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Conclusion

The Buddhist writers addressed in this thesis were active agents within the colonial history of Korea. Indeed, they were in no way marginal. They carved their names into national history as top nationalist leaders and giants of literature, as a major religious leader, as a pioneering but scandalous New Woman, and as an eventually controversial collaborator. The historical master narrative which tends to equate justice with patriotism and human dignity with national identity politically separates this group of writers into either nationalists or collaborators, and morally judges them as good or evil. Han Yongun represented the good and was glorified as a symbol of national pride; in contrast, Yi Kwangsu exemplified evil and was demonized and depicted as a disgrace to the nation. Moreover, these two were assumed to have nothing in common and to be fiercely opposed to each other.

Despite the pervasive depictions of these writers, a focus on their Buddhist beliefs and Buddhist-inspired texts shows us how their own emotions, experiences, voices, and reactions to the colonial and national discourses and policies were far removed from what we have habitually believed under the influence of the nationalist historical discourse. Considering their fame and reputation within national history, this divergence is not something we can simply ignore. Consequently, I have attempted to uncover what is behind the divergence between the writers' own voices and interpretations and our pervasive assumptions and ascriptions with regard to them. In the process I have found even more levels of divergence, between their interior and exterior acts, between their writing and their acting, and between their earlier and later views. I have attempted to reconsider their lives, thought, and literature from new perspectives, such as the religious, postnationalist, and postcolonial and feminist perspectives. In this way, I have tried to add detail and greater depth to the current picture of colonial history and reveal the complexity and diversity that hides behind the politicized and polarized debates on colonial history.

The first author, Han Yongun, has been admired as a source of national pride for championing both humanity and nationalism. However, my examination revealed that he was keenly aware of the disparity between human dignity and national identity. From the outset, he claimed that Buddhist ideas and goals could never be equated with political (i.e., national) goals. While the Koreans suffered under colonial domination, he was against the idea of marrying Buddhism (i.e., religion) with nationalism (i.e., politics) and the subordination of Buddhism to nationalist interests and goals. In his eyes, Buddhism, directed as it is toward humans and sentient beings, and its vision of universal salvation for all men were much bigger than the goals and vision of nationalism. He criticized the colonial overlords, for infringing upon human rights, fundamental freedoms, and the human dignity of individuals, although

he failed to see that another political power, such as Korean nationalism, could also infringe on those same rights while struggling against the dehumanizing colonial power. In that sense, other Buddhist writers were much perspicacious than Han with their critical views of Korean nationalism.

Kim Iryöp and Hong Sayong developed a critical view of Korean nationalism by focusing on diverse social agents in colonial society, such as women, *kisaeng*, and butchers. They saw that these historical subjects were marginalized, controlled, manipulated, and discriminated against by the dominant male nationalists. Although Kim did not react to colonialism as critically as her male counterparts, as a woman she could arguably have held the most critical view of Korean nationalism by disclosing how it harshly punished those who searched for individual interests and freedom, distorted the lives of individuals if their pursuits were irrelevant to national undertakings, and condemned basic human endeavors as egoistic and anti-nationalistic. In contrast, Hong was a writer who offered critical views about both Japanese colonialism and Korean nationalism. He claimed that the Japanese promises of protection and progress were a sham and were offered under deceitful pretenses in order to disguise a reality that was fraught with aggressive domination and racial discrimination. Additionally, he ridiculed the hypocrisy of Korean nationalism by revealing the discrimination or prejudice toward people of lower status that lurked under the campaign for oneness of the Korean nation.

These Buddhist writers also questioned the general assumption that Korean nationalism always took the side of justice and human dignity, presenting diverse and divergent attempts to tackle the problem. Their writings demonstrate that despite their apparent political differences, they actually shared many similarities, including their religious views and insistences, social interests, experiences with the dilemma of morality and politics, and even their covert responses to political affairs. Han Yongun, Hong Sayong, and Kim Iryöp all expressed a great affinity with the concept of self in Sön Buddhism. From this concept, Han derived concepts of self-reliance, self-criticism, and self-reconstruction and elaborated them as ideas for the benefit of the nation. This attempt he shared with the cultural nationalists. Hong Sayong used the concept of self first to allegorize the colonial experience of losing national sovereignty and becoming colonial others. He also derived the notion of non-dependency from this concept to challenge the colonial discourse on Korean identity and subvert the colonial relationship. Showing the disabled, distorted, and lost self (including both body and mind), Kim Iryöp gave voice to more personalized and diversified experiences in the face of colonialism, nationalism, and modernity. She further emphasized Sön meditation as a way to regain self-control, to replenish self-regulatory strength, and ultimately to restore the self to its true identity.

In spite of their similarities, a comparison of Han Yongun and Yi Kwangsu reveals difference to a far greater degree. Han Yongun has been

considered a heroic nationalist who was loyal to the Korean nation throughout his life and indeed, he refused civil registration and changing his Korean name to a Japanese one. He never joined an imperial organization or gave a collaborationist speech. Conversely, Yi Kwangsu was a fervent pro-Japanese collaborator. He discarded his honorable position as a nationalist and betrayed the Korean nation, leading the imperial campaign to adopt a Japanese name and holding important posts in various imperial organizations. He visited imperial armies to give morale-boosting speeches. Han Yongun and Yi Kwangsu went their separate ways and made vastly different political choices.

Nevertheless, the literature of these writers did not match what actually occurred in reality. The obvious political differences between Yi Kwangsu and Han Yongun have led us to assume that they were completely different persons, but their literature informs us that they had many things in common. In their novels, they singled out the bodhisattva's practice of compassion and forbearance among many Buddhist themes and concepts, and presented it as the ideal attitude and *modus vivendi* in wartime. The Buddhist insistence on compassion was deeply associated with their autobiographical experience of the dilemma of morality and politics. They both experienced a situation in which loyalty to the Korean nation clashed with the virtue of humanness. Faced with the Suyangtonguhoe incident, when cultural nationalists were arrested and imprisoned by the wartime colonial government, Yi Kwangsu had to choose between the Korean nation and individuals and between nationalism and the lives of those individuals. In a less dramatic situation, Han Yongun also had to face a similar inner conflict when his benefactors became increasingly involved in collaboration. Han had to choose either his patriotic integrity or the moral imperatives of gratitude. On the basis of their Buddhist beliefs Yi and Han chose morality instead of patriotic duty. This choice was controversial because it led them to literary collaboration.

Obviously, Yi Kwangsu produced a number of collaborationist works and deserves his notoriety as a pro-Japanese collaborator. No one in wartime colonial Korea glorified the Japanese emperor more than he did. No one explained problematic wartime political ideologies more extensively or in greater detail than he did. However, did not the national hero, Han Yongun, perhaps also collaborate with the Japanese through his writings? An examination of some neglected texts of Han, mainly those written during the second Sino-Japanese War, reveals that nowhere did this alleged national hero express his anti-Japanese resistance or criticize the wartime government. For this censorship may be held responsible, but there was more important to his writings from this period. Han advocated self-criticism and self-blame of the Korean people and dissuaded the Koreans from blaming others, such as the Japanese colonial authorities. He even encouraged them to avoid resenting and condemning the colonial government, thereby indirectly advocating accommodation to colonial policies. In many Buddhist essays, he preached how to live and think during wartime. These directions were not opposed to

colonialism or the expansionist war and military aggression. He kept insisting on wartime spiritual practices that were no different from what the colonial government and Korean war collaborators propagated.

Of course, Han Yongun's literary collaboration may be relatively insignificant when compared to that of Yi Kwangsu, but its very existence can threaten Han Yongun's reputation. As Pak Suyŏn has suggested, the myth of Korean patriotic nationalism is characterized by its insistence on purity; thus, it never allows for, let alone forgives, even one single compromise or act of collaboration.¹ For example, Im Hyebong classified the abbot of the Magok Temple, An Hyangdŏk, as a "pro-Japanese" monk because of a single collaborationist act.² We might then question if Han Yongun still deserves to be honored as a national hero in spite of the suspicion that has arisen from his literary collaboration. Indeed, when applying the mainstream nationalist's yardstick, he should undoubtedly be disqualified from the position of national hero and condemned as a "pro-Japanese" figure, much like other Koreans.

However, putting Han Yongun and Yi Kwangsu on the blacklist of nationalist scholarship should not be the end of the story. Upon careful reading, their wartime literature did not merely deliver propaganda messages, but also offered counter-discourses against wartime ideologies and discourses. So, their multilayered texts cannot be simply labeled as "pro-Japanese" or "collaborationist" as nationalist scholars often do. Ironically, Yi Kwangsu who was so well acquainted with wartime political ideologies and discourses could detect the ambiguity and logical fallacies in the colonial discourses better than anyone else. When the dominant authority asserted its unique, "pure" race and culture, he was able to subvert the myth of the Japanese identity by creating a Korean hybrid.

Among Korean Buddhist writers, Hong Sayong seems to most prominently employ strategies of subversion. Yet, Hong did not directly criticize or condemn Japanese colonialism, either. Instead he concurred with the Japanese Pan-Asianist ideology of the return to Asian tradition and culture and the rejection of Western civilization. Although this might be considered to be literary collaboration, through this maneuver, he saw the possibility of restoring indigenous culture, the Korean traditional heritage, including its music and sounds, which ultimately defied assimilation into the Japanese-dominated culture. This Korean tradition provided him with opportunities for mockery, laughter, and irony and enabled him to ridicule the overwhelming force of colonial power.

While Han Yongun is evaluated as the most outspoken thinker in existing nationalist narratives, he seems to less prominently formulate a

¹ Pak Suyŏn 박수연, "Hwaŏm-jŏk p'yŏngdŭng-ŭi minjok-kwa segye" in *Manhaehak yŏn'gu* 2 만해학연구 2 (Inje: Manhae haksurwŏn 만해학술원, 2006), pp.63-65 and 78-81.

² Im Hyebong 임혜봉, *Ch'inil sŭngnyŏ 108-in: Kkŭnagi anŭn yŏksa-ŭi murŭm* 친일승려 108인: 끝나지 않은 역사의 물음 (P'aju: Ch'ŏngnyŏnsa, 2005), p.258.

colonial counter-discourse than the other writers. His emphasis on the Buddhist concepts of *inyok* (forbearance) and *chŏngjin* (strenuous effort) dissuaded the Koreans from resenting and resisting the wartime colonial government, but these areas he focused on were not intended to support the colonial government. The notions were advocated by Han as alternative ways to contribute to the preservation of life and to tactfully preserve his initial goals, which probably included national independence and national identity in spite of political oppression. However, his insistence on gratitude and the image of the heroic Buddha were in congruence with dominant colonial ideologies. He could not extract any counter-discourse from his interaction. In some cases, he was not even aware of the possibility that his tradition-oriented ideas for the nation's sake could be captured by the colonial authorities for their own political purposes.

As scholars such as Theodore Jun Yoo have conceded, colonial history and its legacy are still quite important and sensitive issues in contemporary Korean society.³ The Buddhist writers who were investigated in this study are closely associated with this history and legacy. For example, in sync with the popular acceptance of his role as a national hero, Han Yongun's birthplace has been restored and memorial museums, parks, and monuments have been constructed in his memory. The temple where he composed his masterpiece *Nim-ŭi ch'immuk* and a cultural village that was built in memory of his exploits have emerged as popular tourist attractions. Every year, a cultural festival is held and various awards in honor of him are given to writers, scholars, and a host of eminent leaders. To commemorate Hong Sayong, who is said to have been forced to stop writing by the colonial government, the Hong Sayong Literature Hall and Literature Award have been established in Hwasŏng where his family register is located. Recently, the Kim Iryŏp Cultural Foundation has been launched by her disciples and temple to establish a memorial hall in an effort to commemorate her literary and Buddhist activities.⁴

On the contrary, in memory of Yi Kwangsu, who was branded a representative of the pro-Japanese collaborator group, only one monument has been erected by some of his close literary colleagues, in the backyard of the temple where he spent his last years. Despite his unrivalled literary achievements, no literature prizes or memorial buildings in his name have been allowed by Korean society. Because of his pro-Japanese collaboration, the very mention of Yi Kwangsu is still a hot issue. In recent years, the contemporary novelist Han Sŭngwŏn has asserted that it is wrong to continue to publish the problematic novel *Wŏnhyo taesa*, because the pro-Japanese writer slandered the eminent monk Wŏnhyo and glorified war; the related publishing company

³ Theodore Jun Yoo, *The Politics of Gender in Colonial Korea: Education, Labor and Health, 1910-1945* (University of California Press, 2008), p.202.

⁴ "Ch'ŏngch'un-ŭl pulsarŭdo, Iryŏp sŭnim yuji pattŭnda" 청춘을 불사르고, 일엽스님 유지 받든다 in *Kŭmgang sinmun*, <http://www.ggbn.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=16859>

responded to his criticism by invoking the freedom of interpretation.⁵ Recently, Pusan citizens with a signature campaign have pushed for the removal of a monument on Haeundae inscribed with Yi Kwangsu's poem, because they thought that Yi and his poem represent a disgraceful legacy of the colonial past; indeed, they could see no reason for such a pro-Japanese writer's poem to be placed in a location that represents the heart of tourism in Pusan.⁶

Yet, as this study has shown, the problem of colonial history and the colonial legacy cannot simply be solved by either glorifying or vilifying the people who lived in that period. This politicized and polarized agenda will not settle or resolve the troubled colonial legacy, but rather blind us, distorting our ability to recognize the complexities and ambiguities of the colonial era in Korea. The novel of Yi Kwangsu, which was neither simply pro-Japanese nor nationalist, his literary collaboration that at a certain level subverted colonialism, Han Yongun's collaborationist writing during the war against China, Kim Iryŏp's Buddhist insights, revealing the hidden violence in modernity and Korean nationalism and Hong Sayong's criticism of Japanese colonialism and Korean nationalism all offer opportunities to recognize that the history of colonial Korea was far more nuanced and complicated than is generally believed in today's Korea.

⁵ "Chŏnjaengjuŭija, panjŏnjuŭija... Wŏnhyo nollan" 전쟁주의자, 반전주의자... 원효 논란 in *Chungang ilbo*, http://article.joinsmsn.com/news/article/article.asp?ctg=15&Total_ID=2278433

⁶ "3.1-chŏr-e ullyŏ p'ŏjin Yi Kwangsu sibi ch'ŏlgo moksori" 3.1절에 울려 퍼진 이광수 시비 철거 목소리 in *Omai nyusŭ*, http://www.ohmynews.com/NWS_Web/view/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0001530968