext of servicing Japanese nationals who were living in Korea. However, these Buddhists were sent to Korea with the ulterior purpose of missionary work to aid in the efforts of colonization. Secondly, through the Buddhist missionaries, it was hoped that relationships would be formed with Korean Buddhists to gain converts as part of the cause of converting Korean Buddhism to Japanese Buddhism. Of course, one of the underlying reasons for this was that Korean Buddhism, in comparison to Japanese Buddhism, was considered adulterated and impure; i.e., an inferior version. One of the reasons for the initial success of these attempts was that Korean Buddhists saw immediate benefits for Korean Buddhism in accepting the leadership of Japanese Buddhism.[14]

However, as part of an effort to justify the overall imperialist incursion, a sure method was to confirm the superiority of Japanese Buddhism and the backwardness of Chosŏn Buddhism. This is where the works of early Japanese scholars became useful in the colonization process. The claimed narrative was that Buddhism, which had once been the state ideology of the Koryŏ dynasty, became corrupt and declined into a process of degeneration. Putting forth such narrative must have seemed easy, especially with the adoption of the newly formed studies in the field of the history of religions, which the Meiji intellectuals learned from the European scholars. Thus, based on developments in the study of religion on the part of European scholars, theories in the study of religions became an important tool in the Japanese government's strategy of using "soft" power. In this sense, the works of the early Japanese scholars played an important role.

These methods were employed in Korea, and no less so in other areas of East Asia. Josephson (2012, p. 247) explains that Kishmoto Nobuta, one of the founders of religious studies in Japan, surveyed Korea and the Liaotung Peninsula at the request of Japanese military authorities. The purpose of the survey was to catalogue the religious practices of local peoples in order to determine the best policy of subjugation by the imperialist regime. It appears such Japanese research played no small role. The adopted late-nineteenth-century Western notions of religion that gave primacy to textual studies and denigrated rituals and objects as impure expressions of religion fit the overall rhetoric of Korea, and its people and culture, as backwards. The effect of applying this normative rhetoric in the Korean context resulted in deriding the Chosŏn religions and culture as being rife with superstitious beliefs and practices.

Korean religions such as shamanism, and similarly with Buddhism, were described in this way and deemed to be mostly "vulgarized". The pioneering Japanese scholar of Buddhism during that time, Takahashi Tōru (1877–1966), argued that Korean Buddhism was strongly characterized by belief in the help of the bodhisattvas and fortune-seeking (*kibok*) and lacked doctrinal or philosophical developments. He described the situation of Chosŏn Buddhism in his *Richō bukkyō* as follows:

> Buddhism [in Korea] degenerated gradually due to the suppressive [government] policies from the start of the Chosŏn dynasty. Especially because of the tyrannical rule of Yŏnsan'gun (r. 1494–1506), the foundation of power [of Buddhism] that was built over the two dynastic periods of Silla and Koryŏ was lost. At last, from the mid-Chosŏn period… [Buddhist monks] were called one of the eight [classes of] lowborn (八賤) and were prohibited from entering the capitol. Also, the teachings of Buddhism were believed by no one other than the palatial and ignorant women, and therefore Buddhism had completely lost any societal relevance. Although Chosŏn period Buddhism declined in this way, the effects of Buddhism were surely evident in the traces in the life ways and minds of the people. (Takahashi 2020, p. 31)

Another leading Japanese scholar and monk, Nukariya (1867–1934), held similarly critical ideas of Chosŏn Buddhism, claiming that, although it called itself Sŏn school or meditational school, it was in fact mixed with the doctrinal tradition. Nukariya, by comparing it to the case of Japanese Buddhism, argued that the Chosŏn-period Sŏn school was not purely of the Son tradition (非純禪) because its monks did not stick to solely meditational practices but also engaged in doctrinal study. In this way, he argues that Korean Buddhism during the Joseon period lost its uniqueness, noting, "At the time, the meditational and doctrinal traditions had already become amalgamated and have lost the uniqueness of both traditions" (Nukariya 1930, pp. 497–98). He goes on to debase Chosŏn Buddhism and argues, "When we observe this, the mixture of doctrinal and meditational [traditions], this is the peculiarity of Chosŏn [Buddhism] where from the beginning [of Chosŏn] there was not one monastic who was [purely] a Sŏn practitioner" (Nukariya 1930, p. 577). Nukariya extends his criticism, suggesting that acceptance by Chosŏn monks of the three teachings—Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism—as no different was more evidence of having lost the pure form of Buddhism (Nukariya 1930, p. 666).

In another example, Eda Toshio (1898–1957), a representative and authoritative Japanese scholar of Korean Buddhism during that time, similarly viewed Chosŏn Buddhism as a degenerated form of what was once a thriving tradition in the earlier periods of Korean history. Very similar to Takahashi Tōru, Eda Toshio contended that Chosŏn Buddhism abandoned philosophy and scholarly pursuits and turned to practices of folk beliefs that catered mostly to the masses and women, trends that were identified as forms of degeneration (Eda 1977, pp. 463–81).

These cases reflect application of an external perspective referred to as an etic approach, wherein external notions of Buddhism, which have little to do with what was happening on the ground, were applied. Such notions were normative judgments about what "genuine" Buddhism was expected to be, which in effect, led to the conclusion that Chosŏn-period Buddhism was an adulterated, popularized form not warranting serious academic attention. This has distracted modern scholars of Korean Buddhism from objectively portraying its many important and unique facets. Much of how Chosŏn Buddhism was characterized stems from early-twentieth-century notions of degenerated religions, which became a widely established scholastic perspective notable in the works of early Japanese scholars.[15]

There were reactions from Korean nationalist intellectuals and scholar monks to such labeling of Korean Buddhism, whereby their own perspectives on the history of Korean Buddhism were established. These were part of an effort by early Korean Buddhist scholars such as Ch'oe Namsŏn (1890–1957) to resist Japanese colonial endeavors. For example, nationalist scholars highlighted that Korean Buddhism can be characterized as "*t'ong*" Buddhism (*t'ong pulgyo* 通佛敎), meaning "all embodying Buddhism". This was in an effort to draw up a Buddhist identity that was unique to Korea in contrast to Japanese Buddhism, largely known as sectarian Buddhism (Y. Kim 2011, p. 248). Despite such nationalist efforts, the narrative of Chosŏn Buddhism as degenerated and adulterated have been accepted even by modern Korean scholars and foreign scholars.[16]

The modern degeneration thesis of Chosŏn Buddhism has continued as a form of common knowledge in the academia of Korean history, at times explicitly stated and at other times implicitly stated.[17] These are the remnants of the degeneration thesis passed on from the early developments of Buddhist studies by Japanese scholars, but they are also the effects of the past Christian-centric study of religion from the early twentieth century, as noted in the above discussion. The adoption of the degeneration thesis by modern Korean scholars can also be likened to the effects of self-censorship, which is a result of Korean scholars' education attained abroad, particularly at North American universities.

The phenomenon of self-censorship in Japan and China is well illustrated by Faulk (2013) in his description of the time when the modern field of Zen/Chan (Kr. Sŏn 禪) studies was being established by Japanese and Chinese scholars upon returning home to Japan and China, respectively, after gaining their post-graduate education at Western universities. These scholars of Buddhism became acutely aware that much of the East Asian traditions of Buddhism were mired in ritualism and superstitious practices.

As a solution to this situation, these Western-educated scholars attempted to establish a conception of Zen Buddhism that was rational and bereft of any ritualism and popular practices, accomplished namely by reinterpreting the founders of the Chan tradition as having rejected ritualism. Thus, early prototypical Chan monks such as the semi-legendary figure Bodhidharma and his followers were represented as having engaged in a "'pure form' of Buddhist practice that did not debase itself by catering to the needs of superstitious laymen who clung to unscientific beliefs in merits, spirits of the dead, and magical spells…" (Faulk 2013, p. 48).

Such efforts to make Buddhism into a rational system of thought that was agreeable to modern rationalism in effect resulted in the creation of a gulf between scripture- and doctrine-based Buddhism and lived traditions on the ground. In the opposite sense, this meant that ritualism and popular cultic practices were determined to be irrational elements and signs of backwardness, in contrast to scriptural studies or meditation. Thus, the acceptance of the idea of ritual practices as irrational and superstitious and a sign of degeneration was in fact the result of an attempt to make Buddhism rational, spurred by encounters of Eastern traditions of Buddhism with Western scientific and rationalist ideas. Such move-

ments occurred in the early Meiji period of transforming Buddhism that was modeled on science and rationality.[18]

4. Emic Versus Etic Approaches to Chosŏn Buddhism

It is true that depictions of Buddhism through the etic approach of focusing on exegetical and doctrinal discussions led to normative guidance, while lived social manifestations often took on a very different form. However, such sutra-focused and doctrine-based depictions that have little to do with how Buddhism manifested itself on the ground have been somehow put forth as truer and more genuine representations, and socio-cultural manifestations as adulterated.[19] Yet, cultic practices have been central to the soteriological scheme of Buddhism in East Asia, where salvation for the majority of practicing Buddhists was attained primarily through ritual.[20]

For instance, Clarke argues that the doctrine-based representations of Buddhism, when considered even in an everyday monastic context, are grossly inaccurate. He explains that monasticism as reflected in the in-house monastic codes that deal with the many aspects of the everyday lives of the monks and nuns "offer a markedly different view of the religious life from that espoused in sūtra texts" (Clarke 2014, p. 13).

But we are aware that the emic elements—the cultic practices such as a belief in merits, spirits, and magical spells—were also integral parts of Buddhism to which even the monastics subscribed. This was not anything unusual in premodern Buddhism. It was also how eminent monks were portrayed in their biographies. For instance, Kieschnick (1997, p. 90) explains that the *Song Biographies* 宋高僧傳, similar to other previous biographies, were concerned with thaumaturgical powers and their uses for such purposes as curing illness, bringing rain, and subjugating malevolent spirits.

This was no different in the case of Chosŏn-period Buddhism. There have been substantial developments during that time in ritual performances and other pragmatic but equally important matters of religious practice. It only makes sense to redirect our focus beyond the normative sutra-focused and doctrine-based approaches to these emic developments on the ground in order to shed light on how Chosŏn-period Buddhism became manifest in an everyday setting. I will next discuss prominent developments in the ritual aspects of Buddhism that took place on the ground.

4.1. Ritual Buddhism, Emic Approach

Extant materials provide an insightful portrayal of the religious life that took place at monasteries and temples during the late Chosŏn period. We have ritual texts that contain literary and liturgical content used in performing rituals that accurately characterize ritual Buddhism common at the time. Publication records of Buddhist ritual texts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries indicate this and, similarly, Buddhist ritual paintings known as nectar ritual paintings—*kamno t'aeng* 甘露幀 or *kamno to* 甘露圖—found only in the Chosŏn period, further verify the strong presence of ritualism.[21]

Nam Hŭi-suk notes the strong presence of ritualism, especially the esoteric tradition within late-Chosŏn Buddhism. She indicates that most of the dhāraṇī publications were related to the cult of Avalokitesvara, the attendant bodhisattva of the Pure Land. Nam highlights three attributes of Chosŏn Buddhism as follows: (1) The latter half of Chosŏn saw a conspicuous increase in the publication of dhāraṇī sutras, mantra collections (*chinôn chip* 眞言集) and Buddhist ritual manuals; (2) there was a cessation of state-sponsored publication of any Buddhist texts starting from the sixteenth century; (3) many of the dhāraṇī sutras, mantra collections, and ritual manuscripts were published with *hangul* vernacular annotations (Nam 2012, pp. 10, 14).

Further evidence indicates the prevalence of ritualism during the Chosŏn period. One of the most comprehensive modern compilations of extant ritual texts of the Chosŏn period is the *Han'guk pulgyo ŭirye charyo ch'ongsŏ* (韓國佛教儀禮資料叢書, complete collection of Korean Buddhist ritual material), published in 1993. It consists of a brief introduction and a collation of seventy-four separate titles in 124 fascicles with a total of 2776 pages. A single page of the current compilation contains an image reproduction of four pages of original text, bringing the total number of pages to approximately 11,000 pages of ritual texts.

Pak (1993) describes the collated materials contained in the compilation as belonging to three separate traditions of Pure Land, esoteric, and meditative (Sŏn/Chan). Pak explains that these traditions can be further divided into self-directed rituals (*chahaeng ŭirye* 自行儀禮), other-directed rituals (*t'ahaeng ŭirye* 他行儀禮), and particular rituals (*t'ŭksu ŭirye* 特殊儀禮). Self-directed rituals are described as rituals for paying homage and repentance to the Buddha and boddhisattvas (*yech'am ŭirye* 禮懺儀禮) and include cultivational or ordination rituals. This category of rituals also includes the daily ritual of paying homage to the Buddha (*ilsang yegyŏng ŭirye* 日常禮敬儀禮).

Other-directed rituals include those where lay patrons, through the assistance of monks and nuns, beseech the power of the buddhas and bodhisattvas in order to avoid sickness, crisis, and misfortune and to send merit from the performed rituals to the spirits of deceased loved ones. Pak notes that these other-directed rituals make up the majority of performed rituals and include rituals such as the Water and Land Assembly ritual (Suryuk chae 水陸齋) and the Ritual of the Ten Kings (Siwang chae 十王齋). Lastly, particular rituals include rites that are performed for special occasions, such as the Eye-doting Ritual (Chŏman ŭirye 點眼儀禮) for initiating statues of the buddhas or bodhisattvas (Pak 1993, pp. 11–12).[22]

Focusing on Buddhist ritualism provides an opportunity to discover how the needs of the general people were addressed by Buddhism and what needs were fulfilled, which can be generally divided into (1) fulfilling worldly needs (*kibok* 祈福), (2) safely sending off the dead souls (*ch'ŏndo* 薦度), and (3) healing the sick (*ch'ibyŏng* 治病) (S.-E. T. Kim 2018). This brings to the fore major aspects that characterized Chosŏn Buddhism. While the state suppressed the performances of Buddhist rituals in official spheres, rituals were a common part of Chosŏn-period Buddhism performed at temples, monasteries, and in the private residences of donors, including even royal family members.

4.2. Ritual Buddhism Portrayed in the Nectar Ritual Paintings

Nectar ritual paintings illustrate how Buddhist funerary and memorial rites manifested in the lives of the people in Chosŏn. These paintings enjoyed unprecedented popularity in the late Chosŏn period. They thus represent characteristic forms of late-Chosŏn religious practices. These paintings are important since they display Buddhist expressions of filial piety and ancestor worship. In most cases, they were used during universal salvation rites, which included such rituals as "Rites of Forty-nine Days, the Festival of Hungry Ghosts, the Water and Land Assembly, and the Spirit Vulture Peak Rites, all of which were related to filiality and ancestor worship" (Kang 1994, pp. 88–90).

In these paintings, the world of the living prominently portrays all classes of people—members of the royal family, officials, upper class yangban, commoners, shamans, and criminals. It is their very commonness that makes these scenes stand out. Within these everyday scenes, Buddhist rituals and everyday activities are represented side by side. One other point that stands out is the portrayal of yangban and Confucian officials as attendants attentively observing these rituals (Walraven 2012, pp. 6–7).[23]

The purpose of the Buddhist rituals depicted in these paintings was to pray for the souls of deceased parents or ancestors, or to pray for the souls of all those who have passed

away in calamitous events such as war. In the funerary ritual depicted in the nineteenth-century Pogwan Temple Nectar Ritual Painting (1898), we can see a ritual specialist overseeing the proceeding rite and mourners, men and women, dressed in coarse clothing and distinct head gear worn during mourning kneeling in front of an altar. To the side, we find a troop of monk dancers and a drummer. Above the dance performance is a group of monks, some reading from a scripture, and high-ranking monks seated under a canopy.

Despite the grandeur of the depicted ritual, all the attending monks together with the participating sponsors were part of a ritual performance for the salvation of the deceased parents of the clients. The principal theme of the ritual was filial piety. The same theme was also fundamental to Buddhist ancestral memorial rituals such as the Forty-nine Days Ritual (Sashipkuil chae 四十九日齋), Memorial Day Ritual (Kiil chae 忌日齋), and Ritual for Sending Off the Souls (Ch'ŏndo chae 薦度齋). These various Buddhist ancestral festivals or rituals were the result of adopting a form of filial piety that emphasized the performing of memorial rituals for one's ancestors, ensuring the well-being of the family (Kang 1994, p. 84).

From the above discussion, it can be noted that Buddhism was far from having become deteriorated to the extent of becoming no different from popular religions such as shamanism. Rather, Chosŏn-period Buddhism can be understood as being in a transitional form from having initially been a state-sponsored religious tradition to a more independently institutionalized religion that catered more to the religious needs of the Chosŏn people, ranging from societal elites to commoners.

4.3. Development of the Saṅgha in the Late Chosŏn Period

Further from ritual Buddhism, Chosŏn-period Buddhism appears to have become better established, unlike what has been claimed in the degeneration thesis. A significant indication is the appearance of the new educational system of the Chosŏn saṃgha, known as *iryŏk kwajŏng* (履歷課程). Up to the early sixteenth century, a standardized monastic education shared by different schools of thought does not appear to have been used. Rather, monastic education was a matter for individual monasteries to manage for the purpose of training their members. However, records indicate efforts to form a standardized monastic curriculum in the sixteenth century (J. Lee 2012, p. 69).

By the seventeenth century, there is a clear indication that a more formal, unified curriculum was in place, such as a description by Yŏngwŏl Ch'ŏnghak (詠月淸學; 1570–1654), a monastic of the early seventeenth century, of a monastic curriculum. In his "Sajipsagyo chŏndŭng yŏmsong hwaŏm" (四集四教傳燈拈頌華嚴, Fourfold-Texts—Fourfold-Teachings—*Transmission of the Lamp*—*Analyses and Verses*—*Huayan*), monastic curriculum is described as consisting of three stages: (1) the "Fourfold-Texts Course" (*sajipkwa* 四集科); (2) "Fourfold-Teachings Course" (*sagyogwa* 四教科); and finally (3), the "Great-Teaching Course" (*taegyogwa* 大教科).

The first stage, the Fourfold-Texts Course, is described as a course consisting of gradual cultivation and "investigation of the phrase" (*ch'amgu* 參句). The following stage, the Fourfold-Teachings Course, consisted mainly of scriptural studies to gain insights into the principles of the teachings. The final stage, the Great-Teaching Course, consisted of learning the fundamentals of patriarchal Sŏn while also receiving instructions on correct methods of cultivation (HPC 8, no. 159. 234b21–235b4).[24]

Later on in the early seventeenth century, another course, Course for Neophytes (*sami kwa* 沙彌科), was added to the beginning of the curriculum to form a four-stage curriculum.[25] This four-stage curriculum became generally accepted as a monastic curriculum within the Chosŏn monastic community by the various Buddhist schools and was later adopted as the standard monastic curriculum in modern Korea (J. Lee 2012, pp. 68–71).

That the same seventeenth-century monastic curriculum is used in the modern monastic education system is evidence not only of the enduring monastic educational tradition, but also of new developments that took place in the late-Chosŏn monastic community that continued into modern times. It is also a testament to the well-established monastic community, which proves the degeneration thesis to be problematic and not an accurate description of Chosŏn Buddhism.

In addition, aside from the development of a monastic curriculum, a new system of cultivation was established during the sixteenth century where the devotional practice of recollecting Amitâbha Buddha was incorporated into a system of cultivation with scriptural studies and meditation. Though devotional practices are commonly viewed to be not as "rational" as meditation and scriptural study, it was not considered a corrupted form of Buddhism by the monastics at the time. Rather, as illustrated in sixteenth-century Buddhist developments by Ch'ŏnghŏ Hyujŏng's 淸虛休靜 (1520–1604), an eminent monk and a systematizer of monastic practice, the devotional practice of recalling the Buddha was seen to be an essential part of monastic practice. This newly formulated system of practice, the three paths of cultivation, consisted of meditation, doctrinal learning, and intoning the name of Amitâbha Buddha.

More specifically, the recitation practice of recollecting Amitâbha Buddha was divided into two forms, self-power and devotional other-power. The self-power form was also considered to be self-reliant "recollecting Sŏn" 念佛禪, similar to Sŏn meditation, while the second devotional form of practice relied on the other-power of Amitâbha Buddha (Y. Kim 2015, pp. 132–33).[26]

It appears that the monastics may not even have made such contrasting difference between the two forms of rational and irrational Buddhist practices, meditation and Pure Land practices. In this sense, the "spiritual" model of Buddhism, where Buddhism is defined mainly as a mental enterprise while bodily practices such as ritual performance or devotional practices have been disparaged, needs to be reconsidered. This is an emphasis on the mind as closely associated with apprehending the "absolute", whereas the body functions, if at all, as an inhibitor of spiritual progress.[27] In a similar way, Rambelli, a leading Buddhist studies scholar, raises this critique:

> Until recently, Western scholarship has tended to ignore the Buddhist internal ambivalence toward objects and has stressed instead so-called "spiritual aspects" of Buddhist thought and practice: an emphasis on meditation as essentially a mental discipline (rather than a bodily practice) on the ritual side, together with stress on disembodied and decontextualized cognitive and doctrinal issues. (Rambelli 2007, p. 3)

Aversion to ritualism started early from the initial developments of Buddhology in Korea, evident in early Japanese scholars who were pioneers of the field. They have argued that Chosŏn Buddhism lacked doctrinal or philosophical developments and was strongly characterized by Pure Land cultic and fortune-seeking practices. Though early Japanese scholars were correct in observing that ritualism was a significant part of Chosŏn Buddhism, they repeated early Western-centric notions of religions when they claimed that ritualism and cultic practices were signs of degeneration.

5. Conclusions: Redirecting Buddhist Studies

Indeed, Buddhism became widely spread throughout Asia and came to be adopted into very diverse socio-cultural contexts, thus remolding and reformulating Buddhist practices and rituals to fit the local religious ethos and customs, a natural process of religious and cultural adaptation.[28] Nevertheless, in spite of the prevalence of Buddhist ritual prac-

tices throughout Korea, and also Asia, there is still a tendency to view ritual practices as an abrogation of a pure form.

Shifts from such perspectives are needed all the more for the Chosŏn period given the unique historical circumstances surrounding Buddhism at the time. They include (1) Buddhism being suppressed by the state and eventually losing state recognition; (2) it was a time of intense interaction with Confucianism; (3) it was isolated from much of the Buddhist developments in China and Japan. One of the results of these circumstances was that the monastics could not help but adjust and focus their energy on more practical and organizational issues, with little time, if any, for doctrinal developments and philosophical musings. In this sense, the early Japanese Buddhist scholars were correct in making the observation that Buddhism in Korea was heavily focused on rituals and fortune-seeking. However, to conclude that those characteristics were signs of degeneration fits Western-centric interpretations, harkening back to early-twentieth-century Western scholars of the history of religions.

Being sensitive to the emic aspects and the historical context of Chosŏn Buddhism, it makes sense that the study of Chosŏn Buddhism needs to focus on areas including Buddhism in the everyday lives of the people and Buddhism's state of coexistence with Confucianism. Buddhism, having lost state patronage, had to turn to the people for support, and evidences such as the nectar ritual paintings and donor ledgers for temple works indicate the transition of focus away from the state to the people. Furthermore, it cannot be denied that the Chosŏn period was one of Confucian domination and the monastic community could not help but constantly interact with Confucian elites. This area are beyond the scope of this essay and needs to be addressed in further studies.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, methodology, writing—original draft preparation, and funding acquisition were done by S.-E.T.K. Investigations, gathering resources, writing—review and editing—were done by W.-i.B. and S.-E.T.K. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This paper was funded by the Academy of Korean Studies as part of the project Laboratory Program for Korean Studies, project no. AKS-2022-LAB-2230003.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 The Chosŏn state adopted policies of persecution of the early Catholics through torture and executions. For more on the persecution of the Catholics by the state, see K. Cho (1988) and Baker (2017).

2 On the influences of Western missionaries in Korean society, see, Oak (2010) and A. E. Kim (2001).

3 Mentan (2015, p. 51), while describing the political and cultural history of Western colonization of the African continent, claims that countries were colonized under the political domination of Europe, and later by the United States, in two phases: firstly, intellectual and then spiritual traditions were assaulted, which is often accepted uncritically by the leading and upper-class segments of African society; in the second phase, there was an attempt to replace the indigenous systems completely with the ideas and experiences of the colonizer.

4 In the face of such oppression, Chosŏn Buddhism came to rely on rituals and cultic practices essential to its survival. The implication is that popular practices came to be more developed rather than philosophical and doctrinal traditions. Nam bases her argument on the flourishing publication of ritual texts during the 16th and 17th centuries. See Nam (2004, 2012).

5 K. Lee's (2014) article is an example of the persistence of the conflict narrative.

6 H. Kim (2017, p. 130, n. 11) lists some recent Koreanists who have argued against the degeneration thesis. They include E.-s. Cho (2003), Boudewijn Walraven (2007), Sem Vermeersch (2013), S.-E. T. Kim (2013), and Donald Baker (2014).

7 An example is work by J. W. Kim (2021), who examined a seventeenth century philosophical debate between scholastic monks and Confucian literati.

[8] More recent works on uncovering how Chosŏn Buddhism developed include works by Korean scholars Y. Kim (2020) and Sŏngpil Son (2020, 2024). Also, there have been recent works in the English language along the same line of argument. See Gregory N. Evon (2023) and S. U. Kim (2025).

[9] This was despite the fact that Chosŏn period Buddhism did not all of a sudden turned to cultic practices. *Samguk yusa*, or the *Veritable Records of the Three Kingdoms*, describes the magic and rituals that were inherent aspects of Buddhism from the time that Buddhism was first transmitted to the Korean peninsula. See McBride (2008) and S.-E. T. Kim (2018, pp. 69–70) on the cultic aspects in Korean Buddhism.

[10] Religion as a signifier of culture worked in the same way and often in tandem with culture to establish the notion of "primitive versus modern" societies or lagging versus advanced societies. Chidester (1996, pp. 233–36) explains that religion was considered a feature of being human no different from cultural elements such as language, law, and marriage.

[11] Tatah Mentan (2015, p. 52) describes that "The assault on India's traditions, for instance, was first officially announced by William Wilberforce in his 1813 speech to the English Parliament in which he argued that the English must ensure the conversion of the country to Christianity as the most effective way of bringing it to 'civilisation'".

[12] Mentan (2015, p. 85) makes a similar argument that "Political imperialism may find fierce resistance today (Iran, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Egypt, Zimbabwe), but academic imperialism has not, probably because it is almost invisible".

[13] It was in the mid-19th century that Charles Darwin formulated his theory of evolution by natural selection, evident in his influential book *On the Origin of Species*, published in 1859.

[14] Tikhonov (2010, pp. 267–68) explains that given the circumstances of Korean Buddhism and its situation of destitute, Japanese Buddhism became a "reference model" and a savior for the Korean monks. In this way, especially in an era of modernization, many Korean monastics would have easily adopted the Japanese model.

[15] For more on the activities of early Japanese scholars with respect to the study of Korean religions, including Buddhism, see C. Kim (2007, esp. pp. 33–36).

[16] It needs to be noted that the notion of the degeneration of Buddhism was also applied to Japanese Buddhism by early Japanese scholars of Buddhism (Y. Kim 2017, p. 216). Nonetheless, this does not take away the implication of their work in the process of the Japanese government's colonization efforts.

[17] Ideas of degeneration have circulated into the late twentieth century. For example, Jae-ryong Shim views Chosŏn Buddhism as a form of "degeneration" (Shim 1999, pp. 161, 165–66). Jorgensen is another scholar of Korean Buddhism who argues that "Buddhism was relegated to insignificance as a despised 'heresy' that survived on the margins of élite society, particularly among women, and in the lower classes. Therefore, Confucianism was the overwhelming determinant of Korean social and moral values, leaving Buddhism to the realms of ignorance and superstition" (Jorgensen 1998, pp. 189–90).

[18] In tandem, Buddhist reform movements were formed that promoted anti-superstition campaigns and gained momentum in the mid-1890s. Inoue Enryō 井上 円了 (1858–1919) was one of the very early Meiji proponents who initiated such campaigns. See Josephson (2006, pp. 162–63).

[19] There is increasing awareness of such dissonance and skewed perspectives that has favoured text-based reflections of Buddhism (Wedemeyer 2014; Clarke 2014).

[20] The authors Reader and Tanabe, in their ground-breaking work *Practically Religious*, (Reader and Tanabe 1998), have provided insight into the socio-cultural manifestations of religions in Japan. They argue that worldly mundane needs and benefits are the inherent motives for religious practices.

[21] In addition to the suggested emic methods adopted for this paper, there are other emic approaches. For example, J. Kim (2010, p. 50) suggests exploring the following characteristics of Korean Buddhism: (1) syncretic Buddhism, (2) Buddhism as state protector, (3) Buddhism for praying for good fortune, and (4) skirt Buddhism, meaning "women Buddhism", due to the participation of mostly women in Buddhist practices and events.Another, similar approach is suggested by S.-E. T. Kim (2013, pp. 7–12) that emphasizes an interdependent relationship with Confucian elites, the holder of societal power during the Chosŏn period. Kim claims that while Buddhism had no choice but to depend on Confucian elites for subsistence and recognition, likewise, these elites had nowhere to turn except Buddhism for the urgent matter of death. A more recent work by S. U. Kim (2025) also adopted this perspective.

[22] Although Pak categorizes the rituals into the three types, he draws attention to the difficulty of dividing a ritual in terms of belonging to a certain tradition and drawing a clear boundary between these categories. He explains that this is because a performed ritual contains elements from the various traditions (Pak 1993, pp. 11–12).

[23] Interestingly, the involvement of members of the royal family and high-ranking officials in the production of such paintings and other merit-making temple works (*pulsa* 佛事) is more common than thought. High-ranking officials made up a large portion of the donors for Buddhist paintings and eminent monk steles. See S.-E. T. Kim (2020).

[24] See J. Lee (2012) for more detailed discussion of the courses and the scriptures studied.

[25] Somewhere in the development of the curriculum from the seventeenth century, the *Lotus Sūtra* was replaced with the *Dasheng qixin lun* (大乘起信論, Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna) in the Fourfold-Teachings Course.

[26] Ch'ŏnghŏ Hyujŏng claimed that "Sŏn meditation and chanting are in essence the same given that [through both methods] the mind is cultivated and awakened". This is a claim that the self-cultivational aspect of chanting Sŏn is no different from Sŏn meditation ("Yŏmsong" 念頌, HPC 7.650-651).

[27] Inoue also claimed that Buddhism as a "religion" was limited to the domain of the spiritual world and not the physical as an effort to remove Buddhism from the superstitious cultic practices that endeavored to exercise certain outcomes in the world of material existence (Josephson 2006, pp. 158–59).

[28] Such variations in the adoption of different forms of Buddhism is quite striking when we observe Buddhism through its practiced manifestations and its syncretism with local religions. Such indigenous religions in Asian countries include Shinto in Japan, Taoism in China, spirit cult in Thailand, and shamanism in Korea.

References

Primary Sources

HPC = *Han'guk pulgyo chŏnsŏ* 韓國佛教全書 [Complete collection of Korean Buddhist literature]. Dongguk University Han'guk pulgyo chŏnsŏ retrival system. Available at http://kabc.dongguk.edu/content/list?itemId=ABC_BJ (accessed on 20 November 2024).

Hyujŏng 休靜. "Yŏmsong" 念頌. In *Simbŏp yoch'o* 心法要抄 [The essentials of the dharma of the mind]. In HPC vol. 7.

Yŏngwŏl Ch'ŏnghak 詠月淸學. "Sajipsagyo chŏndŭng yŏmsong hwaŏm" 四集四教傳燈拈頌華嚴 [Fourfold-Texts—Fourfold-Teachings—*Transmission of the Lamp—Analyses and Verses—Huayan*]. In *Yŏngwŏltang taesa munjip* 詠月堂大師文集 [Collected works of the great master Yŏngwŏl]. In HPC vol. 8.

Secondary Sources

Baker, Donald. 2014. Privatization of Buddhism in the Chosŏn Dynasty. *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies* 14: 153–69.

Baker, Donald. 2017. *Catholics and Anti-Catholicism in Chosŏn Korea*. Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press.

Chidester, David. 1996. *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa*. Charlettesville: University Press of Virginia.

Cho, Eun-su. 2003. Re-Thinking Late 19th Century Chosŏn Buddhist Society. *Acta Koreana* 6: 87–109.

Cho, Kwang. 1988. *Chosŏnhugi ch'ŏnjugyosa yŏn'gu [History of Catholicism in the Late Chosŏn Period]*. Seoul: Koryŏdae minjok munhwa yŏn'guso.

Ch'oe, Pyŏnghŏn. 1995. Ilche Pulgyo ŭi ch'imt'u wa singminji Pulgyo ŭi sŏnggyŏk: Put'ojinjong daegokp'a ŭi ch'imt'u saryerŭl chungshimŭro [The Penetration of Japanese Imperial Buddhism and the Character of the Colonial Buddhism]. *Hanguk sasang sahak* 7: 307–16.

Clarke, Shayne. 2014. *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

De Jong, J. W. 1979. *Buddhist Studies*. Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press.

Eda, Toshio 江田俊雄. 1977. *Chōsen Bukkyō shi no kenkyū* 朝鮮佛教史の研究 *[Study of the History of Chōsen Buddhism]*. Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai.

Evon, Gregory N. 2023. *Salvaging Buddhism to Save Confucianism in Chosŏn Korea (1392–1910)*. Amherst: Cambria Press.

Faulk, T. Griffith. 2013. Denial of Ritual in the Zen Buddhist Tradition. *Journal of Ritual Studies* 27: 47–58.

Gomez, Luis O. 1995. Unspoken Paradigms: Meanderings through the Metaphors of a Field. *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 18: 183–230.

Jorgensen, John. 1998. Conflicts between Buddhism and Confucianism in the Chosŏn Dynasty: A preliminary survey. *Pulgyo yŏn'gu* 佛教研究 15: 145–89.

Josephson, Jason Ānanda. 2006. When Buddhism Became a 'Religion': Religion and Superstition in the Writings of Inoue Enryō. *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 33: 143–68. [CrossRef]

Josephson, Jason Ānanda. 2012. *The Invention of Religion in Japan*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Kang, Woo-bang (Kang Ubang). 1994. Ritual and Art During the Eighteenth Century. In *Korean Arts of the Eigtheenth Century: Splenor & Simplicity*. Edited by Hongnam Kim. New York: Weatherhill, pp. 78–97.

Kieschnick, John. 1997. *The Eminent Monk: Buddhist Ideals in Medieval Chinese Hagiography*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Kim, Andrew Eungi. 2001. Political insecurity, social chaos, religious void and the rise of Protestantism in late nineteenth-century Korea. *Social History* 26: 267–81. [CrossRef]

Kim, Chongsŏ. 2007. Ilbonin ŭi han'gukchonggyo yŏn'gu [Japanese research on Korean religions]. Unpublished manuscript.

Kim, Hwansoo. 2017. Buddhism during the Chosŏn Dynasty (1392–1910): A Collective Trauma? *Journal of Korean Studies* 22: 101–42. [CrossRef]

Kim, Jongmyung. 2010. A Search for New Approaches: To Research on Korean Buddhist History. *Korean Histories* 2: 45–56.

Kim, Jong Wook. 2021. A Buddhist Critique of Neo-Confucianism in Seventeenth-Century Chosŏn Korea. *Journal of Korean Religions* 12: 97–127.

Kim, Seong Uk. 2025. *Monks and Literati: The Transformation of Buddhism in Late Chosŏn Korea*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
Kim, Sung-Eun Thomas. 2013. Marginalization of Chosŏn Buddhism and Methods of Research: A Proposal for an Integrated Approach to the Understanding of Chosŏn Buddhism. *Korean Histories* 4: 3–13.
Kim, Sung-Eun Thomas. 2018. Korean Buddhist Adoption of Shamanic Religious Ethos: Healing, Fortune Seeking, and the Afterlife. *International Journal of Buddhist Thought & Culture* 28: 59–85.
Kim, Sung-Eun Thomas. 2020. The Chosŏn Gentry Sponsorship of Buddhist Temple Works: Insights from the Records of Late-Chosŏn Donor Ledgers. *Journal of Korean Religions* 11: 45–73. [CrossRef]
Kim, Yongtae. 2011. Tongashia kŭndae pulgyoyŏn'guŭi t'ŭksŏnggwa orient'allijŭmŭi t'uyŏng [Characteristics of East Asian Modern Buddhist Studies and Projection of Orientalism]. *Yŏksahabo* 210: 229–58.
Kim, Yongtae. 2015. The Establishment of the Approach of Chanting Amitābha's Name and the Proliferation of Pure Land Buddhism in Late Chosŏn. *Journal of Korean Religions* 6: 131–57.
Kim, Yongtae. 2017. The Features of Modern Korean Buddhist Studies and the Formation of the Tradition. In *East Asian Buddhism and Modern Buddhist Studies*. Edited by Kim Jong-wook and Kim Yongtae. Seoul: Dongguk University Press, pp. 195–224.
Kim, Yongtae. 2020. Formation of a Chosŏn Buddhist Tradition: Dharma Lineage and the Monastic Curriculum from a Synchronic and Diachronic Perspective. *Journal of Korean Religions* 11: 103–34.
Kippenberg, Hans G. 2002. *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Lee, Jongsu. 2012. Monastic Education and Educational Ideology in Late Joseon Buddhism. *Journal of Korean Religions* 3: 65–84. [CrossRef]
Lee, Kyungsoon. 2014. The Confucian Transformation of Mountain Space: Travels by Late-Chosŏn Confucian Scholars and the Attempted Confucianization of Mountains. *Journal of Korean Religions* 5: 119–43. [CrossRef]
McBride, Richard D. 2008. *Domesticating the Dharma: Buddhist Cults and the Hwaŏm Synthesis in Silla Korea*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
Mentan, Tatah. 2015. *Unmasking Social Science Imperialism*. Oxford: African Books Collective.
Müller, F. Max. 1878. *The Hibbert Lecture 1878: Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion, as Illustrated by the Religions of India 1878*. London: Longmans Green and Co.
Nam, Hŭisuk. 2004. 16–17segi pulgyo ŭisikchip ŭi kanhaeng kwa pulgyo taejunghwa [16–17th century publications of Buddhist ritual handbooks and the popularization of Buddhism]. *Han'guk munhwa* 34: 97–165.
Nam, Hŭisuk. 2012. Publication of Buddhist Literary Texts: The Publication and Popularization of Mantra Collections and Buddhist Ritual Texts in the Late Chosŏn Dynasty. *Journal of Korean Religions* 3: 9–27. [CrossRef]
Nukariya, Kaiten 忽滑谷快天. 1930. *Chōsen zen kyōu shi* 朝鮮禪教史 *[History of the Chosŏn Meditational and Doctrinal Traditions]*. Tokyo: Shunjū sha 春秋社.
Oak, Sung-Deuk. 2010. Healing and Exorcism: Christian Encounter with Shamanism in Early Modern Korea. *Asian Ethnology* 69: 95–128.
Pak, Semin. 1993. Han'guk Pulgyo ŭirye charyo ch'ongsŏ haeje 韓國佛教儀禮資料叢書 解題 [Preface to the complete collection of Korean Buddhist ritual material]. In *Han'guk pulgyo ŭirye charyo ch'ongsŏ che 1chip [Complete Collection of Korean Buddhist Ritual Material, Book I]*. Edited by Pak Semin. Seoul: Samsŏng am, pp. 11–20.
Rambelli, Fabio. 2007. *Buddhist Materiality: A Cultural History of Objects in Japanese Buddhism*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Reader, Ian, and George J. Tanabe. 1998. *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
Schopen, Gregory. 1991. Archeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism. *History of Religions* 31: 1–23. [CrossRef]
Schopen, Gregory. 1997. *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
Shim, Jae-ryong. 1999. *Korean Buddhism: Tradition and Transformation*. Seoul: Jimoondang Publishing Co.
Son, Sŏngpil. 2020. Increased Temple Publication of Buddhist Texts in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Reading the Political and Cultural Significance of the Monastic Community. *Journal of Korean Religions* 11: 17–34.
Son, Sŏngpil. 2024. *Chosŏnjŏn'gi kukka wa sach'al: Chosŏnsidae Pulgyo yŏksasang e taehan pip'an kwa sŏngch'al* 조선전기 국가와 사찰: 조선시대 불교 역사상에 대한 비판과 성찰 [The state and monasteries of early Chosŏn: Critique and introspection on Chosŏn period history of Buddhism]. Seoul: Tosŏ ch'ulp'an ssiaial.
Takahashi, Tōru 高橋亨. 2020. *Richō bukkyō* 李朝佛教 *[Yi dynasty Buddhism]*. Translated by Yi Yunsŏk, and Tajima Tessŭo. Seoul: Minsokwon.
Tikhonov, Vladimir. 2010. The Japanese Missionaries and Their Impact on Korean Buddhist Developments (1876–1910). In *Makers of Modern Korean Buddhism*. Edited by Jin Park. Albany: SUNY Press, pp. 245–74.
Vasquez, Manuel A. 2011. *More Than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Vermeersch, Sem. 2013. Yi Seonggye and the Fate of the Goryeo Buddhist System. *Korea Journal* 53: 124–54. [CrossRef]

Walraven, Boudewijn. 2007. A Re-Examination of the Social Basis of Buddhism in Late Chosŏn Korea. *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 20: 1–20.

Walraven, Boudewijn. 2012. Buddhist Accommodation and Appropriation and the Limits of Confucianization. *Journal of Korean Religions* 3: 105–16. [CrossRef]

Wedemeyer, Christian. 2014. *Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism: History, Semiology, and Transgression in the Indian Traditions*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Wu, Jiang, and Greg Wilkinson. 2017. *Reinventing the Tripitaka: Transformation of the Buddhist Canon in Modern East Asia*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.