

# Persistence of Sino-centric Ideologies in Korean Buddhism: The Rhetoric of Sino-centrism in the Chosŏn Period Buddhist Apologetic Literature

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**Abstract:** The notion of *chunghwa* 中華, an ideology that points to China as the place of cultural origin, was commonly adopted by both the Confucian scholar-officials and Buddhist monks during Chosŏn Korea (1392–1910). It was supported by the ‘doctrine of the civilized and barbarian’, or *hwai ron* 華夷論, a Sino-centric worldview that positioned China as the centre of the civilized world. Sino-centric ideologies and their varied forms adopted by the Korean monastics can be found in the Chosŏn Buddhist apologetic literature, where Chosŏn Buddhism is portrayed differently through the transition of time.

This paper argues that the formulation and establishment of its identity by the mainstream Buddhist community in the seventeenth century was heavily based on the notions of the Sino-centrism such as the ‘doctrine of the civilized and barbarian’. However, this increased adoption of Sino-centric ideology needs to be contextualized within the rhetorical use of *hwai ron* and not simply as a wholesale and unnuanced acceptance of *chunghwa* ideology by the Chosŏn monastics. This paper will bring to light the uses of the *chunghwa* ideology by prominent literati monastics of the Chosŏn period by examining the arguments laid out in the Chosŏn period Buddhist apologetic literature.

**Keywords:** Sino-centric identity, doctrine of the civilized and barbarian, Sino-centrism, Buddhist apologetics, late-Chosŏn period

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### **Introduction: Persistence of Sino-Centric Ideology in Korean Buddhism**

In the early seventeenth century, a shift in worldview among the Chosŏn Confucian elites occurred as a result of developments that occurred in China—the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) was replaced by the so-called barbarian Qing dynasty in 1644. Needless to say, the ideology of traditional China as the centre of civilization was challenged, to say the least, with the defeat of the Ming forces and the resulting replacement by the Qing dynasty (1636–1912). The shattering of the world order, as the Confucian scholars saw it, and the reverberations of the after-effects were surely felt in Korea. The Chosŏn intellectuals even felt a responsibility to ensure that the culture of the civilized and orthodox Way, previously upheld by the ‘middle kingdom’ (Kor. *chunghwa* 中華), was maintained and even protected. Such a matter was seen as critical in late-Chosŏn (1600–1910) society.

As part of protecting the orthodox Way, the notion of *tot'ong* 道統 (Ch. *daotong*), or ‘orthodox transmission of the [Confucian] Way’, became an important Neo-Confucian rhetoric.<sup>1</sup> The reasoning was that the orthodox teachings of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) that were

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<sup>1</sup> The Chosŏn ruling elites and intellectuals viewed Chosŏn, though a sovereign state, as part of the civilized world. They saw themselves continuing and even protecting the Confucian tradition where Ming China reigned at the center of this world. This sense of a role, even a responsibility, in the transmission of the Way of Confucian orthodoxy—*tot'ong* 道統—was a significant part of political and cultural identity. See Kim-Haboush, ‘Constructing the Center’, 67–71.

transmitted to Chosŏn had to be maintained. Underlying this notion was the idea of the middle kingdom as the source of orthodoxy, which pervaded Chosŏn society and was a widely accepted ideology in late-Chosŏn society.<sup>2</sup> The notion of *chunghwa* 中華 (central efflorescence) may connote a state within a defined territory, but it can also have an ambiguous meaning. Wang offers another use of *hwa* 華 that was elusive and maybe even paradoxical. He describes:

The precise valences of the terms *hua* and *yi* depended on the context of how they are deployed. Chosŏn Koreans might invoke a universal vision of empire transcending the *hua* and *yi*, only to insist in the same breath on a stark, even racialized, divide separating themselves from their Japanese, Jurchen, and Mongol neighbors as barbarian *yi*. Meanwhile, *hua* could be glossed as cultural ‘efflorescence,’ the spatial home of ‘civilization,’ or simply a stand-in for a political ‘China.’ When Chosŏn-Ming users employed the term in compounds such as *mohwa* 慕華 ‘admiring efflorescence,’ or *chunghwa* 中華 ‘central efflorescence,’ they could also superimpose all the above meanings.<sup>3</sup>

The notion of *chunghwa* took on different forms during the Chosŏn period (1392–1910) but consistently stayed important as an ideology and rhetoric for the Confucian scholar-officials and no less important to the Buddhist community. While I hope to add to the greater academic debate on the conceptualization of *chunghwa*, the main aim of this paper is to examine how this notion became manifest during the late-Chosŏn period within the monastic community. Fundamental to these concepts of central efflorescence and admiring efflorescence were the principles of orthodox transmission of the Way and the ‘doctrine of the civilized and barbarian’ (Kr. *hwai ron*, Ch. *huayi lun* 華夷論). These were based on the idea that China was the centre of the civilized world and hence regarded China as the source of orthodoxy.<sup>4</sup> As this paper will argue, these ideals and notions were

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<sup>2</sup> Wang, *Boundless Winds of Empire*, 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 4–5.

<sup>4</sup> On Sino-centric orthodoxy during the Chosŏn period, see Kim, ‘Forma-

fully adopted by not only the community of late-Chosŏn Confucian scholar-officials but also by the monastic community.

Their acceptance and manifestation among the Korean monastic leaders were expressed in various ways. The Buddhist community accepted and worked within societal worldviews that were no different from those adopted by the Confucian literati and the scholar-officials. This paper focuses on two worldviews, based on which an orthodox lineage was formulated: the doctrine of the civilized and barbarian and the orthodox transmission of the Way. Evidently, the newly adopted criteria led to the inclusion of certain monastic patriarchs in the monastic orthodox genealogy while excluding others. Despite the often-touted drastic differences in doctrine and practice between Buddhism and Confucianism, the two traditions existed within the same society immersed in the shared foundational worldview.<sup>5</sup> The monastics simply considered it normal to adopt the ideals that conceived of China as the centre of the civilized world, to which Korea belonged.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Korean monastics used Sino-centrism for various reasons, one being part of rhetorical claims of orthodoxy, such as in the establishment of monastic identity.

I first turn to Buddhist apologetic literature where prominent monastic literati defended the Buddhist tradition against Confucian polemical attacks. We can glean from these works what some of the leading monastics were thinking and the worldviews they subscribed

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tion of a Chosŏn Buddhist Tradition', 111–15.

<sup>5</sup> This, for example, is quite obvious when the great Chŏnghŏ Hyujŏng 淸虛休靜 (1520–1604) explains that a monk that he considered as his dharma grandfather, Chiŏm 智儼 (1464–1534), received the transmission of the Way no differently than within the Confucian community. See Kim, 'The Origin of Orthodox Exclusivity', 116–17.

<sup>6</sup> In modern times, the notion of a nation has played a large part in our identity. During the Chosŏn period, this seems to be the opposite—Korean monastics appear to have considered foremost being a Buddhist monk or belonging to the family of the Buddha, or Sŏkssi 釋氏, more strongly than their connection to the state of Chosŏn.

to, making this genre of Buddhist literature invaluable.<sup>7</sup> We can analyse how some of the literati monks of that time described Buddhism and its role in society.

### Apologetic Writings of the Chosŏn Period Monks

To give context to the Chosŏn Buddhist apologetic literature, with the founding of a new dynasty based on Confucian principles, Buddhism was labelled a heterodox tradition and displaced from its privileged position as a state ideology. It came under polemical attack from the Confucian scholar-officials under the new dynasty founded in the late fourteenth century. As a result, modern scholarship has perceived Chosŏn period (1392–1910) Buddhism as having lost state recognition and privileges, turning to the masses for patronage. It was during such a time that prominent literati monks composed apologetic literature to defend Buddhism and presented it as an orthodox and worthy tradition. These monks were in a position of having to defend Buddhism within the situation of polemical attacks from Confucian scholar-officials and anti-Buddhist state policies.

Buddhist apologia is found throughout the long Chosŏn period and it addresses the real and practical issues of polemical attacks and anti-Buddhist state policies. These methods and arguments advanced by the monastics to maintain Buddhism through the Chosŏn period provide a window into the internal dynamics and the state of the monastic community. Under the crisis of being displaced as the state ideology at the end of the Koryŏ period (918–1392), the monastic

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<sup>7</sup> About a decade before the publication of *Hyŏnjŏng non* 顯正論 [Exposition of the Orthodox], the earliest Buddhist apologetic work by Hamhŏ Kihwa, the system of state governance of Buddhism was suspended in 1512. Following this, the ‘Tosŭng’ 度僧 section of the *Kyŏngguk daejŏn* 經國大典 [National Code], which described the state criteria for monkhood and monastic examinations, was deleted in 1516. See Son, ‘Increased Temple Publication’, 21. This measure was an indication that the saṃgha was no longer recognized within the Chosŏn laws.

community could not help but meet these challenges by adapting to the changes in the socio-political and ideological milieu.

Some of the Confucian polemical attacks included accusations as follows: Buddhism is a barbarian tradition that defiled the social order; monks are unfilial; monks are not loyal to the king; they do not work and are an economic drain to society; and Buddhism brings disorder to social order and generally causes harm to society. Of course, the apologetic literature addresses these specific attacks, but I will focus on one of the main defences put forth by the Buddhist authors in order to argue for legitimacy and orthodoxy: Buddhism as a continuation of Chinese Buddhism, an almost seamless extension of the history and tradition of Chinese Buddhism.

The apologetic writings began to emerge relatively late in the Chosŏn period, suggesting that their composition may not have been a direct response to the late-Koryŏ and early-Chosŏn Neo-Confucian polemics. One of the earliest Buddhist apologetic literatures written by Hamhŏ Kihwa 涵虛己和 (1376–1433),<sup>8</sup> the *Hyŏnjŏng non* 顯正論 [Exposition of the Orthodox, hereafter *Exposition*], may have been composed as a response to Chŏng Tojŏn's 鄭道傳 (1342–1398) critique of Buddhism, one such critique, for instance, being the *Pulssi jappyŏn* 佛氏雜辨 [Array of Critiques Against Buddhism].<sup>9</sup> While the *Pulssi jappyŏn* was published about half a century earlier in 1487, the *Exposition* was published as late as between 1520 and 1540 and was widely distributed.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Hamhŏ Kihwa was an eminent monk and one of the representative scholar-monks of his time. He lived during a time when the power of Buddhism still possessed a certain level of prestige and political power, despite the start of its erosion as a result of Confucian polemic attacks.

<sup>9</sup> Though *Pulssi jappyŏn* was composed and printed in individual form at an earlier date, it was published in 1487 as part of Chŏng Tojŏn's collected works, *Sambong jip* 三峰集 [A Collection of Sambong's Works].

<sup>10</sup> The first recorded publication of the *Exposition* was in 1526 at Chochŏnsa 招川寺 temple, and another publication of the same copy took place in 1537 at Yŏn'gisa 煙起寺 temple. A newly carved printing boards were produced in 1544, indicating its popularity.

Presented here are some apologetic literatures at different times in the Chosŏn period that also represent various issues that the Buddhist community faced. Nevertheless, this paper will focus on a consistent theme apparent throughout the Chosŏn—Buddhist apologetic literature shows a favourable stance towards Sino-centrism. Yet, the nature of the adoption of Sino-centrism changed depending on the socio-historical context and the needs of the monastic community. I will start with one of the earliest pieces of apologetic literature, *Yusŏk chirŭi non* 儒釋質疑論 [Treatise on Questions Between Confucianism and Buddhism, hereafter the Treatise]<sup>11</sup> and its address of the critique that Buddhism is a barbarian tradition.

### *Treatise on Questions Between Confucianism and Buddhism and the Question ‘Is Buddhism a Barbarian Tradition?’*

We can notice that the Chosŏn period monastics adopted a changing and a nuanced notion of Sino-centrism as opposed to a wholesale acceptance when comparing the early adoption to the later. The nuanced adoption of such ideology is all the more evident in the monastic address of the fact that Buddhism did not originate inside but outside of China, which by definition would be barbarian land. Most likely due to the earlier accusations in the Chosŏn period, earlier apologetic literature addressed the question of Buddhism as a barbarian tradition versus the orthodoxy tradition of Confucianism. This issue has been an ongoing Confucian criticism of Buddhism since Buddhism was first transmitted to China from India. It has always been a sore point, which the Buddhist monks could not help but address, in particular given that the founder, Śākyamuni Buddha, was born in India, and moreover, that Buddhism as a religious tradition originated in India eventually being transmitted to China.

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<sup>11</sup> The *Yusŏk chirŭi non* (HPC vol. 7, 252b–278c), attributed to Hamhŏ Kihwa, is an early Chosŏn apologetic treatise written in defense of Buddhism based on the argument of a harmonization of the three teachings; Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. See Kaplan, *Buddhist Apologetics in East Asia*, for a translated version.

How did the Buddhist monks come to terms with the fact that Buddhism originated in India? In the following two early works, this issue was tactfully adopted such that their arguments both defended the claim that Buddhism was not a barbarian tradition while at the same time allowing the adoption of the notion of *chunghwa* and thus ultimately the rhetoric of ‘orthodox transmission of the Way’ and the ‘doctrine of the civilized and barbarian’. The *Treatise* addressed this issue, in this case, in the format of first briefly stating the Confucian critique of Buddhism and then presenting a Buddhist defence, as follows:

Confucians who criticize Buddhism committedly say that Buddhism is the teaching of the western barbarians and cannot be extended to the Middle Kingdom [China]...

[The author responds:] ‘That’ is one dominion and ‘this’ is one [other] dominion. The descendants of Xia 夏 took ‘that’ [dominion] to be barbarian, but how do we know whether India did not take ‘this’ [dominion] to be barbarian? What is more, ‘that’ India is at the center of the southern continent of Jambudvīpa [and thus it is] not barbarian. The scope of that land can almost certainly be counted within what the eastern Xia took to be their dominion, and standing at the center of its five divisions is [the city of] Kapilavastu.<sup>12</sup> 日儒之訾佛者. 必日佛者. 西夷之教也. 不可施於中國...彼亦一天下. 此亦一天下. 諸夏以彼爲夷. 則亦安知天竺之不以此爲夷也. 況彼天竺者. 乃南瞻部洲之中而非夷也. 其地之廣. 若東夏之所謂天下者. 殆有百數. 分爲五天. 而居其中者. 乃迦維也.<sup>13</sup>

The author of the *Treatise*, while admitting that Buddhism did originate outside of China, argues that the concept of centre is a relative concept and that India was once the centre of its own region and thus ‘not barbarian’. The author further argues that it was part of the eastern part of the Xia kingdom, and therefore part of the middle kingdom. The author continues and argues that in the beginning of

<sup>12</sup> Translation from Kaplan, *Buddhist Apologetics in East Asia*, 142–43.

<sup>13</sup> *Yusök chirüi non, gwön* 1, HPC vol. 7, 256c04–c05, c10–c15.



the world of ‘this kalpa’, ‘India is located at the centre of the world, and all teachings spread out from the centre’, wherein the bodhisattvas became sages and mythical figures of China as follows:

[In fact], those who are called sages in the Eastern Xia [China] are all the manifestations of powerful bodhisattvas. Thus, the *Sutra of the Four Regions of Mt. Sumeru* says: ‘Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva became Fuxi and Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva became Nuwa’,<sup>14</sup> and the *Sutra of the Questions of Emptiness and Tranquility* says: ‘Kāśyapa was called Laozi there, and [the Bodhisattva] Māṇava was called Confucius there’. Indeed, the beginning of the teachings was in India and gradually moved eastwards to illuminate this land.<sup>15</sup> 東夏之所謂聖人者。亦皆大權菩薩之示現。故須彌四域經云。應聲菩薩爲伏羲。吉祥菩薩爲女媧。空寂所問經云。迦葉彼稱老聃。儒童彼稱孔丘。則其法之始於天竺。而東漸于此明矣。<sup>16</sup>

An essential point to note here is that the author does not try to reject or argue against the doctrine of the civilized and barbarian, but he usurps and builds on the narrative to claim India, and Buddhism, to be precursors to Chinese history and culture; in the author’s words, the ‘beginning of the teachings’. Therefore, the text argues that India and the Buddhist tradition cannot be barbarian but rather, if Confucianism was an orthodox teaching, then Buddhism, the teaching of India, was also an orthodox teaching. It is interesting to note that the author did not strictly hold to the notion that only China was the centre. The author was making the argument that such notions of ‘centre’ can shift, which is dependent on specific history and geography.

Now, I move to the second apologetic writing by a well-known author, Hamhō Kihwa, who also had similar relative ideas of the centre.

<sup>14</sup> Fuxi and Nuwa are Chinese mythical figures associated with the founding of the Chinese writing system. Kaplan, *Buddhist Apologetics in East Asia*, 164, note 359.

<sup>15</sup> Translation from *ibid.*, 164.

<sup>16</sup> *Yusōk chirūi non, gwōn* 1, HPC vol. 7, 262b07–b12.

*Exposition of the Orthodox*

The *Exposition* together with the *Treatise* have become the representative Buddhist apologetic writings of the early Chosŏn period. The *Exposition* compares Buddhism with Confucianism and explains the benefits and the misunderstandings of Buddhism in an effort to defend Buddhism against wrongful criticisms by Confucian scholar-officials.<sup>17</sup> A common theme of the *Exposition* is that Buddhism and Confucianism are in essence corresponding teachings that take different forms. Nonetheless, Kihwa in the end argues the superiority of the Buddhist teaching.

As in the relativization of conceptual notions such as the centre, the concepts of western and eastern are no different from that in the *Treatise*. In addition, the *Exposition* argues that some of the legendary Confucian figures are no different from the Buddha in that they were born outside of what can be considered China, territorially. In essence, the *Exposition* is saying that Buddhism cannot be discredited as a barbarian teaching based on the mere fact that the Buddha was not born in what was known as Chinese territory. Kihwa explains:

In referring to India from China, calling it west is the same as referring to China from India and calling it east. If one were to decide on the centre of the world, it would be the place when at noon there would be no shadows. That would be no other than India. Given that the Buddha was born there, would not that be because it is the centre of the world? The direction of the east or the west is so called depending on individual customs; it is not based on having determined an absolute centre.

Because the Buddha was a barbarian, his way cannot be followed. If that is so, then Emperor Shun was born in the eastern barbarian region and King Wen was born in the western barbarian region. Because they can be considered barbarians, do we not follow their ways? 華夏之指天竺爲西。猶天竺之指華夏爲東也。若取天下之大

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<sup>17</sup> Muller, *Korea's Great Buddhist-Confucian Debate*, 18, argues that Kihwa's *Exposition* seems to be a response to Chŏn's criticism of Buddhism.

中。則當午無影爲中。天竺乃余。佛之所以示生於彼者。豈非以其天下之大中也。所謂東西者。蓋彼此時俗之相稱余。非占其中而定其東西也。苟以佛爲夷而不遵其道。則舜生於東夷。文王生於西夷。可夷其人而不遵其道乎。<sup>18</sup>

Here, Kihwa argues that an absolute centre does not exist and that the notion of east and west are position dependent and relative terms. The author further makes the argument that, based on the logic of the doctrine of the civilized and barbarian, even legendary figures within Chinese history would be considered barbarian. And if this were the case, would it discount their teachings? The author, in comparing the Buddha to such legendary figures of Confucianism, argues that the Buddha and his teachings are no different and thus cannot be debased as a barbarian teaching. Based on this argument, there is an assertion that because Buddhism originated in India, it cannot be reduced to any less of a teaching than Confucianism, whose own forefathers were barbarians on account of being born in the eastern and western barbarian regions.

However, although Kihwa takes a relative notion of the idea of centre, the overall trajectory of the *Exposition* starting from the introductory section emphasizes the similarities between the two traditions, argues that Buddhist doctrine does not differ from that of Confucianism, and asserts that it also has the effect of edifying the people. For instance, Kihwa explains that the Buddhist teachings of the five precepts is in essence no different from the Confucian teaching of the five virtues. In making this argument, Kihwa consistently makes reference to the foundation of the Way (Ch. *Dao* 道), which governs all principles, regardless of whether they are Confucian or Buddhist. This not only erases the boundaries between these two traditions but also nullifies the distinctions between the Chinese and Korean traditions.

One of the prominent aspects of the *Exposition* is the consistent reference to the words of Confucius, Mencius, and other Confucian—and admittedly Chinese—eminent figures and texts, including

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<sup>18</sup> *Exposition*, HPC vol. 7, 223b12–b19.

*The Analects* and *Mencius*. Furthermore, there is consistent reference to Buddhism in Chinese history for the purpose of uncovering historical teachings. At the same time, there was hardly any reference made to Korean historical events or important Korean figures. It is as if the teachings of the Way and those uncovered from Chinese history were accepted as truths no different from (or perhaps more relevant than) those from Korean history and its historical experiences. In effect, truths discovered from the Chinese setting were considered to be applicable to Korean monastics.

Lessons learnt from the Chinese cultural and historical context and the outcomes deduced from Chinese history are not adjusted or even reinterpreted for the Korean context but are accepted as outcomes that are directly relevant and applicable to the Korean monastics. This is especially obvious in the discussions of the Way. This is in agreement with a consistent pattern of the current apologetic writings—reference points are almost exclusively cases from Chinese history. This can be understood as an acceptance of China's importance, and admittedly, China as the place of origin of truths. Though Kihwa acknowledges that Buddhism came from a foreign land, he emphasizes the long period of integration and the benefits that it brought to China.

To summarize the two early apologetic works, it is clear within the *Exposition* and the *Treatise* that the monastics held a relative, and not an absolute, idea of centre.<sup>19</sup> In the above two works, we recognize that the authors take a tactful approach and do not reject the notion of *chunghwa* but fully subscribe to it. The following apologetic work also evinces a full subscription to the ideologies of *chunghwa* and *mohwa*.

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<sup>19</sup> Even within the Confucian community, in opposition to the loyal pro-Ming faction, there were anti-Ming scholar-officials who held a realist perspective on the matter of whether to stay loyal to the Ming dynasty despite their ouster from Beijing, the central location.

*Memorial Remonstrating Against the Suppression of Buddhism*

The *Kanpye sŏkgyo so* 諫廢釋教疏 [Memorial Remonstrating Against the Suppression of Buddhism, hereafter the *Memorial Remonstrating*] was published during a time of revival of the various levels of the monastic community such as its educational curriculum, rebuilding of temples, and the publication of collected works of eminent monks.<sup>20</sup> It is also noticeably marked by claims of new identities and the establishment of a Buddhist community distant from the state, which in previous times had been heavily dependent on the state for patronage and legitimacy.<sup>21</sup>

Paekgok Chŏnŭng 白谷處能 (1617–1680),<sup>22</sup> composed this memorial specifically at a time when oppressive state policies were applied. In 1661 the two Buddhist cloisters Chasuwon 慈壽院 and Insuwon 仁壽院, located inside the city walls but outside the palace grounds, were shut down.<sup>23</sup> In one interesting defence against the criticism that Buddhist monks evaded military labour, Paekgok argues that monks supplied paper that was given as tribute to China, guarded the South Mountain castle, and fought at battles to protect the country during the Imjin War 壬辰倭亂 (1592–1598). Paekgok further argues:

In using swords, they (monastic soldiers) [could] challenge the

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<sup>20</sup> Kim, ‘The Formation of Late Joseon Buddhism’, argues that much of the modern form Korean Buddhism was formed in the beginning of the seventeenth century.

<sup>21</sup> Kim, ‘The Formation of Late Chosŏn Buddhism’, 2014–18; Kim, ‘Formation of a Chosŏn Buddhist Tradition’.

<sup>22</sup> Paekgok was a Supreme Supervisor of the Eight Provinces 八道都摠攝 and a lineal descendent of the great Buhyu Sŏnsu 浮休善修 (1543–1615). He is also known for his monastery of the Confucian classics. See Hwang, *Chosŏn hugi sŭngjŏn*.

<sup>23</sup> In 1663, the royal votive shrines 內願堂, located in separate residences of the royal family members, were forced closed. See Yi and Tajima, *Kyŏngsŏngje-gung taebang*, 633–34.

strength of the Jin and Chu states. When in battle, monastic soldiers put to practice techniques of the glorious State of Yue 越. In this way it is stated in the ‘Tunes from the States,’ ‘Due to the work of the state, there is no resting.’ And the ‘Smaller Odes’ says, ‘From dawn to evening there is no chance [to rest].’ It can be said that those who have given-up benevolence are few but those who have upheld principle are many. Therefore, it cannot be that Buddhism be abolished arguing that military labour is lost [by the state]—this is the sixth reason.<sup>24</sup> 鋒爭晉楚之強. 陣習羸越之法. 迹此觀之. 國風所謂. 王事靡監. 小雅所謂. 朝夕不暇者. 可謂孤恩者寡矣. 仗義者多焉. 此不可以有失偏伍而廢者六也.<sup>25</sup>

Here again, similar to the above passages, historical examples from China were referenced to highlight the benefits that the Korean monks provided to the country. In arguing for Korean monks’ ability, the swordsmen of the state of Jin and Chu were used as references. A comparison of fighting techniques was also made with those used in the State of Yue. Furthermore, in order to support his argument, Paekgok makes references to ‘Guofeng’ 國風 [Tunes from the States]<sup>26</sup> or ‘Xiaoya’ 小雅 [Smaller Odes], sections from the *Shijing* 詩經 [Book of Odes]. There is no sense that the two worlds of the Korean monks and the historical heritages of the states of Yue and the *Shijing* in any way belonged to different historical times or realms. Truths gained from sources from China were again used to justify or to make arguments for the situation of Korean Buddhism.

The use of such rhetoric indicates the lack of differentiation by the Korean monastic authors between the two cultures of China and Korea; the historical past of China was no different nor differentiated from the history of Korean Buddhism. That is because Korean Buddhism originated in China. Paekgok explains how Buddhism was transmitted to Korea and how the tradition has been adopted and

<sup>24</sup> Translation from Kim, trans., *Buddhist Apologetics*, 110. Parentheses added.

<sup>25</sup> *Taegak T'unggye jip, gwŏn* 2, HPC vol. 8, 337c14–c18.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Guofeng’ 國風 [Tunes from the States] is a section in the *Shijing*. See ECH, s.v. ‘Shijing 詩經’.

used on the Korean peninsula. Paekgok explains:

If we examine the biography of the monks, the State Preceptor Doseon (827–898) is our eminent monk of the East (Korea) who went to Tang China and received the dharma from Yixing (683–727). Yixing was a monk who has been referred to as a sagacious person by Yin Yin. [Yixing is known to have] determined the Great Expansion<sup>27</sup> number and has rectified the mistakes of the [past] diviners, based on the *tuchen shuo*<sup>28</sup> tradition, which has been a 600 year tradition of the Luoxiahong (d.u.).

The mysterious teachings were entirely passed on to Doseon which then returned to the East. He has established order to heaven and earth and has even uncovered the deeply hidden and dark [places].<sup>29</sup> 謹案釋譜. 國師道誥. 我東之聖僧也. 入唐受法於一行. 一行者. 尹愔所謂聖人者也. 膺洛下閔六百年之讖. 推大衍數. 糾其數家之繆. 誥盡傳其妙. 秘而東歸. 繼天地. 貫幽冥.<sup>30</sup>

Receiving teachings from Chinese masters and transmitting them to Korea seems to be a process that has taken place since Buddhism first arrived on the peninsula. One of the reasons for adopting Chinese Buddhism was that centres of Buddhism on the mainland acted as a source. As the scholar Albert Welter puts it, China in many periods of Korean history was the ‘homeland’ of Buddhism.<sup>31</sup> It is no surprise that many eminent monks throughout the history of Korean

<sup>27</sup> The number of Great Expansion (大衍數 or 大衍之數) is fifty, of which forty-nine numbers are used for divination. See ECH, s.v. ‘Zhou Period Philosophy and Thought’.

<sup>28</sup> *Tuchen* 圖讖 (Kr. *docham*) is a divination method based on the doctrine of *yin-yang* and the five agents.

<sup>29</sup> Translation from Kim, trans., *Buddhist Apologetics*, 126.

<sup>30</sup> *Taegak Tŭnggye jip, gwŏn* 2, HPC vol. 8, 341a08–a12.

<sup>31</sup> Welter explains, ‘Hangzhou became a kind of “homeland” for many Buddhists throughout the East Asian region who trace their lineages, doctrines and teachings directly to the Hangzhou regional Buddhist institutions’. Welter, *The Linji lu and the Creation of Chan Orthodoxy*, 36.

Buddhism travelled to the Buddhist centres in China throughout Korean history.<sup>32</sup>

Within Paekgok's composition is a further example of how no division between Korean and Chinese history is perceived. In the following, Paekgok transitions from discussing the case of state preceptors in Korea to referencing Chinese historical examples. Paekgok explains:

The State Preceptor is said to be a master who assists the state and the ruler. Their Way and reputation are of the utmost such that the records have explained, 'If the state is about to prosper, a divine monk will appear.' [That is why] according to the Chinese records it indicates, 'During the [Late] Han of the Emperor Ming times, it was Moteng 摩騰 (d.u.); during the time of Emperor Wu of the Liang, it was Baozhi 寶誌 (418–514); during the time of Emperor Wen of the Sui dynasty, it was Zhiyi 智顛 (538–597); during the Emperor Taizong of the Tang period, it was Xuanzang 玄奘 (600–664); and during the time of Taizu of the Song dynasty, it was Mayi 麻衣 (d.u.).'<sup>33</sup> 國師者. 師補國君之謂也. 其道望最高. 則必記云. 國之將興. 神僧出. 以中國言之. 漢明之於摩騰. 梁武之於寶誌. 隋祖之於智顛. 唐宗之於玄奘. 宋祖之於麻衣是也.<sup>34</sup>

On reading Paekgok's remonstrance against the then Chosŏn ruler's violation of the long-held Buddhist traditions of the earlier kings and queens by evicting nuns from votive shrines and confiscating monastic slaves, Paekgok references only Chinese examples as supporting evidence. Such a method of argument provides a window into the worldview of Paekgok and most likely of the Korean monastics at the time. China provided a source of verification for the

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<sup>32</sup> Vermeersch asserts that in the early history of the transmission of Buddhism from China during the Three Kingdoms Period (220–280), many Korean monks would have travelled to China, though this is difficult to verify. Vermeersch, 'How the Dharma Ended Up in the "Eastern Country"', 259.

<sup>33</sup> Translation from Kim, trans., *Buddhist Apologetics*, 127.

<sup>34</sup> *Taegak Tŭnggye jip, gwŏn 2*, HPC vol. 8, 341a24–b04.



truths that were applied to Korean Buddhism. Furthermore, the use of predominantly Chinese historical examples as Buddhist models indicates that Chosŏn Buddhism was considered to belong to the same historical and cultural worlds.

### Reign Name and Expressions of Loyalty Towards the Ming Dynasty

Another apologetic piece of literature, ‘Sanghan Nŭngju Pilsu jangsŏ’ 上韓綾州必壽長書 [Long Letter Addressed to Pilsu of Nŭngju District, hereafter ‘Long Letter’] by Yŏndam Yuil 蓮潭有一 (1720–1799),<sup>35</sup> further indicates the extent of the adoption of Sino-centrism late into the Chosŏn period. The late-eighteenth century was a time when the monastic community reached high levels of institutional stability. We will note in this composition that Yuil uniquely adopts Confucian ideals and virtues into Buddhist thought and practice.

A general characteristic of Yuil’s thought as presented in the ‘Long Letter’ is China and its history as reference points to make arguments that also applied to Korea’s case. Yuil, contrasts the less-than-congenial relationship between Confucianism and Buddhism during the Chosŏn dynasty with Chinese historical cases. Yuil notes that while Confucian scholars in Song China may have argued against Buddhism, they nevertheless accepted the great similarities between Buddhism and Confucianism. However, Yuil bemoans that Chosŏn Confucian scholar-officials all argued that Buddhism was harmful, even without much ground for support. In Yuil’s argument, China is used as a yardstick and a model to which Korea’s case was compared.

However, Yuil’s ‘Long Letter’ is characteristic of his embrace of many Neo-Confucian values into Buddhist practices. Along with Confucian notions such as filial piety towards one’s parents, Yuil incorporated other Confucian values such as loyalty, humanity,

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<sup>35</sup> Yuil was a prominent descendent of Pyŏnyang Ŏngi 鞭羊彦機 (1581–1645) who in turn was a famous lineal descendent of Chŏnghŏ Hyujŏng.

righteousness, and justice. In his ‘Long Letter’, Yuil adopts Confucian values and argues that such values will lead a person to reach the Buddhist heaven of Sukhāvātī.<sup>36</sup> In this way, just as the Confucian values were adopted and incorporated into the Buddhist soteriology, Yuil also adopted the Confucian ideal of loyalty not only to the Chosŏn sovereign but also towards the Chinese Ming dynasty.

In a verse from Yuil’s poem, ‘Ch’asa wŏnilsong yŏksŏn’ 次謝元日送曆扇 [Responding After Receiving a Calendar and a Fan on the First Day of the Month], his expression of loyalty towards the Ming and rejection of the Qing is explicit:

記得崇禎紀號年	Remembering the reign name of Chongzhen, <sup>37</sup>
大明日月尚昭然	the days and months of the great Ming dynasty are yet bright.
山僧亦有彝倫在	The mountain monk still holds to the non-changing morals;
厭見昆明劫後天	I do not desire to see fate [of the world] after the barbarians have appeared. <sup>38</sup>

We can easily note Yuil’s acceptance of the ideology of *chunghwa*, the Sino-centric orthodoxy. Firstly, although it has been about a hundred years since the downfall of the Ming dynasty, Yuil expresses his loyalty and longing for the Ming dynasty. He also expresses his loyalty to the idea of the Ming as the centre of the civilized world by referencing the reign name of Chongzhen 崇禎. He further explicitly expresses his longing for the days of Ming when he exclaims,

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<sup>36</sup> Yuil writes, ‘In the world of Sukhāvātī, purely benevolent people will be reborn there. Those with a heart that is extremely loyal to their sovereign, filial to their parents, and extremely humane, righteous, compassionate, and kind will be able to be reborn there, not merely by calling the name of Amitābha Buddha’ (極樂之國. 純善者. 往生之. 苟能忠君孝父仁義慈善之心至極. 則可以往生. 非但念佛也). *Yŏndam taesa Imha rok, gwŏn* 4, HPC vol. 10, 283a13–17.

<sup>37</sup> Chongzhen 崇禎 is the era name of the last Ming emperor Yizong 毅宗 (r. 1628–1644).

<sup>38</sup> *Yŏndam taesa Imha rok, gwŏn* 1, HPC vol. 10, 224a23–a24.

‘the days and months of the great Ming dynasty are yet bright’. Of course, the situation is that the Ming has fallen and the Qing dynasty has taken the place of the Ming, a situation that many Korean ruling elites and intellectuals bemoaned. Yuil further expresses this when he laments the downfall of Ming and the rise of the barbarian Qing, an indication that he was deeply invested in the eminence of Sinitic culture and his subscription to the doctrine of the civilized and barbarian.

It might be said that *mohwa*, or ‘admiring efflorescence’, lasted almost to the end of the Chosŏn period. China was generally conceived as a source of culture, civilization, and military might. It was after the Sino-Japanese war of 1894 that such conceptions of China were shattered, leading the Koreans to be more open to western influences. They were especially open to scientific knowledge and military power that came with western missionaries, mostly in hopes of gaining some form of protection against the encroachment of the Japanese onto the Korean peninsula. After the defeat of China by Japan, a Korean intellectual remarked,

The victory of Japan over China made a great impression. Koreans had respected China as the source of power and civilization; now she was beaten to her knees by the eastern islanders who had learned the arts of war and government from the West. People began to believe that everything of the West was superior and best, and they were ready to accept the religion of the Westerners.<sup>39</sup>

Such a Sino-centric worldview, including admiring efflorescence, was widely accepted throughout Chosŏn society, even among the monks, as noted above. In fact, it was an important element in the establishment of orthodox Buddhist lineages, based on which monastic identities came to be formed in the early seventeenth century. At this time, the Chosŏn monastic community was becoming more established after state patronage was severed and legal recognition

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<sup>39</sup> Paik, *The History of Protestant Missions*, 261, requoted from Park, *Protestantism and Politics in Korea*, 109.

rescinded. Through this turn of events, the Chosŏn Buddhist community needed to establish its institutional foundation and societal legitimacy. As part of this development in the seventeenth century, prominent literati monks of the Chosŏn saṃgha endeavoured to form a new identity by reaching back to the Chinese Linji 臨濟 Chan 禪 connections. However, this was done within the framework of Sino-centric rhetoric.

### Rhetorical Use of Sino-Centrism in Monastic Identity

I find it significant that Sino-centrism was used as part of rhetorical claims of heterodoxy in the formation of the monastic identity. As part of the general increase in the effort of the Chosŏn monastic community to become established and socially recognized, they formulated new claims of genealogical identities. These identity claims were heavily influenced by Confucian notions of orthodox transmission of the Way.<sup>40</sup> With increasing separation of the saṃgha from the Chosŏn state as a result of the anti-Buddhist state policies, the monastic community adopted the then-popular notion of orthodox transmission of the Way. It was not too different from its own Buddhist lineal transmission of the Buddha-mind.<sup>41</sup>

The criterion of legitimacy for determining Confucian lineal orthodoxy was, in essence, accepted by the monastic community to lay claims to genealogical orthodoxy. What should be noted here is that these ideas are based on the notion that China was the source of orthodoxy. In other words, this was no different from the 'doctrine

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<sup>40</sup> Unlike previous monastic identities evident in the late-Koryŏ and early-Chosŏn steles that were heavily reliant on its close association with the state, such a relationship was less visible in the newly formed identity. Buddhist steles from those early times were commissioned by the state for either a royal or a state preceptor. Kim, 'Re-purposing the Portrayal', 211–12.

<sup>41</sup> The lineal transmission in Buddhism was based on the transmission of the lamp tradition developed in China in the seventh century and later fully established in the ninth century. For more, see McRae, *The Northern School*, 4.

of the civilized and barbarian' in that China was the source and place of orthodoxy. Based on these criteria and the fact that Naong 懶翁 (1320–1376) and T'aego 太古 (1301–1382) visited China and received transmission from Chinese masters, they were revived some three hundred years later in tandem with the reemergence of Chosŏn Buddhism in the early seventeenth century and the formation of a new monastic identity. Naong and T'aego became the representative figures of the claimed orthodoxy lineages of the Chosŏn Buddhist community.

Initially, Chosŏn monastics considered Naong as the more important figure in the formation of an orthodox Buddhist identity. However, T'aego eventually replaced Naong as the more favoured figure and became the representative figure of Korean Sŏn/Chan orthodoxy of the late-Chosŏn period.<sup>42</sup> One of the reasons that T'aego became more favoured is because Naong's dharma transmission from an Indian monk Zhikong 指空 (d. 1363) deviated from the norms of orthodoxy.<sup>43</sup> This is most likely the reason that T'aego's lineage—which connects him to the Chinese Yangqi 楊岐<sup>44</sup> branch of the Linji tradition—had an edge over Naong's lineage.

Two fundamental aspects—lineal orthodoxy and orthodoxy based on Chinese origins—were important criteria that became even greater marks of legitimacy in the late Chosŏn period. This was well navigated by the seventeenth century monastic authors in establishing claims of orthodoxy for the Buddhist community. These intellectual monks borrowed or mimicked the Confucian notion of 'orthodox transmission of the Way' or *tot'ong* 道統, a criterion which was fundamental to the Neo-Confucian thought and rhetoric in the late Chosŏn society. This notion of a direct transmission of orthodox teachings was central in guarding legitimate orthodox teachings against heretical traditions, a notion which intensified all the more as

<sup>42</sup> Kim, 'The Origin of Orthodox Exclusivity', 105–12.

<sup>43</sup> Kim, 'Re-purposing the Portrayal of Eminent Monks', 112.

<sup>44</sup> Yangqi Fanghui 楊岐方會 (992–1049), a disciple of Shishuang Chuyuan 石霜楚圓 (986–1039), is known as the founder of the Yangqi branch of the Chinese Linji school.

the Ming dynasty, as the source of the civilized world, was defeated and replaced by the Qing dynasty.<sup>45</sup>

As the ideology of Sino-centric orthodoxy exerted greater influence in the early seventeenth century, previously prominent Koryŏ monastic figures became replaced or deleted in the development of a new lineal identity. Establishing the orthodoxy of the great Chŏnghŏ Hyujŏng's 清虛休靜 (1520–1604, hereafter Hyujŏng) lineage, as inscribed in a 1630 stele,<sup>46</sup> was a way of claiming orthodoxy based on the dominance of the Linji tradition in China. After the initial claims in the early seventeenth century, new genealogical identities emerged where we witness a move towards an emphasis on the orthodoxy of the Linji lineage and T'aego as the Korean patriarch. In the *Chongbong yŏngdang ki* 鍾峰影堂記 [Records of Venerable Chongbong] published in 1625,<sup>47</sup> Koryŏ figures identified as not belonging to the orthodox Linji line were deleted including the Sŏn master Chinul 知訥 (1158–1210) and the royal preceptor Naong 懶翁 (1320–1376). This was part of a movement to establish the identity of the Chosŏn monastic community based on the orthodox Linji lineage, using the lineal connection of T'aego to Shiwu Qinggong 石屋清珙 (1272–1352), the eighteenth patriarch of the Chinese Linji line.

Though both Naong, who was considered up to then the most favourable patriarch, and T'aego made the arduous journey to China and received certification from Chinese masters, emphasis on Chinese Linji orthodoxy in the seventeenth century favoured T'aego. As a consequence of the movement, the Linji lineage became syn-

<sup>45</sup> Kim-Haboush, 'Constructing the Center'.

<sup>46</sup> This is 'Hoehyang P'yohunsa Paekhwam Ch'ŏnghŏdang Hyujŏng taesa pi' 淮陽表訓寺白華庵清虛堂休靜大師碑 [Master Ch'ŏnghŏ Hyujŏng Memorial Stele at Paekhwam Hermitage of P'yohunsa Monastery in Hoehyang]. Yi, ed., *Hanguk kosŭng pimun*, 50–54. A Korean translation is available in Yi, *Kyogam yŏkchu*, 214–39.

<sup>47</sup> *Chongbong yŏngdang ki* was composed by P'yŏnyang Ŏn'gi 鞭羊彦機 and is an abbreviation of *Pongnaesan unsuam chongbong yŏngdang ki* 蓬萊山雲水庵鍾峰影堂記 [Unsu Hermitage at Mount Pongnae Records of Venerable Chongbong] found in *P'yŏnyangdang jip* 鞭羊堂集.

onymous with Buddhist orthodoxy in Chosŏn, and even today, this point of reference has come to be generally accepted as the basis of modern-day identity of Korean monastics.

Such effort to clearly distinguish the T'aego–Hyujŏng lineage as orthodox had political reasons. Indeed, the descendants of Hyujŏng could not help but be cognizant of the social and political currents to navigate for the best interests of their own lineal clan. The use of the widely accepted narratives of *tot'ong* and the middle kingdom as the source of orthodoxy was a method to adjust to the pervading and widely accepted ideologies of the late-Chosŏn period. Furthermore, inherent within these notions is the doctrine of the civilized and barbarian. It was incumbent on the monastics to adapt to the societal circumstances and adjust to the social and political trends that were taking place when forming a Buddhist genealogy.

### Closing Remarks

While the Chosŏn period monks held to the idea of *chunghwa*, or Sino-centric orthodoxy, they were also open to the idea that centres can shift, as when the centre was displaced with the defeat of the Ming dynasty by the invading Mongols in 1644. They were aware of the rhetorical sense of the notion of the 'centre'. Nevertheless, the pattern of reaching back to China as the place of cultural and historical origin was common for both Confucian elites and Buddhist monks in the Chosŏn period. Underlying this tendency was the ideology of *hwai ron*, or the doctrine of the civilized and barbarian, a Sino-centric worldview that positioned China as the centre of the civilized world. Evidence of adoption of Sino-centric narratives by Korean monastics are found in Chosŏn Buddhist apologetic literature, where Chosŏn Buddhism has been portrayed as a cultural and historical extension of China. This worldview has also become manifest in the adoption of the Linji lineage as the legitimate orthodox Sŏn/Chan lineage in the seventeenth century.

The method of establishing orthodoxy of the Buddhist community reveals the monastic adoption of the ideal of China as the source of orthodoxy, an ideal that was prevalent among the upper class of the

late-Chosŏn period and also subscribed to by the monastic community. The adoption of this ideal of China as the source of orthodoxy underlies the reason for shifting to a heavily Chinese centred Linji school to define orthodox lineages in the late-Chosŏn period.

That such a movement was initiated in the seventeenth century does not seem to be a simple coincidence. It fits the trend that was taking shape within the late-Chosŏn saṃgha, namely its reemergence and its push to become legitimately recognized as an orthodox tradition. As a consequence of the movement of the early seventeenth century, two notions came to be generally accepted and have since endured; 1) Hyujŏng's lineal clan as the orthodox line, causing many monks to flock to this clan to claim lineal connections, and 2) the Linji lineage as synonymous with Buddhist orthodoxy in late Chosŏn Korea. Even today, these two points of reference have come to be generally accepted and have provided a foundational basis of identity of the present Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism.

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### Abbreviations

- ECH *An Encyclopaedia on Chinese History, Literature and Art.*  
See Secondary Sources, Theobald, ed.
- HPC *Han'guk pulgyo chŏnsŏ* 韓國佛教全書. See Secondary Sources, Tonggung taehakkyo pulgyomunhwa yŏn'guwŏn, ed.

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