

Spirituality, Ageing Society and Social Work in Contemporary South Korea

Key Words: Korea # spirituality # Network # Community # Lay Buddhist #

Dr. Santosh Kumar Gupta
Ph.D. (AKS, South Korea)
Associate Professor
School of Liberal Arts and Language
Amity University Haryana
E-mail: skgupta1@ggn.amity.edu

Santosh Kumar Gupta, received M.A.-Ph.D. in Korean Studies from the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS, South Korea). M.Phil.-Ph.D. from University of Delhi, India, is Associate Professor & Head of Center for East Asian Studies at School of Liberal Arts and Language, Amity University Haryana,

Abstract: This essay addresses new developments in religious organizations as well as religious social activity. Religion and spirituality are changing significantly in South Korea as a result of industrialization and westernization. Organizations that practice Buddhism in particular are shifting their focus and seeking for a more intimate social network. The major challenge appearing in South Korea is ageing society. Since the number of old-age people is growing

gradually, the need of old- age center requiring more resources. Thus, this paper underlines the role of religious center particularly for centers dealing with old-age people. The need of social networks and non-governmental organization are increasing. Korean Buddhist organizations are also changing their dimension and focusing on need-based programs

Introduction

There are several Buddhist groups in Korea, and they conduct a variety of activities both domestically and internationally. Even though the majority of these groups have only recently become involved in society, they have left a lasting impression. In actuality, just a small amount of their activity data-which is only available in Korean-has been made available for more investigation. Nevertheless, there aren't many English-language documents or descriptions of social activities.

While many Buddhist groups are actively addressing the issues of the modern world, some of the most prominent Buddhist organizations-both domestically and internationally-are closely linked to Jogye Jong. Among these are the Buddhist Solidarity for Reform (Chmyeo Pulgyo Jaegahyeondae), generally known as BSR, and the Jung To Society

(Jeondohwai), also known as Join Together Society. The Indramang, also known as Indra's net, collaborates with locals and Chongji Jong, a lay Buddhist group that permits marriages between monks and nuns, to implement creative ideas for the improvement of the impoverished. Although these groups have been interacting with society since the 1980s, they are currently actively looking to do so more. Highlighting the humanitarian endeavors of well-known Buddhist organizations that are genuinely committed to social welfare work and the reform movement becomes vital.

Jung To Society Social Work

The "Raman Magsaysay Award for Peace and International Understanding" that Venerable Pomnyun Sunim, the Master of The Jung To Society, received in 2002 brought attention to this institution. He has been using the teachings of Buddhism to address a wide range of contemporary social issues, such as environmental degradation and greed and poverty. He was born in 1953 in South Korea and entered the monastic community in 1969 at the Gyeongju-based Bunhwang Monastery, where he studied and put Buddha's teachings into practice. Pomnyun Sunim studied Zen Buddhism at Bunhwang Sa, one of the

Jogye order monasteries, under the direction of Master Bulshim Domun. But the Jogye Order does not currently acknowledge him as a legitimate monk. Not even he received instruction in. When he was younger, he became a Buddhist monk, but he quickly gave up his robes to join the Minjungju Undong, a South Korean democracy movement. Pomnyun Sunim, a socially conscious and politically driven individual, came under fire from the current Korean government after he was twice detained and subjected to torture for his political affiliations during the 1980s democratic struggle. After joining the People's Buddhist (Minjung Pulgyo) faction and demanding a democratic setup for the government and monastery, he was expelled from Deorim Seon Won Monastery in 1985 because to his pro-reform political affiliation. It was a pivotal moment for Pomnyun Sunim, who went on to found the Central Buddhist Academy in 1998-now dubbed the Jung To Society.

The organization was founded primarily with the goal of increasing social engagement through social welfare initiatives. Pomnyun Sunim states that "social engagement of Buddhism means to live a life of practice for the purpose of resolving these paradoxes in society and to awaken to them." In light of this, his organization has eight subsidiaries in Korea that are

dispersed across the Korean peninsula and beyond. The Jung To Society's headquarters, known as the Jung To Monastery or Center, is situated in Seoul. It has branches in Ulsan, Daegu, Pusan, Daejeon, Cheongju, Masam, and Gwangju. For the benefit of residents in rural and impoverished areas, these regional centers are putting social welfare initiatives into action.

There are six main sections in The Jung To Society that address various social and environmental issues. The Join Together Society (JTS), Good Friends, Ecobuddha, Jungto Retreat Center, Jungto School of Buddhism, and Jungto Publishing are these parts. These Sections operate under the direction of Jung To Society and are organized on a democratic basis. Among these, JTS, Ecobuddha, and Good Friends are the three divisions that are most actively pursuing activities that address social and environmental issues.

Furthermore, they have started a number of initiatives to bring attention to North Korean human rights concerns, including an instructional program for peacekeeping, assistance in resettling North Korean refugees in South Korea, and an assessment of North Korea's recent human rights situation. Humanitarian aid has been dispatched to the refugees residing along the border between China and North Korea. As part of

the education and refugee care program, weekly open discussions with regular people are being arranged. This serves to highlight the inner voices of the North Korean refugees who fled during the Korean War. Many of the North Korean exiles who made their home in South Korea now identify as citizens of the Republic of Korea. regarding their views on nationality.

In addition to this, protecting people from natural calamities has made the sustainable development of rural areas a primary goal. The primary actions of this segment also include the construction of small dams and the installation of water pumps for irrigation and drinking water. In the same villages where free medical clinics, general counseling services, tuberculosis disease programs, and maternity services are becoming more and more popular, Jeevaka hospitals have also been established. It dispatched a special team for tsunami assistance in 2005 to assist the impacted Tamilnadu region in India. The portion included a volunteer program wherein 72 Korean students actively collaborated alongside Indian volunteers from JTS to give everyday necessities to tsunami victims in partnership with Korean college students. Together with Community Sharamdan employees, these volunteers put up a lot of effort to help the displaced people resume their regular lives

during the post-tsunami period. JTS arranged a one-week camp in Dongheswari with the intention of inspiring students to dedicate their time to the betterment of society and equipping them to help those in need while keeping in mind the suffering and loss of others.

Indranet Social Network

Known as the "Indra Net Life Community" (Indeuramang Saengmyeong Gongdongche), Indramang is a prominent Buddhist community movement in South Korea. It was formally founded in the middle of 1999 by Tobop Sunim, a prominent Jogye Order monk. He is the head monk of Shilsangsa Monastery. He is known as a "trouble-solving broker" since he unwaveringly supported the Jogye Order throughout the dispute over the presidential elections in 1994 and 1998."

The Buddhist idea characterizes the Indramang as a metaphorical world in which everything that exists and the universe are intricately interwoven like spiderwebs. It is worth mentioning that the Avatamsaka Sutra asserts that the god Indra is said to have a net with diamonds at its knots that reflects the image of every jewel. "It symbolizes the realized understanding of the universe's mutual infiltration." In

his philosophical writings, Sin Yong-guk notes that the Indramang was similar to a global village where the ecology and economy are heavily intertwined, and that any attempt to destroy society and the natural world would lead to conflicts, terror attacks, diseases, and natural disasters on a worldwide scale.

However, Indramang's focus is primarily on rural areas, while it also touches on some metropolitan areas. In Seoul, there is a reputable office where volunteers handle the majority of the office labor. The Indramang is divided into five segments: the Ecology Community Movement (Saengmyeong Gongdongche Undong), the Back to Farm Movement (Gwinong Undong), the Cooperative Livelihood Movement (Saenghwal Hyeobdong Johab Undong), the Alternative Education Movement (Daeangyoyuk Undong), the Life Environment Movement (Saengmyeong Hwangyeong Undong), and the Indramang Monthly Magazine (Wolgan Indramang Sosik Jabji).

The "Buddhist Back to Farm School" (Pulgyo Guinong Hakgyo) was founded in March 1998. Its first location is in Seoul, and its second is in the Silsangsa monastery. The school is the first example of a place where agricultural practices can be learned, and it has been widely used to train community members and

students using both theoretical and practical approaches. A year is divided into two semesters, which start in the spring and end in the fall. Twenty students per class are expected to finish a semester within the three months that are projected. Students at the fully residential Silsangsa Back to Farm School are expected to adhere to the school's curriculum and specific commitments of the monastery. In addition to a public eco-toilet where waste and urine are recycled into fertilizer, there is an official structure and a hall constructed from local brick, mud, and wood. On their required field trip to Silsangsa Farm, Seoul Back to Farm School students must present their knowledge of the material they have studied and how it is applied in real life.

The other continuing educational institutions and programs, apart from Silsangsa Small School (Jakaeun Hakgyo), are the following: Kids and Kindergarten School (Eorinijibgwa Chodeung Haksaeng Banggwahu Hakgyo), Season School for Historical Experience (Yeoksa Cheheom Gyejeol Hakgyo), Alternative Social Education Project (Daeanjeok Sahoegyoyuksaeb), and Indramang Village University (Indramang Mauldaehak).

Buddhist Solidarity for Reform and Social Work

In South Korea, Buddhist Solidarity for Reform, primarily regarded as a lay Buddhist movement, was formed in March 1999 by combining the two already-existing groups known as the "Lay Buddhist Council" and the "Lay Buddhist Organization," which had been founded in 1994. The South Korean Buddhist reform movement gave rise to these two organizations. Two lay groups were established by Korean lay Buddhists in the early 1990s with the goal of slowing down tensions between monastic orders and sects within Korean Buddhist monasteries.

In order to include people on a large scale, BSR launched a number of activities between 2001 and 2003. A great deal of influence has been left on Korean society by the majority of these sub-sections of the organization, including the "Booklet on the Way of Practicing Mindfulness," "Green Village Publishing Company and Weekly Farm," "Symposium on Religious Power and Civil Society in Korea," "The Buddhist Academy," "Preparatory Committee for Organizing the Center for Buddhist Policy and Reform," "Green Village Publishing Company and Weekly Farm," and "Program for Migrant Workers." Although they focus on a specific, designated topic, the majority of these groups operate under the auspices of BSR. Regretfully, funding for these subsections is still a

secret due to a lack of reliable sources..

Chongji Buddhist Order Social Work

Founded in 1972 by a virtuous lay Buddhist named Master Wonjeong, the Chongji Jong is one of the principal lay Buddhist orders operating with a missionary fervor inside Korea. It is currently calling lay Buddhists from all over the world to exhibit their role in the modern world. In order to address urban socioeconomic challenges, the founding members chose to build the majority of the centers close to inner cities.

The Order has placed a strong emphasis on its core principle, "Buddhism in Every Day Life," ever since its founding. The motto "Buddhism in Everyday Lives" was highly valued by the current President Hyogang during the October 2008 Second World Lay Buddhist Forum. He emphasized how the lay Buddhist movement has been led by the Chongji Jong. any specifics on his message. A small number of adherents of the Order serve as the primary funders of various initiatives, including social welfare projects. The majority of the connected families have volunteered at the welfare centers. Male and female masters of the centers live basic, non-celibate lives as volunteers and beneficiaries. In the urban areas of

Korea, the Order is practiced by thirty-six institutions, housing thousands of lay followers.

Furthermore, an understanding of the "Kids Study Room" (Eorin Gombu Bang) program of Pusan and Daegu's centers-where underprivileged students and children are encouraged to pursue primary and secondary education-can help picture some other clever ideas. At this point, the orphan pupils can interact with the nearby students who share the "Kids Study Room" during the school day.

By constructing the "Yeoksam Welfare Center," the Order has also extended its program for elderly people who are impoverished and defenseless. The Order is housed in a four-story structure in Seoul's Gangnam neighborhood. Different divisions of the organization are designated for specialized tasks such as the Publication Division, Social Education Program, International Affairs, and Regional Social Welfare, and in 1999, the "Chongji Welfare Foundation." We've already touched briefly on how elderly Koreans are being neglected and ostracized. In Korea, the family remains the primary caregiver for elderly parents, with many aging parents living with their married sons. Despite the fact that individuality has been accepted by Korean society, at least in urban areas. In urbanized Korea, living with one's parents is still desired and

considered a cultural norm. Whereas "Buddhism, the oldest religion in Korea, stresses solemn filial obligation, and particularly the eternal and fathomless love of the mother, which the most filial children would not be able to fully pay back," it appears that the dharma teachings of parental responsibility have profoundly inspired the youth. While Korean society attributes its concept of filial piety to Confucian tradition, it often overlooks the Buddhist understanding of filial obligation, which is described as "all-inclusive, embracing all living creatures and universal."

Chogye Order Social Work

The total number of social welfare institutes or centers run by South Korea's four main Buddhist Orders is also displayed. Of these institutions, Jogye Jong operates around 349 centers (89.7%); Taego Jong operates roughly 10 centers (2.6%); Cheontae Jong operates roughly 5 centers (1.3%); and Jingak Jong operates 15 centers (3.9%). However, counting the 80 centers that were registered, the total number of centers up until 2004 was around 474. The total number of centers is not the same as what is found in the Jogye Jong records. All facilities that are registered are included in 474. It is unknown how many functioning centers there are in total; additional research is necessary to determine this figure.

To further advance the social agenda, the Jogye Order founded the "Jogye Order Foundation for Social Work (Jogyejong Pokjijaedan)" in February 1995. In addition, the Order has taken creative steps to involve society more deeply through the Environmental Protection Activities (Hwangyeongboho Saeob), the North-South Korea Unification Program (Nambukdongil Saeob), and the International Exchange Program (Gukjegyoryu Saeob). Nevertheless as you can see, the Jogye Jong and its affiliated temples are in charge of almost 90% of the centers. Of these, approximately 34% (or 230) of the Jogye Jong centers are directly under its jurisdiction, and the remaining 66% (or 34% of the centers) are managed by the trust. Based on the data that is currently accessible, the Jogye Order is actively involved in the field of child care and education today. Korea has a long history of housing abandoned children and orphans in monasteries, as was previously stated. With a few notable exceptions, monks and nuns have historically received the greatest number of these children.

Won Buddhist Social Work

Master Sotaesan established Won Buddhism, one of the expanding Buddhist sects in South Korea, in 1916. The Korean Buddhism Reform Movement and

current socio-political issues resulted in the founding. The Japanese version of Buddhism, known as the colonial brand, actually reawakened the Buddhists in Korea as it began to spread throughout the Korean peninsula. The Korean Buddhist community argued that modernizing Buddhist practice and teaching and then spreading it was the only way to save and revitalize traditional Korean Buddhism in opposition to the socio-cultural invasion of colonial rule. As a result, Koreans began modernizing and spreading Buddhism throughout both urban and rural areas, taking influence from the Japanese sect. In this regard, the Buddhist Research Society (1902) stepped up to establish the groundwork for contemporary institutions and ideals by educating the lay Buddhist community and monks. Among the well-known movements in the early 20th century were the Jogye Jong Movement, the Imje-jong Reform Movement, and the Wonjong Reform Movement (1908). In addition, the Japanese Governor-General passed a new, drastic Temple Ordinance in 1911 following the successful invasion of Korea, giving the Governor General's office direct power over temples, temple lands, and other property. With the passage of this ordinance, Korean temple governance completely changed, with temple property being managed as a collective enterprise. Additionally,

pro-Japanese temple heads were selected by the Governor General's administration, serving as Japan's espionage.

In Korea and outside, especially in the USA, where they have established headquarters in New York, Chicago, Washington, Manhattan, Boston, and other places, Won Buddhists are a well-organized community. These centers play a crucial role in the dissemination of both dharma and social welfare initiatives. As a result, it seeks to enlist an increasing number of foreigners and inspire them to pursue careers in social work. The organization works with a wide range of topics, including interfaith collaboration, human rights advocacy, environmental issues, social assistance for the impoverished, and North-South Korea unification. They provide a variety of social welfare initiatives for the elderly, kids, underprivileged, disabled, and jobless. According to the data, South Korea has 116 social welfare institutions in total in 2005. There are fourteen social welfare regional centers, thirty child centers, fifteen public meeting facilities, eight nursing homes, four senior citizen centers, and six health centers among them. The bulk of welfare centers-children and young (28.4%), old age (28.4%), and general welfare (12.1%)-seem to be the main concerns for Won Buddhists who are involved in

the community.

Conclusion

Even though South Korean Buddhists participate in a wide range of activities, they are unwavering in their quest for unity and have distinct traits. An overview of current events shows that, starting at the end of the 20th century, socially conscious Buddhist activities have become more and more popular. Better educated men and women being admitted into the Sangha is a sign of good things to come for Korean Buddhism. The younger generation and more ardent lay Buddhists are categorically demanding that Buddhism become more involved in modern culture. It is important to note that the Christian missionaries and Buddhist organizations are embroiled in a fierce rivalry. In this regard, it is inevitable to examine the development of Buddhist organizations. It is a reminder that, historically, Korean Buddhists have valued partnership over solo endeavors. Nevertheless, there is a lack of a cohesive welfare policy in Buddhist social welfare services, with a greater number of centers and institutions operating independently and without collaborating with other Orders. To preserve more objectivity, the Buddhists must also improve their research and evaluation methods. According to a

survey by the National Korean Social Welfare Council, despite the fact that Buddhist nuns have demonstrated a strong commitment to social work, their participation has lagged behind that of social workers who have a strong Christian attachment. However, the information shown in the chart is based on events that occurred in the 1980s, when Buddhist groups had just begun to.

End Notes

1. Frank M. Tedesco, "Social Engagement in South Korean Buddhism", in *Action Dharma New Studies in Engaged Buddhism*, ed. Christopher Queen, Charles Perbish and Damien Keown, (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 166.
2. Jung To Society, ed., *Peace of Mind and Compassion in the Society* (Seoul: JungTo Society, 2002), 9.
3. Frank M. Tedesco, 166.
4. Ven. Pomnyun Sunim, "Buddhism and Social Engagement" (paper presented at the Ineb Seoul 2003 Conference of International Network for Engaged Buddhists, Seoul, Korea, July 20-25, 2003).
5. JungTo Society, "Urigo Daihanminguk Gukmininde," *Pyeonghwaral Chajaganan Areumdaun Saramdul Johunbautdul*, November 12, 2007, 5.
6. Bak In Tak, "Jeongtohoe Cheongsonyeon Indo Wokkaemp," *Pulgyo Sinmun*, November 6, 2006.
7. Lee Seon-min, "Jirisan Silsangsa Dobeop Sunim," *Joseon Ilbo*, January 18, 2001.
8. For the philosophical description of the Indramang, see Sin Yong-guk, *Indeumangui Segye* (Seoul: Doseochulpan Haneulbuk, 1999), 176, 413.
9. Donald W. Mitchell, *Buddhism Introducing the Buddhist Experience* (New York Oxford: Oxford

University Press, 2008), 217.

10. Sin Yong-guk, 531.

11. The details of Indramang are available in Korean, for further, see

http://www.indramang.org/bbs/board.php?bo_table=indramang_general&wr_id=3, 2009-01-08

12. GWon Min-jeong, "Indramang Gongdongcheui Yoram NamWonsi Silsangsa," Saemaul Sinmun, February 1, 2001.

13. Further details of sub-section and their activity are available on the organization's homepage see

<http://www.buddha21.org>

14. Hyogang, "Welcoming Message" in World Lay Buddhist Forum 2008, 4-7.

15. Kim Jae-gyeong, "Chongjijong Yeoksamnoinbokjigwan Unyeong," Buddhapia, March 3, 1999.

16. Sung Kyu-taik, Care and Respect for the Elderly in Korea Filial piety in modern Times in East Asia (Seoul: Jimoondang, 2005), 24, 163-167.

17. For Buddhist filial piety see Kyung-yin Kwon, "Buddhist Ideals and Practice for Ageing Welfare: With Reference to the Sutra of Filial Piety," International Journal of Buddhist Thought and Culture, Vol. 7 (September 2006): 141-143.

18. Jo Seong-hui, "Pulgyosahoepokji Jeondalchegyerooseoui Sachalui Yeokhal" in Jogyejong Sahoepokji, ed. Sahoepokji Beobin Daehan Pulgyo Jogyejong Sahoepokji Jaedan Gihoekyeonguwihonhoe (Seoul: Sahoepokji Beobin Daehan Pulgyo Jogyejong Sahoepokji Jaedan, 2004), 94-95.

Selected Bibliography

Bak, In Tak, "Jeongtohoe Cheongsongyeon Indo Wokkaemp," Pulgyo Sinmun [Buddhist Newspaper], November 6, 2006.

Gwon, Min-jeong, "Indramang Gongdongcheui Yoram NamWonsi Silsangsa," Saemaul Sinmun,

February 1, 2001.

Jung To Society, ed., Peace of Mind and Compassion in the Society, Seoul: JungTo Society, 2002.

JungTo Society, " We are People of Republic of Korea [Urdo Daihanminguk Gukmininde]," Pyeonghwaral Chajaganan Areumdaun Saramdul Johunbautdul, November 12, 2007, 5.

Jo, Seong-hui, "Pulgyosahoepokji Jeondalchegyero-seoui Sachalui Yeokhal" in Jogyejong Sahoepokji, ed. Sahoepokji Beobin Daehan Pulgyo Jogyejong Sahoepokji Jaedan Gihoekyeonguwihonhoe, Seoul: Sahoepokji Beobin Daehan Pulgyo Jogyejong Sahoepokji Jaedan, 2004.

Kim, Jae-gyeong, "Chongjijong Yeoksamnoinbokjigwan Unyeong," Buddhapia, March 3, 1999.

Lee, Seon-min, "Jirisan Silsangsa Dobeop Sunim," Joseon Ilbo, January 18, 2001.

Shin, Yong-guk, Indeuramangui Segye, Seoul: Doseochulpan Haneulbuk, 1999.

Mitchell, Donald W., Buddhism Introducing the Buddhist Experience , New York Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Sung, Kyu-taik, Care and Respect for the Elderly in Korea Filial piety in modern Times East Asia, Seoul: jimoondang, 2005.

Tedesco, Frank M., "Social Engagement in South Korean Buddhism", in Action Dharma New Studies in Engaged Buddhism, ed. Christopher Queen, Charles Perbish and Damien Keown, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.

Ven. Pomnyun Sunim, "Buddhism and Social Engagement"(paper presented at the Ineb Seoul 2003 Conference of International Network for Engaged Buddhists, Seoul, Korea, July 20-25, 2003).

