

Neither Mountain Nor Marketplace Placing the Buddhist Nun in Contemporary Korean Literature

Hyangsoon Yi
University of Georgia

Despite its distinct presence in Korean society for nearly one and a half millennia, the world of Buddhist nuns has remained closed to the "gaze" of outsiders.¹ Even the hagiographies on renowned nuns are available to the public only in snippets and mostly as legends.² The dearth of serious treatments of Buddhist nuns in Korean literature thus reflects and at the same time perpetuates the sense of mystery with which the life of a female renunciant is veiled in popular perception. In modern poetry, there is a tendency to lyricize the mystique of the nun, as is illustrated by two well-known poems from the 1930s: Paek Sok's "Yosung" (The Nun); and Cho Chi-hun's "Sungmu" (The Nun's Dance). From the late 1980s, however, the female monastic community has come under increasing scrutiny by a handful of writers and filmmakers, most notably represented by Han Sung-won, Nam Chi-sim, and Im Kwon-taek.

This paper investigates the portrayals of Buddhist nuns in two novels published in the late 1980s: Han's *Aje Aje Para Aje* (Come, Come, Come Upward) and Nam's *Ltow6ara*(Udumbara).³ Unlike the passing vignettes on the nun provided by poems and short stories, Han's and Nam's multi-volume novels employ a quasi-epic mode to probe the processes and implications of women's enlightenment, from broad socio-historical contexts. Of particular interest among the common narrative strategies adopted in these two works is the use of a pair of nuns, foils to each other, who take widely divergent paths to spiritual attainment. Through these characters, the novelists explore the complex and intrinsic relationship between wisdom and compassion, a foundation of Mahayana doctrine. In both novels, wisdom and compassion are topographically figured in the mountain and the

marketplace, respectively. As the loci of differing types of spiritual pursuit undertaken by Buddhist women, these spatial tropes are crucial in unraveling thematic trajectories in both narratives. Given the multivalent narrative functions of spatial metaphors, this paper traces the patterns of the nun's itinerancy in the two texts, paying special attention to the problematics of sexuality and motherhood, which are clearly mapped in the progress toward the goal of bodhisattvahood.

The Buddhist monastery, as portrayed in *Aje Aje Para Aje* and *Udambara*, can best be described in terms of what Michel Foucault calls "heterotopia."⁴ According to Foucault, heterotopias are "counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted **Utopia** in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (p. 24). They are special forms of utopia existent in any society. But unlike a **Utopia**, which by definition has no physical manifestation, a heterotopia exists as a material location. Paradoxically, it can be "isolated" and is also "penetrable" (p. 26). Some heterotopias are, however, not freely accessible, demanding a special ritual for entry. The function of a heterotopia can change according to socio-historical circumstances, but in general it constructs a space of either "illusion" or "compensation" (p. 27). The former reveals the real world as illusory by contrast, and the latter makes the real world appear to be chaotic. Foucault presents brothels and colonies as two representative types of heterotopic spaces.

As heterotopic spaces, the Buddhist nunneries in *Aje Aje Para Aje* and *Udambara* embody elements of both compensation and illusion. Initially, the heroines perceive the nunneries as ideal sanctuaries for women in existential pain. As the narratives develop, however, the monastic communities turn out to be just as—if not more—intolerant, authoritarian, and hypocritical as secular organizations. In Han's and Nam's texts, this shift in the perception of the nunnery is dramatically inscribed in Sunnyo's and Chihyo's relationships to their respective temples. Both nuns share a traumatic past of malfunctioning families and failed romances which have led them to "go into the mountain." In the end, however, they are expelled from their supposed mountain "sanctuaries" because they become involved with men and thus violate monastic rules. The harsh disciplinary actions imposed upon them expose the inflexibility of the monastery as a religious institution.

Chinsong, Sunnyo's antithesis in *Aje Aje Para Aje*, represents a different case. She had caring parents and a bright future as a high school senior. Despite her comfortable life, she chooses to become a nun. Her determination to leave home against the vehement opposition

of her family is based on her cherished memories of the nuns' temple she had visited with her grandmother. Chinsong's decisive severance of her worldly ties and her determination to pursue her chosen path are sharply contrasted with Sunnyo's constant ruminations about her past and her ultimate failure to adapt to the monastic environment. However, even Chinsong—who closely follows the prescribed path for a novice—eventually encounters the inscrutable inner dynamics of monastic life upon discovering that Sunnyo, a total misfit in her eyes, is in fact favored over her by the abbess Unson in transmission of the lineage. The enigma of her role model, Unson's sympathetic attitude toward the wayward nun, Sunnyo causes Chinsong to experience anger, jealousy, and disillusionment, and ultimately to take to the road in search of different types of teachers in the marketplace.

As Sunnyo and Chinsong for different reasons return to the secular world, so do Chihyo and Hyeil in *Udambara*. A slight variation in the latter dyad is that while Chihyo struggles with her liminal status in society as an excommunicated nun, her foil, Hyeil, is displaced to India where she furthers her sutra study at a graduate school. Although Chihyo is more diligent in practice and also more observant of monastic discipline than Hyeil, it is Chihyo who is ultimately deprived of her monastic status and is forced to leave the nunnery. This may appear to contradict Han's novel in which outspoken and flexible-minded Sunnyo is expelled from the monastery. A close comparison of the two situations, however, shows that both nuns in fact share spiritual earnestness as is hinted by their uncalculating fervent involvement in romance.

In both novels, the nuns' sojourns in the Rabelaisian marketplace are depicted as a necessary step toward achieving a mind of compassion. In other words, itinerancy constitutes a vital step toward a bodhisattva ideal. Throughout his novel, Han emphasizes that religious liberation is incomplete without an understanding of humanity as flesh and blood; enlightenment can be meaningful only when it is attained through suffering. Therefore, the relocations of the nuns to the samsaric vortex are fully justified as an indispensable phase in their transformative processes. According to this thematic scheme, Buddhist itinerancy—called *manhaeng* (ten thousand actions) or *unsuhaenggak* (wandering like a cloud or water) in Korean—serves as a narrative device for synthesizing wisdom and compassion as bodhisattvahood. As is shown by Chinsong's nomadic quest for the truth, Han's literary appropriation of itinerancy purports to Sudhana's allegorical pilgrimage in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* (Flower Ornament

Scripture).

Despite their noble rationales, however, Han's and Nam's spatial reconfigurations of their heroines harbor a rather disturbing narrative mechanism. What triggers the nuns' departures from the world of spiritual contemplation for that of bodily experience is the voyeuristic male gaze constantly hovering around the temple compounds. Embodied by Hyonu and Chongnam in *Aje Aje Para Aje* and by Tonghwa and Pongdu in *Udambara*, the gaze penetrates into the sacred, forbidden space, forcing the nuns out of their sequestered mountain enclosures into the open arena of the marketplace. The menacing force of their gaze is signified by the mental and physical monstrosities branded on them. Hyonu is a serial rapist and thief. Chongnam, born of a monk and a laywoman, behaves eccentrically out of his self-consciousness about his father's unorthodox religious status. Tonghwa has a blind masseuse sister, who is violated by the husband of his spiritual mentor and sculptor-professor Ch'aeryon. An orphan who grew up in the temple, Pongdu is grotesquely deformed due to childhood injuries sustained during a fire. For these men, the young nuns are objects of desire, and both the authors and readers of the novels conjointly participate in the characters' obsessive gaze. The nuns are allowed textual spaces only so far as they fulfill the collective voyeuristic fantasy. This point is acutely borne out by Hyeil, the only nun among the four who is clean of amorous scandals. Her years of overseas stay are only summarily and perfunctorily reported. During this period abroad, she literally disappears from the story, creating a textual void.

Displaced in the modern cityscape, the nuns are reduced to domestic primitives, simultaneously uncontaminated by and vulnerable to civilization. They are simply colonial subjects at home. While their exotic attraction is on public exhibition due to their shaved heads, the nuns are pressured to exchange their innocence for experiential knowledge of humanity.⁵ This motif plays an important part in reading the novels as Bildungsromans. While both authors urge their heroines to confront rather than avoid a world rife with sin and suffering and also to accept rather than denounce humanity in all its guises, the two writers significantly differ in narrativizing these thematic concerns as part of the protagonists' spiritual growths.

The central subject Han tackles in *Aje Aje Para Aje* is the myth of "mountain Buddhism," whose allure, he argues, stems from distancing itself from the real-life problems of the masses. Han's criticism of mainstream monastic tradition is conveyed by the several renegade

monks in the novel, but especially by Chongnam, who ardently defends his father. As a married monk, Chongnam's father is despised by society, but as a master painter of *tonka*, he has made incalculable contributions to maintaining the tradition of Buddhist art. In Han's novel, the motif of celibacy is symbolic of a self-centered Hinayana inclination to a reclusive and ascetic mountain Buddhism, which aspires in principle to the Mahayana ideal of reaching out to people in pain.

Han's critical stance towards the conventional Korean form of celibate monasticism explains the overwhelming dominance of the motif of sexual union in his text. It is placed in the foreground as a prime manifestation of the "blood-red life force in which light and darkness co-exist."⁶ For example, Han makes Unson fully "human" and thus more respectable as a nun by interjecting her fantastic history of political activism and sexual indulgence into the plot. Unson's drastic metamorphosis from a worldly woman to a world-renunciant is vividly reenacted through Chinsong and Sunnyo, "the saint and the prostitute" (Vol. 2, p. 378).⁷ Sunnyo yields herself to numerous men from all walks of life, including a criminal, an ambulance driver, a factory worker, a dog-meat farmer, medical doctors, a painter, a Protestant minister, and so on. No less diverse is the gallery of humanity to which Chinsong is exposed on her journey. These range from a runaway monk, Sunchol, who happens to be Sunnyo's brother, and the bizarre Zen monk who has cut off his testicles as a way of overcoming his erotic desire, to a variety of individuals including a potter, an altruistic policeman, an ex-sailor, and gangsters. Within this dizzying microcosm of samsara, Han draws particular attention to a dog meat farm as the nethermost point of human depravity. It is at this place of "dog-like men and man-like dogs" that Sunnyo's and Chinsong's otherwise differing routes intersect one another (Vol. 2, p. 99).

Be it allegorical or realistic, the problem with Han's characterization and, indeed, his text as a whole stems from his excessive resorting to erotic sensationalism. It seems that the brutal and even gratuitous rapes of the two nun figures do not suffice; the heroines frequently fantasize about violent sexual attacks. Also, while Chinsong is repeatedly confronted with the teachings about Tantric ritual sex by profligate monks, Sunnyo, the consuming temptress, turns into a vampire, causing deaths to the men who come into close contact with her. This tendency, combined with Han's formulaic use of binarism and exploitation of shoddy melodramatic machinery, such as

implausible coincidence and extravagant language, mars the integrity of his text and calls into question the sincerity of his criticism of the religious establishment. Moreover, the novel's thematic structure fails to articulate clearly the relevance of the two women's dehumanization process to their spiritual advancement. Sunnyo dies, longing for a romantic reunion with her high school teacher, Hyonchong, in her next life, and Chinsong, at the end of her tumultuous journey, faces personal grief at the news of her brother's death and her sister's contraction of AIDS and ultimate suicide.

Han's treatment of motherhood similarly echoes a Mahayana Buddhist view of maternity as samsaric bond and dependency par excellence. Diana Paul states that in Buddhism, and especially in early Indian Mahayana tradition, "[m]others represented . . . sufferers and perpetual givers of life in pain, almost as if it were a natural law for women to suffer."⁸ Citing the image of a "sucking calf to his mother" in the *Dhammapada*, Elizabeth Harris also maintains that Buddhism does not glorify motherhood and that maternal love is a form of bondage and thus a "barrier to spiritual attainment."⁹ Maternity does not belong to the sacred but to the secular realm. The complex perception of motherhood in Buddhism can be glimpsed in the puritanical nun, Chinsong's, negative attitude toward her potential for maternity. She constantly prays for a magical elimination of menstruation, which she detests as an unwanted reminder of her female inferiority, and more importantly, as an obstacle to her practice. Her prudish attitude toward all female biological features is squarely challenged by Sunnyo's embrace of them as healthy signs of humanity. Unfortunately, Sunnyo's celebration of her femininity only causes another set of melodramatic catastrophes. Hyonu, without telling her, deserts their baby boy in Unson's temple, and Sunnyo's two stepchildren are blind and deaf. Her suffering as a mother implies the karmic consequences of her sexual dissipation. Her mentally retarded biological son, in particular, symbolizes the evil outcome of the unnatural union between the sacred (Sunnyo as an ex-nun) and the profane (Hyonu as an ex-convict). The boy is entrusted to a childless, devoted Buddhist couple by Unson, but he is eventually sent to a welfare facility after his adoptive parents' sudden deaths. Sunnyo's stepchildren are also associated with the lasciviousness of their biological mother, who abandoned her family and eloped with her paramour.

Ironically, these suffering children occasion Sunnyo to display fully her compassionate nature. In order to raise funds for building a

school for handicapped children, she literally sacrifices her body by prostituting herself with rich donors until she dies of uterine cancer. This ending is anticipated by Han's frequent allusions to Poryonhyang, a legendary nun who is said to have perished by the "fire on her lotus flower."¹⁰ Reminiscent of this legendary nun, Sunnyo is fatally condemned by her uncontainable passion; yet her utmost maternal devotion is undeniably a quintessential act of bodhisattvahood. Han's ambivalence toward the relationship between women's spiritual enlightenment, and their sexuality and motherhood, fails to find an adequate denouement for the text. The thematic tension which results from such ambiguity only escalates into an absolute spatial dichotomy at the end of the novel between the mountain to which Chinsong returns and the marketplace where Sunnyo dies. Han's denial of a meaningful resolution of their fierce competition seriously undermines the theme of the Middle Way, which he highlights at the outset of the novel by quoting Sakyamuni Buddha: "If the strings of a zither are too tight, they will break. If they are too loose, they will not create beautiful sounds. Our life should aim at a balance between the two extremes" (Vol. 1, p. 9).¹¹

Contrasted with the unrelenting rivalry between Sunnyo and Chinsong, the mutual assistance and complementary relationship between Chihyo and Hyeil in *Udambara* are close to the spirit of *toban* (road companion), the Buddhist monastic fellowship. Nam's distinction between the two nuns does not hinge so much on the issue of sexuality, as on practice and study. As mentioned above, Hyeil is a scholar nun whose academic career is hampered by ill health. Unlike the humorous and outgoing type of nun Hyeil, Chihyo is an introvert concentrating on meditation, which she persistently continues even after her expulsion from the order. In juxtaposing Chihyo's meditative training and Hyeil's intellectual pursuit, Nam's emphasis is without doubt on the former. However, Nam's focus is not on Chihyo's realization of buddhahood but on her conversion of her awakening into meaningful social service. Nam elucidates this thematic preoccupation through Chihyo's forced movement from the mountain to the marketplace.

In delineating Chihyo's complicated passage from a rebellious journalism major to a Zen monastic and then to a revered bodhisattva, Nam skillfully exploits the popular motif of the tragic romance of nuns. Chihyo's transition from the city to the mountain is prompted by her mental collapse following an unexpected separation from her fiancé, Tonghwa. In this respect, Nam can be said to capitalize on the

sentimental views of a Buddhist nunnery as an escapist shelter and of nuns as the victims of unfulfilled affairs.¹² However, what should be noted in Nam's treatment of this hackneyed motif is that she presents youthful passion more as a stage one has to undergo in order to reach a higher state of spirituality, not as a mere quagmire where one remains trapped. In this sense, Chihyo's spiritual itinerary seems to aspire to Wonhyo's idea of *muae* (non-obstruction). *Han* s Aje Para Aje* also introduces the idea of *muae* as the goal of Sunnyo's wandering. However, Han's heroine realizes her failure at both the mountain and the marketplace as she is faced with her impending death; she is not liberated from her burning desire for Hyonchong or from her lingering yearning for monastic life. By contrast, Chihyo in *Udambara* successfully overcomes the emotional residue from the past and resolutely dedicates herself to practice under the Zen Master Paekchok. Her newly-acquired equanimity results from the "courage to stain [her] body ... for transformation."¹³ As it turns out, her worldly struggle with Tonghwa functioned as an expedient for enhancing her understanding of the complexities of humanity. Consequently, she readily embraces her religious duties when Paekchok reinstates her into the nun's status.

In its philosophical thrust, Nam's approach to women's sexuality and motherhood is indebted to the Buddhist idea of non-dualistic interconnectedness. This point can be effectively illuminated by Pongdu's combination of physical repulsiveness and spiritual charm. On the one hand, his adult male body signifies a threat to the nuns' abstinence. On the other hand, his inculpable childlike innocence intimates buddha nature, capable of communion with all sentient beings, as is seen in his early morning exercises on the mountaintop. This duality is aesthetically dissolved through the wooden Buddha statues he carves, which are believed to possess magical power. "Nether sacred nor secular and neither a man nor an animal," Pongdu represents a pure state of the elemental life force, before it is subject to the socialization process (Vol. 2, p. 39).

Due to this non-dual state, Pongdu's secret gaze on Chihyo takes on a deeper resonance than a mere voyeuristic curiosity would. She has unwittingly nurtured his talent for religious art, and he has in turn become the mirror of her inner anguish. Their spiritual interconnectedness finds exquisite expression through a special statue commissioned by Lady Lee, the patroness of the temple. Pongdu's strange inability to start the project is correlated with Chihyo's confusion and sorrow, which are caused by Tonghwa's reappearance

in her life as a physics professor after years in the U. S. The spiritual bond between Chihyo and Pongdu manifests itself in the episode in which he loses an arm to a snake while digging up wild ginseng for Chihyo who becomes critically ill after Tonghwa's visit. In one of the most dramatic moments subsequent to this incident, Chihyo, well aware of Pongdu's mental paralysis, makes a nocturnal visit to his room and lets him touch her body and feel its shape. In this extraordinary scene, Nam's language so subtly blurs the borders between realism and fantasy that the reader cannot determine whether the nun-muse really takes off her clothes or whether the entire action takes place in the onlooker's imagination:

Chihyo is standing naked in the room bright with the moonlight. The woodcutter rubbed his eyes with his palms and watched her. She was apparently in a nun's robe, but for mysterious reasons, she appeared to be a naked body. Rubbing his eyes again, he cast his eyes onto her. But it was same; she looked like a naked body. (Vol. 2, p. 251)

Chihyo's unexpected visit reinvigorates Pongdu's creative force, helping him complete the statue. However, this bizarre incident, witnessed by the old woodcutter from the village, leads to their removal from the temple.

As is the case with Han, Nam presents maternal love as the primary example of compassion. However, she does not link it directly to women's sexuality, as Han does. Rather, motherhood is depicted as a part of the intricate cosmic interdependence. For instance, the baby boy Chihyo looks after for a poor working mother reveals various signs of Pongdu's karmic reincarnation. The baby likes carving as Pongdu did. In Chihyo's mental screen, the baby's beautiful eyes overlap with Pongdu's disfigured ones. When the baby innocently calls Chihyo "Mom," she reminisces about the same message Pongdu evoked through his desperate body language. Chihyo's position as Pongdu's surrogate mother figure is further suggested by the resemblance villagers find among the faces of her, Pongdu, and the Buddha statue he crafted for Lady Lee. In this regard, it is noteworthy that Nam's idea of maternity as non-gendered and non-discriminate universal love is played out linguistically in the text. As a creator of Buddha images, Pongdu is called *pulmo*, a "mother of Buddha." Nam further likens Pongdu's "maternal" status to the androgynous *Kwanum* (*Avalokiteshvara*). A parallel Chihyo discerns between the Korean

word "omma" (mom) and "om," the primordial cosmic sound, also reinforces the broad, encompassing meanings Nam assigns to the notion of motherhood in this novel (Vol. 4, p. 148).

Similarly to her treatment of motherhood, Nam resolves the thematic tension between the mountain and the marketplace differently from the way Han handles it. After her descent from the mountain, Chihyo undergoes education in the marketplace, as Sunnyo and Chinsong do in *Aje Aje Para Aje*. While wandering to find Pongdu, she encounters the sick and poor living on the margins of society. At the end of this long spiritual wandering, Chihyo, now urged by her teacher Paekchok, "returns" to society and opens a temple as an urban mission. Her spiritual progress during this period may not be officially acknowledged by the Buddhist establishment but is fully recognized by Paekchok. Converted from the large house which Ch'aeryon used as her art studio until her death, Chihyo's new temple, located in the city and yet full of trees and flowers, topographically embodies the ideals of both the mountain and the marketplace, bridging their gap as their middle ground. This temple later becomes the home to Pongdu's Buddha statue modeled on Chihyo whose "mysterious" power becomes accessible to whoever seeks serenity amidst urban frenzy.

This urban temple serves Chihyo as a testing ground for her qualifications as an ideal mother and thus for her advancement toward bodhisattvahood. This theme is conveyed through a daytime nursery she runs in the temple for slum-area children. By involving herself with these children, she earns the status of mother without being sexually "defiled." As Paul points out, buddhas and bodhisattvas are often born "parthenogenetically, that is, without the sexual intercourse of the parents."¹⁴ Chihyo's image as a compassionate mother of all children is further confirmed when she is entrusted with the religious education of Yung, the boy born of the passionate affair between Paekchok and Ch'aeryon. As Lady Lee's adopted grandson, Yung is exceptionally gifted in both the arts and sciences. Endowed with spirituality and intelligence, which he inherits from his parents, Yung is envisioned by Nam as a buddha figure who will solve various problems of humanity in the coming world. As Yung studies physics with Tonghwa at the university, Chihyo's long struggle with her unrealized love finally comes to an ironic and yet peaceful closure through their pseudo-parenting of the future Buddha.

In *Aje Aje Para Aje* and *Udambara*, Han and Nam pay homage to Buddhist nuns who strive for spiritual attainment. In doing so, they also criticize mainstream monastic education, in which the goal of

compassion is often eclipsed by that of wisdom. In a sense, the two writers attempt to redress the imbalance between them, or more broadly, the misconception of Buddhist enlightenment per se. This argument is corroborated by their common emphasis on the theme of *hoehyang*, "[t]he 'turning over' of merit acquired by good deeds of an individual to the benefit of another being, or of all beings."¹⁵ As a way of fictionalizing this theme, Han centers his text on women's sexuality, whereas Nam concentrates on motherhood.

The above difference is expressed spatially in the two novels. Both Han and Nam take their heroines away from the monastic setting. In the end, however, Han's novel closes on a skeptical note, questioning the possibility of a bridge between the mountain and marketplace, whereas Nam's offers urban Buddhism as a viable form of integration between the two symbolic places. Nam's vision does not advocate the abolition of the celibate monastic tradition. However, she clearly addresses the need for innovations in the tradition so that contemporary monastics can fulfill bodhisattvahood in changing society without forsaking the time-honored ideal of celibate communalism set forth by Sakyamuni.

What reverberates in Han's idea of reform, which is imparted through the mouths of Chongnam and his radical monk friends, is the ethos of *minjung pulgyo* (popular Buddhism) of the 1980s. Han's populist espousal of socially-engaged Buddhism cannot be easily reconciled with the seclusionism of ancient monasticism. In comparison, Nam appears to prefer a gradual alteration of the anachronistic aspects of Buddhist institutions. Their differing stances are lucidly discernible over the issue of the problematic status of the nun. Both *Aje Aje Para Aje* and *Udambara* warrant the possibility of a woman's spiritual awakening. However, this possibility is strictly framed within the guidance of monks, not senior nuns; Unson in *Aje Aje Para Aje* and Hyejo in *Udambara* tend to disappoint and frustrate rather than inspire and enthuse the young novices. Han's text only reiterates the limitations of female monastics, but Nam's, while acknowledging such constraints, nonetheless instills a prospect of innovation through Chihyo's loss and reacquisition of her religious identity. As a disrobed nun, Chihyo studies under Paekchok, together with male monks, who are shown to bow to her as a form of respect when her awakening is recognized by their teacher. These "unorthodox" scenes transpire a new direction for the flawed system of traditional Buddhism.

From a broad historical perspective, a survey of the images of

Buddhist nuns in modern and contemporary Korean literature reveals two overall patterns, both of which are configured in spatial terms. The first pattern involves the mapping of the nun's body. Modern literature nearly exclusively focuses on the nun's shaved head as exemplified by Paek's and Cho's poems, but contemporary works broaden the gaze to her entire body. While this interest can be understood as a strategy for humanizing the "divine" image of the nun, it should be put in appropriate critical perspective. Han's and Nam's approaches to the nun's body as an aesthetic object show a range of ideological cracks latent in the outsider's gaze. Im Kwon-taek's film adaptation of *Aje Aje Para Aje* well attests Han's literary sensationalism rendered into cinematic voyeurism.

The second pattern noted in the literary portraits of nuns is that the geographical settings have shifted from temple courtyards to city centers. This shift is evinced by a comparison of Han's and Nam's works, and the aforementioned poems by Paek and Cho. The "outward" movement to urban locales certainly reflects the changing role of Buddhism in today's Korean society and the increasing activism among monks and nuns.¹⁶ Hence, the interplay between the tropes of the mountain and the marketplace in the fiction can be adequately contextualized in the efforts made by monastics to find a place of their own in the industrialized modern world. The rapidly homogenized landscape of contemporary Korea erases the old topographical distinction between the mountain and marketplace. This obliteration figuratively calls for a redefinition of the relationship between wisdom and compassion, the indivisible doctrinal core of Mahayana Buddhism.

Notes

1. The beginnings of a nuns' monastic community in Korea cannot be precisely determined due to the lack of historical records. According to Japanese sources, three female members of the Japanese imperial family came to Paekche and were ordained there in the 6th century. This implies that that a sizeable community of nuns was already existent in Paekche at that time. For early history of Korean nuns, see Kim Yong-tae's two articles: "Paekche-ui nijungsugye-wa nisungjik kwangye: Ibonsaryo-wa Silla mit Namjo-ui sarye chungsim" (The relationship between the ordination and position of Buddhist nuns in Paekche: Focusing on Japanese historical sources and the cases in Silla and Southern Dynasties), *Han'gukmunhwa-wa Wonbulgyo sasang*

(Korean culture and W6n Buddhist thought) (Iri: Wongwang University Press, 1975), pp. 1-19; and "Silla-ui y6s6ng ch'ulga-wa nisungjik koch'al: Toyunarang ani-ml chungsim-uro" (A study of the Silla women who left home and of the position of Buddhist nuns: Focusing on Toyunarang Ani), *Myongsong sunim kohuikinyom pulgyohak nonmunjip* (A collection of essays in Buddhist studies in commemoration of the Venerable Myongsong's seventieth birthday) (Seoul: Pulkwang Press, 2000), pp. 37-64.

2. In light of the paucity of material on Korean Buddhist nuns, Ha Ch'un-saeng's *Kkaedalum-iii kkot: Han'guk pulgyo-rul pinnaen kuse pigunidul* (Flowers of enlightenment: Buddhist nuns who brought glory to Buddhism in the modern period), 2 vols. (Seoul: Yorae, 2001) is a most welcome contribution to the field of Korean Buddhism. This book contains thirty-two short biographies of highly respected nuns of the twentieth century.

3. The phrase "aje aje para aje" appears in the *Prajnaparamita Sutra* [Heart Sutra]. "Udambara" is the Korean transcription of the Sanskrit word "udumbara," which refers to an auspicious mythical tree whose flowers are said to bloom once in three thousand years.

4. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics: A Review of Contemporary Criticism*, 16:1 (1986): 22-27.

5. The social and psychosexual meanings of a woman's shaved head are extensively examined in *Off with Her Head! The Denial of Women's Identity in Myth, Religion, and Culture*, eds. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz and Wendy Doniger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) and in *Hair: Its Power and Meaning in Asian Cultures*, eds. Alf Hildebeitel and Barbara Miller (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998). For nuns' own perceptions of the significance of their shaved heads, see Paula Arai's ethnographic study, *Women Living Zen: Japanese Soto Buddhist Nuns* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 141-42.

6. Han Sung-w6n, *Aje Aje Para Aje*, 3 vols. (Seoul: Koryowon, 1997), Cover. All subsequent citations refer to this edition and will appear in the text parenthetically.

7. Diana Paul points out that nuns and prostitutes are sometimes associated with each other because both perform "roles dissociated from family life." *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in Mahayana Tradition*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 79.

8. Paul, op. cit., p. 60

9. Elizabeth Harris, "The Female in Buddhism" in *Buddhist Women Across Cultures: Realizations*, ed. Karma Lekshe Tzomo (New York: SUNY Press, 1999), pp. 53-54.

10. In *Aje Aje Para Aje*, Han consistently uses the metaphors of a diamond and a lotus flower to indicate the male and female genitals, respectively.

11. This passage is originally from the *Samyutta Nikaya*.

12. This perception is also widespread in Japan. See Arai's aforementioned book. Robert Buswell points out the popularity of a similar perspective on monks in Korea in *The Zen Monastic Experience: Buddhist Practice in Contemporary Korea*

(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 76.

13. Nam Chi-sim, *Udambara*, 4 vols. (Seoul: Purunsup, 2001), Vol. 2, p. 210. All subsequent citations refer to this edition and will appear in the text parenthetically.

14. Paul, *op. cit.*, p. 63. With regard to the symbolic meaning of Lady Maya's death seven days after her delivery of Sakyamuni Buddha, Paul explains that it is a way of preventing her from having sexual intercourse and thereby protecting her holiness. Paul also adds that although the ideal Buddhist mother does not have to be a virgin, she should be the "paragon of virtue and chastity" (p. 63). Paul's interpretation sheds an insightful light on Ch'aeryon's death soon after giving birth to Yung. She practiced sexual abstinence throughout her marriage, although it was forced by her husband Taeso, who dreaded a fortuneteller's prophecy on birth defects in his family line. Nam portrays Ch'aeryon as an ideal woman who charms and inspires Tamsi (Paekchok's former name) emotionally and intellectually as well as spiritually. Nam describes their relationship explicitly in terms of the legendary union between Wonhyo and Princess Yosok. Yung is, therefore, equivalent to Solchong, the prominent Silla scholar and the alleged son of Wonhyo and Yosok.

15. Christmas Humphreys, *A Popular Dictionary of Buddhism*, 2nd. ed. (London: Curzon Press, 1976), s.v. "parivarta."

16. *Minjung* Buddhism is a good example which shows the participatory attitudes of younger generations of monks and nuns toward socio-political issues.

List of References

- Arai, Paula. 1999. *Women Living Zen: Japanese Soto Buddhist Nuns*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Buswell, Robert. 1992. *The Zen Monastic Experience: Buddhist Practice in Contemporary Korea*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Eilberg-Schwartz, Howard and Wendy Doniger, eds. 1995. *Off with Her Head! The Denial of Women's Identity in Myth, Religion, and Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1986. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics: A Review of Contemporary Criticism* 16 (1): 22-27.
- Ha Ch'un-saeng. 2001. *Kkaedalum-ui kkot: Han'guk pulgyo-rul pinnaen kunse pigunidul* (Flowers of enlightenment: Buddhist nuns who brought glory to Buddhism in the modern period). 2 vols. Seoul: Y6rae.
- Han Sung-won. 1997. *Aje Aje Para Aje*. 3 vols. Seoul: Koryowon.
- Harris, Elizabeth. 1999. "The Female in Buddhism." In *Buddhist Women Across Cultures: Realizations*. ed. Karma Lekshe Tzomo. New York: SUNY Press.
- Hiltebeitel, Alf and Barbara Miller, eds. 1998. *Hair: Its Power and Meaning in Asian Cultures*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Humphreys, Christmas. 1976. *A Popular Dictionary of Buddhism*. 2nd. ed. London: Curzon Press.
- Kim Yong-tae. 1975. "Paekche-uinijungsugye-wanisungjikkwangye: Ilbonsaryo-wa SillamitNamjo-ui sarye chungsim" (The relationship between the ordination and position of Buddhist nuns in Paekche: Focusing on Japanese historical sources and the cases in Silla and Southern Dynasties). In *Han gukmunhwa-wa Wonbulgyo sasang* (Korean culture and Won Buddhist thought). Iri: Wdngwang University Press, 1-19.
- _____. 2000. "Silla-ui ydsong ch'ulga-wa nisungjik koch'al: Toyunarang ani-rul chungsim-uro" (A study of the Silla women who left home and of the position of Buddhist nuns: Focusing on Toyunarang Ani). In *Myongsong sunim kohuikinyom pulgyohaknonmunjip* (A collection of essays in Buddhist studies in commemoration of the Venerable My6ngs6ng's seventieth birthday). Seoul: Pulkwang Press, 37-64.
- Nam Chi-sim. 2001. *Udambara*. 4 vols. Seoul: Purunsup.
- Paul, Diana. 1985. *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in Mahayana Tradition*. 2nd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press.