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Introduction

This study on a group of Buddhist writers active in colonial Korea (1910-1945) is part of a broader attempt to look into the complex process of interaction between religion and literature in producing history during the colonial period. When studying colonial history, it is a salient feature of the period that religion and literature took a prominent role. One may remember that the monumental March First Movement in 1919 was led mainly by *Ch'ōndogyo* (an indigenous religion), Christian and Buddhist religious leaders. Cultural nationalism in the 1920s was under the guidance of devout Protestant Christians such as Yun Ch'ihō and An Ch'angho. Authors were actively engaged in many fields as journalists, priests, schoolteachers, scholars of history or law, and leaders of nationalist and socialist movements. Religious and literary figures were influential social actors who had close contact with the public as well as the colonial authorities and were concerned with social, cultural, and political events and affairs, large or small. It is also no coincidence that many wartime collaborators at the end of the colonial period were either religious figures or literary writers.

The existing dominant scholarship particularly in Korea on the role and meaning of religion and literature for a long time has been conditioned by a nationalist historical perspective, which limits relevant research to the single theme of national resistance against the Japanese colonial power. The description of colonial period literature often begins with the major premise that it was a period of economic hardship and mental distress due to Japanese exploitation and repression. The Korean nation (*Han minjok*) fought against colonialism and demonstrated their national strength in various fields of economy, society, and culture. The motive that dominated the literary consciousness of authors in this period was nothing else but the wish to express their anger with the pen. Facing the national ordeals, writers are assumed to have shown a spirit of resistance or non-conformist attitudes, and made an effort to protect the nation and boost the national spirit of the people.¹

What tends to be emphasized in the general history of Korea concerning religion is confrontation with the Japanese government and religious service to the Korean nation (*minjok* or *kyōre*). Korean Buddhists tried to guard their tradition from the penetration of Japanese Buddhism and governmental control. Such efforts to protect religion were nothing different from the anti-Japanese movement.² Korean Christian churches brought

¹ Yi Myōngjae 李明宰, *Singminji shidae Han'guk munhak* 植民地時代の韓國文學 (Seoul: Chung'ang taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 1991); Kim Yunsik and Kim Hyōn 金윤식 김현, *Han'guk munhaksā* 한국문학사 (Seoul: Minūmsa, 1973/2000); Cho Tong'il 趙東一, *Hanguk munhak t'ongsa* 5 한국문학통사 5 (Seoul: Chisik sanōpsa, 2005).

² Kim Kyōngjip 金敬執, *Han'guk kūndae Pulgyosa* 한국근대불교사 (Seoul: Kyōngsōwōn, 1998/2000); Chōng Kwangho 鄭光浩, *Ilbon ch'imnakshigi-ūi Hanil Pulgyo kwanggyesa* 일본침략시기의 한일불교관

modernization to Korea and made a major contribution to political anti-Japanese struggles. Christians labored to save the Korean people in the midst of hardship and despair and shared joy and sorrow with them.³ New religions such as Ch'öndogyo are often regarded as the defenders of the national spirit against foreign encroachment of Japan and the West.

However, the relationship of religion, literature, and colonial history is much more diverse, complicated, and controversial than we habitually assume. The majority of (Christian/Catholic/Buddhist) believers actually conformed to the colonial rule and tried to concentrate on their religious and spiritual practice without regard to political affairs.⁴ It is problematic to consider the conflation of religion with politics and religious support to Korean nationalist movements as natural and justifiable. The assassination committed by a religious person for the sake of the nation is a question causing controversy rather than a source of pride and compliment.⁵ We need to question if it is realistic to assume that all Korean writers only thought of national independence, and clung to the single theme of resistance without consideration of their job, family, and livelihood. Or, if a literary work is poorly written, is it still a great work if it deals with the national spirit? While he blatantly acted as a pro-Japanese collaborator, Yi Kwangsu devoted himself to Buddhist exercise. Is such a man morally depraved due to his political choice? There are many other questions which do not neatly fit into the nationalist interpretation of religion and literature.

I became aware that the nationalist historical perspective is one fundamental problem that should be dealt with first. As a recent surge of scholarly works points out, this perspective is too simplistic and skewed to capture the complexity of the colonial history of Korea. It makes religion and literature completely subservient to the central concerns of the nationalistic view; in other words, it transforms them into nothing but ideological tools for national politics. It excludes the possibility that religious/literary ideals and goals can be in discord with the national aspirations and that religious and literary figures had divergent responses to colonialism and not just manifested

계사 (Seoul: Aūmdaun sesang, 2001); Kim Sunsök 김순석, *Ilcheshidae Chosöñch'öngdokpu-üi Pulgyo chöngch'aek-kwa Pulgyogyo-üi taeüng* 일제시대 조선총독부의 불교정책과 불교계의 대응 (Seoul: Kyöngin munhwasa, 2003/2004).

³ Min Kyöngbae 閔庚培, *Han'guk Kidokkyohoesa* 韓國基督教會史 (Seoul: Yöñse taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 1993/2002); Yi Manyöl 이만열, *Hanguk Kidokkyo-wa minjok üisik: Han'guk Kidokkyosa yön'gu non'go* 한국기독교와 민족의식: 한국기독교사연구논고 (Seoul: Chisik sanöpsa, 1991/2000).

⁴ Chang Kyusik 장규식, *Ilcheha Han'guk Kidokkyo minjokjuüi yön'gu* 일제하 한국 기독교 민족주의 연구 (Seoul: Hyeon, 2001), pp.74-75; Kim Kwangsik 김광식, *Künhyöndae Pulgyo-üi chae chomyöng* 근현대 불교의 재조명 (Seoul: Minjoksa, 2000), p.23; Pori Park, "Korean Buddhist Reforms and Problems in the Adoption of Modernity during the Colonial Period in *Korea Journal* (Spring 2005):87-113, pp.106-107.

⁵ In this light, we need to critically think about Yun Sönja's study on Catholicism in Korea. From the nationalist perspective, she regrets that Catholicism was passive and less contributive to national movements. Restoring An Chunggün who assassinated Korea's enemy Itō Hirobumi 伊藤博文 in 1909 as a true Catholic national fighter, she re-nationalizes Catholicism. See Yun Sönja 윤선자, *Han'guk kündeasa-wa chonggyo* 한국근대사와 종교 (Seoul: Kukhak charyowön, 2002).

a single spirit of resistance. For a more nuanced and fuller understanding of the meaning and role of religion and literature, I found it necessary to avoid the limitations of the nationalist historical perspective and to seek an alternative or different view of colonial history.

I was not alone in this endeavor. Many scholars have recently worked on challenging the nationalist master narrative and presented a more complex and diversified vision of colonial history.⁶ Historians, in particular, have critically tackled and demystified the status of the nation as a single monolithic agent of national history⁷ and explored more diverse social agents such as women, laborers, and peasants whose various experiences, needs, interests, and self-oriented activities cannot be homogenized into nationalist independence movements.⁸ They have also labored to draw a more subtle and complex landscape of colonial Korea, confronting the simplistic binary of colonial repression/exploration versus national resistance, and bringing the interplay between colonizer and colonized to light. In doing so, they have headed toward a postnationalist and postcolonial historiography on the colonial period.

Such attempts have brought a remarkable change to various fields of study previously affected by the nationalist perspective and triggered in-depth studies and analyses. But looking closely into the question of what sparked this historical reappraisal, it is surprisingly methodologies, theories, and sources of other fields of studies that have provided a new and alternative way to an understanding of colonial history. Diverging from the “classical” history which

⁶ Yonson Ahn and Koen de Ceuster succinctly summarize issues, changes and trends in recent scholarship on the history of colonial Korea. See Yonson Ahn, “Introduction: De-nationalising and Re-nationalising the Past” in *Contested Views of a Common Past: Revisions of History in Contemporary East Asia*, edited by Steffi Richter (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2008), pp.11-21; and “The Colonial Past in post-colonial South Korea: Colonialism, Modernity and Gender” in *Ibid*, pp.157-180; Koen De Ceuster, “When History Matters: Reconstructing South Korea’s National Memory in the Age of Democracy” in *Ibid*, pp.73-98.

⁷ E.g., Andre Schmid, *Korea Between Empires, 1895-1919* (Columbia University Press, 2002); Henry H. Em, “Minjok as a Modern and Democratic Construct: Sin Ch’aeho’s Historiography” in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, edited by Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp.336-361; Yun Haedong 윤해동, *Singminji-üi hoesaekchidae: Han’gug-üi kündaesöng-gwa singminjuüi pip’an* 식민지의 회색시대: 한국의 근대성과 식민주의 비판 (Seoul: Yöksa pip’yöngsa, 2003); Im Chihyön 임지현, *Minjokjuüi-nün panyökida: sinhwa-wa hömu-üi minjokjuüi tamnon-ül nömöšö* 민족주의는 반역이다: 신화와 허무의 민족주의 담론을 넘어서 (Seoul: sonamu, 1999/2008); Pak Noja and Hö Tonghyön 박노자, 허동현, *Uri yöksa ch’oe jönsön* 우리역사 최전선 (Seoul: P’urün yöksa, 2003).

⁸ Clark Sorensen, “National Identity and the Creation of the Category “Peasant” in Colonial Korea” in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, edited by Gi-Wook Shin and Michael Robinson (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp.288-310; Joong-Seop Kim, “In Search of Human Rights: The Paekchöng Movement in Colonial Korea” in *Ibid*, pp.311-335; Theodore Jun Yoo, *The Politics of Gender in Colonial Korea: Education, Labor, and Health, 1910-1945* (University of California Press, 2008); Mun Okp’yo et al, *Shin yöšöng: Han’guk-kwa Ilbon-üi kündae yöšöngsang* 신여성: 한국과 일본의 근대 여성상 (Seoul: Ch’öngnyönsa, 2003); Hyaewool Choi, “Wise Mother, Good Wife”: A Transcultural Discursive Construct in Modern Korea” in *The Journal of Korean Studies* 14.1 (Fall 2009):1-34.

usually focused on political and economic issues, recent scholarship has become aware of colonial history as a site where political studies, economics, sociology, cultural and gender studies, psychology, geography, and anthropology are intertwined. By applying sociological, cultural, and anthropological theories and methods, for instance, socio-cultural history, the history of everyday life, and oral history focusing on individuals' experiences and voices enter into a new mainstream of study on colonial Korea.⁹

Religion and literature: An interdisciplinary approach to colonial history

I argue in this study that religion and literature are key fields to illuminate the diversity and complexity of history and that they deserve to be the focus of postnationalist and postcolonial studies. Religious historians have made efforts to question the nationalist take on religion. They have noticed that the reactions of religious leaders to modern colonial society were not homogeneous at all. For example, critically reappraising the notions of "Buddhism for protecting the nation" (*hoguk Pulgyo*) and celibacy as the general characteristics of Korean Buddhism, they have come to claim that the assumption that religion should serve the nation or state or the equation of religious and political identities cannot be simply justified as morally correct and politically patriotic. Rather, it needs to be critically discussed with regard to its strong connection with similar Japanese notions and its tendency to ignore the possible diversity of interests among Korean Buddhists.¹⁰

Ken Wells's insights and arguments concerning the relation between religion and politics have been particularly important for my investigation. He points out how if one approaches religion as a crucial part of cultural history, the claims attached to the concepts of nation, state, and religion can collide with each other.. Religion and nationalism as cultural expressions bring into light tensions and conflicts as well as intimate connections between these concepts.¹¹ Yet, he admonishes researchers not to "reduce" religion to a mere constituent element of culture and argues that to believers, religion may be the most

⁹ Yonson Ahn, "The Colonial Past in post-colonial South Korea: Colonialism, Modernity and Gender" pp.170 and 176; Koen De Ceuster, "When History Matters" p.92.

¹⁰ Kim Kwangsik 김광식, *Künhyōndae Pulgyo-ŭi chae chomyōng* 근현대불교의 재조명 (Seoul: Minjoksa, 2000), p.17; Robert E. Buswell, "Imagining "Korean Buddhism" in *Nationalism and the Construction of Korean Identity* edited by. Hyun Il Pai & Timothy R. Tangherlini (University of California, 2001), pp.73-107; Gregory Evon, "Contestations over Korean Buddhist Identities: The "Introduction" to the *Kyōnghō-jip*" in *The Review of Korean Studies* 4.1, (2001):11-33, p.13; Kim Jongmyōng 김종명, *Hanguk chungse-ŭi Pulgyo ūrye: sasang-chōk paegyōng-gwa yōksa-jōk ūimi* 한국중세의 불교의례: 사상적 배경과 역사적 의미 (Seoul: Munhak-kwa chisōngsa, 2000), pp.146-150; Pankai N. Mohan, "Beyond the "Nation-protecting" Paradigm: Recent Trends in the Historical Studies of Korean Buddhism" in *The Review of Korean Studies* 9.1 (march 2006):49-68.

¹¹ Ken Wells, *New God, New Nation: Protestants and Self-Reconstruction Nationalism in Korea, 1896-1937* (Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd, 1991), transl. In Soo Kim, *Sae hananim sae minjok* 새 하나님 새 민족 (Seoul: Publishing House The Presbyterian Church of Korea, 1997), pp.13-41.

fundamental part of their lives and be central to all other activities, including those of a nationalist nature.¹² I agree with his assertion that religion “suggested ideas and directions of change to significant numbers of Koreans...inspired whole programs of social reform...and motivated national leaders and their followers to take decisive action in relation to the challenges of their times - in short, religious beliefs determined key positions historical figures held and acted upon.”¹³ Seeing religion as a motivating force of history and a source for the richness of historical experiences, he strongly suggests that we should “restore religious language and metaphors to discourse about history and society”.¹⁴

Boudewijn Walraven has pointed out that some religious narratives provide alternatives to the mainstream national history on colonial Korea. He argues that religious leaders and philosophers, novelists, poets, playwrights, politicians, journalists, and media personalities all contribute to the representation of history. According to him, “Korea offers a striking example of non-professional historiography influencing professional historians in the early part of the twentieth century, when religiously motivated historical views originating in *Taejonggyo*, the cult of Tan’gun, gained wide currency outside their original context”.¹⁵ New religions in the general history of Korea are often regarded as the defenders of the national spirit against foreign encroachment, of both Japan and the West. However, his close investigation reveals their alternative discourses of history, i.e. in one particular case, resistance against the Japanese, goes against the divine plan, colonization is the way Japan serves Korea in penance for the crimes they committed during the Imjin War, and God chose Japan as protector against the West. Thus, Walraven argues, religion provides us with a wide range of historical narratives, contested interpretations of the turbulent events of the twentieth century in the light of religious teachings and various collective representations of Korean history.

Reading colonial literature as nothing else but the creative work of an author or as a political instrument for achieving national liberation is seen as an outdated method these days. In recent years, more and more scholars take interest in literary texts as cultural products and alternative sources for socio-political history.¹⁶ Literature may bring us closer to the lived experience of people and shed light on various facets of social and cultural life as it was

¹² See particularly his article “Providence and Power: Korean Protestant Responses to Japanese Imperialism” in *Reading Asia*, edited by Frans Huesken & Dick van der Meij (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001) pp.154-172.

¹³ Ken Wells, “The Failings of Success: The problem of religious meaning in modern Korean historiography” in *Korean Histories* 1.1, 2009, p.62.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.63-64.

¹⁵ Boudewijn Walraven, “The Parliament of Histories: New Religions, Collective Historiography, and the Nation” in *Korean Studies* 25.2 (2001):157-178, p.158.

¹⁶ Korea, Sheila Miyoshi Jager, *Narratives of Nation Building in Korea: A Genealogy of Patriotisms* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2003); Kyeong-Hee Choi, “Neither Colonial nor National: The Making of the “New Woman” in Pak Wansŏ’s “mother’s Stake I” in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, pp.221-247.

shaped in colonial society, such as the realities of daily life, gender, free love, marriage, poverty, migration and the conditions of the diaspora, print capitalism, the consumption of material modernity, and urban landscapes.¹⁷ It is colonial literature, too, that opens a new way of understanding colonialism and how it was a deeply “psychological” matter. As scholars such as Ashis Nandy argue, colonialism was not only about political domination or economic gains. It was to colonize the mind, using a gendered and sexually allegorized vision of the colonial relationship. The colonized thus had to cope with a profound psychological transformation.¹⁸ Nowhere else but in the powerful language of literature are captured the feelings of loss, melancholy, a sense of the unheroic nature, desire for power, fear, and self-pity that were underlying the colonial relationship.¹⁹

As post-colonial studies articulate, “literature and literary study in the academy have been crucial sites of political and cultural struggle with the most far-reaching results for the general history and practices of colonization and decolonization”.²⁰ The definition of the term “postcolonial” may be still debatable. It may simply indicate the aftermath of colonialism and it might be confused with anti-colonial nationalism. Postcolonial studies, in the general sense, imply an acknowledgement of the interaction between colonizer and colonized both ways and between imperial culture and indigenous cultural practices. It explores diverse and complex reactions to colonialism beyond the single narrative of resistance nationalism and challenges the dichotomous opposition between colonialism and nationalism, as well as the conventional discourse of political dominance and resistance.

Post-colonial critics stress the importance of the literary texts as a site where colonizer and colonized encounter each other, the dynamics of domination and subjugation and control and subversion are shaped, and a complex and mutually interactive process of identity formation takes place.²¹

¹⁷ Kwŏn Podŭrae 권보드래, *Yŏnae-ŭi shidae: 1920-nyŏndae ch'oban-ŭi munhwa-wa yuhaeng* 연애의 시대: 1920년대 초반의 문화와 유행 (Seoul: Hyŏnsil munhwa yŏn'gu, 2003/2004); Yi Sanggyŏng 이상경, *Han'guk kŭndae yŏsŏng munhaksa ron* 한국근대여성문학사론 (Seoul: Somyŏng ch'ulp'an, 2002); Jiwon Shin, “Recasting colonial space: nationalist vision and modern fiction in 1920s Korea” in *Journal of international and area studies* 11.3 (2004):51-74; Munhak-kwa pip'yŏng yŏn'guhoe 문학과 비평 연구회, *1930-nyŏndae munhak-kwa kŭndae ch'ehŏm* 1930년대 문학과 근대체험 (Seoul: Ihoe munhwasa, 1999); Ch'ŏn Chŏnghwan 천정환, *Kŭndae-ŭi ch'aek ilkki: Tokcha-ŭi t'ansaeng-gwa Han'guk kŭndae munhak* 근대의 책 읽기: 독자의 탄생과 한국 근대문학 (Seoul: P'urŭn yŏksa, 2003).

¹⁸ Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Oxford University Press, 1983/2009); T.M. Luhrmann, *The Good Parsi: The Fate of a Colonial Elite in a Postcolonial Society* (Harvard University Press, 1996).

¹⁹ T.M. Luhrmann, *The Good Parsi*, p.6.

²⁰ “General Introduction” in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, edited by Bill Ashcroft et al (London and New York: Routledge, 2006/2008), pp.3-4.

²¹ George Lamming, “The occasion for speaking”; Abdul R. JanMohamed, “The economy of manichean allegory”; Homi K. Bhabha, “Signs take for wonders” republished in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, pp.9-43; Sascha Ebeling, “Introduction” in *Colonizing the Realm of Words: The Transformation of Tamil Literature in Nineteenth-Century South India* (Albany: SUNY, 2010), pp.1-20.

The literature of the colonizer represents imperial language and knowledge, imaginary assumptions of the superiority of the colonizers' culture and values, and strategies of discrimination and integration. The literary acts of colonized people show their attempts to cope with the imperial presence through translating, reproducing, and re-working colonial language and its strategic narratives, a process that may be described with concepts such as mimicry, mockery, hybridity, and ambivalence, through which they could subvert colonial discourses or produce counter-colonial discourses.

Pro-Japanese collaborationist literature in Korea is a good object for post-colonial readings. The relevant texts have been neglected and disparaged by nationalist scholarship for a long time. They were even excluded from Korean literature. Im Chongguk was the first scholar who saw the necessity of studying pro-Japanese literature.²² Yi Kyŏnghun followed him, conducting an extensive study on Yi Kwangsu's pro-Japanese writings.²³ However, their works were still confined within the nationalist perspective as is manifest in their goal: to convict the pro-Japanese collaborators and not to repeat the shameful history by revealing what they did. It was up to recent scholars such as Kyeong-Hee Choi and Yun Taesŏk to embark on a true re-reading and re-evaluation of wartime collaborationist literature.²⁴ They argue that wartime collaboration is not the only message we need to pick up from those literary works. Creative writers produced significant subtexts under the surface of collaboration. Their writing is situated between the extremes of collaboration and resistance. Detecting the contradictions and ambivalences of colonial power and propagating its imposing wartime rhetoric, they see, these writers attempted to subvert the colonial narratives and destabilize the original identity of colonial authority.

Buddhist writers in colonial Korea

In line with this interdisciplinary approach to colonial history, I will focus on writers with a Buddhist background and deal with their literary articulations on religious themes. My aim is a study on religion and literature during the colonial period but also, more importantly, a study of colonial history through religion and literature. Religious writers are placed in a space where religion

²² Im Chongguk 林鍾國, *Ch'inil munhak non* 親日文學論 (Seoul: Minjok munje yŏn'guso, 1966/2002).

²³ Yi Kyŏnghun, *Yi Kwangsu-ŭi ch'inil munhak yŏn'gu* 이광수의 친일문학연구 (Seoul: T'aehaksa, 1998).

²⁴ Kyeong-Hee Choi, "Another Layer of the Pro-Japanese Literature: Ch'oe Chŏnghŭi's "The Wild Chrysanthemum"" in *POETICA* 52, 1999:61-87; Kim Chaeyong et al 김재용 외, *Ch'inil munhak-ŭi naejŏk noll* 친일문학의 내적 논리 (Seoul: Yŏngnak 역락, 2003); Han Suyŏng 한수영, *Ch'inil munhak-ŭi chaeinsik: 1937-1945-nyŏngan-ŭi Han'guk sosŏl-gwa singminjuŭi* 친일문학의 재인식: 1937-1945년 간의 한국소설과 식민주의 (Seoul: Somyŏng ch'ulp'an, 2005); Yun Taesŏk 윤대석, *Singmunji kungmin munhak non* 식민지 국민문학론 (Seoul: Yŏngnak, 2006); Kim Yangsŏn 김양선, *Kŭndae munhak-ŭi t'alsingminjisŏng-gwa chendŏ chŏngch'ihak* 근대문학의 탈식민지성과 젠더정치학 (Seoul: Yŏngnak 역락, 2009).

and literature cross-fertilize each other rather than exist in separation, and therefore, show dynamic interaction in co-producing history. This area of intersection or the triangle where religion, literature, and colonial history meet has been little considered by existing scholarship,²⁵ even by most interdisciplinary approaches to colonial history, because these still seek to single out religion or literature rather than paying attention to both.

There were a considerable number of religious writers in colonial Korea. Many authors felt affinity with religion and incorporated religious views – of Christianity, Catholicism, Buddhism, or one of the New Religions – into their literature. It is almost impossible to deal with all of them and the huge body of texts they produced, the more so because this kind of study demands a close scrutiny of the literary works. Hence, I have limited my scope to Buddhism and singled out four important writers. Buddhism has been one of the most influential religions in Korean society and culture. Somehow, studies of Buddhist literature in Korea have been mostly about songs and Buddhist tales in the Silla period, about Buddhist poetry in the Koryŏ period and about novels that were generally written in vernacular Korean in the Chosŏn period. Thus, these studies concentrate on the ancient and pre-modern periods.²⁶ The modern period is almost exclusively the subject of studies of Christian literature.²⁷ There is a clear need to embark on research of modern Buddhist literature.

Another reason is that the four Buddhist writers I singled out are important historical figures, who should be reappraised from recent religious, postnationalist and postcolonial perspectives. They were socially prominent intellectuals in colonial Korea, who took leading roles in literature, religion, socio-cultural reforms, women's rights movements, nationalist movements, or collaborationist wartime mobilization campaigns. Despite their fame and social influence, the presence of their religiosity and the literary texts related to this have received little attention from scholars except in the case of one writer, Han Yongun. In discussing the various activities of these Buddhist writers, religion and religiously inspired writings so far have not been taken into consideration.

²⁵ Historians usually do not take fiction, the product of the writer's' imagination, as a historical source. Scholars in religious studies do not take a serious interest in literary works, either. Literary critics tend to view the religion of an author as a matter of personal religious belief unconnected to his or her literature and other activities.

²⁶ Examples are Hong Kisam 홍기삼, *Pulgyo munhak yŏn'gu* 불교문학연구 (Seoul: Chimmundang 집문당, 1997); In Kwŏnhwan 인권환, *Han'guk Pulgyo munhak yŏn'gu* 韓國佛教文學研究 (Seoul: Kogyŏtaehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 1999). The first attempt at a study of modern Buddhist literature came out in 2007 but it still needs to be explored and developed more. See Minjok chakka hoeŭi pip'yŏngpunkwa wiwŏnhoe 민족작가회의 비평분과위원회, *Han'guk hyŏndae chakka-wa Pulgyo* 한국현대작가와 불교 (Seoul: Yeok, 2007).

²⁷ Im Yŏngch'ŏn 임영천, *Munhak-kwa chonggyo: Kidokkyo-wa hyŏndae munhak* 문학과 종교: 기독교와 현대문학 (Kwangsŭ: Chosŏn taehakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 2000); Kwŏn Oman et al 권오만 외, *Kidokkyo-wa Han'guk munhak* 기독교와 한국문학 (Seoul: Yŏngnak 역락, 2000); Sin Ikho 신익호, *Munhak-kwa chonggyo-ŭi mannang* 문학과 종교의 만남 (Seoul: Han'guk munhwasa, 1996).

Nationalist scholarship has been biased toward religiousness, either filing it away as a personal matter irrelevant to writers' activities related to social and literary issues, or viewing it as an expression of escapism from harsh reality, in other words, a retreat from the national struggle. Alternatively, religion is regarded as a pathway to the aims of the nation. The nationalist interest in Han Yongun tends to make his Buddhism completely subservient to nationalist undertakings and even asserts that his Buddhism was a guise for nationalist movements. Whether Han is concerned or the other writers we discuss, nationalist scholarship also has focused on some very limited texts as canonical works, while the remaining large number of texts has been granted less attention or completely neglected like the pro-Japanese collaborationist literature. From the nationalist perspective, their Buddhist-inspired works are regarded as insignificant, and hence left unattended.

Of course, there have been some counter-studies, though generally conducted in a fragmented and scattered manner, that have emphasized the importance of Buddhism in the literature of the colonial period, but these dissociate religion and literature from colonial reality and have produced limited interpretations without considering their socio-historical meanings and roles in a broader historical context.²⁸ Probably as believers, the scholars mainly focus on interpretations of dogmas and teachings in literary works and do not question how writers concerned understood Buddhism on an individual basis. In some of these studies, the writers cannot be distinguished from preachers and their Buddhist writings from books of sermons, which aim to propagate Buddhism and seek converts. From such an apologetic and evangelist standpoint, Buddhist literature can only be glorified. A critical examination is impossible.

Given the fact that an evangelist approach has been a general characteristic of studies of religious literature in Korea, it seems to me necessary to discuss it with reference to my study. Many religious writers indeed had didactic intentions and wished to propagate their religion in the popular form of literature. Some of them were also priests, monks, and theologians who were bound to the doctrines, dogmas, and standpoints of one church. Nonetheless, the intention to propagate one's faith was only one aspect of the multiple and varying meanings of religiosity in colonial literature. There is a possible divergence between their didactic intentions and their actual literary expressions. The religious beliefs of the writers are not consistent or always the same, either. There are different shades of religion from writer to writer and from story to story, even within the same religion. Because religious notions mentioned in literature are usually basic concepts targeting ordinary readers

²⁸ I cannot mention all of those studies. In case of Yi Kwangsu, see Ch'oe Chōngsōk 崔正錫, "Ch'unwŏn Yi Kwangsu-ŭi taesŭng Pulgyo sasang yŏn'gu" 春園 李光洙의 大乘佛教思想 研究 (Ph.D. dissertation, Tongguk University, 1977); Tongguk taehakkyo pusŏl Han'guk munhak yŏn'guso 東國大學教附設韓國文學研究所, *Yi Kwangsu yŏn'gu: ha* 李光洙 研究 : 下 (Seoul: T'aehaksa, 1984).

and the majority of the writers were lay believers, it often makes little sense to look for profound philosophical or theological explanations or to glorify this literature as “sacred.”

What these writers were mainly concerned with was fundamental matters of the human condition, life, death, misfortune, and the tragedies of existence rather than rigid religious dogmas. As writers, they were open to other religions. In search of the significance of existence, they often had an interest in various religions and practiced them as well. Compared with religious leaders, they were relatively free to express their opinions and thoughts. This becomes particularly obvious at a time when churches and religious organizations, under the direct control of the colonial government, spoke with one voice. These individual writers let us hear more diverse voices, more profound considerations, and different reactions with regard to issues and events in colonial society. Inconsistency in their religiosity is closely related to the constantly changing historical context and their public and private reality. Hence, this feature is not a problem but rather, a useful indicator as to how keenly religious writers were aware of and reacted to the changing historical situation of early twentieth century Korea.

For the Buddhist writers, Buddhism was not reduced to a personal belief, nor were their Buddhist-inspired writings a mere tool for missionary work, or for the promotion of Korean nationalism. In line with the argument Ken Wells has advanced, one has to accept that religion held a key position in determining their life, thought, literature, as well as the direction of their social projects, producing distinctive and diverging discourses about colonial history. Therefore, without consideration of Buddhist knowledge and belief, we cannot gain a proper and full understanding of these writers’ lives, significant activities or projects in colonial Korea. At this point in time, when the large neglected body of texts is being restored and explored avoiding the excessive concentration on canonical works, Buddhist-inspired writings are among the first texts worthy of notice, for they provide us with rich resources for critical postcolonial, postnationalist and feminist discourses about colonial history.

The writers I deal with in this study represent a larger body of thinking and writing individuals in colonial Korea, while at the same time their creative writing on Buddhist themes imparts individual life stories, voices, and experiences. As scholars such as Poshek Fu claim, writers were not abstract intellectuals in isolation from the historical reality or living upon national ideology alone.²⁹ Made of “flesh and blood,” they had needs, emotions, and weaknesses and took care of food, clothes, shelter, family, children, means of subsistence, a profession, and knew love, marriage, and divorce, while living everyday life. As writers, they were capable of articulating their

²⁹ Poshek Fu, *Passivity, Resistance, and Collaboration: Intellectual Choices in Occupied Shanghai, 1937-1945* (Stanford University Press, 1993) p.xii.

autobiographical experiences, inner feelings, pains and conflicting moral and political choices in vivid images and powerful language.³⁰

Facing the negotiations of daily life and reality, a person we now call a nationalist hero turns out to have been driven by emotional tension and intellectual anxiety, rather than displaying heroic fearlessness. So-called villainous, shameless pro-Japanese collaborators were actually tortured by fear, anxiety, and pangs of conscience. Their observation of individual human lives (in particular, women's lives) discloses how Korean nationalism interfered with basic human rights and infringed on their liberties, just as colonialism did. Their stories capture the diversity, complexity, and richness of colonial life experiences which the nationalist historical perception has failed to catch.

The nationalist narrative has stressed the nationalist struggle as the most important priority for the Koreans under the colonial rule. Individual stories and experiences that emerge from the writings mentioned above show us that nationalism is one possible solution, not the perfect solution. Sometimes it brought about more problems and troubles than it settled, and there were many things it would not solve. When these writers struggled with disease, when they grieved over the loss of a child, when they were broken-hearted from love lost, when they failed in business, when they became involved in quarrels, they realized that it was neither Korean nationalism nor Japanese colonialism but religion (Buddhism) which could give them answers about what life and death are, why misfortune happened to them, and how they could cope with sadness, pain, and despair. Their writings dramatized this and provide a rich record of how Korean individuals coped with life in colonial reality, trying to make sense of their existence in various ways on the basis of their religiosity.

These writers were social actors who often spoke on behalf of their contemporaries in the same situation and their literary works in many cases became part of the robust public debate of the period. When, as Benedict Anderson has argued, the novel, the newspaper, and magazines became the major technical means for producing and disseminating the idea of national identity and nationalism,³¹ writers dominated printed media and became the prime movers in introducing, translating, (re)producing, and disseminating nationalist discourse as well as a wide range of social, cultural, and political discourses to people. Such social activities were far removed from boosting a monolithic nationalism in the form of anti-Japanese resistance through their writing, as nationalist scholarship presumes.

As Andre Schmid argues, the act of writers was not promotion of a settled form of nationalism focusing on political struggles, but a process of nation-building in that they produced divergent visions of the nation, a

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1983/2006), pp.25-36.

discourse of the nation, and nation-building strategies, deeply entwined with the international environment of that particular historical moment, when in various ways the colonizer and the colonized interacted with each other.³² The writings of Buddhist authors show us that their attempts at producing historical discourses constituted a complex process fashioned by reinventing Confucian tradition as the national ideology, advocating or condemning the cultural trend of modernity, revisiting ancient history of Korea, translating and adopting gender politics from the colonizer, and so on.

More specifically, Buddhist knowledge, metaphors, images, insights, and beliefs provided a powerful language to interpret the living history of the colonial period. Few writers undertook a direct attack on the colonial authorities and some even dissuaded people from harboring hatred or anti-Japanese sentiments. The Buddhist vision for nationalism was not focused on “resistance” but primarily on self-reflection and self-cultivation. The March First Movement, which is proudly commemorated in national history as an event where Koreans showed their collective strength, was diagnosed, for example, by writers like Hong Sayong as abortive and demonstrative of the blindness to the most fundamental truth: colonialism does not merely imply political rule or economic benefit but colonization of the mind. Buddhist-inspired interpretations and historical discourses of the colonial period present many alternatives to mainstream nation-focused history and richly nuanced responses to colonialism, defying the simplistic nationalist view of Buddhism as a defender of the national spirit.

This is not to deny that Buddhist writers were prominent producers and promoters of a set of national discourses, but their predominant role in this is only half the story, and mainly based upon their early works and activities up to and including the 1920s. Their writing in the 1930s and early ‘40s reveals the untold story that they were the very critics of Korean nationalism and in some cases, iconoclasts who pulled down the concepts and visions for nation building they had previously created. At odds with the nationalist assumption that in this dark colonial period (*amhŭkki*) Korean literature suffered a period of frustration and regression due to political repression and enhanced censorship, many writers, in particular the Buddhist writers I have chosen to study, steadily and even more vigorously continued to conduct their literary activities. Ironically it was the time when these writers were most preoccupied with Buddhism and poured out Buddhist novels, essays, and poems. These Buddhist narratives afford us a window on many intriguing and controversial discourses. A critical reflection on Korean nationalism and nationalist movements is part of this. They denounced the hypocrisy of nationalists who still practiced blatant discrimination against women and low status groups while preaching that all Koreans were equal in the sight of the nation and should pursue the spirit of brotherhood. They saw how often Korean nationalism sharply contrasted with

³² Andre Schmid, *Korea between Empires*, pp.4-9.

humanity and questioned what is morally and politically more valuable: the abstraction of the Korean nation or concrete human lives. It is particularly interesting to investigate how this matter came up in another sensitive debate, over the tacit or explicit acts of collaboration life in the turmoil of wartime seemed to require, and how Buddhism was presented as holding the key to the solution of this besetting problem.

This study is divided into four main parts, each one devoted to one of the writers I singled out: Han Yongun, Yi Kwangsu, Kim Iryŏp and Hong Sayong. Different from the other three, the monk Han Yongun (韓龍雲, 1879-1944) is widely recognized as a Buddhist writer. Given the quantity of research on him, which amounts to about seven hundred books and articles on his Buddhism, literature and nationalism, one might question if a further study is necessary.³³ Surprisingly, however, many of those studies have focused on three extremely early texts, *Chosŏn Pulgyo yusillon* 朝鮮佛教維新論 (A treatise on reformation of Korean Buddhism, 1913), “Chosŏn tongnib-ŭi sŏ” 朝鮮獨立의 書 (A letter about the independence of Korea, 1919), and *Nim-ŭi ch’immuk* 님의 沈默 (*Silence of the Beloved*, 1926) and, in line with nationalist historical perspective, drawn an image of a heroic Buddhist monk who championed Korean nationalism. Exploring many of his non-canonical, neglected, or forgotten works in the light of critical postcolonial and postnationalist readings, I will attempt to reappraise his predominant image as a national hero and the incongruous assumptions over his “Buddhist nationalism.” Instead of the politicization of his religiosity, I will present Han’s divergent views i.e., his nationalism with an emphasis on self-reflection, not on resistance, the centrality of Buddhism to human life, not national political goals, his ambiguous and controversial notions reeking of collaboration, and as yet untold stories about the moral conflicts and dilemmas he faced in wartime.

Part two deals with the most controversial writer in colonial Korea: Yi Kwangsu (李光洙, 1892-1950). As is widely known, he was a prominent writer who by 1919 assiduously cultivated modern Korean literature, and a leading cultural nationalist who worked for the Provisional Government of Korea in Shanghai, and was in charge of the nationalist organization Suyang tong’uhoe (moral cultivation society), at home. He provided one of the most controversial instances of wartime collaboration at the end of the colonial period. His insistence that I did “collaboration for the sake of the Korean nation” is still a topic of hot debate. The wide range of activities he undertook touch the central issues in colonial history, and therefore constitute an important part of the study of colonial history itself. Important is that he was a very religious person during his entire life and that his religiosity which is covered by a veil and

³³ According to Pak Ch’ŏrhŭi, the number of studies was presumed to be five hundred in 1997. In 2008, it reached seven hundred in total. See Pak Ch’ŏrhŭi 박철희, “Introduction” in *Han Yongun* 한용운 (Sŏgang University Press, 1997/2000), p.7; Kim Kwangshik 김광식, *Manhae Han Yongun p’yŏngjŏn* 만해 한용운 평전 (Seoul: Changŭng, 2008), p.4.

rarely brought to scholarly attention is crucial to an understanding of his life, literature, and sociopolitical activities. His Buddhism is particularly interesting because it was his faith during the most critical period of his life, when he was engaged in life-or-death struggles with terrible diseases and trapped in despair due to his son's death. Publicly presenting himself as pro-Japanese, he feverishly produced a vast amount of Buddhist works. Two chapters on his Buddhist novels constitute my attempt to understand this most controversial man in colonial history. This Buddhist fiction will be read as "hidden transcripts," which allegorically unfold the forbidden sociopolitical stories of wartime colonial reality he faced, as well as reveal his Buddhist belief behind his outward political choice of collaboration. From a postcolonial point of view, this fiction can be read as literature that creates layers of counter discourses while using colonial language.

In part three, I discuss Kim Iryöp (金一葉, 1896-1971) who added a rare female voice to male-dominated Buddhist literature. She was an eye-catcher in 1920s colonial society as one of the pioneering New Women (*sin yŏsŏng*). When such a woman was tonsured and entered the Buddhist sangha around 1930 to be a Buddhist nun, people saw her with a biased gaze, saying it was the inevitable fate of a New Woman. Scholars have primarily focused on her feminist activities and writings and taken for granted that, as a Buddhist nun, she left mundane colonial society and abandoned all of her literary, feminist, and social activities. The fact is, however, that she remained active, even more enthusiastic and productive, as the increased amount of her writing demonstrates. The neglected Buddhist literature of Kim Iryöp, which was silenced in masculine nationalist discourses and is still misconstrued as a lack of concern for colonial reality and national affairs, needs to be explored anew. It will provide us with the subtle yet significant voice of a Buddhist woman articulating the experiences of free love, modernity, personal suffering, social misunderstanding, conflict, and self-sacrifice, while denouncing the inhumanity and violence of Korean nationalism against women.

The final part deals with Hong Sayong (洪思容, 1900-1947). He is best known as a poet in charge of the early 1920s literary coterie magazine, *Paekcho* 白潮 and as a casual playwright for the theater group T'owŏlhoe 土月會. From a nationalist perspective, many of his poems, with themes such as dreams, women, and liquor, are labeled as "decadent" or "escapist" literature, whereas some poems in folksong-style and plays with a hint of tradition or local color are simply regarded as patriotic or nationalistic. Up to now, the fact that he took a serious interest in Buddhism and went on a pilgrimage several times, roaming temples and reading Buddhist scriptures, has been glossed over. His literary works with Buddhist inspiration, however, demonstrate that Hong was neither a simply decadent nor a simply nationalist writer, but as one of the most prominent Buddhist writers in colonial Korea exhibited counterdiscursive strategies. As one of the few writers who were able to see through the colonial subterfuge and the psychology of colonialism, he struggled to awaken the

colonized mind of the Koreans and employed mockery, parody, mimicry, and satire to threaten the dominant colonial culture. The question how Buddhist motifs, languages and insights were incorporated into his early and late writing in order to grapple with the colonial experience of the March First Movement and imperial wars will be my main concern in this part.