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# Increased Temple Publication of Buddhist Texts in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Reading the Political and Cultural Significance of the Monastic Community

Son Söngpil

## Abstract

The publishing of texts is a historical phenomenon with many social, political, intellectual, and cultural implications. In contrast to previous studies, this article adopts a quantitative method of examining the number of Buddhist texts published in each century and categorizing the texts according to their characteristics. Moreover, the entire Chosön period is not characterized by anti-Buddhist state policies; rather, the shifting conditions of the temples are considered over the course of the centuries. Moreover, I consider the diverse factors that may have impacted the publication of Buddhist texts. Based on these methods, the findings contrast starkly with what has heretofore been understood about Chosön Buddhism over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Based on a social and historical perspective, this study finds that the state policy on Buddhism and the publication output of Buddhist texts were entirely unrelated. Based on an examination of temple-published texts, it is found that Chosön temples selectively adopted from previous traditions, while after the Imjin Wars Buddhist institutions and culture came to be reformulated. Lastly, it is demonstrated how the temple publication of Buddhist texts was a precursor to the later popularization of book culture, the wide dissemination of texts, and the expansion of readership.

**Keywords:** Buddhist texts, state Buddhist policy, state monastic examination, Ch'öngghö Hyujöng, monastic curriculum, Fourfold Curricular Texts, the Four Confucian Texts, vernacular translations, Sūtra on Deep Indebtedness to One's Father and Mother

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Introduction

The publishing of texts is a historical phenomenon with diverse social, political, intellectual, and cultural implications (Bonfil 2006). Throughout the temples in all regions of the Korean Peninsula in the sixteenth century there was a notable increase in the activities of planning and organizing of the monastic and societal infrastructure for printing diverse Buddhist texts (Kim 1990, 24–26). The numbers of texts printed and the rise and fall of printing can be easily verified through various sources. In fact, a unique attribute of Buddhist texts is that a colophon is appended at the very end of a text that contains precise details concerning its publication. Thus, based on this information there have been extensive compilations of data on the Buddhist texts published during the Chosŏn period. If we take this information and simplify and tabulate the results, they may be summarized as follows:

Table 1. Number of Published Buddhist Texts by Type and Century

Century		15th c.	16th c.	17th c.	18th c.	19th c.	Total
Types							
Woodblock-print 木板	State-published	34	—	—	—	—	34
	Temple-published	64	301	319	169	55	908
Manuscript 活字	State-published	27	—	—	—	—	27
	Temple-published	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total		125	301	319	169	55	969

Source: Adapted from Son (2018a, 123, 312)

The number of texts is based on the number of titles of printing boards, printed copies, or complete manuscripts under a single title. Of course the numbers recorded in Table 1 cannot be said to be the definitive total of Buddhist

texts that have been published, since many titles would either have been lost or destroyed. However, these numbers represent a relatively accurate figure, and reflect the greater societal developments in the printing of Buddhist texts of the Chosŏn period.<sup>1</sup> In the above table there are three evident trends: First, in the fifteenth century there were publications of Buddhist texts in the form of both woodblock prints and manuscripts; second, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there was a dramatic increase in the number of Buddhist texts published at temples; third, over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was a sharp decline in the publication of Buddhist texts.

Based on the generally accepted history of the Chosŏn period, such a development in the publication of Buddhist text is an aberration, which does not concur with the general historical narrative of Chosŏn. According to conventional Chosŏn history, Buddhism, under harsh suppressive state measures during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, was drastically subdued only to later revive on account of the Imjin Wars (1592–1598). Furthermore, it has been understood that Chosŏn society became increasingly Confucianized through the dissemination of Confucian practices and texts. Given the historical context, the significance of the high number of Buddhist texts that were continually published over the same timeframe have not, until recently, been evaluated and brought into the mainstream discourse—this in fact appears to have been completely ignored by historians. In fact, the drastic rise in the number of Buddhist texts published in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries contradicts mainstream thinking on the period. Thus, under these circumstances the following discussion will highlight the historical significance of the high number of published Buddhist texts from the political, social, philosophical, and cultural perspectives.

### **Changes in Buddhist Policies and the Societal Basis of Temples**

It has been widely accepted that anti-Buddhist policies were harshly applied by the Chosŏn court. This then begs the question of how it was possible for the trends in the publication of Buddhist texts (Table 1) to have occurred at all. If we examine the *Chosŏn wangjo sillok* (hereafter *Sillok*) or the enacted codes of

laws during this period, policies regarding Buddhism can be divided into three main categories: policies regarding Buddhist clerics, policies on temples, and policies on various Buddhist schools. Depending on which of these categories, the purpose and the issues were quite divergent (Son 2018b). The revisions that were carried out on these policies and laws in the early Chosŏn period were largely intended to either reduce or abolish the system of state recognition of Buddhist clerics. In a similar vein, laws that prohibited the building of new temples were intended to stop the increase in the number of temples (Son 2019b, 72–74). Moreover, laws that regulated neophytes joining monastic communities were for the purpose of reducing the number of licensed monks—who were exempted from corvée labor.<sup>2</sup> These policies that were enacted, in a pragmatic sense, were in following with the needs of the state at the time and as a result, they were naturally reformed to accord with the changing needs of the constantly shifting socio-political landscape of the Chosŏn period.

It is no exaggeration to state that in Chosŏn historiography the most misunderstood government action has been the revision of policies towards Buddhism. Among these state policies, the clearest changes during the Chosŏn period occur through two main revisions of state policies on Buddhism; one in 1406 and another in 1424. These early state revisions were brought about by the judgement that Buddhism should no longer have input in state administration. What is also apparent is that underlying these actions were other closely related ulterior aims, namely to increase state assets. Simply put, many of the lands that had previously been generously bestowed upon the temples by the state were selectively revoked and returned to state ownership and control (Son 2019c, 256–258). Together with the overall depression of the once vibrant temple economy, the effect of these policies was a great reduction of the social and political power of the Buddhist community, which ultimately led to the dissolution of the upper administrative levels of the Buddhist community.

However, as a by-product of these early state actions, new systems of governance of Buddhism were established by the state and remained firmly in place for over eighty years, up to the rule of Yŏnsan'gun (r. 1494–1506), who is known to have undertaken some of the harshest anti-Buddhist actions (Son 2019c, 271–272). However, previous to Yŏnsan'gun's time, state monastic

examinations were carried out and state Buddhist officials were appointed, and moreover, there are even records attesting that state lands were allocated to select temples. All these actions were carried out, albeit at a significantly subdued scale, through most of the fifteenth century. The situation was undoubtedly that Buddhism had not been entirely removed from the purview of state administration and was indeed within the range of state operations and control.

Nevertheless, in the closing days of Yōnsan'gun's rule the Buddhist community came to experience decline at the hands of state suppression. The fifteenth-century System of Governance of Buddhism (Sūngjōng 僧政)<sup>3</sup> was abruptly dismantled towards the end of Yōnsan'gun's rule and was not revived at the start of the reign of his successor, King Chungjong (1488–1544). The situation without the System of Governance of Buddhism continued for forty years, into in the early part of the sixteenth century during the time of King Chungjong. It was not until 1550, on the occasion of being included into the National Code (Kyōngguk taejōn 經國大典), that the System of Governance of Buddhism was reinstated as law and state policy,<sup>4</sup> and was in operation for fifteen years before being abolished once again in 1566. This state of being abolished continued through the late sixteenth century and into the reign of King Sōnjo (r. 1567–1608).

However, at the start of the Imjin Wars (1592–1598), with the state in dire need of soldiers to fend off the invading Japanese forces, King Sōnjo had little choice but to turn to the monastic community for help and as a result enacted a system of recruiting monks as soldiers and administering them, which was immediately put into place in 1592, the same year the war started. This form of governance of Buddhism continued on even after the conclusion of the Imjin Wars and although consequently different from the previous governance system, it was nonetheless a novel method of mobilizing and managing the monastics at large—mainly by way of appointing and authorizing monastic titles. It is evident that from the perspective of a larger historical framework, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were times of revoking and reinstating the systems of governance of Buddhism and in the end settling to the late-Chosōn system of governance of monk soldiers.

In light of this discussion, of the governance system of the monastics, there does not appear to be any direct relationship between the publication of

Buddhist texts during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the transitions in the system of state governance of Buddhism. If we tally the average number of publications of Buddhist texts throughout these years, we arrive at the following figures.

As can be noted in Table 2, there was a rapid increase in the number of Buddhist publications before the Imjin Wars in the sixteenth century, and particularly in the 24 years immediately preceding those wars. Between the years 1530 and 1540, the publication numbers began to increase and between 1570 and 1580 we can witness the highest number of publication, an average of 5.75 texts published per year. In the latter half of Chungjong's reign, when the System of Governance of Buddhism was revoked, the number of publications actually began to increase and in the period of Myōngjong's rule when the governance system was reinstated the publication numbers did not increase. Yet when the state governance system was again revoked during the early half of Sōnjo's rule, the number of publication increased greatly. From this we can deduce that the installation of the governance system of Buddhism did not necessarily translate into an increase in Buddhist publication numbers, and vice versa.

We can conclude also from Table 1 that there is no relationship between changes in the System of Governance of Buddhism and the publication numbers of Buddhist texts. That is because when compared to the fifteenth century when the governance system was in place, in the sixteenth century the number of publication dramatically increased when the governance system was in fact mostly in a state of being abolished. This is a phenomenon that is difficult to make sense of using the previous interpretative perspectives on Buddhist history, which closely equated the rise and fall of Buddhism to whether or not the Buddhist community was under the purview of the state, i.e., the System of Governance of Buddhism.

In other words, in past research on Chosōn Buddhism, the abolishment of the governance system was interpreted as a state policy of suppression of Buddhism. However, as discussed above, the revision of the governance system of Buddhism was basically related to the administrative processes of state institutions, in this case for Buddhism. For instance, even though there were Buddhist texts published at the temples in great numbers, there is no case of

**Table 2.** Buddhist Text Publications in the 16th and 17th Centuries (by average number of texts published per year)

Reign/ Period	Yŏnsan'gun (1495–1505) (11 yrs.)	Chung- jong (1506– 1525) (20 yrs)	Chung- jong (1526– 1545) (20 yrs)	Myŏng- jong (1546– 1567) (22 yrs)	Sŏnjo (1568– 1591) (24 yrs)	Imjin Wars (1592– 1598) (7 yrs)	Sŏnjo & Kwanghae (1599–1622) (24 yrs)	Injo (1623– 1648) (26 yrs)	Hyojong & Hyŏnjong (1649–1674) (26 yrs)	Sukjong (1675– 1700) (26 yrs)
Average number of texts published	0.91	0.75	3.50	3.32	5.75	0.29	2.63	3.77	2.88	3.23

*Source:* Son (2013, 122)



the state prohibiting such temple publications. If there were no prohibition on the production and dissemination of Buddhist texts, which indeed was the case, how could it be argued that Buddhism experienced state suppression?

From another perspective, there being no active state prohibition on the publication of Buddhist texts, then how about the state depriving resources to the temples, by either the enactment or the abolishment of the System of Governance of Buddhism? The answer seems quite clear—the increase in temple publication of Buddhist texts in the sixteenth and seventeenth century would not have been possible without a stable temple economic foundation. The publication operations undeniably needed access to a large amount of material and human resources, which regional powerful familial organizations of the scholar-officials, and even local Confucian schools, had difficulty accessing.

That this took place at temples is a reflection of the high levels of economic resources and infrastructure that the temples maintained, and the sudden increase in the publication of texts in the sixteenth century is all the more an indication of a robust economic foundation of the various publishing temples. In order to make sense of this phenomenon, we need to realize the close involvement in this process of various types of lands, large populations of monastics, and the steady support of wealthy lay sponsors.

However, to date, research on temples of this period has been severely lacking, and what is more, even the number of existing temples in period Chosŏn society is unclear. Indeed, a significant number of temples were omitted from the temple surveys recorded in the 1406 and 1424 state revisions of the System of Governance of Buddhism. Furthermore, temples that were not originally designated as temples were not included in the list of temples to which the legal revisions were applied (Son 2019b, 75–76).

In practical terms, temples were an organization that could not exist without a solid social and economic foundation, such that even daily maintenance required a significant level of material and human resources. During the Koryŏ period, there were temples that fell into ruins due to war, natural disaster, falling monastic members, and failing finances, a situation that was no different in the Chosŏn period. The number of temples that were included into the System of Governance of Buddhism in the late Koryŏ and early Chosŏn periods is roughly estimated at between 500 and 2400 temples (Son

**Table 3.** Number of Temples in the Andong, Chinju, and Sŏnsan Regions (15th–17th Centuries)

	<i>Sejong sillok chiriji</i> (1432–1454)			<i>Sinjŭng tonggung yŏji sŭngnam</i> (1481–1530)			<i>Yŏngga chi</i> 永嘉誌 (1608) <i>Chinyang chi</i> 晉陽誌 (1633) <i>Ilson chi</i> 一善誌 (1636)		
Category	Temple	Hermitage	Total	Temple	Hermitage	Total	Temple	Hermitage	Total
Andong	–	–	–	7	–	7	30	32	62
Chinju	2	–	2	17	2	19	34	63	97
Sŏnsan	1	–	1	11	4	14	21	13	34

2019c, 258–259), but the number of those designated in the 1406 and 1424 revisions was reduced to 242 and 36 temples, respectively. As noted earlier, these numbers designated simply those temples that were designated in the policy changes, and did not include other state-recognized temples or temples not recognized by the state but which were local or community temples. The actual number of temples that existed during the fifteenth century can be estimated using various historical sources, but according to the often-used source, the *Sillok*, the estimated number of temples is 9,500 and the number of monastics ranged from 105,000 to 106,000.<sup>5</sup>

Government historical sources, such as the usual government documents related to temples, can prove highly inaccurate due to the policy-driven nature of the records and the definition of what constituted a temple. One way of circumventing such state-centered records is to use private records that are driven by other aims, such as local and practical-use records like town chronicles (*ŭpchi* 邑誌). Furthermore, there are other forms of non-written records, including maps, that prove to be rich sources of information not only on officially recognized temples but even smaller local temples. Though the recorded temple information and sorting criteria in the geographical maps and town chronicles vary over time, these are nonetheless valuable sources of various information on Chosŏn period temples.<sup>6</sup> For instance, data on the number of temples was gathered from the maps *Sejong sillok chiriji* 世宗實錄地理志 (“Geography monograph” of the *Annals of King Sejong*), and the *Sinjŭng tonggung yŏji sŭngnam* 新增東國輿地勝覽 (Newly expanded geographical encyclopedia of Korea), and this

information was compared with the privately recorded town chronicles, the *Yōngga chi* 永嘉誌 (1608), *Chinyang chi* 晉陽誌 (1633), and *Ilsŏn chi* 一善誌 (1636). The information gathered was for the Andong, Chinju, and Sŏnsan regions of Kyōngsang-do province and is summarized in Table 3.<sup>7</sup>

In the above table, we can see that depending on the source, the number of temples may vary. For instance, the *Sejong sillok chiriji* map recorded the least number of temples in the three regions of Andong, Chinju, and Sŏnsan. In the second source, *Sinjūng tonggung yōji sūngnam*, there were more temples recorded compared to the *Sejong sillok chiriji*. However, in comparison to these two maps, the town chronicles had much higher recordings of temples. Based on this, we can understand that even if a temple is not recorded on Chosŏn-period maps it does not necessarily mean the temple did not exist. From this we can realize that there must have been many temples that were not recorded on the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century maps. Therefore, given that the town chronicles recorded many more temples in comparison to the maps, the actual number must have been much higher than the total number of 1,650 temples recorded on the comprehensive map of Chosŏn Korea, the *Sinjūng tonggung yōji sūngnam*. Especially given the dates of the town chronicles, which post-date the Imjin Wars when many temples are known to have been destroyed, the number of temples in the sixteenth century would have been higher than the number in the seventeenth century.<sup>8</sup> In this way, the actual total number of temples would have been in fact higher than the recorded numbers for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and given that such a high number of temples were maintained, it follows that the social and economic foundations to support these temples must have existed. Therefore, based on the increased publication of Buddhist text in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the temples must have been in a relatively comfortable position to be able to fund such a resource- and labor-intensive activity.

### **The Continuation of a Tradition and the Reorganization of the Buddhist Community**

What is the significance of the temple publication of Buddhist texts in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries in the larger discourse of the history of

the Chosŏn period? It has been the general understanding that after the founding of the Chosŏn Yi dynasty, Buddhist institutions under harsh anti-Buddhist state policies came close to complete decimation. The publication of Buddhist texts was interpreted from this perspective, a narrative of decline that has become so engrained as an interpretive framework through which the entire history of the Chosŏn period has been described.

In examining the Buddhist texts published in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we are able to decipher in detail the characteristics of the printed copies.<sup>9</sup> A noticeable character is the genealogical aspects of these copies, wherein we can decipher four basic types: 1) prints from Koryŏ print blocks that were passed down, 2) prints from Yuan China print blocks, 3) reprints of fifteenth-century state-sponsored print blocks, and 4) newly printed temple prints. There are further variations based on other noticeable characteristics, including reprints, original manuscript copies for print-block carving (*p'ansŏ* 板書), annotated copies (*kugyŏl* 口訣), and vernacular translations (*ŏnhae* 諺解).

The publication of these Buddhist texts was carried out also within a different socio-political context wherein, previous to the fifteenth century, temples on average may have published one or two titles over the entire length of their operation, but from the sixteenth century onwards, there is evidence of planning and organization that resulted in the publication of various types of Buddhist texts, a trend that continued to the eighteenth century (Kim 1990, 24–26; Son 2013, 123).

If we examine these texts, we can divide them into the following types: scriptural texts, meditational study texts, and ritual texts. These texts appear to have been used for study in lecture halls, ritual performance, and public edification (Son 2013, 140–162). These characteristics show the publication rationale to be a selective continuation of the preceding Buddhist tradition, while at the same time a creative formation of new traditions. In particular, the characteristics of publication of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century meditational study texts used in lecture halls clearly show both the enduring and changing aspects of the Buddhist tradition. The texts that represented mainstream Buddhist tradition, such as the recorded teachings of Mongsan Tōki 蒙山德異, *Expositions of Mongsan Hwasang Six Ways* (Mongsan hwasang *yukto posŏl* 蒙山和尚六道普說), and the scripture that was popularly used by

Naong Hyegŭn 懶翁惠勤 (1320–1376), *Chanzong yongjia ji* 禪宗永嘉集, were printed in large numbers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

In comparison, in the sixteenth century diverse meditational study texts were published, but in the seventeenth century the publication of the *Expositions of Mongsan Hwasang Six Ways* and the *Chanzong yongjia ji* were markedly reduced.<sup>10</sup> However, on the flipside, the publication of *Excerpts from the Dharma Collection and Special Practice Record with Personal Notes* (*Pŏpjiŭ pyŏrhaeng nok chŏryo pyŏngip sagi* 法集別行錄節要并私記) and *Preface to the Collection of Chan Sources* (*Chanyuan zhuquan ji duxu* 禪源諸詮集都序) significantly increased in number. In the aftermath of the Imjin Wars, in the first half of the seventeenth century, the monastic community was reorganized for its role in the wars, with the disciples of Ch'ŏnghŏ Hyujŏng

**Table 4.** Monastic Ranks or Title in the Kwijinsa Temple Copies of the *Commentary on the Flower Ornament Sūtra* and *Daśabhūmi-vyākhyāna*

	Monastic rank or title	Dharma name	Text
1	Head of the Sŏn School, Supreme Sŏn Master 判禪宗事 都大禪師 兼 奉恩寺 住持	Pou 普雨 (1510–1565)	<i>Commentary, Daśabhūmi</i>
2	Head of the Doctrinal School, Supreme Master 判教宗事 都大師 兼 奉先寺 住持	Ch'ŏnch'ik 天則 (d.u.)	<i>Commentary, Daśabhūmi</i>
3	Head of the Doctrinal School, Supreme Master 教宗判事 都大師 前 奉先寺 住持	Ilchu 一珠 (d.u.)	<i>Commentary</i>
4	Head of the Sŏn School, Supreme Sŏn Master 判禪宗事 都大禪師 兼 奉恩寺 住持	Ilung 一雄 (d.u.)	<i>Commentary</i>
5	Head of the Doctrinal School, Supreme Doctrinal Master 判教宗事 都大教師 奉先寺 住持	Sŏlmae 雪梅 (d.u.)	<i>Commentary</i>
6	Grand Sŏn Master 前 貝葉寺 住持 大禪師	Sŭngun 乘雲 (d.u.)	<i>Commentary</i>
7	Grand Master 正陽寺 住持 大師	Pŏpcha 法慈 (d.u.)	<i>Commentary</i>
8	Grand Doctrinal Master 華嚴宗 大教師 烟峰寺 住持	Hyŏnmin 玄敏 (d.u.)	<i>Commentary</i>
9	Grand Master 曹溪宗 大師 前 檜巖寺 住持	Ŭibyŏn 義卞 (d.u.)	<i>Commentary</i>
10	Grand Doctrinal Master 華嚴宗 大教師 前 衍慶寺 住持	Yŏngun 靈雲 (d.u.)	<i>Commentary</i>
11	Grand Doctrinal Master 華嚴宗 大教師	Kyŏngnyŏng 敬岑 (d.u.)	<i>Commentary</i>
12	Grand Master 前 神光寺 住持 大師	Kyemuk 契默 (d.u.)	<i>Daśabhūmi</i>

Source: Yi (2014, 485–488)

清虛休靜 (1520–1604) as the head figures. Based on their efforts, a systematized curricular course (*iryŏk* 履歷) came to be established (Kim 2010, 223–230) and the corresponding Fourfold Curricular Texts (*sajip* 四集) included the above mentioned published texts, which in the end became the fundamental texts of the lecture halls.<sup>11</sup>

One of the reasons Hyujŏng's disciples came to have great influence in the late Chosŏn monastic community was because during Myŏngjong's rule (r. 1545–1567), Hyujŏng held the highest monastic post as the overseer of both the meditational and doctrinal schools. Previous to Hyujŏng, the only other heads of both the meditational and doctrinal schools recorded in the *Sillok* are Pou 普雨 (1510–1565) and Sujin 守眞 (d.u.). In stark contrast to the *Sillok*, other sources published in the late Chosŏn period recorded many more masters who were appointed to this and similarly prestigious posts. For instance, in copies of the *Commentary on the Flower Ornament Sūtra* (*Dafang-guang fo huayan jing shu* 大方廣佛華嚴經疏, hereafter *Commentary*) and the *Daśabhūmi-vyākhyāna* (Ch. *Shidi lun* 十地經論, hereafter *Daśabhūmi*) that were published at Kwijinsa 歸眞寺 Temple between the years 1556 and 1565, we can witness the name of the supplicant and the names of the monastic donors and their official titles in the colophons. In many cases, monastic titles higher than Great Sŏn Master (大禪師) and Great Doctrinal Master (大教師) can be noted. Below are the names and official titles in a tabulated form.

The above table shows that during the time of Myŏngjong's rule there were others besides Hyujŏng who were conferred the high Buddhist title of head of either the meditational school or the doctrinal school or the supreme master of the schools. Pou 普雨, Ch'ŏnch'ik 天則, Ilchu 一珠, Ilung 一雄, and Sŏlmae 雪梅 were appointed the head of either the meditational or the doctrinal schools, but this is only recorded and revealed through the Buddhist texts and not Chosŏn government sources. This is an indication, based on the state endowed monastic titles, that these masters and heads of schools were recognized by the state, and an indirect indication of the recognition and status the temples of these masters must have received. The overall social and economic stability of Buddhist temples during the sixteenth century, along with the recognition they received from Chosŏn society at large, is demonstrated through their ability to publish such a high number of Buddhist texts.

Another aspect of Chosŏn Buddhism that is closely intertwined with the narrative of decline is the effect of the Imjin Wars on the Chosŏn monastic community. Previous research on Chosŏn Buddhism has argued that the monastic community experienced a revival in the seventeenth century after the wars due to the active participation and success of the campaigns of the monk-soldier in defence of the Chosŏn state. This claim is based on the idea that through the participation of the monk-soldiers in the wars the monastic community was able to regain extent a degree of social and state recognition, and in so doing become revitalized. However such claims are the result of an over-estimation of the effect of the System of Governance of Buddhism over the monastic community and also the continuation of a thinking that under-estimates the level of social and economic foundation the sixteenth-century monastic communities possessed.

In reality, the effects of the abolition of the System of Governance of Buddhism was largely limited and did not have a noticeable impact on the actual activities and affairs of the temples, and despite its abolition many temples were in full operation without any significant impact on the volume of Buddhist texts being published. If we consider the Imjin Wars, the output of published Buddhist texts in the sixteenth century before the wars was greater than the seventeenth century, and the variety of Buddhist texts published was also more diverse. Given this occurrence, one would have to assume that the Imjin Wars must have had the opposite effect on the monastic community than previously accepted, and must have dealt a harsh blow to the large-scale, active, and diverse activities of the sixteenth century. Given the revelations of the overall damage the Imjin Wars inflicted on Chosŏn society, the later interpretation would only seem common sense. Yet, despite the Confucian transformation of Chosŏn society and its socio-political domination by scholar-officials, the monastic community was able to be led by Hyujŏng's disciples, and reformulate itself as a new form of Buddhism based on genealogical claims of the Linji dharma lineage and creative doctrinal and practice methods, such as the "three gates of practice and study" (*sammun suhak* 三門修學), were developed and put into practice (Kim 2010).<sup>12</sup>

### Increased Dissemination of Texts and Expanding Readership

Now, I turn to the question of the significance the temple publication of Buddhist texts over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for the history of Korean publishing. The rapid increase in temple publications over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries can be seen as a continuation of the highly advanced printing culture and technology dating from the Koryŏ period (Son 2018a, 312–314). However, we need to bring to light some changes, in that up to the fifteenth century printing was done primarily by the state and was a cultural domain of the higher social class and an important aspect of their high culture. Then, in the sixteenth century, the printing of Buddhist texts completely shifts to the temples located throughout the peninsula, and printing of Buddhist texts by the state completely ceases. This shift was also an indication of the temples being the principle printers of Buddhist texts geared largely towards the masses, which was part of the increased dissemination of such texts to the greater population.

It is understood that, in general, in the Chosŏn period the publication of texts and their distribution was principally done by the state and commercial printing was not established until the eighteenth century, when texts for sale or loan began to appear. Texts on practical knowledge, such as medical information or farming, and popular vernacular novels appeared in the eighteenth century, which added significantly to the expansion of text distribution.<sup>13</sup> Related to this was the development of the infrastructure for publishing and dissemination of texts, which greatly aided the spread of Confucian thought and texts of practical knowledge.<sup>14</sup> However, on the other hand, given that these texts were published and distributed mostly by the state and other methods monopolized by scholar-officialdom, the creation and spread of diverse forms of knowledge was heavily regulated and curtailed (Kang 2014). Although the publication and dissemination of texts is an important part of Chosŏn cultural history, the publication of Buddhist texts is rarely discussed as a part or even a contributing element to such historical transformations.

The disinterest in and lack of discussion of these matters appear to be based on nothing other than a deeply ingrained image of Buddhism as having been subjected to severe suppressive state measures. The framework of discourse of



Buddhism as the object of suppression and the image of temples as isolated in the mountains has added to the underestimation and devaluation of the role and function of temples in the development of the larger publishing technology and culture. Nonetheless, the temples were maintained and functioned within the regular economic system of Chosŏn society and in this manner it is difficult to imagine that the temple publication of Buddhist texts was isolated from the wider Chosŏn social milieu and was only related to the development of the monastic curricular system. The technology, financial backing, and consumption that were closely related to the publication of Buddhist texts were all inextricably linked to larger society. For example, the printing material had to be obtained from outside the temples and the financial support in many cases came from lay sponsors, and finally, the texts were often published for the edification of the masses, or in the case of ritual manuals, printed for use in the performance of rituals of which the consumers were the patrons.

From this underlying framework, the high volume of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century temple publications was a response to the needs that arose in the operation of the temples. It goes without saying that these texts were published as needed with no indication of active state efforts to stop or prevent these temple printing activities. This does not fit the idea that temples were targets of active state suppression.

Indeed, the number of published texts is an important indicator of the dissemination of the texts being published. To evaluate and to provide a clearer focus on the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century publication of texts by temples we can compare the publication of Buddhist texts with the publication of Confucian texts. For example, taking the publication of the Fourfold Curricular Texts (*sajip* 四集) that are the basic study texts of the lecture halls of the late Chosŏn period and comparing that with representative texts of the Confucian local schools, the Four Confucian Texts (*sasŏ* 四書), we can note an interesting pattern, as depicted in the following Tables 5 and 6. Table 5 denotes the publication numbers over the Chosŏn period of Buddhism's Fourfold Curricular Texts, which consist of the following: *Preface to the Collection of Chan Sources* (*Chanyuan zhuquan ji duxu* 禪源諸詮集都序), *Excerpts from the Dharma Collection and Special Practice Record with Personal Notes* (*Pŏpchip pyŏrhaeng nok chŏryo pyŏngip sagi* 法集別行錄節要并入私記), *Collection of Chan Master Dahui*

**Table 5.** Number of Publications of the Fourfold Curricular Texts (*sajip*)

Century	15th c.	16th c.	17th c.	18th c.	19th c.	Total
<b>Buddhist text</b>						
<i>Chanyuan zhuquan ji duxu</i>	1	10	16	1	–	<b>28</b>
<i>Pöpchip pyörhaeng nok. . .</i>	1	11	14	1	–	<b>27</b>
<i>Dahui Pujue chanshishu</i>	1	13	12	2	–	<b>28</b>
<i>Gaofeng Heshang chanyao</i>	1	13	13	2	–	<b>29</b>
Total	4	47	55	6	–	<b>112</b>

Source: Son and Chöŉn (2018, 242–244)

**Table 6.** Number of Publication of the Four Confucian Texts (*sasö*)

Century	15th c.	16th c.	17th c.	18th c.	19th c.	Total
<b>Confucian text</b>						
<i>Analects</i>	5	3	12	13	13	<b>46</b>
<i>Mencius</i>	–	3	19	14	11	<b>47</b>
<i>Great Learning</i>	1	2	14	15	13	<b>45</b>
<i>Doctrine of the Mean</i>	2	4	16	18	15	<b>55</b>
Total	8	12	61	60	52	<b>193</b>

Source: An (2007, 156–170)

*Pujue's Works* (*Dahui Pujue chanshishu* 大慧普覺禪師書), and *Gaofeng Heshang's Essentials of Chan* (*Gaofeng Heshang chanyao* 高峰和尚禪要). In comparison to this, Table 6 denotes the Four Confucian Texts (*Analects*, *Mencius*, *Great Learning*, and *Doctrine of the Mean*) over the same time period, from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries.

On examining the above tables we find the following: First, the publication of the Fourfold Curricular Texts of Buddhism increased significantly in the sixteenth century compared to the previous fifteenth century, whereas the Four Confucian Texts did not increase over the same time period. Second, the

publication of the Four Confucian Texts increased in the seventeenth century after the Imjin Wars. Third, although the publication of the Fourfold Curricular Texts of Buddhism declined noticeably in the eighteenth century and afterwards, the Four Confucian Texts maintained their publication numbers through to the nineteenth century. Another noticeable difference between the Buddhists and Confucian texts is that while the Buddhist texts were published at temples after the sixteenth century, Confucian texts were published in the provincial offices and central state institutions and then later came to be privately published for commercial aims starting from the nineteenth century.

The Fourfold Curricular Texts, on the other hand, while published in high volumes throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, became noticeably reduced in the eighteenth century and further dropped in the nineteenth century to levels similar to those of the fifteenth century. The Four Confucian Texts, in comparison, maintained their publication levels the seventeenth century to nineteenth century, even when they later came to be published by commercial publishers.

If we read into the above findings, we can deduce that Buddhist publications outside of those that were state supported mainly began appearing in the sixteenth century, but their publication levels were maintained in the seventeenth century by Buddhist temples. While temple publications dwindled somewhat in the eighteenth century, the publication of Confucian texts was maintained initially through state involvement in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and later through private commercial interests in the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup>

There is another genre in the history of pre-modern Korean publishing—vernacular translations—that provide a different perspective on the history of publishing. The publication of these translations not only contributed to the support and development of print culture but also written culture. Vernacular literature was initially used mainly for translating Buddhist sinoscript texts into more popular forms of writing and communication. When considering the texts that were translated into the vernacular script, the main purpose of such enterprises was fundamentally in order to publish texts for use in Buddhist lecture halls for the monastics (Kim 2015, 223–224). These matters are interconnected with the continuation of the System of Governance of Buddhism in

the fifteenth century and the enactment of the monastic examinations and state-licensed monks (*tosŭng* 度僧). This is because the published vernacular texts were the basis for preparations to sit for the state monastic examinations.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, not only were fifteenth-century vernacular translations of Buddhist texts published, but even texts never previously translated were newly translated and published. An examination of the publication of vernacular translations of the Buddhist texts, including newly translated texts, results in the following.

**Table 7.** Publication of Buddhist Vernacular Translations during the Chosŏn Period

Century	15th c.	16th c.	17th c.	18th c.	19th c.	Total
Published vernacular Buddhist texts	22	49	24	27	6	128

Source: Yi (2011, 33–36)

As noted in Table 7, the sixteenth century was not only the period of Chosŏn history with the greatest number of publications of Buddhist texts, it also saw the most publications of vernacular translations of Buddhist texts. Table 8 shows the many titles that were newly translated into the vernacular, which indicates that the sixteenth century was the most active time for translations. These projects were not simply new translations into the vernacular but also involved the carving of new print blocks in the vernacular script. Indeed, the enterprise required substantial resources and planning, and thus there must have been a perceived need for these publications for the temples to have gone through such trouble to produce them.

Overall, these newly translated and published texts seem similar to the published Buddhist texts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in that the new texts consisted of those that were used at the lecture halls or were related to the performances of rituals and edification of the masses. In other words, the vernacular texts were heavily used for the same purposes as the generally published texts—the systemization of the lecture hall curriculum, standardization of rituals, and the expansion of the base of people to be edified.

**Table 8.** 16th- and 17th-Century Vernacular Translations of Buddhist Texts<sup>16</sup>

	Title	Publication year	Publication place
1	<i>Excerpts from the Dharma Collection and Special Practice Record</i>	522	Misang 未詳 region
2	<i>Sūtra on Deep Indebtedness to One's Father and Mother</i>	1545	Chŏnju 全州 region
3	<i>Commentary on The Ten Profound Verses</i>	1548	Haesusa 淨水寺 Temple
4	<i>Sōnggwan chajae kusu yukcha sŏnjŏng</i>	1560	Sukch'ŏn anbuk 肅川 館北 region
5	<i>Expositions of Mongsan Hwasang Six Ways</i>	1567	Ch'wiamsa 鷲巖寺 Temple
6	<i>Mirror of the Sŏn School</i>	1569	Pohyŏnsa 普賢寺 Temple
7	<i>Personal Admonitions to Neophytes Who Have First Aroused the Mind</i>	1577	Songgwangsa 松廣寺 Temple
8	<i>Sūtra of Long Life</i>	mid-16th c.	Misang 未詳 region
9	<i>Concise Records on Guiding the Recitations</i>	1637	Hwaŏmsa 華嚴寺 Temple

Source: Kim Kijong (2019, 236)

In addition to this, Confucian study texts, medical texts, and texts on farming were translated into the vernacular in the sixteenth century, and in the latter part of the sixteenth century basic Confucian scriptures such as the *Analects* and *Mencius* were translated into the vernacular script by the state (Yi 2008). However in terms of publication and distribution, it is clear that Buddhist texts were the most translated and distributed as vernacular texts. The sixteenth century especially saw previously un-vernacularized Buddhist texts being translated. Moreover, only relatively recently has it come to be accepted that there occurred a surge in vernacular translations in the sixteenth century and that this activity was primarily carried out at temples.

Among the Buddhist texts that were translated into the vernacular, it is of particular note that the most translated and disseminated as a vernacular text

during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was the *Sūtra on Deep Indebtedness to One's Father and Mother* (Ch. *Fumuenzhong jing* 父母恩重經). This sūtra was first translated into the vernacular script in 1545, not by a monk but by a member of the gentry named O Ŭngsōng, and was published with the assistance of monks. Part of this process involved translating the original sino-graph text into the vernacular script, and on top of this, 21 illustrations were appended. After the initial translation in the sixteenth century, it was printed 11 times over the same century, 18 times in the seventeenth century, eight times in the eighteenth century, and once in the nineteenth century (Song 2001; Kim Kijong 2019, 241–242). There are several unique aspects about this scripture: it was translated by a member of the gentry, it was published with the aim of edifying the people, and since the sixteenth century, was printed at least 38 times.

Through this process we can gather that the publication of Buddhist texts not only added to the growth of the lecture halls but to the dissemination of written culture and book culture among the populace, a significant point in the cultural history of Chosōn. Such vernacular translation trends extended to Chinese novels after the eighteenth century, while at the same time Korean novels came to be written purely in the vernacular script. Adding these various factors together, this led to the increased distribution of texts together with the growth of the populace that consumed written culture and literature (Yi 2016, 121–148). However, before this occurred, we can witness the growth in publications of Buddhist texts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a phenomenon that served as a precursor to the expansion readership.

## Conclusions

The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century temple publication of Buddhist texts can hardly be viewed as related to the Chosōn state's anti-Buddhist policies towards the monastic community. Rather, such publishing was made possible through the economic foundation of the many temples that existed during that time. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were a time when the System

of Governance of Buddhism was repeatedly enacted and abolished. However, unrelated to this, there existed many temples and communities of monastics, a foundation upon which the temple publication of Buddhist texts was able to continue and flourish through the seventeenth century. From this historical fact we can understand that the temples during this time were not in a destitute state, as evidenced by the amount of resources and human labor that were required in order to publish the volumes of texts that appeared during this time.

I have also come to the conclusion, based on the Buddhist publications in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, that the Chosŏn Buddhist community selectively continued the traditions of Koryŏ Buddhism, and created new traditions from them. Furthermore, having experienced the traumatic events of the Imjin Wars, the monastic community became reorganized and new cultural practices established. The Buddhist texts published at the time took various forms, to include edited or annotated works or translations into the vernacular script. Certainly, as a result of the Imjin Wars the scale of publications diminished, their diversity decreased, and thriving cultures were dealt a painful blow. Nevertheless, under the helm of the disciples of the great Hyujong, Buddhism was reformulated.

Finally, through the various dynamic changes that took place in Chosŏn publishing culture, most notably the increase in the publication and dissemination of Buddhist texts, readership was broadened. This growth was given a particular boost by the translation of texts into the Korean vernacular, bringing a print culture that was previously enjoyed only by very select groups of elites to the majority of the population. The vernacularization of sinoscript texts and the translation of popular Chinese novels helped expand the base of readership, which added further impetus to the creation of a native literary culture that included vernacular novels. By helping to establish such a widespread written and literary culture, Buddhism's role in the creation of a foundation for publishing aimed at the populace is a historical development difficult to ignore. This is particularly true given that material research, such as on the publication of Buddhist texts, and interpretations from multiple perspectives are essential to introducing different approaches to and providing new insights into the political, social, intellectual, and cultural aspects of the Chosŏn era.

## Notes

- 1 Buddhist texts from the Chosŏn period are constantly being rediscovered. In a currently on-going study, the following figures are reported: 15th century – 125 texts, 16th century – 563 texts, 17th century – 559 texts, 18th century – 311 texts, 19th century – 109 texts, for a total of 1,667 texts (Yi Chongsu 2019).
- 2 By reducing the number of monks who were in possession of a monastic license, it reduced the number of people who were exempt from corvée labor, which would be favorable to the state who needed more labor power to carry-out large scale projects such as building roads or repairing dams. For an in-depth discussion see Yang (2017).
- 3 By a system referred to as Sŭngjŏng 僧政 the state administered Buddhist temples, to include appointing abbots and granting temple lands. This system was put in place during the Koryŏ period but was carried over to the Chosŏn period. It was also through this system that the state monastic examinations were administered, monastic ranks (僧階) determined, and monastic titles (僧職) granted. See Son (2019b, 132, 83–85; 2019c, 240–241).
- 4 CWS, *Myŏngjong sillok*, vol. 10 (5/12/15). This refers to the *Chosŏn wangjo sillok* (*kwŏn* 10, 5th year of Myŏngjong's reign, 12th lunar month, 15th day). All future citations will be rendered in this way.
- 5 CWS, *Sŏngjong sillok*, vol. 122 (11/10/26).
- 6 Son (2019c, 275–276) describes the 56 temples listed in the *Sejong sillok chiriji* that were included in the System of Governance of Buddhism. The 1,650 temples listed in the *Sinjŭng tonggung yŏji sŭngnam* were selected as those considered to be important among all the temples then existing in the country. Harmonizing the varied recording methodologies and the sorting criteria of these sources is discussed further in Son (2019c).
- 7 See Son (2019a; 2019b, 87).
- 8 Though various temples in Andong and Sangju regions were not listed in the map *Yŏji sŭngnam*, numerous temples that existed at the time can be verified in various materials. See Son (2019a, 201–203).
- 9 For a listing of the various sixteenth-century Buddhist texts published at temples, refer to Son (2013, 135–137) and for the period of the seventeenth century refer to the same document (215–217).
- 10 See Kim and Song (2019) for a description of the socio-political circumstances that contributed to the decline of the publication of meditational study texts.



- 11 In the seventeenth century, several of Hyujōng's works, such as the *Unsudān gasa* 雲水壇歌詞 and *Mirror of the Sōn House* (*Sōn'ga kwigam* 禪家龜鑑) were published in large volumes. See Son and Chōn (2018).
- 12 Yi (2010) argues the “three gates of practice and study” method to be a unique doctrine developed in the late Chosōn period.
- 13 Yi (2016) has claimed that the expanded dissemination of texts had a multi-variant effect amongst the various genres of texts and their increased popular use.
- 14 The Advanced Center for Korean Studies describes the inter-traditional influence that took place, especially in the culture of printing (*Han'guk kukhak chinhūngwōn* 2014).
- 15 Though a thorough historical analysis would be needed, it can be conjectured that the continuation of the state civil examinations would have maintained a consistent demand for the Four Confucian Texts to the end of the Chosōn period, whereas such consistent demand for the four Buddhist texts would not have existed.
- 16 These translated texts with their sinographs are:

*Excerpts from the Dharma Collection and Special Practice Record* (*Pōppjip pyōrhaeng nok chōryo* 法集別行錄節要)

*Sūtra on Deep Indebtedness to One's Father and Mother* (*Fumuenzhong jing* 父母恩重經)

*Commentary on The Ten Profound Verses* (*Sipyōndam yohae* 十玄談要解)

*Sōnggwan chajae kusu yukcha sōnjōng* 聖觀自在求修六字禪定 諺解

*Expositions of Mongsan Hwasang Six Ways* (*Mengshan heshan fawu luele* 蒙山和尚六道普說)

*Mirror of the Sōn School* (*Sōn'ga kwigam* 禪家龜鑑)

*Personal Admonitions to Neophytes Who Have First Aroused the Mind [of Enlightenment]* (*Ch'obalsim chagyōngmun* 初發心自警文)

*Sūtra of Long Life* (*Changshou jing* 長壽經)

*Concise Records on Guiding the Recitations* (*Kwōnnyōm yorok* 勸念要錄)

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