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Acta Koreana, Volume 20, Number 2, December 2017, pp. 563-590 (Article)

Published by Keimyung University, Academia Koreana



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ENGAGING THE URBAN BUDDHIST LAITY: THE ‘BUDDHIST SOLIDARITY FOR REFORM’ ORGANIZATION IN SOUTH KOREA

By SANTOSH K. GUPTA

During the Japanese colonial period and after the arrival of Korean independence, Korean Buddhism experienced a noticeable revival and rise of Buddhist organizations and NGOs. This article aims to examine the characteristics of lay Buddhist communities, with special reference to the ‘Buddhist Solidarity for Reform’ (BSR) organization in contemporary South Korea, which is actively engaging the laity by defining the role of modern Buddhism. This leading organization began as a distinct community movement confined to the urban masses and based on Buddhist beliefs. The group seeks reform of monastic Buddhism and calls for deeper participation of the laity in Buddhist activities. The BSR represents the elite urban class and primarily functions as a moderator for socially engaged Buddhism. This organization not only deals with community matters but also serves to buttress promotion of Buddhist practices in everyday life. The BSR functions completely independently and is critical toward the monastic-centric Buddhist orders of South Korea. Describing historical shifts in the lay Buddhist movements, this study analyzes how the lay Buddhist organizations are raising their voices, furthering social agendas for the urban laity and expanding their social bases by forming religious social networks.

Keywords: Lay Buddhism, engaged Buddhism, reformation, social welfare, social base, social networking, urban laity, Buddhist Solidarity for Reform (BSR)

Contemporary scholarship on modern Korean Buddhism emphasizes monastic practices, canonical texts, prominent monks, and central Buddhist orders.

* The contents of this article are adapted from the author’s doctoral dissertation and were first presented at the Pacific Asian Conference on Korean Studies, the University of Auckland, New Zealand, 2011. Major revisions in context and content have been made by including the latest data received from Buddhist organizations.

Researchers primarily focus on the development of monastic communities and Buddhist practices, thus marginalizing the contribution of lay Buddhists (*chaega pulcha*) in the reformation and modernization of Korean Buddhism.¹ Although there are some English- and Korean-language academic writings on modern Korean Buddhism and its social engagement—such as Sorensen 1996, Tedesco 2003, Kwön 2004, Kim Ŭngch'öl 2009, Pori Park 2010, Kim Chongin 2010, Kim Jongmyeong 2010 and Kim Hwansoo 2014—there are no serious investigations of the issues of lay Buddhism and its role in the shaping of modern Korean Buddhism. Moreover, some scholars also accentuated the limitation and debacle of lay Buddhists in the modernization process of modern Korean Buddhism. For instance, Jongmyung Kim states that the ‘failure to involve the laity was one the limitations of the reform programs and modernization process of Korean Buddhism.’² Similarly, Pori Park states that ‘the laity did not play an active role’ and ‘lack of lay involvement was one of the limits to [the] process of modernization’.³ Furthermore, Kim Hwansoo states that ‘monastic-centered development marginalized the lay Buddhists’ during the colonial and postcolonial period, and even ‘left little room for laypeople’ in the contemporary period.⁴ Even so, these studies lack in-depth exploration of the lay Buddhist movement and its colonial and postcolonial correlation.

Hence, disagreeing with the argument of previous scholarship, my primary objective is to outline the base and rise of the lay Buddhist movement in the first half of the twentieth century so as to trace the historical underpinnings of the rise of the laity and its linkage with contemporary organizations. This study seeks to investigate the major questions of whether the lay Buddhist movements have been backing Buddhist reformation in South Korea, as well as to what extent they have been contributing to the modernization of Korean Buddhism. Moreover, I will use the development of BSR as the primary example for my thesis-argument so as to elucidate a new perspective on how lay Buddhists have been progressive and challenge the monastic community in contemporary period. I will also

** I would like to thank my anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments and suggestions, which were very helpful in revising this article into its current form.

¹ The term *chaega pulcha* refers to both male and female lay Buddhists, and terms such as *keōsa*, laity, and lay Buddhists are in the same vein.

² Jongmyung Kim, “Yi Nūnghwa, Buddhism, and the Modernization of Korea,” in *Makers of Modern Korean Buddhism*, ed. Jin Y. Park (New York: State University of New York, 2010), 97.

³ Pori Park, “The modern Remaking of Korean Buddhism: The Korean Reform Movement During Japanese Colonial Rule and Han Yongun’s Buddhism (1879–1944),” PhD diss., University of California, 1998, 93.

⁴ Kim Hwansoo, “Social Stigmas of Buddhist Monastics and the Lack of Lay Buddhist Leadership in Colonial Korea (1910–1945),” *Korea Journal* 54 (2014): 127.

comprehend the correlation between colonial and postcolonial lay Buddhist movements because the reformation and modernization aspirations of early lay Buddhists were not fully accomplished and are still resurfacing today.

This examination of lay Buddhist activities is primarily a descriptive inquiry of the programs, objectives, and working mechanisms of the BSR. This study, however, will not merely describe the organization but also analyze the nature, characteristics and vision of the lay Buddhist movement in contemporary South Korea by using accessible institutional materials and data. For a better understanding of the lay Buddhist movement, this study utilizes the contextual framework of division into two major historical periods: colonial (1910–45) and postcolonial (1946–2016). This is because the historical analysis of the lay Buddhist movements in the colonial and postcolonial periods will enable contextualization of the organizations from the contemporary social perspective. Likewise, it appears that the lay Buddhist organizations of the colonial period were primarily reformist in nature and, more or less, contributed to the preparation of a strong foundation for the Buddhist modernization and social engagement, which have been resurfacing and continuing even today. The methodology utilized for researching this article included interviewing some engaged members, office bearers, and beneficiaries; undertaking research tours to relevant places in South Korea and India; and participation in some lay Buddhist activities. Moreover, the study researched and cross-checked various organizational data, such as annual reports, pamphlets, newsletters, newspaper articles, and brochures; analyzed personal observations; and conducted field-work in order to establish the reliability of the collected data.

As an initial step toward understanding these matters, we will briefly review the relevant history. The notion of a need for reformation and modernization of Korean Buddhism emerged in the early twentieth century; however, those who advocated this quickly divided into two factions over the issue of function and, in Robert E. Buswell's categorization, became a "conservative movement" favoring traditional roles and a "progressive movement" standing for engaged and receptive Buddhism.⁵ One should note that the term 'engaged Buddhism' was coined much later than the evolution of Han Yong-un (Manhae; 1879–1944) and his fellow monks, who advocated social engagement for modern Korean Buddhism and exhorted monks to be involved with society instead of confining themselves merely to monasteries.⁶ Consequently, throughout the first half of the

⁵ Robert E. Buswell, Jr., "The Emergence of a Korean Buddhist Tradition," in *Korean Buddhism in East Asian Perspective*, comp. Geumgang Center for Buddhist Studies (Seoul: Geumgang Center for Buddhist Studies, 2007), 28.

⁶ Song Hyōnju "Kūndae Han'guk Pulgyo kaehyōk undongsō" [Modern Korean Buddhism reform

twentieth century, a series of drives for the reformation and modernization consisted of the restructuring of the *sangha*, Buddhism for the masses, simplification of practices and education, the relevance of Buddhism in modern life, pro-laity monastics, and deeper social engagement. Pertinently, these issues are resurfacing as a potent force in the contemporary period.

Moving further, we must note that contemporary lay Buddhist followers have shown greater respect toward the monastic community, but they have also criticized it for its monk-oriented approach and working methods. Lay Buddhists are not only seeking their active participation in the core steering committees of Buddhist orders, but they are also demanding the modernization and deeper social engagement of Korean Buddhism. For instance, the Chogye Order, the largest and most influential Buddhist order in South Korea, encountered mass protests in 1994 when several hundred monks held a hunger strike, raising the issues of monastic corruption, democratic setup and social engagement. This movement turned more volatile when students from Central Sŭngga University and hundreds of lay Buddhists joined it on April 5, 1994. Consequently, the Chogye Order administration unleashed violent forces on protestors, resulting in the arrest of hundreds people.⁷ After the subsiding of this chaotic situation, the Chogye Order adopted a new constitution. Since then, the Order began a ‘Look toward Society Policy’ and conceived many projects focusing on social welfare, environmental protection and conservation programs, and North-South Korea exchange programs.⁸ In 1995, the Chogye Order established a semi-independent section called ‘Korean Buddhism Chogye Order Social Welfare Foundation’ (Taehan Pulgyo Chogyejong sahoe pokchi chaedan) for operational management.⁹ In terms of social welfare activities, the chronological growth of Buddhist social welfare in Korea shows that the Chogye Order recorded a three-fold increase in the number of its social welfare centers. The total social welfare centers run by the Chogye Order were 95 during the period of 1985 to 1995, which significantly increased to 389 during the period of 1995 to 2005.¹⁰ Moreover, many women

movement], *Chonggyo wa munbwa* 6 (2000): 163.

⁷ Taehan Pulgyo Chogyejong kyoyugwŏn, ed., *Han'guk kŏnhyŏndae Pulgyosa yŏnp'yo* [Chronological history of modern Korean Buddhism] (Seoul: Taehan Pulgyo Chogyejong kyoyugwŏn, 2000), 139–149.

⁸ Mujin Sŭnim and David Ma, eds., *Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism* (Seoul: Jogye Order, 2005), 60.

⁹ Taehan Pulgyo Chogyejong kyoyugwŏn, ed., *ibid.*, 344–5.

¹⁰ Santosh K. Gupta, “Socially Engaged Jogye Order in Contemporary Korea,” Paper presented at the 10th ISKS International Conference on Korean Buddhism, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, August 24–25, 2011. For more information, see, Taehan Pulgyo Chogyejong Sahoebokchi Chaedan, ed., *Pulgyo sahoe pokchi p'yŏllam* [Buddhist social welfare guidebook] (Seoul: Chogyejong sahoebokchi chaedan, 2006), 10–73.

monks came forward for social welfare work—Kyehwan Sūnim notes that the modern reform has had a great impact on *bhikkhunis*—and they are increasingly involved with hospitals, taking care of the disabled, and running kindergartens.¹¹ Pertinently, Korean lay Buddhist initiatives are influencing the Korean monastic community to be more socially engaged to better meet the needs of modern society. In this regard, the objective and activities of the Buddhist Solidarity for Reform (BSR; Ch’amyō Pulgyo Chaega Yōndae), is significant because they are the foremost lay Buddhist group with the widest networks. The BSR, registered with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism as a non-profit organization, was primarily founded to criticize the power struggle between different dharma factions, corruption, and mismanagement of the Chogye Order administration.¹²

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE RISE OF THE LAITY AND LAY BUDDHIST ORGANIZATIONS

During the Chosŏn Dynasty (1392–1910), when Buddhism lost most royal patronage and experienced the hardships of persecution, lay Buddhists supported monastic communities and played an important role in carrying forward Buddhist culture and practices. Although Chosŏn Buddhists failed to secure the support of aristocrats and government officials, who turned their sympathy towards the Confucian faith, suppression of Buddhism was not a uniform phenomenon during the Chosŏn era. For example, Chosŏn Buddhism, as Kim Yongt’ae argues, was engaging common people in many ways by embracing folk beliefs and performing various religious rituals. Kim further emphasizes how some prominent kings and members of royal families were apparently pious Buddhists with favorable attitudes toward monasteries. Moreover, early kings T’aejong and Sejong showed interest in Buddhism and made major changes in its organization, rescinding and reducing the earlier Buddhist orders.¹³ Similar views on the persistence of Buddhism are found in the scholarship of James H. Grayson,¹⁴

¹¹ Gyehwan Sūnim, “Historical Reviews of the Activities of Korea Buddhist Nuns,” Paper presented at the 8th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women Discipline and Practice of Buddhist Women: Present and Past, Seoul, Korea, June 27 – July 2, 2004.

¹² BSR, *Chōnggi ch’onghoe* [The Buddhist Solidarity for Reform: General Annual Meeting] (Seoul: Buddhist Solidarity for Reform, 2007), 80.

¹³ Kim Yongt’ae, “Chosŏn sidae Pulgyo chōngch’aek ūi sidaejōk ch’ui” [The trends of Buddhist policy during the Chosŏn period], in *Sinang kwa sasang ūro pon Pulgyo chōnt’ong ūi hūrūm* [The stream of the Korean Buddhist tradition as seen through faith and thought], ed. Kuksa p’yōnch’an wiwōnhoe (Seoul: Tusan Tong’a, Kuksa p’yōnch’an wiwōnhoe, 2007), 240.

¹⁴ James Huntley Grayson, *Korea: A Religious History*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 152.

Boudewijn Walraven,¹⁵ and Cho Eunsu,¹⁶ who emphasize that Buddhism received the “support of commoners” and remained “important in the private life of people.” Thus, lay Buddhists seem to have continued to be engaged with the monastic community and played a substantial role in the shaping of Korean Buddhism and its continuity to modern times. Similarly, during the pervasive and dominant influence of Imperial Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945), lay Buddhist followers became less persuasive as the monastic community struggled to sustain the identity of traditional Korean Buddhism. Nevertheless, the reformation and modernization movement of Buddhism, supported by the Buddhist laity, was deeply interlinked with cognizance of patriotism and national consciousness.

The notion of reformation and modernization of Korean Buddhism began in the early twentieth century when the Buddhist Research Society was founded in 1904, and further, established the Myeongjin Institute in order to enable monks to adopt prevailing pragmatic notions and employ them to modernize Korean Buddhism.¹⁷ The organization founded an administrative center at the Myeongjin Institute that commenced secular courses, such as arithmetic, history, geography, philosophy, physics, biology, and foreign languages.¹⁸ Diversification of educational programs with the inclusion of non-Buddhist courses was a sign of Buddhist modernization, which provided space for deeper collaboration between monks and the laity. Accordingly, based on the characteristics of modern Buddhist endeavors, one may group the participants into three categories: Buddhist elites who made scholarly contributions, monks who led the Buddhist revival and reformation movement, and commoners composed of Buddhist practitioners who congregated with the masses.

The Buddhist and Buddhism-sympathizer elites from the emerging middle class were a notable influence. Most prominent among the leaders were Chang Chiyŏn (1864–1921), Yi Nŭnghwa (1869–1943), Ch’oe Namsŏn (1890–1957), Chŏng Inbo (1893–1950), Yi Kwangsu (1892–1950), Kim T’aeŭn (1889–1989) and Yi Wanyong (1858–1926).¹⁹ These prominent figures endorsed Buddhist practices by evolving the notion of “ethnic-national culture” (*minjok munhwa*) and “ethnic-national Buddhism” (*minjok Pulgyo*).²⁰ To some extent, their critical writings and

¹⁵ Boudewijn Walraven, “Editor’s Introduction,” *Journal of Korean Religions* 3 (2012): 5–8.

¹⁶ Cho Eunsu, “Re-thinking Late 19th Century Chosŏn Buddhist Society,” *Acta Koreana* 6 (2003): 87–109.

¹⁷ “Pulgyo chongmuguk chwŭjisŏ” [Buddhism general affairs bureau prospect], *Taehan maeil sinmun*, March 12, 1908.

¹⁸ Pori Park, “Korean Buddhist Reforms and Problems in the Adoption of Modernity during the Colonial Period,” *Korea Journal* (Spring 2005): 87–89.

¹⁹ Kim Hwansoo, *ibid.*, 113.

²⁰ Kim Chongin, and Hŏ Usŏng, “20-segi ch’o Han’guk chaega Pulgyo ŭi Pulgyo sajŏk ŭimi”

vocal endorsements encouraged lay Buddhists to make steps toward national Buddhist revival and reformation. Some of the leading organizations that appeared were the Chosŏn Association for the Promotion of Buddhism (Chosŏn Pulgyo chinhŭnghoe, 佛教振興會) in 1914, later renamed the Buddhist Co-operative Association (Pulgyo hyöpsönghoe 佛教協成會) in 1922; the Korean Buddhism Society (Chosŏn Pulgyohoe, 朝鮮佛教會) founded by Yi Nŭnghwa in 1920; and the Young Men's Buddhist Association (Ch'öngnyön Pulgyodo, 青年佛教徒), popularly known as the YMBA. These organizations emerged as representative platforms for the Buddhist elites and contributed to the development and discussion of academic aspects of modern Buddhism, as well as playing an important role in institutionalizing lay establishments. But they saw little success, in terms of social networking, for several reasons: limited resources, politicization of organizations and the lack of deeper collaboration between monastics and the laity.²¹ Moreover, a paucity of simplified Buddhist education and materials, the basic requirements for connecting young monks and the laity, were among the prime factors behind the inefficiency of these organizations.

Monks, predominantly married monks, also played an important role in mobilizing lay Buddhists. Han Yongun (Manhae) was the first visionary monk who felt the needs of the time and advocated the idea of Buddhist socialism; and he recommended social engagement as the most practical, worthy tool for contemporary Buddhism. Buddhist socialism is a socio-political ideology that advocates social egalitarianism based on Buddhist principles, such as the law of nature, non-violence, compassion, and mindfulness. Nevertheless, Manhae's notion of Buddhist socialism is not well elaborated: "He simply emphasized that Buddhism does not support the possession of personal wealth and economic inequality, yet he did not develop further aspects of this notion."²² Gradually, a few pragmatic monks held a series of meetings and campaigns in different regions, which finally resulted in the founding of the Imje Order (Imjejong) in 1911 under the guidance of Manhae.²³ In 1912, the Imje Order established a center in Seoul, where more than a thousand lay Buddhists participated and extended their vigorous support to progressive monks.²⁴ Although this movement could not leave behind a deep imprint on the process of modernization, the tendency

[Historical context for the lay Buddhism in the early 20th-century Korea], *Tongsö pigyo munbak chönöl* 23 (2010): 45–75.

²¹ Kim Hwansoo, *ibid.*, 113.

²² Pori Park, "A Korean Buddhist Response to Modernity," in *Makers of Modern Korean Buddhism*. ed. Jin Y. Park (New York: Suny Press, 2010), 45.

²³ Kim Kwangsik, *Han'guk kündae Pulgyosa yön'gu* [Research on the history of modern Korean Buddhism] (Seoul: Minjoksa, 1996), 71–77.

²⁴ "P'ogyodang üi sönghwang" [Success of Dharma propagation], *Maeil sinbo*, May 28, 1912.

endorsed the participation of Buddhist laity and inspired the Buddhist community toward social engagement and missionary work. Likewise, for engaging women-folk, progressive monks admired the social consciousness of women, supported women's concerns, and emphasized "women's liberation" by promoting literacy among them, which more or less influenced the Buddhist lay-women.²⁵ Therefore, the advocacy of "Buddhist socialism and recommendation of deeper social engagement and critique on religions"²⁶ drew from the cultural emotions of young monks and Buddhist laity, who brought forward many organizations devoted to Buddhist social engagement. Subsequently, the reformation and modernization movement witnessed the establishment of several socially engaged organizations, for instance, Kyōngsōng Pulgyo chajehoe (1917), Taejōn Pulgyo chajōnwōn (1918), Inch'ōn Pulgyo chajehoe (1918), Pusan kongsaengwōn (1924), Mokp'ō kongsaengwōn (1927), and Chosōn sahoe saōp hyōphoe (1931).²⁷ These initiatives were major stepping stones to broaden the ambit of Buddhist social engagement by engaging progressive monks and the Buddhist laity. Notably, there were 117 centers serviced by 122 monks who were engaged with various social projects, thereby attracting lay Buddhists towards monastic communities during the colonial period.²⁸

This research further found that commoners or the common Buddhist laity became more active because of the common call of the Buddhist elites and monks. Available data documents the unremarkable state of Korean Buddhism and the participation of the laity in the early twentieth century. According to a published survey of the Government-General (Sō tok-ofu) of 1915, there were apparently 69,728 monks, 11,968 nuns and 10,000 common laity. While there is a paucity of materials to cross-check the numbers of the Buddhist laity in the first quarter of the twentieth century, a devout Buddhist laity emerged and attempted to mobilize the masses for socio-religious participation. Kwōn Sangno, Paek Yongsōng, and Yi Yōngjae are the representative figures who primarily emphasized Buddhist education for lay Buddhists. Moreover, Yi Yōngjae propagated the notion of "people's Buddhism" (*minjung* Pulgyo, 民衆佛教) and the "people's era" (*minjung ūi sidae*).²⁹ One should mention that Han Yong-un

²⁵ Sō Chunsōp, "Segan kwa ch'ulsegan sai ttonūn kyōngesōn esō külssūgi" [A new writing and boundary on custom and renunciation], *Manbaehak yōn'gu* 1 (2005): 188–193.

²⁶ Ku Moryong, "Manhae sasang esō ūi chayū wa p'yōngdūng" [Manhae's freedom and equality thought], *Manbaehak yōn'gu* 2 (2006): 52–53.

²⁷ Kwōn Kyōng'im, *Pulgyo sahoe pokchi silch'ōllon* [Buddhist social welfare practice] (Seoul: Hakchisa, 2004), 126.

²⁸ Pori Park, *ibid.*, 2005, 97–103.

²⁹ Kim Chongin, and Hō Usōng, *ibid.*, 45–75.

included *minjung* theology into Buddhism in 1910,³⁰ and this theology has periodically re-appeared in modern Korean Buddhism. The significant contribution of the common Buddhist laity lies in the propagation and production of various literatures on the basic doctrines of Buddhism in the Korean language. In addition, they contributed to the development of Buddhist social networks and collaborative projects.

What is pertinent to note is that the newly emerging lay Buddhists were not merely the followers of monks or those praying for blessings, but they also endorsed the active participation of laity in monastic activities. Consequently, one of the major features that emerged was the increasing number of meditation centers open for both male and female lay Buddhists. Many monks came forward and offered the basic teachings of the Buddha, as well as meditation classes, to the Buddhist laity. In this context, the missionary zeal of Monk Paek Yongsŏng and his movement called *taegakkyo* and *taejung kyohwa* is notable because it motivated and connected thousands of lay Buddhists. He endeavored to bridge the distance between monks and Buddhist laity by opening Sunday schools and providing Buddhist doctrinal teaching to the common Buddhist laity, particularly young people.³¹ Moreover, such collaboration between monks and the common laity was instrumental in bringing young people into their fold. However, the impetus for reforming Buddhism and bringing lay Buddhist followers to a common platform was not an easy task because the majority of these social networks underwent surveillance during Imperial Japanese colonial rule.

After Korean independence in 1945, the complex issues that Korean Buddhism faced were Japanized Buddhists, monk-marriage, eating meat, drinking alcohol, ownership of monastic property and so on. Undoubtedly, the Korean Buddhists had to respond in the transitional phase, and the restoration and purification of Korean Buddhism started with the conflict between celibate and non-celibate monks. This prolonged conflict continued for seventeen years until it virtually ended in 1970, when the Chogyejong and T'aegojong were officially recognized as representative of celibate and non-celibate monks, respectively.³²

During the first three decades after liberation from Imperial Japan, Korean Buddhists, under the leadership of the Chogye Order, tried to overturn the

³⁰ John Jorgensen, "Minjung Buddhism: A Buddhist Critique of the Status Quo-Its History, Philosophy, and Critique," in *Makers of Modern Korean Buddhism*. ed., Jin Y. Park (New York: SUNY Press, 2010), 277.

³¹ For details on *taegakkyo* [enlightenment] and *taejung kyohwa* see, Kim Pangnyong, "Künhyŏndae Han'guk Pulgyo e nat'an an saenghwal Pulgyo ūi yuhyŏng kwa mirae Chaega Pulgyo ūi panghyang" [Lay Buddhism's type in modern Korean Buddhism and the direction of future lay Buddhism], *Han'guk kyosu Pulcha yŏnham hakboeji* 20 (2014): 69.

³² Taehan Pulgyo Chogyejong kyoyugwŏn, ed., 2000, 65, 96.

Japanized version of Buddhism by focusing on the restoration of traditional Korean monastic practices, which further distanced the monastic community from the laity. Although there were strong endeavors to enhance lay Buddhist participation and form social networks in South Korea, organized movements did not appear until the 1960s: the Korean Buddhism Dharma Association (Taehan Pulgyo Talmahoe 大韓佛教達磨會; 1957), Korean Buddhism Three Jewels Association (Taehan Pulgyo Sambohoe 大韓佛教三寶會; 1964),³³ Korea Youth Buddhist Association (1960), and the Korean Buddhist University Federation (1963).³⁴ In the 1970s, the Taewŏnjŏngsa (1970), Korea Institute of Buddhist Studies (1974), and Korean Buddhist Promotion Foundation (1975) were active lay Buddhist organizations. However, their contributions are emphasized less in scholarship, and they seem not to have made a noticeable impact on the lay Buddhist movements. Likewise, the Diamond Sutra Recitation Group (Kūmganggyŏng toksonghoe 金剛經 讀誦會; 1973) and Porimhoe (寶林會; 1965) emerged as popular meditation retreat groups that attracted hundreds of followers from different regions.³⁵

Subsequently, there was a political crisis in 1980, when military personnel entered monasteries and arrested ninety-eight monks and lay Buddhists on suspicion of illegal anti-state activities. This anti-monastery stance encouraged young monks to denounce the prolonged passivity of Korean Buddhism, which further brought monks and lay Buddhists together. During the Congress of Korean Young Buddhist Union at Pŏmŏsa in 1983, thousands of young monks and lay Buddhists demanded freedom for monasteries.³⁶ Thereupon, the Chogye Order appears to have reemphasized the notion of *minjung* Buddhism and Buddhist social engagement,³⁷ which had been repeatedly echoed during the colonial period. Similarly, lay Buddhist organizations also appeared with assorted social programs. Some prominent organizations were the Association of the Engaged Buddhist Movement (1980), Tongsan Panyahoe (1982), Nūngin Sŏnwŏn (1985), the Association of the National Buddhist Order for the Realization of Pure Land (1986), and the Association of National Buddhist Orders (1988). They rose in favor of the establishment of missionary centers and Buddhist education systems in urban vicinities.³⁸ Consequently, one finds the Chogye Order

³³ Kim Ŭngch'ŏl, "Han'guk chaega Pulgyo undong ūi yŏksa wa hyŏnhwang" [History and present condition of the Korean lay Buddhist movement], *Tongasia Pulgyo munhwa* 4 (2009): 85–86.

³⁴ Kim Pangnyong, 153–4.

³⁵ Kim Ŭngch'ŏl, *ibid.*, 90–95.

³⁶ For the chronological development see, *ibid.*, 117–120.

³⁷ Kim Kwangsik, *Han'guk hyŏndae Pulgyosa yŏn'gu* [Studies of modern Korean Buddhism] (Seoul: Pulgyo sidaesa, 2006), 276.

³⁸ Pak Kwangsŏ, "The Lay Buddhist Movement in Korea," paper presented at the Buddhist

proposing several policies for assimilating, preparing, and disseminating basic Buddhist teachings and practices to the lay Buddhist community in the late 1980s and in the early 1990s.³⁹ Presently, hundreds of retreat centers led by monks and lay Buddhists are mushrooming and gaining popularity in urban areas. For instance the Pŏpkisa Sŏn Meditation Center (Pŏpki Sŏnwŏn, est. 1995), Munsasu Bŏp'hoe (聞思修法會, est. 1995), and Hodu Maül Vipassana Center (est. 1992),⁴⁰ are primarily focused on spiritual cultivation and mental peace. Among recent developments, the Chogye Order's *kanhwa sŏn* retreat program and Temple Stay Program are worth mentioning because they are gaining popularity among lay Buddhists and further closing the gap between the monastic community and lay Buddhists.

BUDDHIST SOLIDARITY FOR REFORM

Thus, bringing together several strands of the early lay Buddhist movements, the Buddhist Solidarity for Reform organization emerged and endured the contemporaneous socio-political upheavals of contemporary Korean Buddhism. They are one of the distinctive lay Buddhist organizations that provide a strong platform for intellectuals, students, women, and the common people. The organization is diverse in their objectives, functions and approaches, and it represents a few distinct social groups. For example, BSR represents an elite community of lay Buddhist followers and functions as a mentoring and pressure group. Members of this organization are critical of being centralized and monastically controlled, particularly by the Chogye Order, and demand greater access and lay Buddhist participation in policy-framing. Although they have engaged with South Korean society for a long time, they are now actively seeking greater social engagement. Therefore, one must highlight the foundational base and social activities of this prominent Buddhist organization committed to bringing the monastic community and laity together for deeper social engagement. In the early 1990s, South Korean lay Buddhists founded two lay organizations, the Lay Buddhist Council (Pulgyo chaega hoeüi) and the Lay Buddhist Coalition (Chaega yŏnhap), to mollify the monastic conflicts and the sectarian disputes of various Korean Buddhist orders and monasteries. The BSR was founded in March

Forum: the Role of the Lay Buddhist in Contemporary Society Conference, Pulgyo Ch'ongijjong, Seoul, October 26–30, 2008.

³⁹ Taehan Pulgyo Choyejong kyoyugwŏn, ed. *Chogyejong sa kŏnbyŏndae p'yŏn* [Modern and contemporary history of the Chogye Order] (Seoul: Chogyejong ch'ulp'ansa, 2005), 283.

⁴⁰ Kim Ŭngch'ŏl, *ibid.*, 90–95.

1999 through the merger of these two existing organizations, and thus it inherited the Buddhist reform and modernization agendas of the late-twentieth century. The founding members of the BSR were Prof. Pak Kwangsö, Dr. Sö Ton'gak, Im Wansuk, Chöng Unggi, and Im Tongju.⁴¹

The last two decades witnessed profound upheavals in the Korean Buddhist community, particularly when the Buddhist Orders were deeply mired in financial mismanagement, as well as violent conflicts within and outside their organizations. In addition, a few incidents of communal violence and fundamentalism became deep concerns when Korean Christians aggressively propagated anti-Buddhist slogans.⁴² These critical issues provoked lay Buddhists, including members of the BSR, to march onto the streets to bring monastic concerns before the Buddhist followers. Furthermore, in a later phase, the Chogye Order became the main focus for wide-ranging reforms. As mentioned above, one of the major sectarian disputes occurred at the Chogye Order Headquarters in 1994 on the issue of managing the political and economic affairs of the Buddhist monastic community,⁴³ which drew the attention of lay Buddhist followers toward the rampant corruption in the order.

The years of 1999 and 2001 were ignominious for the Buddhist Orders, when Buddhist monks and nuns began quarrelling over the issue of the Chogye Order General Assembly election.⁴⁴ Soon, the turmoil shocked lay believers and shook their faith and belief in the monastic community. The incident was a major setback for lay Buddhists, who are the primary financial supporters of the Buddhist monastic orders in Korea. Consequently, lay Buddhists began to stage a series of protests against the Chogye Order, demanding serious monastic reforms and transparency. The Chogye Order authorities failed to maintain peace between factional groups, and that failure provided an opportunity for public intervention. Because of the contemporary controversies, the Buddhist laity demanded transparency in all financial transactions of the Buddhist orders and temples. Such incidents as at the Chogye Order lifted the veil of secrecy of Korean monastic

⁴¹ Taehan Pulgyo chinhügwön, ed., *Han'guk Pulgyo ch'ongnam* [Comprehensive survey of Korean Buddhism] (Seoul: Taehan Pulgyo chinhügwön, 2008), 406–407.

⁴² Harry L. Wells, “Korean Temple Burnings and Vandalism: The Response of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 20 (2000): 239–240; Choe Sang-hun, “Religious peace under threat in South Korea,” *The New York Times*, October 14, 2008.

⁴³ Henrik H. Sorensen, “Korean Buddhism on the Threshold of the 21st Century,” in *100 years of Modernization in Korea: Toward the 21st Century*, ed. The Academy of Korean Studies (Korea: The Academy of Korean Studies and Samsung Foundation of Culture, 1996), 170.

⁴⁴ Frank M. Tedesco, “Social Engagement in South Korean Buddhism,” in *Action Dharma New Studies in Engaged Buddhism*, eds. Kristopher Queen, Charles Prebish and Damien Keown (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 170.

institutions and, accordingly, left disputed issues for new generations upon which new reform movements were organized from time to time. These circumstances enabled the BSR to gain momentum when a majority of lay Buddhist followers launched rallies and processions against the deceitful practices of the Buddhist orders. Moreover, in the beginning, BSR perceived massive financial mismanagement and proposed financial transparency for Buddhist orders in general and the Chogye Order in particular. This movement resulted in the promotion of mutual participation, collective responsibility, and cooperation between monks and lay Buddhists. To prolong the demand of greater social engagement, the BSR, with the help of forty Buddhist groups, hosted three major events: the Forum for Buddhist Movement Network, the Rally for Buddhist Independence and Reform, and the Project for Planning Programs and Fund-raising. Gradually the BSR emerged as a strong organization by securing the support of the contemporary major Buddhist organizations and further established its own identity.

Since its inception, BSR had initiated several programs to engage people on the mass level and expand its social networks. Seeking deeper social engagement, BSR established several allied subsections, such as the Preparatory Committee for Organizing the Center for Buddhist Policy and Reform and, also, the Buddhist Academy. The BSR also initiated a regular symposium focusing on religious pluralism and civil society in Korea. The organization scaled a higher step when the South Korean government acknowledged its advice on the issue of employment favoritism, thus preventing religious favoritism against aspiring employees.⁴⁵ Furthermore, a bimonthly journal titled *Engaged Buddhism*, a booklet emphasizing mindfulness, a newsletter, and a publishing company called Tosöch'ulp'an ch'orongmaül were launched so as to disseminate the welfare agendas and expand the social network, having a tremendous impact on the lay Buddhist community.⁴⁶ Moreover, in 2007, the Leaders Forum was initiated and has been holding regular meetings on various subjects of modern Buddhism since that time.⁴⁷ These platforms have been instrumental in garnering the support of elite-class and middle-class families.

The critical approach of BSR toward the Buddhist orders has been instrumental in the reformation and modernization of Korean Buddhism. Consequently, one finds that the Chogye Order commenced various welfare

⁴⁵ Donald W. Mitchell, *Buddhism Introducing the Buddhist Experience* (New York Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 273.

⁴⁶ The Buddhist Solidarity for Reform, "History," accessed November 10, 2008, http://www.buddha21.org/english/read.cgi?board=about_activitie&y_n...

⁴⁷ BSR, *Ch'amyö Pulgyo chaega yöndae sosikechi* [Buddhist Solidarity for Reform newsletter] (Seoul: Buddhist Solidarity for Reform, 2012), 3.

programs in the last two decades, and even other organizations showed greater interest in welfare projects. In terms of the participation of the laity in the monastic affairs of Chogye Order, the most important accomplishment came in 2001 when members of BSR participated in monitoring the Account Settlement Meeting of the Chogye Order (Chogyejong kyölsin chonghoe). Further, members participated in the Chogye Order annual general meeting (Chogyejong chungang chonghoe) on the issue of ancestral rites amendments and memorial service regulations in 2003.⁴⁸ Apparently, the Chogye Order is also intending to bring the monastic community and lay community together by engaging representatives of lay Buddhist organizations.

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL NETWORKING

The true success of the BSR lies in its successfully mobilizing academics, health professionals, legal professionals, intellectuals, entrepreneurs, students, and the middle-class Buddhist laity. Thus, BSR has been garnering sound intellectual capital, which helps the organization gain a competitive advantage. Most participants, board members, and committee members are affiliated with the teaching-and-research profession, the medical profession, and print and electronic media. So it appears that the BSR has a reliable think-tank operating, framing policies for Buddhist organizations and working as a moderator of engaged Buddhists.

Moreover, the participation of the intellectual community and members of civil society in various socio-religious activities in South Korea has produced new social actors and new spiritual groups. Likewise, new Buddhist groups are vying to bring educated people into their fold. For example, according to available data, there were 37,153 intellectuals, associated with various Buddhist organizations in 2000, who have advanced concerns over the monastic reform and social engagement of Korean Buddhism.⁴⁹ In this context, BSR is not an exception, and the group is inclined to draw more educated people to its mission. The increasing number of members and lay followers associated with the BSR has immense implications. As per available records from 2016, the total number of permanent members has increased to about a thousand. Moreover, there has been a gradual rise in the number of permanent members who serve as the backbone of the

⁴⁸ BSR, *ibid.*, 2007, 84, 88.

⁴⁹ Im Haeyöng, "Sach'al üi chiyöng sahoebokchi säp hwalsöngghwa pangan" [Promotion of the regional community welfare of temples], in *Taehan Pulgyo Chogyejong sahoe pokchi*, ed. Chogyejong sahoebokchi chaedan (Seoul: Chogyejong, 2003), 105.

organization in terms of finance and social capital.⁵⁰ Along with part-time volunteer support, full-time paid workers are engaged in developing the BSR's social reach and expanding its network.

Socio-religious mentoring, social motivation, issue-based counseling, propagation of the idea of Buddhist social engagement, and reinterpretation of socio-religious issues have been advanced as long-term goals, all of which have a greater influence on middle-class and elite Buddhist followers. Their commitment to propagating the notion of socially engaged Buddhism, that is, social solidarity, inter-religious dialogue, and mutual understanding among diverse cultural groups, has played an important role in developing BSR networks throughout South Korea. The organization articulates its mission as follows: "to develop a vision and establish a cooperative relationship through which Buddhists can cultivate their minds and develop a sustainable alternative community based on the Buddha's teachings." And in order to establish the credibility of Korean Buddhism, they propose to support reform of Buddhist orders, contribute to the unification of the Korean peninsula, and support human rights, justice, and welfare around the world. The BSR also participated in inter-religious dialogue with a network of Korean religions seeking a greater role in society.⁵¹ Participation in such interfaith and interreligious dialogue not only positions the BSR as a reputable organization, but likewise provides an opportunity to learn about new ideas that the various religious groups implement.

The BSR mission and goals were formulated immediately after the organization successfully penetrated its influence into middle-class society by raising the issue of monastic reforms. Tedesco appraises such initiatives as a major turning point of Korean Buddhism, when the BSR advanced efforts to make the Buddha's teaching comprehensible in modern society.⁵² The ultimate goal of BSR seems to have been to bring Korean monastic Buddhism to the common masses and to nurture new types of bonds between monks and the laity. For example, lay Buddhists have vehemently criticized and discouraged the *sangha* for using luxurious facilities,⁵³ proposing instead simplicity for the *sangha* as Buddha, the master of the *dharma*, had prescribed for the community.⁵⁴ The issue of the

⁵⁰ BSR, *Chōnggi ch'onghoe* [Buddhist solidarity for reform: Annual general meeting] (Seoul: Buddhist Solidarity for Reform, 2009), 28.

⁵¹ Kim Ūngch'ōl, *ibid.*, 89.

⁵² Frank M. Tedesco, *ibid.*, 172.

⁵³ Henrik H. Sorensen, *ibid.*, 170–171.

⁵⁴ For details on behavior in relation to material possessions, see Yi Kōryong, "Chaega Pulchae sam esō mulchilchōk soyu ūi ūimi" [The meaning of material possessions in lay Buddhists' life], paper presented in the 1st Buddhist Forum: the Role of the Lay Buddhist in Contemporary Society conference, Pulgyo Ch'ongjijong, Seoul, 2007.

modern lifestyle of monks was so potent that urban middle-class followers, particularly BSR members, became suspicious and launched a rather modern attempt to have monks live according to the monastic ideal articulated in certain normative Buddhist texts, such as the *Vinaya Pitaka*. Thus, while the organization supports traditionalism, the reformation objective represents a modern approach that applies modern methods for socio-centric programs.

Since 2000, several programs were initiated seeking expansion of social networks by engaging diverse social groups. The Engaged Activities for Korean Society and New Civilization Movement Program was launched to form thirty communities and a group of 500 leaders, which would further set up 10,000 foreign family communities and 100 leaders for the promotion of Korean society and the civilization movement. This program is deeply grounded in Buddhist culture, promoting cultural assimilation and motivating locals and foreigners to develop a rational approach by applying Buddhist teachings in everyday life. In this context, the Advanced Information for Everyday Life and Management Program was initiated for the introduction and promotion of new techniques in order to highlight participant experiences in collecting statistical data and management techniques through the use of electronic devices.⁵⁵ With these various programs, the BSR has set up a goal to increase its membership, whose dues serve as its main source of income. Nevertheless, the exact number of beneficiaries and new members is not available.

Crucially, as newly emerging phenomena such as low birth rates, an ageing society, and individualism are deepening in society, the Buddhist leadership is becoming more sensitive toward social development. Keeping this in view, an innovative campaign called Happy Time Movement was initiated to promote the Buddhist idea of interdependence and mutual cooperation.⁵⁶ Neighbor, youth, student, and lay Buddhists are the main force of this campaign, and they play the dual role of host and guest, contributor and beneficiary. Through the program, BSR also expanded its social network by collaborating with local community groups, regional rural groups, and urban community groups in order to integrate community members into the mainstream and dispel isolation and social insecurity engendered by modern social developments. In 2016, when the author visited the BSR headquarters and inquired about the campaign, there were no materials to outline its accomplishments and the program seems to have initially had momentum and networked with several groups but has subsequently

⁵⁵ BSR: Buddhist Academy, "History of Buddhist Academy", accessed March 4, 2008, <http://www.buddhistac.org/aca/cc103.php>.

⁵⁶ BSR: Buddhist Academy, "History", accessed March 4, 2008, <http://www.buddhistac.org/aca/cc103.php>.

developed at a particularly slow pace.

Seeking a maximal solution, the BSR initiated the Learning from the Past Mission, a special initiative for mutual cooperation, designed to counter the growing trend of the nuclear family and individualism. The mission was launched to primarily support members for consolidation and develop a deeper relationship with the Buddhist laity. The program organizers seek to convince people to share 3 percent of their time, 3 percent of their income, 3 percent of their engagement, and 3 percent of their devotional and meditational time for the well-being of neighbors and eventually for society. Active volunteers and permanent representatives are also supposed to appeal to their family members and neighbors to share 3 percent (15 minutes a day) of their total time for the good of their neighbors. The concept of income-sharing is based on savings from one's total income and expenditures. Participants are urged to spend less on birthday parties, wedding ceremonies, commemoration days, and other occasions, thus promoting a thrifty attitude in the family and the neighborhood.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the slogan of "three percent engagement" is based on the idea of one's active participation with society. Members exhort males and females to divide and devote 3 percent of their time to persuade three people each month to propagate the idea of collective sharing. Members also advise people to practice meditation for fifteen minutes a day, out of their total leisure time, for themselves and for the inner peace of others, which will eventually deepen peace and harmony within society. Although the BSR is a lay Buddhist movement, the growing popularity of its programs attracts the monk community, and besides members, some monks cooperate with the programs.⁵⁸ Additionally, the concept of sharing with neighbors was designed to bring more people into the organizational network, but there is no clear data demonstrating how many people have taken this initiative seriously and joined this mission.

The abovementioned initiatives are fundamentally designed for South Koreans and appear to be instrumental in fostering collaboration with the Buddhist laity and other socio-religious groups. Programs facilitate diverse platforms whereupon members, volunteers, and the laity work for the development of a socially responsible community. The strong emphasis on neighborhood and regional community centers facilitates outreach to the masses and gradually develops the social base. The various programs apparently seek to mobilize the Buddhist laity for deeper participation in Buddhist activities and to motivate the laity to be advocate for monastic reform. The social programs help volunteers to easily reach

⁵⁷ Hō Chōngch'ŏl, "Chaega yōndae 3% nanum undong ch'ōnghoe" [The movement for three percent sharing], *Pulgyo sinmun*, January 17, 2007.

⁵⁸ Yi Kōryong, 2007, 268–271.

and motivate the laity and, thereby, expand the social network to small cities. The BSR has been collaborating with various religious networks, religious NGO networks, and civil society networks in the last two decades, resulting in a reputation that builds and establishes the organization as a potent Buddhist force.

Moreover, the BSR social network is not confined to the national level, but has an international orientation. Deeply influenced by the socially engaged Buddhism of Asia, the organization strives to work in collaboration with renowned Buddhist leaders and organizations, emphasizing Korean monastic reform in a global perspective, raising social and environmental concerns as a collective entity, and wishing to form a global Buddhist community. Members are encouraged to adopt and adapt new ideas from socially engaged Asian Buddhists such as Thich Nhat Hanh of Vietnam, the Dalai Lama of Tibet, now based in India, and others. Thich Nhat Hanh's ideas have deeply influenced the BSR, and his slogans for engaged Buddhists have received wide acclaim among South Korean Buddhist intellectuals. Thus, with involved individuals seeking deeper collaboration and networking, a series of campaigns titled "Change the World and Myself" were organized under the aegis of the BSR. Through these drives, BSR oriented its organizational infrastructure to Koreans and foreigners for group meditation and training programs, seeking broader receptiveness to campaigns.⁵⁹ The BSR also initiated the Leadership and Restoration of the World Buddhist Program to promote inter-exchange of leaders and organizations, also aiming to build a club of socially engaged people and organizations for each continent.⁶⁰ In this series of campaigns, the BSR collaborated with the Manuski and invited Lokamitra—a Western convert working on behalf of the Indian untouchables under the aegis of the Ambedkar Movement—to advance dialogue on the role of contemporary Buddhism, its future prospects, and its implications in contemporary society.⁶¹ Deeper collaboration and mutual cooperation between the BSR and the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayaka Gana (TBMSG), and Ambedkarite Buddhist networks facilitate an important platform for the sharing of innovative ideas.⁶² The organizations frequently invite and send delegations to participate in conferences and social development programs.⁶³ Moreover, for international propagation and

⁵⁹ Kim Hayōng, "Chaega yōndae ch'amyō Pulgyo suhaeng k'aemp'ein" [Buddhist solidarity for reform campaign], *Pulgyo sinmun*, June 9, 2002.

⁶⁰ BSR, *ibid.*, 2007, 19-23, 87.

⁶¹ Pak In'aek, "Pulga ch'ok ch'ōnmin Lokamitra pōpsa" [Untouchable Master Lokamitra], *Pulgyo sinmun*, June 25, 2004.

⁶² Kwōn Oyōng, "Indo ūi kyoyul munhwa sent-'ō sōllip" [Establishment of a center for education and culture in India], *Pōppo sinmun*, August 10, 2004.

⁶³ BSR, *Chōnggi ch'onghoe* [Buddhist Solidarity for Reform: Annual general meeting] (Seoul:

issue-based attention, the BSR started an online program in 2003, through which distant visitors can register, become members, and gain access to recent developments in BSR activities.⁶⁴

In this context, BSR hosted a series of inter-sect and inter-religious dialogues and endeavored to invite the incumbent Dalai Lama to South Korea, though the latter was not allowed to visit for political reasons. However, BSR sent a delegation to the South Korean Department of Foreign Policy and Diplomacy, requesting that the government grant him entry.⁶⁵ Unfortunately, because of political pressure, the group failed to convince the government to confer any privilege upon the Dalai Lama. On other faiths, inter-religious cooperation as projected by the BSR involves local and global Protestant, Catholic,⁶⁶ and Buddhist NGOs that aim to promote social harmony and work together on broader goals. BSR members actively participated in inter-religious meetings to form a network of religious NGOs organized by Christian Civil Society and Solidarity. The participants of all the religious groups were convinced to organize regular workshops, essay publications, and online solidarity works globally. Most of the Korean social organizations and NGOs are reported to have welcomed this initiative and started organizing a series of religious dialogues in many cities and in the countryside.⁶⁷ Ostensibly, the nature of the BSR expansion agenda is progressive, seeking far-reaching social networking with diverse social groups. Collaborative projects in South and Southeast Asia are having a positive impact on the downtrodden and enable BSR to interact with the beneficiaries of its religious agenda.

BUDDHIST EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WELFARE

The BSR is a Buddhist community movement, whereby community members cultivate spirituality for moral development and practice the Buddhist idea of charity to make a difference in society. The organization appears to respect the

Buddhist Solidarity for Reform, 2010), 26, 97, 101.

⁶⁴ Pae Chaesu. "Ch'amyö Pulgyo chaega yöndae [Buddhist solidarity for reform]," *Pulgyo sinmun*, April 26, 2003.

⁶⁵ Kim Chongnak, "Dalai Lama panghan tto musan" [Dalai Lama travel denial again], *Munbwa ilbo*, November 3, 2007.

⁶⁶ Ch'oe Chöng'uk, "Sam taejonggyo net'üwök'ü üi palchok" [Three religions' network establishment], *Kungmin ilbo*, April 5, 2001.

⁶⁷ Frank M. Tedesco, "Questions for Buddhist and Christian Cooperation in Korea," International Association for Religious Freedom, accessed May 5, 1999, <http://www.geocities.com/~iarf/tedesco1.html>.

traditional division of monk and lay followers and does not raise the issue of whether only monks or also lay Buddhists can achieve enlightenment. Rather, BSR seeks coherent cooperation between the monastic community and the laity within South Korea as well as with people abroad. The idea is to combine the sound infrastructure and networks of monasteries with the social and financial capital of lay Buddhists and, further, to employ collective effort as a means to bring about social change.

After extensive discussions and negotiations over the functions of BSR, Buddhist intellectuals felt a need for a common platform in order to educate and train lay Buddhists and form a group of devoted professionals for social welfare work. Therefore, in October 2001, the Board members founded a 'Buddhist Academy' with the primary objective of modernizing and revitalizing monasteries and Buddhist organizations in addition to providing educational and financial support for motivated young scholars.⁶⁸ With such objectives in view, the academy started to offer a management course for monks, affiliated members of the monastic community, and lay followers. The management course is designed to develop a model monastery for the twenty-first century and provides an internship course for Buddhist social activists. The academy also includes a training course to develop family-friendly programs, a training course for professional planners, a tour course for leaders, and a meditation course for NGO activists. The academy holds monthly workshops on monastery management and monitors developmental programs. This academic initiative has become contributory, as it generates substantial income from the various courses.⁶⁹

The BSR seems to have initiated various short- and long-term programs, such as the Combined and Self-Leadership Program to prepare and develop a leadership community for self-reflection and self-reliance. In addition, the My Leadership Club was established in 2006 to educate a number of people through the Buddhist approach on social welfare and, thus, to prepare a pool of committed social workers.⁷⁰ The Our World and Research on Mahayana Wisdom Program is primarily focused on Buddhist courses that promote participants to learn the secret endowments and wisdom of Mahayana society and preserve this tradition for the next generation.⁷¹ This program includes simplified Buddhist texts in Korean, which connects Buddhist scholars to the common masses.

The educational centers are located in urban areas and nearby vicinities and

⁶⁸ Taehan Pulgyo chinhŭngwŏn, *ibid.*, 406.

⁶⁹ BSR, *Chŏnggi ch'onghoe* [Buddhist solidarity for reform: Annual general meeting], 2016, 49, 115.

⁷⁰ BSR: Buddhist Academy, "History", accessed March 4, 2008, <http://www.buddhistac.org/academy/index.htm?sm=2>.

⁷¹ BSR, *ibid.*, 2010, 31-33.

include certificate and diploma courses designed for shorter periods of study. The majority of participants, both students and instructors, are engaged as volunteers. The educational programs attract young people, students and monks, because eminent intellectuals and professionals often join the group and share their expertise. For example, the My Leadership Club program attracts about thirty students each semester and generates financial resources for their education.⁷² Perhaps more pertinent is that a number of young monastic members have been inclined to participate and collaborate with the laity for the propagation of Buddhist education.

Remarkably, BSR does not have any social welfare center except for regional offices that facilitate the extension of the organization, and local people increasingly demonstrate curiosity in charity work and participate directly in social welfare projects. Since the beginning of the movement, this group has been motivating individuals and organizations to carry out welfare programs. Objectively, it works as a mediator and a fundraising organization. The BSR developed a model mechanism for charity whereby engaged experts first identify the area of work, prepare projects after in-depth analysis, and finally look for fund-generation sources or interested NGOs. To some extent, the organization also works as a funding agency and facilitates financial aid for small projects by generating financial resources from members and local people. Evidently, BSR has been organizing regular campaigns in different regions of South Korea, motivating people toward social work. Apparently, the campaign is firstly geared toward fund-raising and secondly toward seeking the maximum number of sponsors able to finance welfare projects.

In this way, a significant amount is being spent on the institutional edifice, with the highest proportion of income being assigned for salaries, organizational business, periodical publications, campaigns, and advertisements. Annual reports reveal that the organization spends more than half of its revenue on salaries and other expenditures (Fig. 1).

⁷² BSR, *ibid.*, 2016, 77–9.

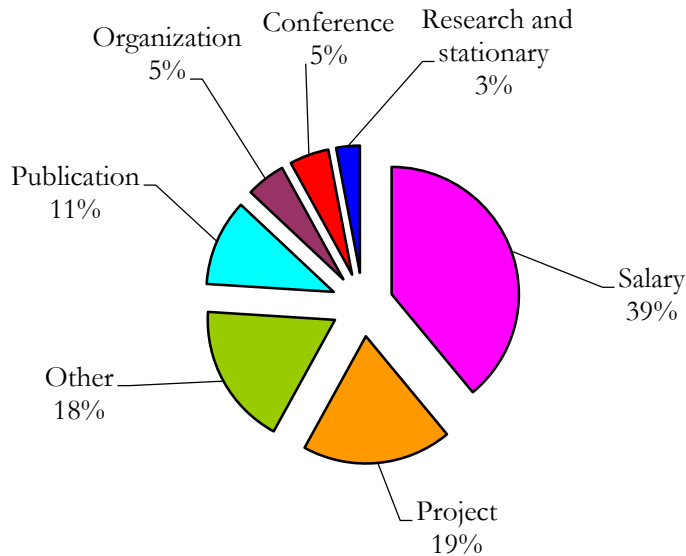


Figure 1: Distribution of BSR financial expenditures. Source: BSR 2006: 36–37.⁷³

In 2002, seeking deeper engagement with diverse groups, BSR took up the issue of migrant workers and devised numerous programs for their welfare. Direct medical and medicinal support, group counseling, language training for everyday life, cross-cultural festival celebrations, and food offerings have attracted many migrants into the BSR fold, where workers have a platform and an opportunity to attract the attention of local people. Continuing the welfare agenda, BSR held an event in 2006 on the occasion of the Muslim festival Jumma, at the Manhae Education Center, inviting minority migrants to celebrate the religious festival and also listening to their concerns regarding human rights, oppression, and discrimination.⁷⁴ The primary motive of such events is to promote a multi-religious, multicultural ambiance and communal harmony by supporting minority migrants, who frequently look for emotional support during holidays.⁷⁵ The BSR

⁷³ BSR, *Chōnggi ch'onghoe* [Buddhist solidarity for reform: Annual general meeting] (Seoul: Buddhist Solidarity for Reform, 2006), 36–37.

⁷⁴ Pak Int'aek, "Chaega yōndae isipsail Manhae NGO kyoyuk sent'ō" [Manhae NGO Education Center], *Pulgyo sinmun*, December 20, 2006.

⁷⁵ For details on Buddhist opinions on Muslims see Pae Pyōngt'ae, "Chonggyo sisōl nae T' up' yoso sōlch' i kungmin ūi kibon'gwōn ch'imhae" [Establishment of polling stations at religious centers, infringement of fundamental rights of citizens], *Ch'amyō Pulgyo* 2, 2008: 4–9.

has solicited and encouraged workers from time to time to extend a hand of support in the long-term interest of the mission.

Likewise, the organization launched a mission to support the Buddhist community of India in 2002. Since then, BSR has been motivating individuals and organizations to carry out welfare programs abroad. The Barepur Village in Kannauz district, Naviganj and Bongaon Villages in Mainpuri district of Uttar Pradesh state, and Dungeswari Village in Gaya District of Bihar state are the pilot project locations in India. Furthermore, these areas abound in significant numbers of the Dalit (untouchable caste), and the majority of the population are passionately religious. The BSR has provided funds to install hand-pumps for clean drinking water in ten villages of Bihar. As per records of 2004 and 2008, through coordination between registered and host members of the BSR, funds of about 20,000 and 50,000 USD in cash were spent for impoverished Dalit people, for school and park construction in Barepur Village and Bongaon Village, and for the construction of a Dhamma Hall in Naviganj Village.⁷⁶ Through the mutual cooperation of locals and their land grants, the school and the meditation hall are now facilitating education and Dharma teaching.

Members of BSR also proposed a conversion ceremony in collaboration with members of the Ashoka Mission Vihara, Delhi, an engaged Buddhist organization, as well as with members of the Ambedkar movement. The BSR members took one step further by creating a separate fund and offering one US dollar for each convert to Buddhism.⁷⁷ Thus, the organization has promoted and supported inter-faith conversion in India. Moreover, staff members and sponsors have occasionally made personal visits and inspected the progress of social work at designated sites. This wave of positive change is gaining popularity among South Korean intellectuals, especially among members of BSR. When the author conducted a study of developments in these areas in 2009 and 2013, he found several constructive works and great appreciation for the initiatives of BSR. Its ties with Neo-Buddhists in India have inspired them in many ways, and now, many people in India are willing to donate land for community development. Besides that, the BSR is also providing funding for South and Southeast Asian countries, thereby enhancing people-to-people contact.

⁷⁶ An Munok, “Chagŭn chŏngsŏng ũro Sŏkkajong kot’ong pundam” [Sharing the suffering of the Buddhist family with a small investment of sincerity], *Pŏpŏo sinmun*, August 10, 2004,

⁷⁷ For details on financial support see BSR website, accessed on November 10, 2008.

CONCLUSION

The rise and continuity of lay Buddhist movements became more visible during the colonial period when the monks and Buddhist laity started to establish organized institutions. Although the early organizations were, more or less, concerned to sustain the identity of traditional Buddhism, we must view them as also socially progressive in their approach, because they focused on the revival, reformation and modernization of Korean Buddhism. My research proposes that the lay Buddhist movement moderately succeeded in its mission, as it were working under the strict surveillance of the colonial régime, and successfully established institutions and developed social networks. The movement produced significant leadership and gradually established the laity as the key stakeholders of modern Korean Buddhism. The monastic community and laity approached each other and came together on a common platform for deeper social engagement.

It appears that the reformation and modernization agenda was partially fulfilled, and it continued as a solid issue even after independence. By analyzing the lay Buddhist movements of the postcolonial period, one finds that various Buddhist groups have emerged in the last several decades. Some are working for reforming and modernizing Buddhist institutions; some are focusing on Buddhist retreats; some are focusing on charity and welfare works; some are developing community living; and some are raising social issues. Their working methodologies, orientations, target groups, and volunteer projects attest to significant transformations in the realm of social-work in general and within the monastic community in particular.

Unlike monk-led lay Buddhist organizations of contemporary Korea, the Buddhist Solidarity for Reform organization is a lay movement that members of the Buddhist laity initiated on their own, and its dedication to the promotion of monastic reform, Buddhist modernization, social solidarity, and welfare agendas in South Korea is notable. Because the organization respects traditional practices and the monastic community, they have frequently advanced calls for monastic reforms and participation of the laity. Thus, monastic reform is continuing as an important subject. The BSR is also, to a certain extent, contributing significantly to address the grievances of the common Buddhist laity by proposing several Buddhist educational programs and simplified reading materials. Thus, Buddhist education and the availability of educational materials have been a continuing priority. The gradual and constant efforts of lay Buddhists are, to some extent, influencing the Chogye Order, which have brought about various pro-laity programs and the pursuit of democratic management through reforms in the past several decades.

Although this representative lay-Buddhist organization possesses an archaic view of social engagement, it welcomes the ideas of other religious and social groups toward undertaking substantive societal spiritual upgrades. Therefore, through deeper social engagement and networking, this organization is successfully attracting the attention of the Buddhist masses and emerging as a model of lay Buddhism. During the last two decades, the leaders of this organization have sought to establish an international outlook, and therefore, they seek close proximity with other Buddhist leaders and welfare organizations. They are increasing their visible presence in South Korean society and abroad. Particularly, the welfare projects for selected downtrodden people of South Asia have a wide appeal. The strong dedication for seeking more welfare projects seems to sustain the stability and continuity of their agendas.

Submitted: September 1, 2017

Sent for revision: October 17, 2017

Accepted: December 4, 2017

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