Chapter 5

Love, Buddhism, and nationalism: Kim Iryŏp's Buddhist stories in the age of free love

Introduction

In march 1933, *Samch'ŏlli* 三千里 magazine presented a caricature of a woman in thick-rimmed glasses, standing on a large lotus leaf, pressing her palms together. She is clothed in an unusual costume, a full robe knotted at the waist, and is adorned with armbands; she is crowned with a dragon. She looks like a goddess, a beautiful female avatar of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva. At the pond's edge, there is a man in a Western suit, necktie, and felt hat. He is holding a pen and a letter and is crying for her. The cartoon tells the story that the woman says good bye to the gentleman who is probably in love with her and leaves the secular world on a single leaf for a new Buddhist world. The woman portrayed in the caricature is Kim Iryŏp (金一葉, 1896-1971).[1]

Kim Iryŏp, whose real name is Kim Wŏnju, was one of a few audacious pioneering New Women (*sin yŏsŏng*) in early 1920s colonial Korea. Like the famous Japanese female poet Higuchi Ichiyō (通口一葉, 1872-1896) from whom Yi Kwangsu took her pen name Iryŏp ("single leaf"), she was a promising female poet active in a male-dominated literary circle. As an early advocate of the women's rights movement, she strove for women's liberation, education, and gender equality. Kim was arguably one of the most radical New Women in Korean history; she openly promoted free love and women's sexual freedom, engaging in fierce confrontations with the existing patriarchal society. These efforts brought her enormous unwanted attention and prompted gossip and scandals about her love life.

However, there is another side to Kim Iryŏp. As the caricature above indicates, Kim Iryŏp renounced her role as a New Woman and became a Buddhist nun in 1933. The eye-catching New Woman's entering the Buddhist sangha stirred up public interest and prompted her to clarify her religious aspirations: she was content with her current married life but needed a life of religious dedication to fully inquire into the depth of life and her true being.[2] Her aspirations were not really different from those associated with Buddhist renunciation in general. Nonetheless, as a Buddhist woman she was subjected to social prejudice almost throughout her life. Her contemporaries misjudged

[1] Her real name is Wŏnju. Her Buddhist name is Hayŏp 荷葉. Iryŏp is her pen name. She is better-known by her pen name Iryŏp. Thus, I will use her pen name rather than her real and Buddhist names.

[2] "Ilch'e-ŭi seyŏg-ŭl tanhago" 一切의 世慾을 斷하고 in *Samch'ŏlli* (November 1934); "Kain tokssuk kongbanggi" 佳人獨宿空房記 in *Samch'ŏlli* (August 1935), p.90.

her religious volition, lamenting how repeated failures in love, heartbreak, and an unhappy marriage had finally forced her to leave reality and escape to the remote mountains.[3] Many of today's scholars, too, write off her transition to Buddhism as the doomed end of a premature New Woman, just as her peers did at the time.

Recently, however, there has been a growing recognition of the need to rethink Kim Iryŏp's involvement in Buddhism. Recent scholarship points out her monastic life was not a failure or the end of her career, having been overshadowed by the scholarly focus on her feminist activity as a New Woman.[4] Buddhism turns out to have occupied a prominent place in her life, thought and literature. Jin Y. Park, for example, argued that Buddhist philosophy provided Kim with a way to overcome the limitations of modernity and feminism and to find answers to her lifelong search for self and freedom. Park especially looked the importance of Kim's Buddhism in a broad context in which Korean Buddhism encountered modernity, showing how Buddhist women had different views and experiences of modernity.[5] The general tendency that the activities of women have been neglected and left out in male-dominant Korean Buddhist history also makes Kim's religious life worth examining.[6]

Kim Iryŏp's role as a female Buddhist writer puts her in a unique position, too. Buddhism provided a new orientation and inspiration for her writing. It is wrong to assume that she abandoned her literary and social activities due to Buddhism. Since her first encounter with Buddhism in 1928 until 1940, she produced a great output of literature, as the increased number of her publications proves.[7] Many Buddhist-inspired works written during this period are not quite up to par from a religious and literary perspective. Nonetheless, they furnish rich and significant source materials we need to explore more nuanced and complicated experiences of Kim Iryŏp in her relationship with Buddhism and nationalism than is assumed.

The short stories by Kim Iryŏp that I will analyze in this chapter vividly portray the process of her struggle with life in colonial times with help of her Buddhist beliefs. However, she did not just accept Buddhist views as

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[3] "Kain toksuk kongbanggi" 佳人獨宿空房記, pp.89 and 91; "Sakppalhago changsamibŭn Kim Iryŏp yŏsa-ŭi hoegŏngi" 削髮하고 長衫입은 金一葉女史의 會見記 " in *Kaebyŏk* (Jan. 1935), pp.14-15.

[4] Kyŏng'wan 경완, "Iryŏp sonsa-wa sŏn," 一葉禪師와 禪 in *Han'guk hyŏndae chakka-wa Pulgyo* 한국현대작가와 불교 (Seoul: Yeok, 2007), p.52; Pang Minho 방민호, "Kim Iryŏp munhag-ŭi sasang-jŏk pyŏnmo kwajŏng-gwa Pulgyo sŏnt'aeg-ŭi ŭimi" 김일엽문학의 사상적 변모 과정과 불교 선택의 의미 in Ibid, pp.83-84 and 130.

[5] Jin Y. Park, "Gendered Response to Modernity: Kim Ir-yŏp and Buddhism," *Korea Journal* 45.1 (Spring 2005):114-141.

[6] Cho, Eun-su, "Introduction" in *Korean Buddhist nuns and laywomen: hidden histories, enduring vitality* (Albany: SUNY, 2011), pp.1-14.

[7] According to Bonnie B.C. Oh, 1932 was the most productive year of her poetry composing. See Bonnie B.C. Oh, "Kim Iryŏp: Pioneer Writer/Reformer in Colonial Korea" in *Transactions* 71 (1996): 9-30, p.24.

readymade answers for her problems. As will be discussed, she as a Buddhist woman, having a keen awareness of gender equality problems, noticed the male-dominated nature of Korean Buddhism and tried to amend or criticize it from a woman's point of view. Her short stories will further show that she did not simply give up her early ideas of modernity (epitomized by free love) and feminism under the influence of Buddhism. This is why I will examine her Buddhism as an extension and revision of her early activity.

The age of *yŏnae*: From a New Woman to a Buddhist nun

Kim's involvement in Buddhism did not clearly distance her from her previous activities as a New Woman. It did not simply oppose or condemn her feminist ideas and goals, by adopting Buddhist principles. Kim's concern with love (*sarang*) continued in her Buddhist writings; it even was the main concern in many of her postcolonial texts from the 1960s. One might think this was because of her lingering attachment to that particular secular affair, but Kim herself disputed this, insisting that she consciously became a Buddhist nun to be able to love in a true sense, to be the master of love, not the slave, and to solve love's problems by learning the essence of love.[8] This remarkable marriage of love and Buddhism, as far as Kim's colonial-period texts are concerned, needs to be discussed within the broad historical context in which love (*yŏnae* or *chayu yŏnae*, 戀愛) pervaded the air as socio-cultural ideology and practice. Therefore, a sketch of the climate of 1920s and 1930s Korea, her role as a revolutionary New Woman at the time, and her transition from a women's leader to a Buddhist woman is necessary and it also will be useful for other chapters in this dissertation.

In Kwŏn Podŭrae's phrase, the 1920s in colonial Korea was the age of free love (*yŏnae-ŭi sidae*).[9] Colonial society after the March First Movement (1919) was infatuated with the new cultural trend of *yŏnae*. This term may now belong to everyday language but historically seen, it was a Western import that reached colonial Korea through China or Japan, a modern construct that did not exist before. From the outset, the term *yŏnae* was devised to translate Western term "lŏbŭ" (love) and its exotic mood and came to connote romantic feelings between man and woman only.[10]

Soon a new group of women, tellingly influenced by Western liberalism and the trans-cultural feminist trend of New Women movements, appeared in

[8] In "Mu-rŭl anŭn munhwain: hŭllŏgan yŏinsang-ŭl ilkko" 無를 아는 文化人: "흘러간 女人像"을 읽고in Kim Iryŏp, *Miraesega tahago namtorok: sang* 未來世가 다하고 남도록 上 (Seoul: Inmul yŏn'guso, 1974), pp.284-294. (Further abbreviated as *Miraese*)

[9] Kwŏn Podŭrae 권보드래, *Yŏnae-ŭi sidae: 1920-nyŏndae ch'oban-ŭi munhwa-wa yuhaeng* 연애의 시대: 1920년대초반의 문화와 유행 (Seoul: Hyŏnsil munhwa yŏn' gu, 2003).

[10] Kim Kyŏng'il 김경일, *Yŏsŏng-ŭi kŭndae, kŭndae-ŭi yŏsŏng: 20-segi chŏnbangi sin yŏsŏng-gwa kŭndaesŏng* 여성의 근대, 근대의 여성: 20세기전반기 신여성과 근대성 (Seoul: P'urŭn yŏksa, 2004), pp.121-124; Kwŏn Podŭrae, *Yŏnae-ŭi sidae*, pp.12-18.

Korea as a cultural symbol and preached and practiced the gospel of free love (*chayu yŏnae*) and love-based marriage (*chayu kyŏrhon*). Kim Iryŏp was one of those pioneering New Women in the early 1920s who played a pivotal role in the process that turned the term *yŏnae* into the hallmark of 1920s Korean culture. She edited a woman's magazine, *Sinyŏja* 新女子, which was short-lived but the "first journal published and run by Korean women in Korea with a distinctive feminist orientation,"[11] and advocated the most liberal revolutionary feminist ideas, with special emphasis of freedom of love and sexuality, in confrontation with the traditional virtues and customs imposed on women.

As Jiweon Shin remarks, Confucian ideology stresses the inferior position of women to men. "Obedience, subjugation, chastity and endurance were considered the highest virtues that they could attain."[12] The role of women was primarily to produce sons and offer cheap labor. In the traditional patriarchal system of early arranged marriages, the most important duty of women was to serve their parents-in-law, their husbands and children. During the enlightenment period when Confucianism as a state ideology was denounced for hindering modernization and causing the downfall of the country, the traditional restrictions on women, such as early and arranged marriage, concubinage, and no school-education and the ban of re-marriage were placed under heavy and concentrated attack. Korean intellectuals (mostly males) began to realize the importance of women's education, in particular of its role in national politics.

Kim Iryŏp and her peers[13] in the early 1920s had the benefit of a female education at modern (in particular, Christian mission) schools and colleges and came to be the first generation of women in colonial Korea who advocated self-awakening for women and emancipation for their own sake. They claimed that women should free themselves from the traditional gender-discriminative and patriarchal family system and be reborn as "new women." They discarded the traditional clothes and long hairstyle and wore short skirts and bobbed hair and argued women's right to education as the way to discover individuality and personal happiness, not for the benefit of home education for children. Instead of women's submission to men and responsibility for caring parents-in-law and children, they suggested that Korean women should pursue absolute sexual equality, basic human dignity, spiritual and economic independence, and a profession.[14]

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[11] Kim Yung-Hee, "A Critique on Traditional Korean Family Institutions: Kim Wŏnju's Death of a Girl" in *Korean Studies* 23 (1999):24-42, p.6.

[12] Jiweon Shin, "Social construction of idealized images of women in colonial Korea: the 'new woman' versus 'motherhood'" in *Decolonization: Perspectives from Now and Then*, edited by Prasenjit Duara (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p.240.

[13] Na Hyesŏk, Kim Hallan, Hŏ Yŏngsuk, Chŏng Chongmyŏng, etc.

[14] There are a surge of studies on New Women in the early 1920s. Among them, see Theodore Jun Yoo, *The politics of gender in colonial Korea: Education, Labor, and Health, 1910-1945* (University of California Press, 2008), pp.58-94; Mun Okp'yo et al 문옥표 외, *Sin yŏsŏng: Han'guk-kwa Ilbon-ŭi kŭndae yŏsŏngsang* 신여성: 한국과 일본의 근대여성상 (Seoul: Ch'ŏngnyŏnsa, 2003); Yi Sanggyŏng 이

Yet, Kim's most iconoclastic ideas of new womanhood are evident in her claims on freedom in love, marriage, divorce, and family matters.[15] She regarded love (*yŏnae*) as the fountain of energy of human beings. Adopting Hendrik Ibsen's and Ellen Key's view of love and marriage, she believed that *yŏnae* is beautiful and sacred because it unites the human body and mind and that love-based marriage is moral regardless of legal process, whereas marriage without love is immoral and sinful. She encouraged women to free themselves from unhappy marriages. Divorce was suggested by this free love advocate as a better and honest choice than the continuation of a loveless, hypocritical, and unfaithful marriage. The traditional custom of early and arranged marriage was anathema to Kim. Most of all, she flatly challenged the traditional view of female chastity.

> *According to old customs, chastity is a material thing… If a woman has a sexual relationship with a man, her chastity is assumed to be contaminated and ruined… but chastity is in no way such a solid body. There is love and there is chastity. If love disappears, the obligation of fidelity disappears, too*.[16]

From the outset of her feminist activity and even after she converted to Buddhism, Kim was critical about the fact that chastity was imposed on women only in traditional society. She did not demand chastity from both woman and man. Rather, she re-defined the concept of chastity from something physical to a spiritual matter. In her view, it was neither a material things having a form or shape nor a moral imperative. It was the passion itself between the two lovers and the emotional devotion to the partner. Therefore, if the feeling of love is gone, there is no obligation of chastity. In the same way, if new love comes, then the emotional form of chastity should be activated. Her insistence on freedom in love and sex was very radical and revolutionary even for today and stirred up a great deal of public debate and controversy.

Free love became popular among young people, and was put into practice as the hottest cultural trend. Stories of free love and marriage, love affairs, the abandoning of female chastity, the failure of love, divorce, re-marriage, the degradation of female students into second wives (modern concubines) and love-induced insanity and suicide filled newspapers, magazines and literary works of the 1920s. These were no more the New

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상경, *Han'guk kŭndae yŏsŏng munhaksaron* 한국근대여성문학사론 (Seoul: Somyŏng, 2002).

[15] As studies on Kim's feminist-oriented works and activities, see Bonnie B.C. Oh, "Kim Iryŏp: Pioneer Writer/Reformer in Colonial Korea"; Kim Yung-Hee, "A Critique on Traditional Korean Family Institutions"; ------, "From Subservience to Autonomy: Kim Wŏn-ju's 'Awakening'" in Korean Studies 21 (1997): 1-21; Pak Yongok 박용옥, "1920-nyŏndae sin yŏsŏng yŏn'gu: *Sin yŏja*-wa *Sin yŏsŏng*-ŭl chungsim-ŭro" 1920년대 新女性 硏究: *新女子*와 *新女性*을 중심으로 in *Yŏsŏng yŏn'gu nonch'ong* 2 여성연구논총 2 (2001):1-31.

[16] Kim Iryŏp, "Na-ŭi chŏngjogwan" 나의 貞操觀 in *Chosŏn ilbo* (8 Jan. 1927). Republished in *Miraese: ha*, p.156.

Women's personal matters. Many people rallied to support, oppose, or discuss those issues. *Yŏnae* was consumed by new social players called 'modern girls' (*modŏn gŏl*) and 'modern boys' (*modŏn poi*) as representative of modernity or Western culture.

The chief consumers of free love dated in newly created spaces such as cafés, bars, dance halls, theaters, and restaurants in the Namch'on district of Seoul, an area in which Japanese settlers resided. They drank "Western" liquor and beverages while listening to jazz music.[17] Ch'anggyŏngwŏn and Namsan Parks were the preeminent dating locations. These parks were a product of colonial modernity. In 1907, the Korean King, Kojong 高宗, had been dethroned by the Japanese authorities. His Ch'anggyŏng Palace 昌慶宮 had been transformed into a public zoo, where Japan's unofficial but symbolic flower, the sakura (cherry blossom) was planted and in full bloom in the spring. Namsan Park, built in 1910, harbored the Chosēn jingu shrine 朝鮮神宮, a Japanese Shinto shrine which was a symbol of political and religious patriotism.[18] *Yŏnae*, likewise, runs parallel with the history of colonial modernity.

Modern literature became a touchstone of the enthusiasm for *yŏnae* and the impetus for spreading the idea of free love and marriage.[19] The romances of the Japanese writer Kikuchi Kan 菊池寬 were widely read by Korean students. No Chayŏng's *Sarang-ŭi pulkkot* 사랑의 불꽃 (*A flame of love*, 1923) - a collection of love letters - was the top selling book throughout the 1920s. Many writers preached their versions of free love; No more arranged and early marriages, a man's proposal of marriage and a woman's acceptance of it in a Western way, a waiting period until their love is firmly settled, pure platonic love without interference of money, distinction between pure love and lust, marriage recognized by authorities such as the church, the principle of monogamy, et cetera. Interestingly, the classic *Ch'unhyangjŏn*, the love story of a daughter of a *kisaeng* and a son of *yangban*, was also popularly read and sold in the marketplace.

As a recent surge of studies describe, New Women and their embodiment of free love became the central theme in social, cultural, moral, religious, and political (colonial, nationalist and socialist) discourses. Various groups from New Women to conservatives, nationalists, socialists, missionaries and the colonial authorities were fiercely engaged in a discussion over the issue of

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[17] Yoo Sunyoung, "Embodiment of American modernity in colonial Korea" in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 2.3 (2001):423-441.

[18] Sin Myŏngjik 신명직, *Modŏn ppoi, Kyŏngsŏng-ŭl kŏnilda* 모던보이 京城을 거닐다 (Seoul: Hyŏnsil munhwa yŏn'gu, 2003), pp.41-49.

[19] Ch'ŏn Chŏnghwan 천정환, *Kŭndae-ŭi ch'aek ilkki: Tokcha-ŭi t'ansaeng-gwa Han'guk kŭndae munhak* 근대의 책 읽기: 독자의 탄생과 한국근대문학 (Seoul: P'urŭn yŏksa, 2003), pp.64-76, 157-167 and 348-349; Ko Misuk 고미숙, *Nabi-wa chŏnsa: Kŭndae! 18-segi-wa t'alkŭndae-rŭl mannada* 나비와 전사: 근대! 18세기와 탈근대를 만나다 (Seoul: Hyumŏnist'ŭ, 2006/2008), pp.167-233; Kim Chiyŏng 김지영, "Kŭndae munhak hyŏngsŏnggi 'yŏnae' p'yosang yŏn'gu" 근대문학 형성기 '연애' 표상 연구 (PhD dissertation, Koryŏ tahakkyo, 2004); Kwŏn Podŭrae, *Yŏnae-ŭi sidae*, pp.92-145.

"women." Despite their different intentions, the most influential and dominant ideology of gender politics throughout the whole colonial period was *hyŏnmo yangch'ŏ* 賢母良妻 (wise mother and good wife). As scholars such as Hyaeweol Choi observe, this was also a modern construct under the influence of Korea's Confucian notion of *pudŏk* (womanly virtue), Japan's Meiji gender ideology of *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife and wise mother), and American Protestant missionary women's ideology of domesticity in mission schools.[20]

The promoters of this ideology condemned *yŏnae* (free love) as nothing more than lust and irresponsible behavior. Nationalists and socialists once supported the idea of free love but largely and in particular from the late 1920s, experienced severe criticism against New Women's free love ideology as sexually indulgent, morally decadent, bourgeois taste, an imitation of Western sentiments, vain and selfish, and especially indifferent to national, colonial, and class-related matters. Through female school education, a supportive, home-keeping and self-sacrificing image of women was taught. The primary role of educated women was to create a sweet home, to support their husbands, to raise their children healthily and to manage home economy efficiently.

From the 1930s, sacred motherhood was justified and supported by the colonial authorities, the Korean nationalists and a new generation of New Women. They all emphasized that the fate of the empire and the Korean nation was on the shoulder of women. Concurrent with war preparations, imperial mothers were encouraged to contribute to demographic increases, to raise proper imperial citizens, and to conserve basic necessities and electricity, and donate war supplies to the empire. The nationalists shared their view of womanhood with the colonial authorities, but for a different purpose. Korean women were not excluded from national struggles, but conformed to the nationalist agenda as a symbolic body of the Korean nation and as supporters of male nationalists. The pursuit of their souls and bodies had to be protected for the sake of nation.[21]

New Women who made iconoclastic attacks on female chastity and the myth of motherhood were subjected to enormous pressure in colonial society. This was especially true in the changing climate of the 1930s. In the confrontation with the Western powers, Western culture and modernity were re-defined as evil. Free love, once celebrated as the sign of modernity, was accordingly stigmatized as a symbol of degeneration, egocentrism, and self-indulgence under the evil influence of Western culture. As a consequence, many pioneering New Women were driven to insanity and suicide. Kim Iryŏp

[20] Hyaeweol Choi, ""Wise Mother, Good Wife": A Transcultural Discursive Construct in Modern Korea" in *Journal of Korean Studies* 14:1 (Fall 2009):1-34.
[21] Sheila Miyoshi Jager, *Narratives of Nation Building in Korea: A Genealogy of Patriotism* (Armonk: M.E.Sharpe, 2003); Suh Ji-young, "Collision of Modern Desires: Nationalism and Female Sexuality in Colonial Korea" in *Review of Korean Studies* 5.2: 111-132; Insook Kwŏn, "'The New Women's Movement' in 1920s Korea: Rethinking the Relationship between Imperialism and Women" in *Gender & History* 10.3 (Nov. 1998):381-405.

found a way out in the form of Buddhism. Her conversion to Buddhism (1928) in no way equals a tragic ending.

Kim's personal experiences inform us that her concern with love did not end when she converted to Buddhism. In fact, she converted to Buddhism after falling in love with a Buddhist man and later married a secularized Buddhist monk (*chaegasŭng*, 在家僧). Contrary to the stereotypical prejudice, she did not retreat from her feminist and literary activities due to Buddhism. She made most controversial statements refuting the dominant ideology of wise mother and prudent wife during this period.

> *It is unreasonable that we should stay at home because we are women. It is unavoidable that women give birth to children. But we can leave our children to professionals. Women need social activities. Our home is too small and limited. The position of women will never be better if we waste our time with domestic labor.*[22]

In a discussion meeting organized by *Sin Tong-A* 新東亞 journal in May 1932, she complained about a woman's duties related to housekeeping and childrearing. As seen in the quotation, she cried out for an alternative model. She argued that women should get out of the home and not confine their activities to housekeeping. Moreover, the ideal of sacred motherhood was rejected by her. She did not oppose women's role in the reproduction of offspring, but as long as childrearing was concerned she thought that women do not have to raise their children by their own hands and can rely on other persons such as kindergarden teachers. Although she accepted Buddhism as her religion, she still stuck to her feminist arguments. As many studies point out as her shortcoming, she was preoccupied with women's love and sexuality and may have shown little attention to other sociopolitical issues such as class, national movements, and colonialism. Yet, her views were not entirely irrelevant to politics. Since women's issues were central to colonial and nationalist politics, she was one of a few thinkers fighting against the patriarchy that colonialism and Korean nationalism shared.

Revisiting Buddhist tales and legends

After her conversion, Kim Iryŏp eagerly participated in Buddhist activities such as publishing modern Buddhist magazines such as *Pulgyo* 佛教 and strove to propagate Buddhism through her literary works. In doing so, she socialized with well-known progressive Buddhists like Kwŏn Sangno 權相老 and Paek Sŏnguk. In 1931, she was appointed the commissioner of education (*mungyo pujang*) in the (Korean) Buddhist youth and women's association (Pulgyo yŏja

[22] "Yŏgija chwadamhoe" 女記者 座談會 in *Sin Tonga* 新東亞 (May 1932). Republished in *Miraese: ha*, p.215.

ch'ŏngnyŏnhoe, 佛教女子青年會).[23] So, she was not a failure who turned her back on a colonial society that was hostile to her and hid herself in Buddhism. Rather, she started a new life as a successful leader of Buddhist women.

Buddhism was in no way a single and readymade answer for Kim, as some Buddhist-oriented studies conclude, in "overcoming" the limitations of modernity and feminism. In my thinking, Buddhism was a lifelong question that Kim had to ponder. It was another question for her to figure out what in Buddhism was useful for solving love problems. Even if one acknowledges that Buddhism is a timeless and universal philosophy, historically seen, however, Korean Buddhism could not be unaffected by the vortex of change Korea found itself in. It had to make a desperate attempt to find ways to keep up with the times; restoring its traditional presence, renewing and modernizing its organization, negotiating and battling with the Japanese colonial government or Japanese Buddhists, competing with other religions, and taking part in society as well as in nationalist or collaborationist projects.[24]

As Jin Y. Park points out, women's roles in and responses to those various Buddhist attempts to cope with various challenges have been completely neglected in the related discussion.[25] The free love trend prevailing in 1920s Korea I sketched before also has not been much considered as an important part of the social environment Buddhism faced. In that sense, Kim Iryŏp's distinctive (gender-specific) responses to Buddhism and her vivid experiences as a Buddhist woman in colonial Korea can fill a lacuna. This is nowhere more evident than in her 1930s short stories. One of the first attempts in this respect was a short story entitled "P'arangsae-ro hwahan tu ch'ŏngch'un" 파랑새로 化한 두 靑春 (The transformation of two lovers into bluebirds, 1929).[26]

The main storyline of this work is as follows: A young mendicant comes to a house. In this house, a maiden lives alone, waiting for her father. Her father has gone to town and has still not come back home. It is already late and dark. The monk lodges at her house, spends the night with her and leaves the next morning. Her father comes back with good news about her marriage. However, the daughter is indifferent to her marriage. She only thinks of the

[23] "Chŏnwi yŏsŏng tanch'e pangmungi, Pulgyo yŏja ch'ŏngnyŏnhoe-ŭi chinhyŏng: changch'a chŏnsŏn-e chojog-ŭl kwaktchanghandago handa" 前衛 女性團體 訪問記, 佛教女子青年會의 陣形: 장차 전선에 조직을 확장한다고 한다 in *Samch'ŏlli* (Dec 1931), p.72.

[24] Robert E. Buswell, The Zen Monastic Experience (Princeton University Press, 1992), pp.21-36; Hendrik H. Sørensen, "Buddhism and Secular Power in Twentieth-Century Korea" in *Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth-Century Asia*, Edited by Ian Harris (London and New York: Continuum, 1999), pp.127-152; Kim Kwangsik 김광식, *Kŭnhyŏndae Pulgyo-ŭi chaejomyŏng* 근현대불교의 재조명 (Seoul: Minjoksa, 2000); Pori Park, "Korean Buddhist Reforms and Problems in the Adoption of Modernity during the Colonial Period," *Korea Journal* (Spring 2005):87-113;------,"A Korean Buddhist Response to Modernity: The Doctrinal Underpinning of Han Yongun's (1879-1944) Reformist Thought," *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 20.1 (June 2007):21-44.

[25] Jin Y. Park, "Gendered Response to Modernity," pp.115-116.

[26] In *Pulgyo* 55 (Jan. 1929). Republished in *Miraese* 1, pp.189-199.

monk and chants what she has learned in the arms of the monk. Spring comes. The mendicant comes back as promised. When he recites a magic spell, the two young people are transformed into bluebirds and fly away. After they have disappeared, two pairs of shoes are left behind.

This work deals with a curious love story between a monk and a woman. Not only the content but the method of storytelling may be seen as crude and simple. The protagonists commit "improper" acts without the slightest pang of conscience. Although they meet with some difficulties, neither of them shows emotions and inner conflicts. The ending of the story, that the protagonists change into birds, is far removed from reality. The lack of realism can be explained by the fact that this short prose has its origin in the oral tradition. At the beginning of the work, Kim Iryŏp alludes to the resemblance of her story to existing folktales or legends by saying, "This story might be an old tale or a legend. I might have heard it in childhood, otherwise I dreamt it."[27]

It is interesting to see that when Kim wrote this work, her colleagues in *Pulgyo* magazine were busy with re-discovering, re-introducing and recording many unattended oral legends or tales in Buddhism. For example, they released a special collection of Buddhist tales on snakes, at the beginning of the snake year of 1929.[28] From such a climate, Kim Iryŏp took a hint for her literary compositions. The Buddhist legends or tales she found interesting were especially related to love. Her short story "Yŏngji" 影池 (Reflections in a pond, 1928),[29] for instance, is based upon the sad love story of a mason, Asadal, and his wife Asanyŏ, which is associated with the Sŏkka Pagoda in Pulguk Temple 佛國寺. If so, what kind of specific legends were re-introduced and even remade into "P'arangsae-ro hwahan tu ch'ŏngch'un"? How did she change the existing tales and what do these changes tell us?

As to which Buddhist legends or folktales Kim's short story is related, my belief is that a folktale and two kinds of Buddhist tales can be considered: the first is Tanggŭm-aegi, a *muga* (shaman songs) narrative which probably existed as a form of folktale. The other is a representative Buddhist tale about a lovesick monk Chosin 調信. Another is a Buddhist legend about the personification of Kwanseŭm bodhisattva 觀世音菩薩. Although it is a shaman song, the story of Tanggŭm-aegi deals with the theme of monk. In this story, a mendicant monk visits a *yangban* house where he only finds the daughter called Tanggŭm-aegi. She as a chaste girl denies him to access, but the monks enters her house using a magic and makes her pregnant by swallowing three grains of rice the monk has given her. After spending the night, the monk leaves. The family members who return to home find the pregnant girl and expel her from

[27] *Miraese: sang*, p.189.
[28] There are five essays on the theme of snakes published in the 55th edition of *Pulgyo* from "Sa-wa Pulgyo-e kwanhan sŏrhwa" 蛇와 佛敎에 關한 說話, "Ŏbin-gwa kŭmsabo" 業因과 金蛇報, to "Sama" 蛇魔 of which the full text was censored and deleted by the colonial administration.
[29] In *Pulgyo* 50/51 (Sep. 1928). Republished in Kim Iryŏp, *Miraese* 2, pp.246-249.

the family. Tanggŭm-aegi gives birth to three sons. The sons become deities or *mudang* ancestors.[30]

One can easily see that the story retold by Kim Iryŏp is very much like the Buddhist tale in *muga*. The main motif of the relationship between a girl and a mendicant monk is borrowed in her short story. However, I want to pay attention to some large and small differences between them. As Boudewijn Walraven explains, in the story of Tanggŭm-aegi, becoming pregnant and giving birth to three babies have an important religious meaning, because it indicates the supernatural birth of deities.[31] However, this important theme in the old tale is completely left out in Kim's short story.

The old tale does not propagate Buddhism, but it rather sends a message that young girls should beware of mendicant monks.[32] Tanggŭm-aegi indeed denies the mendicant monk whereas the monk intrudes into her house and makes her pregnant at his will. However, the message Kim imparts differs from it. She depicts that the mendicant monk proselytizes. The maiden in Kim's story does not deny the monk and his Buddhist teachings. She accepts him as well as Buddhism and love he gives. She is still not a passive recipient of his love and Buddhism. She diligently practices Buddhism and actively keeps her love for him. Regardless of her arranged engagement with another man (this is missing in the story of Tanggŭm-aegi), she tries to be faithful to the monk where her heart belongs to. The monk also keeps his promise and comes back to her. In this way, Kim conveys the love story of a girl and a monk, changing the old tale about the supernatural birth of deities or a warning about bad mendicant monks.

A love story between a monk and a woman Kim Iryŏp composed is rare to find in Korean Buddhist history. What we can find most is a Buddhist tale on a lovesick monk represented by the Chosin tale in *Samguk yusa* 三國遺事 (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms), which may have been popular in Korea since Yi Kwangsu adapted this tale for his successful novel *Kkum* 꿈 (*Dream*) in 1947. Chosin is a young monk. One day, he sees the daughter of Kim Hŭngong and falls in love with her. He prays to Kwanŭm bodhisattva [33] – Avalokiteśvara – for help and falls asleep. In his dream, he marries her and they live happily together. But the happiness does not last forever. After forty years, he cannot afford to provide for his large family. He even kills someone out of hunger. He becomes old. At last, he and his wife part from each other. At the moment of their bitter parting, Chosin awakes from his dream. Through the dream, Chosin

[30] Boudewijn Walraven, *Songs of the Shaman: The ritual chants of the Korean mudang* (Columbia university press, 1994), pp.50 and 94-95.
[31] Ibid., p.50.
[32] Ibid., p.98.
[33] Tae-Hung Ha and Grafton K. Mintz translated Kwanŭm Bodhisattva as a "goddess of mercy." Yet, I have chosen the designation of "Kwanseŭm bodhisattva" to emphasize the role of bodhisattva in the associated Buddhist tales.

has tasted all the sweetness and bitterness of life. He feels shame for his desire and behavior and becomes a widely admired monk.[34]

(Table 1)

Chosin tale	**Kim Iryŏp's short story**
A lovesick monk	A love story of a monk and a woman
Has a crush on a girl who is engaged to someone else	A mendicant and a woman fall in love. She is engaged to someone else
Prays to Kwanŭm bodhisattva and achieves love in his dream	Spend night together. The monk teaches her Buddhism
Awakes from his dream, has remorse for his passion and transgression of the *vinaya*	Recites a magic spell, changes their bodies into bluebirds, flies away to an eternal place
Love is an obstacle to Buddhist practice	Love has a positive meaning to propagate Buddhism
Warns monks against degeneration	Achievement of love = attainment of the Buddhist goal

As is shown in Table 1, both stories present young monks who fall in love with girls at first glance. Both heroines are engaged to another man. Chosin achieves his love in his dream. The young monk and the young maiden in Kim's story achieve their love, transforming themselves into birds and flying to an eternal place. Despite similar plot structures, these two stories have crucial differences. Chosin's tale focuses on the male protagonist Chosin and his Buddhist awakening. The male protagonist awakes from his dream and perceives the transience of his passion. He feels remorse for his attachment and transgression against essential precepts. The mendicant's breaking the *vinaya* (律/戒) precept is not an issue at all in Kim's short story. Although the monk spends the night with a woman, he has limited inner conflict because of his transgressive behavior and feels little remorse or regret.

Kim's story focuses more on the girl. The heroine falls in love with a mendicant monk and becomes a Buddhist. Regardless of the arranged engagement and marriage with another man, she only thinks of the monk and tries to be loyal to her feeling toward him. The mind-set of the heroine

[34] Iryŏn一然, *Samguk yusa* 三國遺事 (Seoul: Yonsei UP, 1972), pp.247-251.

resonates with Kim's feminist claims; women should free themselves from arranged marriages. It does not bring them happiness. Marriage should be based on love. Love as a union of two bodies and minds does not need to be sanctioned by legal measures such as marriage.

The big difference between the two stories is in relation to the view of love or passion. Chosin's tale illustrates the traditional, male-oriented, Buddhist view of love as a big obstacle to Buddhist practice. A lovesick monk is not an object of sympathy but of accusation. He should be warned, so that he becomes aware of his depravity and conforms to appropriate practice. Although Chosin temporarily achieves his love for a woman, it does not last forever. Love cannot be a goal for a Buddhist practitioner. *Nirvana*, great wisdom and enlightenment are given as the ultimate goal. Love is seen as an obstacle to be overcome on the way to enlightenment. This is the edifying intention of the Chosin tale.

Did Kim Iryŏp also try to overcome love with the help of Buddhism, as some studies presume? Is this a gender-specific, female-oriented attempt, or is it again the confirmation of a male-oriented Buddhist culture and tradition? Kim's view of love, at least expressed in this short story, is not to discard or overcome love, devaluing it as incomplete and limited. She rather discerns that the existing Buddhist view of love is male-centered and tries to subvert and reinterpret it. Love in her story is not an obstacle to Buddhism, but has a positive meaning, as it helps to convert the young girl to Buddhism, a detail, by the way, that is absent in the folk-tale versions of love stories of monks. Without falling in love with the mendicant, the woman does not become a Buddhist. Yet, love is not a mere means to lead living beings to Buddhism. In that case, the skillful means should be abandoned after the goal is achieved. As depicted in the story, Kim values the ideal of love as much as Buddhism. It is not a choice for one or the other. Showing that the achievement of love and the propagation of Buddhism are not in mutual conflict, she suggests the possibility of the compatibility of love and Buddhism. In this way, the edifying traditional tale is remade into a revolutionary love story between a monk and a woman.

A comparison of Kim's story with another tale about a personification of Kwanseŭm bodhisattva once again brings out her viewpoint. This tale, which has several cognates, is a legendary story associated with the Podŏk Hermitage 普德庵 in the Kŭmgang mountains. This legend is not widely known to the public. So, let me first sketch out the legendary tale on the basis of *Yujŏmsa ponmalsaji* 楡岾寺本末寺誌 (Record on head and branch temples of Yujŏmsa) complied by Kwŏn Sangno.[35] In the Koryŏ period, there was a young monk called Hoejŏng 懷正. In his dream, he received summons to find a person named Haemyŏngbang 解明方. Hoejŏng was able to find his house but he was not there. His daughter was alone. The young monk and the daughter slept together for several nights. He felt shame when he considered his sins and left

[35] Kwŏn Sangno 勸相老, *Han'gul sach'al chŏnsŏ* 韓國寺刹全書 (Seoul: Dongguk taehakkyo, 1979), pp.478-483.

her. The monk heard later that she was actually Kwanŭm bodhisattva. So, he re-visited her. The woman washed herself under a waterfall. She became a bird and fluttered into a grotto. Inside the grotto, he found a Buddhist scripture and an incense-burner. The monk established a hermitage in that place.

(Table 2)

Podŏk legendary story	**Kim Iryŏp's short story**
A story about belief in Kwanŭm bodhisattva	A love story of a monk and a woman
The young monk Hoejŏng spent several nights with a girl whose father was absent	A mendicant visited a house and spent the night with a girl whose father was absent
He felt remorse for his sins and left her	He felt little remorse. Taught Buddhism and left the woman
Hoejŏng heard that she was Kwanŭm bodhisattva and revisited her	He revisited her
The daughter changed into a bird and hid herself in a grotto	Both changed their bodies into bluebirds and flew away to an eternal place
A Buddhist scripture and an incense-burner were left behind	Their shoes were left behind
A bird as a sign of Kwanŭm bodhisattva	Bluebirds as a medium which makes the impossible, such as the forbidden love between a monk and a woman, possible.
A monk had a sincere belief in the supernatural power of Kwanŭm bodhisattva and re-established a temple	Two young people achieved their love as well as their Buddhist goal

Where is the summary of Kim's story? As summarized in Table 2, the Podŏk tale has a greater resemblance to Kim Iryŏp's story than the former legend. A young monk Hoejŏng visited a house where a woman was alone. Her father was absent for several days. He stayed with her and had a conjugal

relationship with her. This series of incidents corresponds to those in Kim's story. The fact that Hoejŏng left her and then revisited her is also similar to Kim's plot. What attracts our attention is the presence of birds. The daughter of Haemyŏngbang changed into a bird and fluttered into the grotto. This transformation is not presented in the Chosin story. In Kim's story, the mendicant and the young maiden also become bluebirds and fly away to the eternal place. While the bird left a Buddhist scripture and an incense-burner behind, the two bluebirds in Kim's story leave their shoes behind.

Regardless of variant versions, the Podŏk legend is basically related to Kwanŭm belief. Kwanŭm bodhisattva, whose characteristic feature is compassion, manifests himself as a mortal woman, attracts and tests the monks, and ultimately leads them to awakening. In the same way, the daughter of Haemyŏngbang attracts the young monk Hoejŏng, informs him of her true identity as Kwanŭm and in the end, grants him awakening. The Buddhist scripture and the incense-burner are signs that she is actually Kwanŭm. A white or blue bird and shoes are also typical symbols of Kwanŭm as presented in a number of legends.[36]

However, Kim Iryŏp's story has little to do with a sincere belief in Kwanŭm's supernatural power and compassion. The bluebirds in her story are not the manifestation or sign of a bodhisattva's supernatural power but used as a medium, which goes beyond time and space and which, therefore, makes the impossible possible. As in the folktale "Urŏng kaksi" (The Pond-snail Maiden),[37] bluebirds play a role in making the forbidden love between a monk and a young woman possible. Like the Chosin tale, the Podŏk tale about Kwanŭm aims to warn a loose-living monk, allowing him to feel remorse and leading him to awakening. Love, in that Kwanŭm tale, represents temptation that lures the monk away from the Buddhist path. It is a form of skillful means, not just a disguise to hide the bodhisattva's true nature. It is not love or passion but Kwanŭm's virtue of compassion that leads and guides the monk to the right path to awakening. The Podŏk tale may be considered another kind of male-narrated edifying tale.

Kim, who had been an ardent advocate of free love, did not reproduce the conventional view on passion as it was in male-dominated Buddhist tradition. Rather, she reworked it from a woman's point of view. Her short story shows that she revolutionarily amended the legendary stories handed down in Buddhism from early times into a love story in which a monk and a woman achieved lasting love. She changed the negatively charged meaning of love and tried to discover a positive role for love within Buddhism. As Buddhist woman she revalued love, which had represented as an obstacle, a regrettable

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[36] Iryŏn一然, *Samguk yusa*, translated by Tae-Hung Ha and Grafton K. Mintz (Seoul: Yonsei tahakkyo ch'ulp'anbu, 1972), pp.245-246.

[37] Ch'oe Naeok 崔來沃, *Han'guk kubi* pp.245-246. *chŏnt'ong-ŭi yŏn'gu: kŭ pyŏni-wa punp'o-rŭl chungsim-ŭro* 韓國 口碑傳說의 硏究: 그 變異와 分布를 中心으로 (Seoul: Ilchogak, 1981), pp.118-121.

temptation. She accepted Buddhism as her religion and aimed to solve love problems through it, but she did not uncritically accept all of Buddhist ideas and customs. Nor did she abandon her feminist idea of love.

Calling renunciation into question

Some years later, Kim wrote a more realistic work which portrays the experience of Buddhists in colonial Korea and tackles the traditionally most honored act of Buddhism: renunciation. Her short story "Aeyogŭl p'ihayŏ" (愛慾을 避하여, Escape from passion)[38] deals with the parting of two lovers because of a renunciation. Its plot is not complicated: Hyŏngsik leaves his lover Hyeyŏng and enters a monastery. Hyeyŏng, in tears, writes letters to him questioning his retreat. Her letters deeply shake him and he finally takes his life, leaving a note behind. His note says that his decomposing body can teach her the truth. Hyeyŏng feels remorse and meditates in repentance.

This is a quite short story, but it tackles the major Buddhist problem of *ch'ulga* (出家, renunciation) in modern society. *Ch'ulga* means leaving one's home and abandoning one's dear wife, children, parents, and friends. In Buddhism, it is conventionally taught that otherwise one cannot end karmic relations. These karmic relations become causes that once again draw one into the cycle of transmigration. Renunciation by monks has often been admired as a noble deed, aiming to take care of other living beings while forgetting one's own comfortable life. For example, the founder Shakyamuni's renunciation was admired as "Buddha's concern for universal rather than private well-being."[39]

However, recent Buddhist feminists such as Rita M. Gross have asked the question of whether the Buddha was not, in fact, irresponsible and cruel, and whether his actions did not leave his wife emotionally vulnerable.[40] Renunciation in reality is accompanied by many kinds of trouble, conflict, hardship, and worries. However, this remains unspoken or is silenced, because it is overshadowed by the great act of reclusion in many cases conducted by men. In colonial society, when the Confucian family ideology was still dominant, a man's renunciation was almost like running away from his family. The monk Ch'ŏngdam, for example, even went to a temple in Japan to be a monk, but in the end, he was caught by his mother and forced to conceive a son with his wife in order to continue the family lineage. He had to break the *vinaya* precept.[41] Another monk, Unhŏ, had to bring his family near his temple because

[38] In *Samch'ŏlli* (April 1932). Republished in *Miraese: sang*, pp.232-241.
[39] Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism after Patriarchy: A feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New Work, 1993), p.17.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Yun Ch'ŏnggwang 윤청광, *Kosung yŏltchŏn 24: Ch'ŏngdam k'ŭn sŭnim* 고승열전 24: 청담 큰스님 (Seoul: Uri ch'ŭlp'ansa, 2002), pp.15-96.

his mother, wife and children suffered from economic and spiritual hardship due to the absence of the head of family.[42]

How many Buddhist leaders in colonial Korea did address this problem? Surprisingly, there were few. In his early treatise, *Chosŏn Pulgyo yusillon* 朝鮮佛教維新論 (The Reformation of Korean Buddhism, 1913), Han Yongun 韓龍雲 iconoclastically refuted the long Korean Buddhist tradition of celibacy and insisted on the importance of the marriage of monks. Han argued that celibacy is not Buddhist truth but an expedient means of practice, and he saw it as a serious obstacle to the future development of Buddhism in Korea, which caused many evils, such as impiety to one's parents and a lack of patriotism to one's country. [43] While focusing on the problem of celibacy, Han implied that celibate monks and nuns caused great trouble in society, but his focus of criticism was celibacy, not becoming monks or nuns. His proposal was intended to reform the traditional *sangha* system, not to deny its presence. He did not question or problematize reclusion itself. What he worried about was the possibility that many monks would leave the priesthood and temples become empty, not the other way around, which implies that he still supported the act of renunciation.

The celibacy Han questioned was but one part of the more fundamental issue of renunciation. The troubles and problems he pointed out were also limited and male-oriented. He cared about the man's "duty" to serve parents, society, and country by reproducing. It was not to deeply sympathize with the uncared-for (mostly women), their vulnerable position and emotional wounds, and their spiritual and economical sufferings, and to listen to their voices, which had to be silenced in the course of a man's renunciation and for the development of a Buddhist *sangha*. Accordingly, he never elaborated the problems of renunciation in his literary and non-literary texts.

It had to be a Buddhist woman, Kim Iryŏp, who called the major Buddhist event of renunciation into question in her literary work and sought to amplify silenced voices, in particular of those who had been left behind. It was possible for her because she had first-hand experience. "Escape from passion" is largely autobiographical. Kim dated a Buddhist, Paek Sŏnguk. This man was one of the first Korean Buddhists who went to Europe for study. In 1925, he received a doctorate in Zen Buddhist philosophy at Würzburg University, Germany. Returning to Korea, he was appointed the director of the *Pulgyo* publication company, to which Kim frequently contributed her literary pieces. He introduced Buddhism to her but after entering into a relationship with her one day, left her and entered a temple to become a monk, leaving Kim Iryŏp heartbroken and despondent.[44]

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[42] Yun Ch'ŏnggwang, 윤청광. *Kosung yŏltchŏn 19: Unhŏ kŭn sŭnim* 고승열전19: 운허 큰스님 (Seoul: Uri ch'ŭlp'ansa, 2002), pp.187-193.

[43] Han Yongun, *Chosŏn Pulgyo yusillon* 朝鮮佛教維新論. Republished in *Han Yongun chŏnjip* 2, pp.82-87.

[44] "X-ssi-ege" X에게 in *Pulgyo* (June 1929). Republished in *Miraese: sang*, pp.219-225; "B-ssi-ege" B씨

Hyŏngsik in "Escape from passion," who is highly educated and has received a university degree, is modeled after Kim's lover in reality. He repeatedly says that he cannot marry the heroine because he is determined to enter priesthood and leaves a short note: "It is time to say good-bye". This also reflects the autobiographical facts in detail. The heroine, on the other hand, represents the writer herself. As Kim did in reality, Hyeyŏng desperately wishes to get married to her lover. The heroine falls in love at first sight when she meets Hyŏngsik in the office of a publishing company and is asked to tellwhere she comes from. This is what Kim actually experienced. Most of all, the heroine's letter addressed to her lover expresses her despair and sorrow when she was abandoned due to her lover's renunciation.

Based upon her own experience, Kim could write a short story about renunciation as it is practiced in Buddhism. Hyeyŏng, who represents the voice of the writer, does not praise Hyŏngsik's resolution to enter the temple. Following the traditional Buddhist views of selflessness, Hyŏngsik breaks up with his girlfriend to become a monk. In his thinking, love and marriage are for one's personal wellbeing. The noble act of leaving home is to leave this behind for a larger altruistic purpose, to benefit others. By tradition, women like Hyeyŏng should not hinder a man's entering the monastery and should remain silent about the hardship they experience because of it.

However, as expressed in her letter, Hyeyŏng does not passively accept her lover Hyŏngsik's unilateral withdrawal from the relationship. She breaks her silence to protest against his leaving. She laments that he, Hyŏngsik, has taken all happiness from her. She blames him for his irresponsibility and his outdated way of thinking. In the present time, she argues, everyone experiences love, gets married and gives birth to babies. This is the way people live. Refusing to see her viewpoint, Hyŏngsik declines her proposal of marriage many times over and finally runs away from her. In her eyes, he sticks to the conventional Buddhist view of love and marriage and does not even try to think of other possible relationships between the practice of Buddhism and the human life course.

From a woman's perspective, Kim gives a voice to those helplessly left behind after a partner's act of renunciation. The lengthy complaint letter of the heroine, which actually constitutes the whole short story, reveals the violent and ruthless side of the honorable deed of renunciation.

> *You who I once believed to be the personification of compassion! How could you put me into pain who once sincerely loved you? It is said that the true aim of Buddhist practitioner is to save sentient beings. Does it make sense that you chose to abandon a suffering sentient being to practice*

에게 in Kim Iryŏp, *Ch'ŏngch'un-ŭl pulsarŭgo* 靑春을 불사르고 (Seoul: Kimyŏngsa, 2002), pp.16-133; "Chilli-rŭl morŭmnida" 眞理를 모릅니다 in *Yŏsŏng tonga* 女性東亞 (Dec. 1971-Jun. 1972). Republished in *Miraese: sang*, pp.301-319.

Buddhism? No. Please forgive me. I am not expressing resentment but just my own groaning. Maybe, I am too stupid to understand your aspiration? Don't worry. I will never stand in the way of your serene wish.[45]

Hyŏngsik's lofty act of renunciation is supposed to benefit other living beings and to help them get rid of suffering. Hyeyŏng's confession shows how this act that in principle is compassionate turns out to be ruthless in reality. After being abandoned, the heroine, Hyeyŏng, comes to suffer from a disease and is in pain. In the quote above, one can hear the heroine groan in deepest grief and sense her criticism of the way a compassionate act of renunciation in actual fact victimizes an innocent person and even drives her into death. She clearly enunciates her feelings of grief, frustration and helplessness in this story. However, she also displays her resolution and the extant of her love by not wanting to stand in the way of her lover's serene wish and choice of Buddhism.

It is important to note that Kim Iryŏp expresses her emotional and spiritual torment. As mentioned before, lamentations or complaints from the abandoned party have, traditionally, been neglected and even condemned as obstacle by the male-dominated Buddhist tradition. In his play called "Ch'ulga" 出家 (Leaving home, 1938), Hong Sayong (洪思容, 1900-47), for example, depicts Shakyamuni as shaking off his wife Princess Yashodhara's hand while scolding her, "You silly woman. One who obstructs my way will be cursed. Family and relatives are all demons".[46] This male playwright represents the view and narrative of historically male-dominated Buddhism and sees a woman and her love as silly and evil, and as failing to understand the great act of renunciation.[47] Instead of soothing and persuading the woman, Shakyamuni scolds and curses her; the female character is shown as vulnerable, passive and voiceless. In contrast, Kim Iryŏp restores the voice of the deserted woman and subverts the male-dominant perspective and narrative.

In Kim's story, it is not the woman but the man who is weak and indecisive. The heroine Hyeyŏng is not a passive and submissive woman who helplessly accepts her lover's leaving and is silent about her pain and agony. Breaking the male-imposed silence, she is eager to express herself and her feelings. She forms and defends her own opinion about his act of reclusion. She is also resolute in showing the power of love, whereas the protagonist Hyŏngsik is not a strong man like Shakyamuni in Hong's play. His act of leaving is not depicted as noble but as cowardly. It is to run away from a woman and conceal himself in the mountains. The heroine disparagingly regards it as due to the stubbornness and rigidness of his character. Although

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[45] *Miraese: sang*, p.238.

[46] In *Hyŏndae Chosŏnmunhak chŏnjip* 現代朝鮮文學全集 (Sep. 1938). Republished in *Hong Sayong chŏnjip* 洪思容全集 (Seoul: Saemunsa, 1985), p.265.

[47] Shakyamuni in history left his palace secretly in the middle of night while his wife was sleeping. So, Hong's depiction that Shakyamuni condemned his wife is fictional.

he has become a monk, his spirit is not strong enough to forget or ignore all of his previous relationships and secular concerns. At the end of the story, after reading her touching letter, he falters in his resolution and takes his own life.

> *My eyes looked for Hyeyŏng. I failed to deter my hands from writing a response to her letter. I failed to stop halting my legs. I fell asleep, hugging her letter. Like a baby who falls asleep hungry, and wakes up over and over crying for milk, twisting his body, I was overwhelmed by my passion. At last, I could not withstand the call of my passion any more*.[48]

This paragraph shows how Hyŏngsik's troubles derived from the collision between Buddhism and passion. In spite of his intense meditation, he is disturbed by a single letter from his lover and turns out to be vulnerable to love. He first hides himself in the mountains to escape from love. After reading the love letter, he realizes that he cannot suppress his feelings and desire for her anymore, unless he disappears from this world. Thus, he decides to abandon his body, which has fallen victim to passion. This contrasts with the heroine's strong will to survive despite desperate circumstances.

This short story gives us more interesting hints as to the ways in which love and Buddhism confront each other. In the previously discussed story "P'arangsae-ro hwahan tu ch'ŏngch'un," Kim Iryŏp depicted the idealized compatibility of Buddhism and love as challenging the negative connotation that conventional Buddhism attached to love. From a woman's perspective, this second story tackles another conventional practice in male-dominated Buddhism that is renunciation, and it restores the lost voice of the female victim of renunciation. At the same time, Kim does not show love as compatible with Buddhism any more. She sees the troublesome way in which the existing form of Buddhism is in fierce confrontation with love as the modern way of life. If the first story has a happy ending in which the protagonists achieve their lasting love in harmony with Buddhism, the later work has a tragic ending, in that the Buddhist monk takes his life after experiencing the conflict between love and his faith.

The storyteller seems to be aware of the fact that a Buddhist's suicide is definitely problematic and evades the question by saying that Hyŏngsik's death is not suicide, but rather a mysterious disappearance. There is no description of his actual death. When his body is found, only his letter tells us that he "has left." Kim ambiguously relates that some medical doctors examined the corpse, but that there was no trace of him having taken poison or done any fatal damage to it. Hyŏngsik leaves his physical body, rather than dying. This mysterious ending is somehow reminiscent of the old Buddhist legends discussed before. His body and a short note left behind are similar to the shoes, the Buddhist scripture or the incense-burner in those tales. Its effect is also

[48] *Miraese: sang*, p.240.

similar.

Seeing Hyŏngsik's body and note, the heroine converts to Buddhism, feels remorse and repents. She awakens to the Buddhist truth of impermanence (*musang*, 無常), realizing that everything is in a state of continual change and nothing stays as it is. Hyŏngsik's decomposing corpse functions as a skillful means (*upaya*) to lead the heroine to awakening and induce repentance. In the light of these effects, Hyŏngsik's act of leaving his body behind is an act of compassion, similar to that depicted in the traditional Kwanŭm tales. Interestingly, Kim Iryŏp reverts to the view of the Buddhist legends which she had rebelled against. Does this mean that she began to adapt herself to the male-dominant narratives of Buddhism, rather than simply challenging?

The confrontation between love and Buddhism seems not to be a simple triumph of Buddhism over love. The male protagonist is touched by a woman's love letter, succumbs to his passion for her and finally ends his life, whereas the heroine is moved by his note containing his last wish, reflects on herself, and converts to Buddhism. Nobody has won or lost. The man accepts the power of love, whereas a woman accepts the power of Buddhism. Reconciliation rather retaliation is Kim Iryŏp's solution for the problem of love and Buddhism people may face with in personal life.

A critical voice toward nationalism

As a Buddhist woman, Kim did not accept Buddhism as it was. She discerned that the Buddhism of her days was very much male-oriented. She attempted to problematize its conventional views and practices and sought to restore the voices (mainly of women) that had been silenced in the male-dominant Buddhist society. Amid such attempts, she came to write one more remarkable work. The short story "Hŭisaeng" 犧牲 (Sacrifice) serialized in *Chosŏn Ilbo* from the very first day of the year 1929 for a week is a rare piece of work in which Kim calls Korean nationalism into question as
another patriarchal ideology. Contrary to the assumption that this feminist and Buddhist woman never showed any interest in politics, colonial policies and nationalist movements, this work addresses her critical questions and responses concerning these political issues.

The short story begins with a scene where the heroine Yŏngsuk nervously waits for her lover Sŏng'il. Sŏng'il regularly visits her, but on this morning it is particularly hard for her to be patient. It is because she has an important news to tell him. While confessing that she is pregnant, she desperately hopes that Sŏng'il will propose marriage to her and form a family. The unexpected news causes him mental anguish. Sŏngil is a man whose life is wholly dedicated to his work. It is not clear what kind of work he is exactly doing but this work definitely demands his full attention and dedication. It does not allow him to pursue personal interests. Personal happiness is regarded

as a sin. To do the job, he is not allowed to marry, form a family and support wife and child.

Pregnancy is usually a matter for congratulations, but in their relationship, the child is a seed of misfortune. The pregnancy turns out to be an insurmountable source of suffering. Sŏngil cannot give up his undertaking because of his personal matters. Nor can he deny or evade his responsibility over the pregnancy. In distress and despair, he makes up his mind. It is not to marry but to commit double suicide. The heroine is surprised and disappointed by his suggestion. She deters him from committing suicide and eases him saying that she and her future child will not burden him and hinder his undertaking. She suggests an alternative plan to marry another man and raise the child with him. She swears to hide herself forever and not to reveal that they have a son. Sŏng'il feels uncomfortable but agrees with her.

The short story reminds an informed reader of Kim Iryŏp's own experiences. One might characterize her entire work as autobiographical fiction. In the two short stories discussed in earlier sections, both heroines are led to follow Buddhism by falling in love with men, a male mendicant or a would-be monk (This is exactly the opposite of old Buddhist legends in which monks are led to practice Buddhism more sincerely by women, the personification of Avalokiteśvara). This particular depiction is analogous to Kim's own conversion to Buddhism. Yet, no other work better fictionalizes the variety of her experiences than "Hŭisaeng." The beginning, in which Sŏng'il regularly comes the girl's house and the heroine Yŏngsuk nervously waits for her lover is identical to Kim's own experience meeting her lover Paek Sŏnguk. He regularly came to her house to preach Buddhism to her. As amply reiterated in her autobiographical writings, Kim, who fell in love with him at first sight, used to wait for him with nervous excitement. The detailed descriptions in the short story, such as the fact that the only pleasure in her life came when meeting Sŏng'il, the European style greeting kiss the lovers share, and the heroine's expectation of marriage, all reflect Kim's experiences while dating Paek.

The motif of suicide in the story seems borrowed from a different experience. By 1923, she was dating the poet Im Changhwa 林長和. He hid the fact that he had a wife in his hometown, the consequence of the old custom of early arranged marriage. To achieve a union that was impossible in reality, he suggested double suicide to her. Kim Iryŏp had no intention of taking her life. So, she exchanged the lethal dose of heroin with sodium, and by doing so, prevented the incident, but their relationship ended as a result.[49] The pregnancy shares similarities with Kim's secret delivery of her son Kim Taesin (whose Japanese name was Ota Masao) in 1922. Marrying a Japanese student was difficult, even though she was pregnant with his child. After giving birth to the

[49] Kim Iryŏp, "P'iŏngk'in kasŭm-ŭl angko sanŭn R-ssi-ege" 피엉킨 가슴을 안고 사는 R씨에게 in *Ch'ŏngch'un-ŭl pulsarŭgo*, pp.156-193; Kim Iryŏp, "Heroin" 헤로인 in *Chosŏn ilbo* 朝鮮日報 (9-10 March 1929). Republished in *Miraese: sang*, pp.212-218.

baby, she left him and the infant, suggesting him to marry another woman and to form a happy family.[50]

Kim apparently created the plot by interweaving her previous, diverse and incoherent experiences into it. For that reason, maybe, the storytelling is inelegant, unnatural and unconvincing. The story deals with a premarital, unwanted pregnancy. This is far from an unusual problem for many young couples, either in the period in which the story was written or today. However, the way both protagonists solve the problem is out of the ordinary. Abortion is not taken into consideration as an option at all. Instead, the male protagonist makes an extreme suggestion of suicide as if there were no alternative way to deal with the situation. It is a natural expectation on the woman's part that the man would marry her. However, when this expectation is not met, her plan B is neither abortion nor suicide. It is not to raise the child by herself. It was to seek an alternative man with whom she can raise her child.

The most doubtful and absurd thing about the story is the "undertaking" the male protagonist is engaged in. The reason why the pregnancy of the heroine is problematic is not that it is unexpected and unplanned, but that it clashes with Sŏngil's work. This activity is designated merely as a certain "thing" (*kŭ il*) and is not concretely defined. Nonetheless, this vague term rules over the mind of protagonists. This activity wields enormous power over Sŏngil's mind and life. Marriage, forming a family, pregnancy, childbirth, and childrearing are all incompatible with it. What is this mysterious undertaking?

> *Sŏng'il and Yŏngsuk are Koreans (Chosŏn saram), the most distressed people in the world. They are not egoistic and shameless persons who only pursue their own happiness. This is the reason why their love has no hope and future. The greater their delight is, the more they feel sorrow. The more their love deepens, the more their heart is filled with grief.*[51]

Although the writer does not explicitly say so, presumably because of censorship, this paragraph gives a clue that the mysterious undertaking is for the sake of the Korean people. The Koreans, including Sŏngil and Yŏngsuk, are an unhappy nation, having lost their sovereignty, country, freedom, and voice to the Japanese colonial power. Seeing their plight, all Korean men and women feel obliged to fight against the colonial authorities and to achieve the ultimate national goal of independence. This is supposed to give freedom and happiness to all Koreans. In such a situation, a person who looks after his own happiness, personal interests and pleasures in the form of love is politically condemned for

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[50] Kim T' aesin 김태신, *Hwasŭng Ŏmŏni-rŭl kŭrida* 1 화승 어머니를 그리다 (Seoul: Irŭn ach'im, 2004); Yi Ch'ŏl 이철, *Kyŏngsŏng-ŭl twihŭndŭn 11-kaji yŏnae sakŏn: modŏn kŏl-gwa modŏn poi-rŭl maehoksik'in ch'imyŏngchŏgin sŭnk'aendŭl* 경성을 뒤흔든 11가지 연애사건: 모던걸과 모던보이를 매혹시킨 치명적인 스캔들 (Seoul: Tasan ch'odang, 2008), pp.132-137.

[51] *Miraese: sang*, p.203.

lack of patriotic nationalism and also morally accused as mean-spirited, egoistic and shameless.

It is, however, not Kim's intention to condemn such egoistic individuals. In her reality, she herself was condemned for her individual pursuit of free love and marriage. The quote above rather reflects the dominant social atmosphere and reveals the paradox caused by nationalist struggles; this struggle aimed to unite all Koreans and achieve freedom and independence, but for that purpose it demonized and took away their individual freedom to love, their joy, hope, and laugher. Individual Koreans were doubly controlled by colonial and nationalist powers, but did not realize this because Korean nationalism had "nationalized" their minds, as if this state of affairs was natural and right, exactly in the way Japanese colonialism had "colonized" the mind of the Koreans. Sŏngil is a social leader and nationalist, whose body and mind, more than ordinary Korean men and women, should be solely dedicated to the Korean nation. He is symbolically married to the "imagined community" of the nation. This is the reason why he cannot marry Yŏngsuk and be the father of their child. Korean women such as Yŏngsuk lose their future husbands and fathers of children.

In the story, Kim depicts the confrontation between human dignity and patriotic nationalism and reveals the dehumanizing power that is often inherent in nationalist struggles. The historical master-narrative perceives anti-colonial nationalism as a form of humanism and equates justice with patriotism. However, Kim saw how often Korean nationalism sharply contrasted with humanity. This is expressed in the inner conflict of the male protagonist. Sŏngil's nationalist undertaking clashes with Yŏngsuk's pregnancy. Love, marriage, forming a family, pregnancy, childbirth, and childrearing are actually universal human rights and ordinary life activities. However, his nationalized mind makes him think of the pregnancy as an obstacle that stands in the way to the national goal. Although it is happy news for him personally and a matter of congratulation, it only burdens and agonizes him. On the one hand, he feels responsibility and sympathy for the woman who is pregnant with his child. Without his help, this pitiful woman may have a hard life. With a little fatherless child, her life may be ruined. He cannot merely leave the two pitiful lives alone in this turbulent world.

On the other hand, Sŏngil questions whether his compassion may be due to love and lust, to trivial feelings that distract him from the nationalist can be.

> *Who can carry out the undertaking at issue except me? The problem with Yŏngsuk is anyhow my personal affair. The discussion of raising a child as a future hope might be a pretext to avoid my public and social responsibility. My conscience does not let me take care of my own comfortable life and enjoy a happy sweet marriage and family life, ignoring my compatriots (tongjok). However, these days and in the current social structure, it is hard for a woman*

like Yŏngsuk to take care of herself, even though she is a well-educated and sensible woman. Yet it is much harder to pull out my arms from the collapsing house where thousands of people are living. What should I do?[52]

The nationalist concern for one's fellow man stands in direct confrontation with basic human feelings and rights that are part of almost every human life. It disparages Sŏngil's inclination to love and marry as selfish and anti-social. Yŏngsuk is a temptress who tries to stop him from continuing his nationalist work. A man's parental love is labeled as his personal affair and an excuse to shrink from his urgent responsibility to defend thousands of people and their lives. Although Sŏngil further sees his child as one of the important future servants for future Korea and realizes the importance of education and safety for the child at that moment of time, it is not seen as urgent as the colonial condition and misfortune of his compatriots. It is also not his job. As sketched before, nationalists as well as Japanese colonial authorities promoted the cult of domesticity and the ideology of wise mother and prudent wife and fully entrusted the role of reproduction, childrearing and education to women, encouraging Korean men to strive for the nation. Nationalism in Sŏngil's mind tips universal human rights, diminishes their value as a personal matter. He evaluates them using the nationalist yardstick whether and in which way they can contribute to the nation.

Facing the confrontation between ordinary human life and a life dedicated to the Korean nation, Sŏngil chooses neither his family (wife and child) nor his compatriots, but an alternative; double suicide. He is distressed and confused, pinned in between his conscience as an individual human being and his responsibility to his Korean compatriots. He is unable to solve this problem. He loses his perspective and tries to forget his problems through suicide. Compared with the male protagonist, the heroine is more resolute in taking decisions. Yŏngsuk releases Sŏngil from the heavy duty of paternal care and suggests to him that he should work wholeheartedly for his nation, whereas she herself chooses to give birth to a child and raise it.[53] This choice may be to defend human value and life on the one hand, but on the other hand may be seen as supporting the cult of domesticity with its emphasis on motherhood and female sacrifice for the sake of men.

However, Yŏngsuk's choice turns out to defend neither human value nor the cult of domesticity. Her initial dream to get married and form a family with Sŏngil is broken by the forceful assertion of nationalism. As an alternative plan, she will have an incomplete and deformed family in which the missing husband and father is replaced by a puppet. This is not really to protect human value and life. Nor is Yŏngsuk a wise mother and prudent wife in a true sense. As articulated in her last statement, all of this is done for Sŏng'il, whose life

[52] Ibid., p.205.
[53] Ibid., pp.206-207.

dedicated to national struggles will be noted and honored in history.[54] To make Sŏng'il a national hero, women like Yŏngsuk sacrifice their lives, human dignity, human rights, fundamental freedom, even swearing to keep it a secret. Their experiences of broken love and marriage, the distorted family life, the ensuing mental agonies and economical hardship are all silenced.

Somehow, Sŏngil's dedication to the nationalist movement is reminiscent of the religious practice of renunciation Kim tackled. Both nationalists and Buddhist practitioners tend to be admired as noble or great. Mostly male, they forget their personal interests – a sweet home, happy marriage and harmonious compatible family life – and intend to take care of a large group of people. They leave their families, wives, and children uncared for on their way to Buddhism and nationalism. Many of the uncared-for are exposed to emotional hurt and economic hardship. However, the male-dominated narratives of Buddhist and national histories only remember and shed light on the great acts and efforts of men. Women who are left behind or sacrificed themselves as victims for men appear nowhere in the dominant narratives. Their experiences and voices are put to silence.

Kim Iryŏp, as a Buddhist woman, breaks the silence. She shows people like Yŏngsuk who were excluded from the national arena as the nameless and voiceless. They are usually assumed to be irrelevant to the nationalist struggle or even temptresses who are an obstacle to the nationalist movement. Against this, she argues that one should remember the voiceless people whose silence and sacrifice became the foundation of the nationalist movement. In another essay, she also claims that male nationalists such as Yi Kwangsu are greatly indebted to the women and families behind them.[55] While uncovering the experiences of individuals and women, she reveals that Korean nationalism did not work side by side with human values; rather, it confronted and even severely damaged them. The distorted body of a Korean family in her fictionalized account shows how Korean nationalism dehumanized individual Koreans and impinged on their human dignity and liberty instead of protecting them.

Conclusion

Kim Iryŏp's short stories show how a New Woman was reborn as a Buddhist woman. Although she herself thought that Buddhism is a fundamental truth, whereas the feminist ideology is also a temporary remedy,[56] it does not mean that she discarded her feminism in adopting Buddhism as her new creed. Interestingly, right after her conversion, she made more radical feminist arguments challenging the patriotic idea of virginity and the dominant ideology

[54] Ibid., p.210.
[55] Ibid., pp.352-363.
[56] *Kaebyŏk* 開闢 (Jan. 1935). Republished in *Miraese: ha*, p.226.

of the wise mother and prudent wife in her society. Religiously, at that time she was a mere novice without proper and deep insight into the essentials of Buddhist teachings but she could discern how Buddhist tradition and culture in her days were male-dominated and that women had no voice in the male-dominated Buddhist community. She attempted to change and revise the hostile view of women and love in Buddhism. She did not merely follow existing Buddhist ideas and practices but critically questioned them, exploring voices and experiences often silenced by conventional Buddhism.

Buddhism was not the only authority Kim Iryŏp criticized in her fictional stories. Korean nationalism, too, was questioned. Her contemporaries, as well as today's scholars, were critical of her preoccupation with women's love and sexuality and of her indifference to colonial reality and the national movements. It is true that she did not much problematize Japanese colonialism or policies in her Buddhist works. Nor did she infuse patriotic nationalism into the people's hearts in colonial Korea. Instead of the Korean nation, she discovered more diverse and neglected social agents, such as women, and shed light on their experiences which are often silenced and excluded by mainstream historical narratives. In her writing, Korean nationalism came under criticism for impinging upon fundamental human rights to love, marriage, pregnancy and childbirth. Kim Iryŏp proved that a Buddhist woman was able to see the dehumanizing power hidden in nationalism.