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Buddhism in Korean Film during the Roh Regime (1988-1993)

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Contents

1. Introduction
2. Buddhist Films, 1988-1993
3. Conclusions: A Critical Review

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Abstract

This article outlines and critically discusses South Korean Buddhist films made during the time of the Roh Tae-woo government (1988-1993), which can be called a semi-democratic and semi-dictatorial regime. This was a period of transition in film policy from the censorship of the earlier dictatorial regimes to the freedom of expression offered to directors by the later democratic administrations, unprecedented in Korean film history. During this period the technical skill of directors improved bringing about a corresponding improvement in the quality of Korean Buddhist films and thus international attention. Although the government allowed filmmakers considerably more freedom to express ideas about sensitive political and social issues during the Roh regime, because of individual and institutional pressures, filmmakers could not freely and critically portray monastic lives and religious issues. For example, conservative Buddhists protested the release of films that depicted Korean Buddhism in a negative light, calling for a form of private censorship. These pressure led filmmakers to use abstruse dialogues, metaphors, stories, images, and technical terms in their Buddhist films, particularly those about Zen Buddhism, that likely baffled audiences.

Key terms: South Korean cinematic history, Buddhist films, movies during the Roh regime, Im Kwon-taek, Bae Yonggyun, Buddhism in popular culture, Buddhism and politics, Critical Buddhism, Buddhism in literature

1. Introduction

Korean films in general and Korean Buddhist films in particular can be divided into the following eight periods. Films made:²

- (1) during the colonial period (1910-1945);
- (2) from liberation in 1945 to the April 19 Revolution in 1960;
- (3) during the earlier part of Park Chung-hee's (Bak Jeonghui) (1917-1979) military dictatorship (1961-1979);
- (4) during the later period of Park's regime in the 1970s;
- (5) under Chun Doo-hwan's (Jeon Duhwan) (b. 1931) military dictatorial regime (1980-1988);
- (6) during the time of Roh Tae-woo's (No Tae'u) (b. 1932) semi-democratic and semi-dictatorial regime (1988-1993);
- (7) from 1993 to 1999 under the democratic governments;
- (8) from the year 2000 and after.

Critics suggest that film, if used with caution, offers a powerful medium for investigating a country's history since individual films will often reflect the prevailing political conditions and social attitudes of the time. That assumption informs this article. During the colonial period, three dramatic films about Buddhism were made under the strict supervision of the colonial government, which used the medium to guide Koreans to understand and support its policies. At the time, the government did not allow films to be made with content that opposed it in any way. In response, some Korean directors of the period chose to make non-political, romantic films. Indeed, the very first Korean film, *The Vow Made Below the Moon* released in 1923, was made indoctrinate people into the views of the colonial government. Likewise, the first Korean Buddhist film, *Unforgettable Sorrowful Song* (1927), portrays state protectionism³ and two subsequent films, both produced in 1930, were tragic love stories.

The history of Korean Buddhist film in the second period begins with *A Hometown in Heart* (76 minutes) directed by Yun Yonggyu (b. 1913) in 1949. Other than this, we cannot find Buddhist films made during the time the US Military Administration governance of South Korea (1945 – 1948) and before the Korean War (1950 – 1953). One Korean Buddhist film titled *Seongbul-sa Temple* made during the war in 1952, emphasizes the ideal of state loyalty as a

The Korean Government Romanization System revised in 2000 is used for Korean terms. If names have not previously been Romanized, these article authors have done so using East Asian Standard Romanization Systems. Foreign terms, those not included in the *Webster English Dictionary*, appear in italics.

² This article examines only feature films. For a treatment of Korean Buddhist short films, which are not considered in this book, see Mun Gwan-gyu, "Han'guk danpyeon bulgyo yeonghwa yeon'gu" (Research in Korean Buddhist Short Films), *Bulgyo hakbo* (Journal of Korean Buddhist Research Institute of Dongguk University) 52 (August 2009): 229-50.

³ See Ronald S. Green, "Institutionalizing Buddhism for the Legitimation of State Power in East Asia," in Chanju Mun, ed., *Mediators and Meditators: Buddhism and Peacemaking*, ed. Chanju Mun (Honolulu: Blue Pine, 2007), 219-31. Chanju Mun also discussed state protectionism of East Asian Buddhism in the section '7. State protectionism: East Asian Buddhist contexts' of his article "Buddhism and Peace: An Overview," in *Buddhist Roles in Peacemaking: How Buddhism Can Contribute to Sustainable Peace*, eds. Chanju Mun and Ronald S. Green (Honolulu: Blue Pine, 2009), 27-38.

virtue. In a time of national crisis, the film exhibits a model of traditional Korean Buddhism that pre-modern rulers had lauded. Like many Korean films of the first period, South Korean Buddhist films from the second to the fourth period often promoted the twin Confucian cardinal virtues of state loyalty and filial piety, which the anti-Communist and dictatorial rulers prized.

The fifth period of South Korean Buddhist film is contemporaneous with the military regime of Chun Doo-hwan (September 1, 1980 – February 25, 1988), which began after the Park government ended upon his death on October 26, 1979. The sixth period coincides with the presidency of Roh Tae-woo (February 25, 1988 – 25 February, 25 1993). Although the film industry had continued the trends of the 1970s through the fifth period, this sixth period witnessed a marked shift occasioned by key changes in the domestic and international environment.

Chun's military regime adopted the Yusin Motion Picture Law promulgated on February 16, 1973, which authorized censoring scripts before shooting and post-production. This censorship and other factors caused a decline in the film industry beginning in the 1970s and continuing during Chun's rule. The sharpness of this decline is evident in key cinematic statistics related to movie production, viewership, and so on.

Before the Roh administration, Im Kwon-taek (b. 1936) directed his first Buddhist film *Mandala*, which was awarded the Grand Prix at the 1981 Hawaii Film Festival. During the Roh government, he directed his other Buddhist film titled *Aje Aje Bara Aje* (Come, Come, Come Upward) in 1989, which won the Bronze St. George Award at the sixteenth Moscow International Film Festival. Bae Yonggyun (b. 1951) directed the film *Why Has Bodhidharma Left for the East?* and received the Golden Leopard Award at the 1989 Locarno International Film Festival. Just three months after the end of the Roh government on February 25, 1993, Jang Seon-u (b. 1952) directed and released the film *The Avatamsaka Sutra (Hwaeom-gyeong)* on June 26, which was awarded the Alfred Bauer Prize at the 1994 Berlin International Film Festival.

After Roh's partly-democratic and partly-dictatorial regime ended, the democratic governments that followed abandoned censorship, thereby allowing filmmakers to freely engage their imaginations and produce a variety of films on previously prohibited topics. Eschewing portrayals of state loyalty and filial piety in their Buddhist films, directors focused, instead, on social and religious issues including interfaith cooperation, the reunification of Korea, discrimination, human rights, and the environment.

2. Buddhist Films, 1988–1993

We can identify eight Korean Buddhist films that were released during the Roh regime. In order of release date, these are: (1) *Karma* (105 minutes) directed by Yi Duyong (b. 1942) and released on May 20, 1988; (2) *Aje Aje Bara Aje* (134 minutes) directed by Im Kwon-taek and released on March 3, 1989; (3) *Uḍumbara Flower* (106 minutes) directed by Kim Yangdeuk (b. 1948) and released on September 13, 1989; (4) *Why Has Bodhidharma Left for the East* (175 minutes) written and directed by Bae Yonggyun and released on September 23, 1989; (5) *The Police, Childeuk, and Buddhist Monk Neoteol* (90 minutes), an action comedy film for children directed by Wang Yong and released on January 8, 1990; (6) *Ose-am Hermitage* (115 minutes) directed by Bak Cheolsu (1948-2013) and released on March 24, 1990; (7) *Dream* (93 minutes) directed by Bae Changho (b. 1953) and released on September 29, 1990; and (8) *Beyond the*

Mountain (108 minutes) directed by Jeong Jiyeong (b. 1946) and released on May 25, 1991. We take up each of these films in the order listed.

1. Yi Duyong directed the film *Karma* (*Eop*, 105 minutes) in 1988. In it, Governor Heo is worried about a plague that is sweeping the country. He admonishes Mr. Gu and his wife for making amulets to ward off evil. Later, Heo castrates Mr. Gu for making superstitious claims and takes his wife as his mistress. Heo comes to be tormented by hallucinations and nightmares and begins to blame it on a curse by the couple. Although he kills the couple at their reunion, he is unable to ward off his bad karma and dies from leprosy. The film addresses the themes of karmic retribution and exorcism.

2. In *Aje Aje Bara Aje*, Im Kwon-taek takes up themes from his 1981 film *Mandala* (105 minutes) uncompleted 1984 film *Bhikkhuni*; those themes include sexuality, the vinaya (the Buddhist ethical code), Zen Buddhism, self-cultivation, Bodhisattva practice, and Dharma lineage in Korean Buddhist monasticism.⁴ The film is based on a novel by Han Seungwon (b. 1939), which the author revised for the film. But we can trace the earliest expression of these themes back to *Transgression* (112 minutes), a 1974 film by Kim Giyeong (1919-1998); they reappear in *Beyond the Mountain* (108 minutes), which Jeong Jiyeong directed in 1991.

While *Mandala* expresses its themes by focusing mainly on the lives and practices of two monks, Beobun and Jisan, Im's 1989 film *Aje Aje Bara Aje* explores its themes by following the lives of two nuns, Cheongha (secular name: Sunnyeo) and Jinseong. Both women became nuns under the same master, Eunseon at Deogam Temple. While the defrocked Sunnyeo advocates the altruistic Bodhisattva spirit of helping others in need, Jinseong strictly preserves monastic rules and seriously practices Buddhism to obtain enlightenment. Im's treatment favors Sunnyeo over Jinseong in *Aje Aje Bara Aje*, unlike in *Mandala* in which we might say he favors Beobun's advocacy of self-cultivation over Jisan's practice of helping others, although he shows the value in both approaches.

When Im released his 1981 film, he seemed to have been very cautious about not including elements critical of the dictatorial region of Chun. However, because he made the 1989 film one year after the Chun stepped down from his presidency in 1988, he could address three sensitive political issues; the Vietnam War (1956-1975), the Gwangju Democratization Movement, and the government's discrimination against the family members of Communists or Communist sympathizers. He also included anti-government demonstration scenes. Although his treatment of these issues seems, at times, arbitrary and rather heavy-handed, he is to be applauded for his courage.

As background, the military dictator Park Chung-hee dispatched South Korean soldiers to Vietnam at the request of the US government and many died in the war. Another military general Chun Doo-hwan crushed the Gwangju Democratization Movement, killing many innocent civilians and seizing power. The civilian dictator Syngman Rhee (1875-1965) persecuted and killed Communists and Communist sympathizers and their family members during his three-term presidency from August 15, 1948 to April 26, 1960. The three dictators, civilian and military,

⁴ On modern Korean Zen Buddhist monasticism, see Robert E. Buswell, Jr., *The Zen Monastic Experience* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992) and on the Dharma lineage of Korean Buddhism, see "Pt. 1 Overview of Korean Buddhism: Interconnecting Sectarianism and Ecumenism," in Chanju Mun, *Purification Buddhist Movement, 1954-1970: The Struggle to Restore Celibacy in the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism* (Honolulu: Blue Pine, 2011), 23-79.

targeted innocent family members of Communists and Communist sympathizers and prevented them from obtaining decent jobs in South Korea.

In *Aje Aje Bara Aje*, Sunnyeo's life is shaped by her interactions with three men substantially and, to a lesser degree, by two others.⁵ The former include her father, high school history teacher, and a third who is instrumental in her suspension from the monastic order. First, her father was driven to become a monk by his traumatic experience as an officer during the Vietnam War. After becoming a monk under the ordination name Yunbong he endeavored to somehow live with the guilt of killing innocent people during the war; he could not, however, get rid of this guilt. Second, because a false rumor circulated about an illicit affair between Sunnyeo and a high school history teacher, Hyeonjong, she is forced to leave school. Hyeonjong had participated in the Gwangju Democratization Movement and his wife, who was eight-month's pregnant at the time, was killed during the police/military crackdown. Sunnyeo's interaction with Hyeonjong opens her eyes to a broader and more critical view of modern Korean history.

Third, after becoming a Buddhist nun, Sunnyeo saves a man named Bak Hyeon-u as he is attempting to commit suicide. We learn that Bak had been a student activist for democracy and that his father was a Communist during the Korean War. Because he could not get a good job because of his father's affiliation, he became destitute and suicidal. After Sunnyeo saves him and visits him in the hospital, temple members come to believe that she is having an affair with him and has violated the monastic rule of celibacy. When they baselessly criticize her, she does not defend herself but walks away from the temple and is followed by Bak.

At first she resents Bak who has been instrumental in her abandonment of the monastic life. However, as time passes, she comes to feel that she might genuinely help him, thereby expressing the altruism of the Bodhisattva. So she marries him and gradually their relationship becomes pleasant. But Bak is killed at work in a coal mining accident and their child is stillborn.

After Bak's death, Sunnyeo meets a legless man and altruistically marries him and provides her body to fulfill his sexual desires. However, like her first husband, he also dies suddenly. Next she serves as nurse's assistant on Bigeum Island in the South Sea. There she meets a doctor whose wife had died and who is raising his small son alone. She marries him, helping both in his practice and to raise the boy. However, he also dies suddenly while they are making love. Thus, all five men who touched her life met miserable fates.

During this time, Jinseong remained a nun and we see her development through her relationship with two men: a student activist and a cave-dwelling monk. The film shows us that the Buddhist institution values those who emphasize self-cultivation over those who engage in altruistic actions. However, Jinseong's life is not without its own trials and she meets two men who challenge her views. After her master, Eunseon, sends her to study at a university to broaden her perspective on life, she meets U Jongnam on campus. He encourages her to experience the joys and sufferings of the real world, asking her to question the value of her monastic life in the mountains suggesting there is greater value in devoting her life to helping others in need. Meanwhile, all around her at the university students are protesting. Jinseong eventually leaves the university and decides to enter a cave in order to dedicate herself further to self-cultivation. In the cave, however, she is surprised by the appearance of a depraved monk who forces her to look where his genitals used to be before he cut them off in an attempt to eliminate his sexual desires. He admonishes her as an arrogant nun, ignorant of how difficult it is to accomplish Buddhahood. Even so, Jinseong does not change but maintains her views and

⁵ Yi Jin, "Han'guk bulgyo yeonghwa yeon'gu: palsip nyeondae ihu jakpum eul jungsim euro" (A Study on Korean Buddhist Films between 1980 and 1993) (MA thesis, Dongguk University, 1995), 36.

monastic lifestyle.⁶ It is possible, however, that the monk in the cave was a figment of her imagination and a projection of her own self-criticism.

One day Sunnyeo meets her Dharma sister Jinseong who is pursuing personal attainment as she travels along the coast of the South Sea. This meeting contrasts the monastic Buddhist path of Jinseong and the non-monastic Bodhisattva path of Sunnyeo, who is dealing with the suffering of others at the hospital. Eventually, and after many years, Sunnyeo returns to Deogam Temple where she had once been a nun. While the other nuns there try to shun her for what they incorrectly perceive as her past and present defilement, her master Eunseon can see her virtue and tells the others she has been awaiting for Sunnyeo to return even as she is dying. Sunnyeo learns the values of truth, freedom, and salvation from Eunseon in the latter's last days of life. Eunseon also instructs the other nuns to allow Sunnyeo to live in a corner of the temple complex and return to monasticism if she chooses so. However, after Eunseon's funeral and cremation, Sunnyeo again returns to secular life through which she will continue to help others who are suffering in the world.

Although on the surface Sunnyeo and Jinseong appear as opposites, the film positions their respective paths as complementary. Sunnyeo had always missed her master and the monastic life, although she resided in secular society. Jinseong's feelings about herself were reflected through the eyes of U Jongnam, who considered her to be selfish and taught her to be humble and to understand her former Dharma sister Sunnyeo, who prioritized altruistic actions over monastic life that emphasizes self-practice and self-enlightenment.

The actress Gang Suyeon (b. 1966) who played the role of Sunnyeo in the film received the Bronze St. George Award for the best actress of the year and director Im Kwon-taek was nominated for the Golden St. George Award at the sixteenth Moscow Film Festival, even though South Korea did not have diplomatic relations with Russia at the time. *Aje Aje Bara Aje* was also chosen as the best film of the year at the 1989 Grand Bell Film Festival that the Korean Motion Picture Association has annually presented in recognition of excellence in South Korean films.

3. Kim Yangdeuk (b. 1948) directed *Uḍumbara Flower* in 1989 based on a famous four-volume novel written by Nam Jisim (b. 1944).⁷ In the film, Donghwa and Hyeonji, two lovers, witness Hyeonji's father raping Donghwa's sister. After this, Hyeonji begins to avoid Donghwa out of shame and then leaves the country to study abroad. Donghwa falls ill to pneumonia and develops mental problems. To recover, she is sent to a temple, becomes a Buddhist nun, and receives the ordination name Jihyo. When a man named Bongdu is bitten by a snake while hunting for ginseng, Jihyo helps him. However, just as in the case of Sunnyeo in *Aje Aje Bara Aje*, Jihyo is expelled from the nunnery as a result. Later, she meets the eminent master Damsi and through him, she will be reborn as the Uḍumbara Flower which is said to bloom only once every 3,000 years. The Uḍumbara Flower is an auspicious symbol used in Buddhist iconography and storytelling to indicate a rare and precious occurrence. Although Hyeonji and Jihyo reunite in front of a Buddha image, by then she is very ill. As in Im Kwon-taek's two Buddhist films, the story contrasts rigid monastic rules with Bodhisattva activity, the latter of which results in social ostracization. Donghwa's rebirth is similar to the Buddhist metaphor that says the Bodhisattva of

⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁷ Nam Jisim is a famous Buddhist novelist in South Korea. She was born in Gangneung, Gangwon Province and graduated from Ewha Women's University. She wrote her first novel, *Pine Wind and Water Waves*, in 1980 and has written several more novels since then. She also wrote her representative four-volume novel *Uḍumbara Flower* in 1987.

Compassion is born inside a lotus flower. This theme in Korean movies dates to the *Story of Sim Cheong* directed by Yi Gyeongson in 1925. Likewise, the shunned mother in the 1949 film *A Hometown in Heart* is compared with the Bodhisattva of Compassion and associated with the image of a lotus flower that is embedded in her prayer beads.

4. Bae Yonggyun directed the film *Why Has Bodhidharma Left for the East?* in 1989. He wrote the script for his film, unlike Kim and Im who directed their films based on novels. Bae's film showcases principles of Zen Buddhism through three major figures, an old master named Hyegok, a monk called Gibong, and an orphan child known as Haejin. Even though he did not use a modern novel as the basis of his movie, in his script he also did not develop his own style that is different from that found in modern novels used for other films portraying aspects of Zen.

Like other filmmakers, Bae uses the Ten Ox-Herding Pictures of Zen Buddhism as a metaphor for stages of his characters' progress toward enlightenment. Chinese Chan Master Kuon Shiyuan made the current, most widely distributed version of the pictures, which include poems and short pieces of prose based on an earlier Daoist work of the twelfth century Song Dynasty. The English translation of these ten pictures are (1) Searching for the Undisciplined Bull, (2) Discovering the Bull's Traces, (3) Partially Seeing the Bull, (4) Catching the Bull, (5) Taming the Bull, (6) Riding the Bull Home, (7) Transcending the Bull only, (8) Transcending both Bull and Self, (9) Reaching the Original Source, and (10) Returning to Society. These images address key tenets of Mahāyāna Buddhism and are meant to be used as guides for Zen practitioners to attain enlightenment and then to return to the secular world to save all sentient beings from suffering. The images metaphorically describe a boy (a Zen practitioner) attempting to find his lost bull, which symbolizes the original and natural mind the practitioner is attempting to discover and tame.

The first image shows a boy going out to find a bull in the field. The second illustrates the boy finding the bull's footprints. The third shows the boy following the bull's footprints and finally gets a glimpse of it. In the fourth image, he has trouble catching the wild bull. In the fifth, he harnesses the bull. In the sixth image, he rides the tamed bull, happily returning home while playing a flute. In the seventh, after he has returned home, he sits alone forgetting the bull. The eighth picture is an image of only a circle, representing the state of emptiness that the boy can attain by forgetting both bull and self. In the ninth picture, there is no bull and no boy, having only a beautiful scene representing the original, clear mind. In the tenth picture, the boy returns from the mountain to the village and goes to teach what he has realized to all sentient beings.

Following up on some of the representations of Zen concepts in Bae's film, Yun Yongjin directed the film *Enlightenment (Hal)*, 86 minutes) in 2010. It includes the themes of Zen Buddhism and interfaith cooperation between Catholicism and Buddhism. In the film, Ucheon and Michael, two orphans, have lived together in an orphanage like brothers, but have an insoluble religious conflict. Against wishes of Michael, who becomes a Catholic priest, Ucheon becomes a Buddhist monk. One day, Ucheon leaves on a two-day journey with his master Cheongsong. Ucheon attains enlightenment through his master's teachings and meets Michael again.

Im Sullye (b. 1960) directed the film *Rolling Home with a Bull* (108 minutes) also on Zen Buddhism in 2010. Her film premiered at the Jogyesa Temple, head temple of the Jogye Order in downtown Seoul. In it, against his father's wishes, a man named Seonho begins a journey to cattle markets across the country to sell his family's cow, but fails to sell it. His ex-girlfriend Hyeonsu appears wherever he goes. At one point Seonho has a chance encounter with a Seon

monk, who serendipitously gives him advice. Seonho ends up taking the cow back home and finding new value in the old agricultural tradition, which, like the wisdom of Buddhism, is being lost in the process of modernization. The film also incorporates the ox-herding pictures to symbolically express the principles of Zen Buddhism and changes in the protagonist's perspective.

5. Wang Yong directed the 1989 action and absurd science fiction comedy for children, *The Police, Childeuk, and Buddhist Monk Neoteol* (90 minutes). In the film Dr. Gong Dalgu has a strange dream about how to rule the world. With the 'baby-god,' Dr. Gong attempts to create four-dimensional beings, destroy the Buddhist Monk Neoteol, and change to orbit of the earth. The 'baby-god' needs pure tears of six children to operate. Dr. Gong assembles a gang and they start kidnapping children to obtain their tears. The Buddhist Monk Neoteol coincidentally discovers Childeuk, son of Dokgo, and gives him supernatural powers. Neoteol, Childeuk, and the police eventually come together to put an end to the plan of Dr. Gong and his gang.⁸

Following Wang Yong's film that combined two different genres, action and comedy, Bak Cheolwan directed an action comedy film *Hi, Dharma* (95 minutes) in 2001. This film attracted nearly five million viewers nationwide. Even though it can be classified as an action comedy, it indirectly offers viewers Buddhist teachings. Not unlike some martial arts films, *Hi, Dharma* put forward temples and monks as main characters in a film that mainstream viewers enjoyed. Three years after the film's extreme success, Yuk Sanghyo (b. 1964) directed a sequel to it, *Hi, Dharma 2: Showdown in Seoul* (101 minutes) in 2004. The four major actors who portrayed monks in this film actually shaved their heads at Bong'won-sa Temple in Seoul,⁹ which is famous for preserving traditional Korean Buddhist dance, music, rituals and paintings. The actors Jeong Jin-yeong (b. 1964), Yi Wonjong (b. 1966), Yi Munsik (b. 1967), and Yang Jin-u portrayed the monks Cheongmyeong, Hyeon-gak, Daebong, and Mujin respectively in the film. The first three of these actors also appeared under the same ordination names in the previous film *Hi! Dharma*. The sequel was shot in Seoul and at Daegak-sa Temple in Busan.¹⁰ Like the original, the sequel received favorable attention from the public and from the Buddhist establishment. The films portray the schemes of a group of mobsters who hide out from police in the temple, pretending to be devout Buddhists. A variety of other films have used a similar plot device, including the 2008 Thai film *In the Shadow of Naga* directed by Nasorn Panungkasiri. But except experiencing the karmic repercussions of their deception as we might expect, the criminals in *Hi! Dharma* receive their punishment and moral lessons from the monks whom they try to bully. But these monks are proficient in the martial arts and, in the course of the film, earn the respect of the mobsters for their fighting skills and for their Buddhist principles. Of course, we could say this is a kind of karmic repercussion.

6. Bak Cheolsu directed the 1989 film *Ose-am Hermitage* based on Jeong Chaebong's (1946-2001) fantasy tale. Just as Ham Sedeok (1915-1950) used the themes of children and nostalgia in his play *A Little Monk* in 1947, Jeong set the founding legend of the Ose-am

⁸ See http://test.kmdb.or.kr/eng/md_basic.asp?nation=K&p_dataid=04282 (accessed April 28, 2015).

⁹ Bong'won-sa Temple is located at 1 Bong'won-dong, Seodaemun-gu, Seoul. This temple might officially belong to its parish head temple of Jogye-sa, affiliated with the Jogye Order. Although this temple and Seon'am-sa Temple legally belong to the Jogye Order, the Taego Order actually manages the two temples.

¹⁰ Daegak-sa Temple was established as the Busan propagation center of Higashi Hongan-ji Pure Land Shin Buddhist Sect of Japanese Buddhism in 1894 and is currently affiliated with the Hwajaeng Buddhist Order.

Hermitage¹¹ of Baekdam-sa Temple¹² (Mt. Seorak in Inje, Gangwon Province) in a modern context. The story centers on two children, Gilson and his elder, blind sister Gam-i. The monk Jajang (590-658) established a hermitage in the seventh century CE and named it Gwaneum-am (Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva) Hermitage. Later, in 1643, the monk Seoljeong rebuilt and renamed it Ose-am Hermitage. In the film, Gilson and Gam-i are raised at a Catholic orphanage and cannot give up their dream of finding their mother. The five-year-old boy Gilson and his blind sister Gam-i overcome all manner of hardships, displaying grit and determination to realize their dream. However, when they reach their hometown they discover that it has been flooded because of the damming of the nearby river. They meet Haengun, a monk, and stay at his temple. While the monk is away begging for donations, a blizzard hits and blocks the way back to the temple, stranding the children. Angela, a Catholic nun, goes in search of the missing children and finds Gilson, dead and frozen in a sitting position. He looks pale and seems to say that his sister will suddenly open her blind eyes. The small temple where he sat was afterwards named Ose-am Hermitage (Hermitage of a Five-Year-Old Child Monk). Seong Baeg-yeop remade the film and released it in 2003 as an animated film titled *Ose-am Hermitage* (75 minutes). The remake received an award at the 26th Annecy Animated Film Festival in 2004.

7. Bae Changho remade Shin Sang-ok's (1925-2006) 1955 film and Shin's 1967 remake of the film (90 minutes), all of which are titled *Dream*. Bae released his film (93 minutes) in 1990 based on the original 1947 novel by Yi Gwangsu (1892-1950). He presented it at the 44th Cannes Film Festival in 1991. Yi Gwangsu based his novel on the story of a dream experience by the monk Josin of Naksan-sa Temple in Yangyang, Gangwon Province. The story is originally found in the book *Samguk yusa* (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms), which was compiled by the monk Iryeon (1206-1289).¹³ Uisang (625-702) was known to have established the temple in 671 on Korea's east coast after earnestly praying to and having a vision of the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Avalokiteśvara. For this reason it is considered one of the most important temples in Korea related to Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva.

In *Samguk yusa*, Josin falls in love with a beautiful woman and secretly prays to live with her. In a dream, he marries her and they have five children together over a period of forty years. Their first son suddenly dies and when Josin and his wife become old, they raise the remaining four children in extreme poverty. Josin wakes up from the dream just when he and his wife are about to be separated from each other—two children go with each of the parents. And then he repents of the desire for the woman and vows to live as a sincere monk.

Bae greatly modified the story of Josin for his film. In it, Josin dreams of a young maiden named Dallae who visits the temple one day. Josin becomes enamored by her beauty and loses control of himself. Forgetting his social standing as a monk, he accosts her while she is bathing. As a result, the two leave the village to make a family together. They have two children and run a dye store. But Josin finds that he cannot possess Dallae's heart. Over time, she becomes a prostitute and Josin becomes addicted to opium. Many years later, Josin searches for Dallae but learns that she is dead. Living alone by the sea, Josin makes a statue of her.

¹¹ Ose-am Hermitage is located at 72 Yongdae-ri, Buk-myeon, Inje-gun, Gangwon Province.

¹² Baekdam-sa Temple is located at 690 Yongdae-ri, Buk-myeon, Inje-gun, Gangwon Province.

¹³ Kim Dal-yong, trans., *Overlooked Historical Records of the Three Korean Kingdoms* (Seoul: Jimoondang, 2006), 253-5.

8. Jeong Jiyeong planned to direct his film *Beyond the Mountain* in 1983. However, he suspended the project for several years, finally releasing it in 1991. In writing his script along with Jo Yeongcheol, he referred to three novels by the nationally famous novelist and ex-monk Go Eun (b. 1933), *Transgression*, *Beyond the Mountain*, and *A Beautiful Lady*. When we discuss this film, we should also mention that in 1974 Kim Giyeong directed *Transgression*, also based on Go Eun's novel by that title, one of the three Jeong used.

The novelist Go was originally affiliated with Songgwang-sa Temple¹⁴ and trained under the supervision of his master Hyobong (1888-1966).¹⁵ The film was made during the fourth period of Korean cinematic history outlined, that is, during the later period of the Bak regime, in the 1970s. The film addresses sexuality, the vinaya, Zen Buddhism, and the Dharma lineages of Korean Buddhist monasticism, becoming the thematic forerunner to later South Korean Buddhist films made from the fifth to the eighth period. Kim screened the film at the third Tehran Film Festival in 1975.

In *Transgression*, Mubul of the Seosan Temple saves Chim-ae, an orphan, while Chim-ae is wandering in troubles caused by war. Chim-ae becomes a monk and undertakes ascetic practices under Mubul. After he grows up and becomes an eminent young monk, the temple's highest monk, Beobyeon, tests Chim-ae to see if he is eligible to become the next master, that is, to receive the Dharma lineage transmission. To do so, Beobyeon sends the most beautiful nun, Myohyang, to Chim-ae as his last trial, to see if he has overcome sexual desire. However, Chim-ae fails this test by mentally violating the precept of celibacy when the two fall in love. As a result, both Chim-ae and Myohyang are forced to return to the secular world.

While Kim made his film based on Go Eun's novel *Transgression*, Jeong made his film by combining three of Go Eun's novels including the *Transgression*. Therefore, Jeong's film is very similar to Kim's in content, plot, and themes. Both feature the themes of Zen Buddhism and monastic lineage, sexual desire and enlightenment, self-cultivation and service, among others. Jeong presented his film at the fourth Tokyo Film Festival in 1991.

Kim represents the Dharma transmission of Zen Buddhism as being more important than the love between Chim-ae and Myohyang. In contrast, Jeong focuses more seriously on the forbidden love between Chimhae and Myohon and Chimhae's longing for the secular world than on issues related to Dharmic transmission. However, as seen above, both directors use similar figures in their films. For example, Kim and Jeong both feature senior masters, Mubul and Beobyeon. While Kim depicts two teenager monastics Chim-ae and Myohyang, Jeong uses adult monastics Chimhae and Myohon.

¹⁴ There are three major temples in Korean Buddhism that represent the Three Jewels respectively. Tongdo-sa Temple represents the Buddha Jewel because it has a relic of the Buddha. Haein-sa Temple represents the Dharma Jewel because it has the entire Buddhist Canon on wooden blocks. The South Korean government designated the depositories for the Tripitaka Koreana woodblocks as a national treasure of Korea on December 20, 1962. The temple and the depository of the wooden blocks were also added to the World Heritage List in 1995. Songgwang-sa Temple represents the Sangha Jewel because it has produced sixteen great masters since the Goryeo Dynasty. After Jinul increased the scope of the temple and his Dharma descendants played important roles during the Goryeo Dynasty, the temple became a leading temple in the history of Korean Buddhism.

¹⁵ Hyobong became a monk under Seokdu (1882-1954) at Boun-am Hermitage of Singye-sa Temple on Mt. Geumgang (Diamond) in 1925 at the age of thirty-eight. After practicing Zen at several centers under eminent masters, he trained Zen practitioners at Sam'il-am Hermitage Zen Center of Songgwang-sa Temple for more than ten years, starting in 1937. He moved to Haein-sa Temple in 1946 and guided Zen practitioners as the spiritual leader at Gaya Praxis Complex from that time until the beginning of the Korean War. He participated in the Buddhist Purification Movement in 1954, became the order's secretary-general in 1957, and the order's supreme patriarch in 1958.

In the film *Beyond the Mountain*, Chimhae follows a path of monastic practice under the instruction of the high master Beobyeon at a mountain hermitage. One day, Beobyeon sends Chimhae on an errand to another mountain temple known as Seowon-dang Hall, where he accidentally sees Myohon, an extremely beautiful nun. Days later he fulfills his desires when he meets her in the mist near the hall. While returning to his temple, he becomes lost in the mist, symbolizing his loss of control and the resulting confusion. Three days later, he finds himself in the temple after having been rescued by Mubul, who had come upon him in the mountains.

Ashamed that she could not control her sexual desire, Myohon cuts her fingers. Chimhae's suffering is likewise increased through criticism received from his master, Beobyeon. Later, Beobyeon gives a last sermon as the spiritual leader to resident monks at the head temple to which his hermitage, the Seowon-dang Hall, and many other branch temples were affiliated. Afterward, he summons Myohon to his residence and asks her to show him her naked body as his last wish. Then, he suddenly passes away. On the day the master is cremated, the senior master Mubul tells Chimhae that Master Beobyeon had given instructions on a way to enlightenment through transgression. Chimhae decides to go to the secular life and departs from the temple alone.

Jeong's film can be compared with Im Kwon-taek's 1981 film *Mandala* and his 1989 film *Aje Aje Bara Aje*. Im features one set of two seemingly contradictory figures, Beobun and Jisan, in his 1981 film and another set of two, Jinseong and Sunnyeo, in his 1989 film. While the two main characters are monks in his 1981 film, they are nuns in his 1989 film. Jeong also portrays another very similar set of two senior figures, Beobyeon and Mubul. Beobun, Jinseong, and Beobyeon can roughly be categorized as one group that prefers self-cultivation to helping others, while Jisan, Sunnyeo, and Mubul form another group that values helping others above self-cultivation. In this way, Im and Jeong adopted very similar conventions to develop the respective stories.

While Im features two middle-aged monks, Beobun and Jisan, in his 1981 film, Jeong introduces two senior monks, Beobyeon and Mubul, in his film. And while Im develops a story with philosophical content in his 1981 film, Jeong's story is from the romantic perspective of teenagers. In Jeong's film, the protagonist Chimhae is a novice teenage monk about to become a full monk.¹⁶ Because he was raised under the guidance of his tonsure master Beobyeon since childhood, he longs for his mother and for secular life. Because he lives in a monastery in which all those surrounding him are monks, he is curious about women of his own age.

Chimhae is naturally and simultaneously exposed to three choices related to his personal and monastic experiences. First, he might model his life after his tonsure master Beobyeon, a sincere and eminent master, become a full monk, preserve monastic precepts, and pursue a monastic life. Second, he might follow after the lifestyle of the liberal monk Mubul, who is free from monastic rules and enjoys fulfilling his sexual desires. Third, he might choose to develop an intimate relationship with the novice teenage nun Myohon.¹⁷

Jeong attempts to religiously sublimate the romantic love between the two teenage novice monastics through the roles of the two senior monks Mubul and Beobyeon. He shows how a

¹⁶ See the entry of "ten precepts" in *The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism*, ed. English Buddhist Dictionary Committee (Tokyo: Soka Gakkai, 2002), 678-9. A novice monk is required to receive and preserve ten precepts, (1) not to kill, (2) not to steal, (3) to refrain from all sexual activity, (4) not to lie, (5) not to drink intoxicants, (6) not to wear ornaments or perfume, (7) not to listen to singing or watch dancing, (8) not to sleep on an elevated or broad bed, (9) not to eat at an improper hour, i.e., after noon, and (10) not to own valuables such as gold and silver.

¹⁷ Yi Jin, 43.

novice teenage nun (Myohon) transforms her love of a novice teenage monk (Chimhae) to universal and religious love through a process of engraving a human face on wood. After her parents died, she lived in the house of her father's friend. She falls in love with that friend's son, who is older than her. However, after he dies in a car accident, she engraves his face in wood while longing for him. Chimhae looks like the man she loved and suddenly she realizes that the face she engraved also looks like that of the Buddha.¹⁸

3. Conclusions: A Critical Review

Buddhist films released during the time of the Roh regime can be reviewed critically in terms of the following three aspects. First, once General Chun Doo-hwan's military regime ended in 1988, Roh Tae-woo, who also participated in the coup with Chun, officially assumed the presidency on February 25, 1988. Afterward, he gradually eliminated government censorship of political expression in films during his regime.¹⁹ Roh became president through direct elections on December 16, 1987 stipulated in the ninth amended constitution passed on October 27, 1987. The second clause of the twenty-second article of the constitution prohibits the government from censoring films. Therefore, directors were able to explore social and political themes in their films by being relatively unimpeded during the sixth period.

In addition to the themes of nostalgia, dreams, sexuality, monasticism, and Zen Buddhism described in the films of the second to the fourth period, and most prevalent during the fifth period (during the military dictatorship), directors from the sixth period (during the Roh regime) treated sensitive political issues, such as democracy, labor strife, dictatorship, human rights, Korean reunification, environmentalism, feminism, slums, democratic education, and so on, which had not been discussed in fifth period film.²⁰ Thus, Im Kwon-taek was able to include themes such as ideological conflicts, the Vietnam War, and the Gwangju massacre in his 1989 film *Aje Aje Bara Aje*.

It is important to note, however, that even though these themes appear in some films of the sixth period, none of those films directly discuss these issues. In addition, throughout all these periods, we find an absence of films dealing with sexism, undemocratic temple management, monastic embezzlement, sexual misconduct, gambling, violence, tax evasion, and so on, which often occurred in Buddhist monastic organizations. Likewise, although many temples constructed buildings and destroyed the environment in their mountain surroundings, directors did not spotlight environmental problems during the sixth period, or even in the later periods.

Some Buddhist film directors of later periods took up ideological and class conflicts, human rights, and environmentalism. For example, the seventh-period film *Karuṇā* (Compassion, 1996, 110 minutes), directed by Yi Ilmok (b. 1940), discusses the Korean Civil War (1950-1953), ideological conflicts between Communists and anti-Communists, and the reunification of Korea after it had been divided by the Soviet Union and the United States after the Second World War.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁹ Kim Dongho et al., *Han'guk yeonghwa jeongchaek-sa* (A History of Korean Film Policy) (Paju, Gyeonggi Province: Nanam chulpan, 2005), 291-304.

²⁰ Korean Film Council (Kim Mihyeon), ed., *Han'guk yeonghwa-sa: Gaehwagi eseo gaehwa kkaji* (Korean Cinema from Origins to Renaissance) (Seoul: Communication Books, 2006), 307-43. The book's English version is Korean Film Council, ed., *Korean Cinema: from Origins to Renaissance* (Seoul: Communication Books, 2007) and its abridged English version was also published online at the council's English website (www.koreanfilm.or.kr/jsp/publications/history.jsp).

Before South Korea became democratized, directors could not make films dealing with the social issues of anti-imperialism, pro-democracy, reunification, human rights, discrimination, and so on. But directors were able to discuss the issue of reunification during the seventh period (1993 to 1999 under democratic governments) and the eighth period (from the year 2000 to the present).

Yi Seungjun (b. 1971) and Yi Seonggyu (b. 1963) directed and released the documentary film *Unseen War: Report for the State of Bihar in India* (90 minutes) in 2000 during the eighth period. In it they discuss the disappearance in India of the Buddhism taught by the historical Buddha but also ongoing conflicts between castes. Even though they selected a rare topic that does not seem to be directly related to Korean Buddhism, in fact the film presents a broader perspective on Buddhism to a Korean audience. It was shown in the short film competition section of the twenty-sixth Korea Independent Film Festival in 2000.

In 2003, also in the eighth period, Kim Hwantae directed and released the documentary film *People Who Don't Take up Arms* (68 minutes) on human rights. O Taeyang, a Buddhist, declared conscientious objection to military service on December 17, 2001, which was a controversial issue in South Korea. The film shows what he experienced after the declaration and how Korean civil rights activists reacted to it. It demonstrates how he came to know that members of several other religious groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, also rejected military service and were persecuted for it in the name of national security during the last sixty years. People who gathered on International Conscientious Objectors Day (May 15) publicized the belief and commitment to conscientious objection.

In 2013, Jiyul (b. 1957), a nun of Naewon-sa Temple on Mt. Cheonseong in Yangsan, South Gyeongsang Province, directed and released the documentary *Following the Sandy Naeseong River* (73 minutes), which discusses environmental issues. When the government initiated the construction of the Yeongju Dam on the Naeseong River in late 2009, she pitched a tent on its banks and began to live there in order to protect the surrounding environment. While living in the tent, she exposed to the public the improper and unreasonable environmental impact assessment report that the government wrote to justify construction of the dam. She also recorded drastic changes in the river and completed the film by herself. She critically and vividly discusses the negative repercussions of the government's four major river restoration projects²¹ and shows the audience the importance of environmental preservation.

The second aspect we can use to critically review films made during the Roh regime is related to how conservative monastics and lay Buddhists of the Jogye Order selectively reacted to Buddhist films. While they showed favoritism to directors whose films describe Buddhism in a positive light, they protested against those who depicted Buddhism in ways they considered negative, sometimes stopping production of those films. Because their unreasonable and sectarian attitudes made it nearly impossible for directors to make films critical of Buddhist organizations, it is difficult to find films that deal with the anti-intellectual, anti-social, and unethical practices in Buddhist institutions, but only those emphasizing positive aspects of those organizations. So, although directors have enjoyed freedom of expression in theory, in practice they have been unable to discuss Buddhism unreservedly in their films. For example, when directors have described celibate monasticism in a positive way, the order and its conservative members wholeheartedly supported them. When they have realistically shown sexual desire in

²¹ Former South Korean President Lee Myung-bak (Yi Myeongbak) (b. 1941) who served as the tenth president of South Korea from February 25, 2008 to February 25, 2013 initiated the four major river restoration projects on the Han, Nakdong, Geum and Yeongsan Rivers in South Korea.

the lives of monastics from a humanistic perspective, the order and its conservative members protested physically and legally. Although Buddhist leaders publicly defended the dictatorship in the name of state protectionism before the sixth period, directors did not use their films to chastise them for doing so, but supported the pro-governmental stances of the Buddhist leaders through their films.

When, in 1984, Im Kwon-taek was making the film *Bhikkhuni* on the life of a nun through the Taeheung Film Studio, a Buddhist organization which secured its script argued that the film defames the dignity of Korean Buddhist nuns and requested that the studio stop making the film. Various Buddhist organizations, including the Jogye Order and its affiliate, the National Association for Korean Buddhist Nuns, cooperated with one another to protest against the studio. Although various art organizations including the South Korea Film Society vehemently opposed the unreasonable request and supported the studio, the studio stopped making the film. Thus, Buddhist organizations implemented private censorship, which violates the freedom of expression required for a working democracy and stipulated by the constitution.

A similar case can be found in relation to the novel *Mandala* by Kim Seongdong (b. 1947), later used as the basis of the film by the same name by Im Kwon-taek. Kim published a medium-length novel titled *A Wooden Fish* in the magazine *Weekly Religion* in 1975. After being kicked out of the Jogye Order for publishing the novel, he revised it and published the new version under the title *Mandala* in the magazine *Korean Literature* in 1978. While Buddhists typically have written novels to propagate and defend Buddhism, with an insider's knowledge, Kim realistically describes how a monk desires to obtain enlightenment and simultaneously suffers from physical desires. He also shows in his novel many ways in which monastic organizations are corrupt. In reaction, the Jogye Order officially expelled him on the grounds that he defamed the order and the celibate monastic tradition through the novel *A Wooden Fish*.

When Im directly treated the themes of sex and monastic lives in his three Buddhist films including *Bhikkhuni* which was never completed, he received criticism from the Jogye Order. However, when Kim Yangdeuk portrayed the lives of nuns in his film, he did not receive opposition but support from the Jogye Order. The order even allowed Kim's film to be made at Mang'wol-sa Temple,²² a nunnery, on Mt. Namhan south of Seoul. So, while the Jogye Order, its monastics, and its affiliate temples strongly criticized some films, they strongly supported others, providing access to their traditional and historical temples.

The third aspect we can use to critically review films made during the Roh regime is related to the use of dialogue that appears to be baffling, whether intentionally or not, to audiences. When directors discussed Buddhist philosophy in films made from the fifth to the eighth period, they included many Buddhist technical terms. However, we are very skeptical about the extent to which audiences can understand the stories, dialogue, metaphors, and terms used in them. Even Buddhist monks and specialists might find it difficult to understand peculiar metaphors and terms used in the dialogues portrayed as occurring between Zen practitioners in the films. Just as a Zen master trains disciples in an actual Zen center, film protagonists sometimes expound stories, engage in conversations, ask questions, or make statements, to provoke disciples to have "great doubt" and to test their progress in Zen practice.

Kim Giyeong, Im Kwon-taek, Jeong Jiyeong, and other directors directly adopted the style of Zen communications and thereby attempted to reveal the truths of Zen Buddhism to

²² Mang'wol-sa Temple is located at 14 Sanseong-ri, Jungbu-myeon, Gwangju-gun, Gyeonggi Province, and is affiliated with the parish head temple of Jogye-sa.

greater and lesser degrees in their films. Even when we read Zen texts slowly, it is fairly difficult to understand them. When we listen to a lot of ambiguous Zen dialogue between protagonists in a film, we are even more likely to become frustrated. So, we suspect that the majority of the audience, almost all but a few Zen specialists and practitioners, may be unable to follow the conversations and storylines of these films.

Audiences might be frustrated immediately upon seeing even the film titles without having enough knowledge about Buddhism in general and about Zen Buddhism in particular. Most Korean filmgoers are unlikely to know the meaning of Im Kwon-taek's film title *Mandala*²³ or of his film *Aje Aje Bara Aje* (Skt., *gate gate pāragate*), literally "Gone, Gone, Completely Gone," which is the final line of the *Heart Sūtra*.²⁴ They also might not know the meaning of the *hwadu* (Chn., *huatou*) "Why Did Bodhidharma Come from the West?" which Bae Yonggyun slightly changed for the title of his film *Why Has Bodhidharma Left for the East?* A *huatou* is also called a *gongan* or *kōan* in Japanese. A *kōan* is originally, in China, a government decree or public notice. In the Zen school, it refers to a master's statements, including questions and answers directed at disciples. The famous example of a *kōan* is the question "Why Did Bodhidharma Come from the West?" The purpose of the *kōan* is to help Zen practitioners transcend rational, dualistic thinking and develop intuition.²⁵ They are used to help the student focus during meditation and also to test whether a student has obtained a certain level of insight.²⁶ After being developed in China, *kōan* practice spread to Korea and became a prominent form of meditation in Korean Buddhism, remaining so to the present.

Bodhidharma is the legendary founder of the Zen School of Buddhism in China. He is said to have come from India to China in the early sixth century and to have provided the direct transmission from mind to mind in China. Chinese Buddhists have believed that he passed his enlightenment down through a succession of later Chinese patriarchs. He too has traditionally been considered the twenty-eighth patriarch in a direct line of transmission from Śākyamuni Buddha. He is believed to have meditated in a cave on Mt. Song at Shaolin Temple near Luoyang for nine years. He is also considered the founder of the martial arts tradition of Shaolin monks. So, martial arts films portray him as the founder of Shaolin Kung Fu and sometimes even feature him fighting.²⁷

In the film *Mandala*, audiences are subjected to a *kōan* given by Nanquan (748-834) to his lay disciple Lu Gen during the Tang Dynasty in China. The protagonist, Beobun, struggles with this *kōan* throughout the film.²⁸ The *kōan* as given in the movie is "I have raised a gosling in a bottle. Because the gosling became a big goose, we could not get it out from the bottle. How can you pull the goose out without breaking it?" The *kōan* is originally included as the ninety-first case of the *Congrong Lu* (The Book of Serenity), a Song-dynasty Zen collection, in the following way.

²³ See the entry of "mandala" in the English Buddhist Dictionary Committee, ed., 390-1. Mandala is an object of devotion on which Buddhas and bodhisattvas are depicted or on which a doctrine is expressed. Many Buddhist schools regard a mandala specific to their respective schools as the embodiment of enlightenment or truth.

²⁴ Even the English title under which it is sold, *Come, Come, Come Upward*, is a mistranslation, likely due to misunderstanding.

²⁵ John McRae discusses various uses of Zen encounter dialogues in Chapter 4 of *Seeing through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

²⁶ See the entry for "kōan" in the *English Buddhist Dictionary Committee*, 339.

²⁷ For example, see the film *Master of Zen* directed by Brandy Yuen in Hong Kong in 1994.

²⁸ Yi Jun, 52-4.

(A government official named Lu Gen) first asked (Master) Nanquan, “I have raised a goose in a bottle and it gradually grew too big to get out. Now, without damaging the bottle or injuring the goose, how could you get it out?”

Nanquan called to him, “Sir!”

Lu Gen responded, “What?”

Nanquan said, “The goose is out.”

At these words Lu Gen was awakened.²⁹

Because Lu Gen’s thoughts were confined within the limitations of his established mindset, he could not liberate them. Nanquan guided him to go beyond his preconceptions, to think outside the bottle as it were. Beobun can be seen as Lu Gen in the film. As Lu Gen had done, he attempted to free himself from his conventional and pre-established way of thinking. As Nanquan taught Lu Gen to liberate himself, an eminent Zen master advised Beobun to overcome his dogmatic worldview. However, when the audience hears the *kōan* without prior knowledge of Zen Buddhism, they are likely to be confused by it and misunderstand (Zen) Buddhism.

The audience also encountered two *kōans* in the film *Aje Aje Bara Aje*, which might make it difficult to understand. Eunseon provides the fourth *kōan* of the famous Zen text *The Gateless Gate* to her disciple Jinseong, who wanted to model herself after her image of a traditional nun and cultivate her mind for enlightenment accordingly. In the film, the *kōan* is “Why does the bearded Bodhidharma not have a beard on his face?”³⁰ Eunseon attempts to guide her disciple to overcome dualistic views through the *kōan*. When Cheongha (Sunnyeo’s ordination name) was forced to leave the temple due to wrongful acquisition, Eunseon provided a very appropriate *kōan* for her as well: “You leave your mind here in this temple and you go to the secular world with your body. Which one, your mind or your body, is real for you?” Each endeavored to solve their own *kōans* throughout the film.

Filmmakers who want to include Zen Buddhist themes in their movies face the dilemma of how to preserve the unique and seeming non-sense qualities of Zen Buddhism and still communicate effectively with the audience. If a film over-emphasizes the uniqueness of Zen discourses, it might alienate the audience from understanding its contents. On the other hand, if a director over-attempts to make Zen dialogues easy for audiences to understand, they risk presenting a superficial and oversimplified version of Zen. We hope that in the future filmmakers will keep this in mind and think of ways to balance these two apparently contradictory objectives in their Buddhist films.

²⁹ T.48.2004.286a26-29.

³⁰ T.48.2005.293b23-29.

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한글요약

본 논문은 반(半)독재 반(半)민주정권으로 정의될 수 있는 노태우정부 시기 (1988-1993) 에 만들어진 한국불교영화들을 개관하고 비판적으로 검토하였다. 노태우정권은 엄격하게 검열을 실시하였던 이전의 독재정권들과 표현의 자유를 상당히 보장한 후대의 민주정권들 중간에 위치하고 있다. 노태우정권 기간 동안 몇 명의 영화감독들은 그 전에 비해 발전된 영화제작과 촬영기술을 이용하여 수준높은 불교영화들을 만들었고, 그 결과 임권택과 배용균 감독이 그 기간동안 만든 불교영화들은 국제적으로도 찬사를 받았다. 영화감독들은 노태우정권 하에서 그들이 만든 영화들을 통해서 정치-사회적으로 민감한 이슈들을 상당히 자유스럽게 그리고 비판적으로 다룰 수 있었음에도 불구하고, 개인적 그리고 조직적 차원에서 한국불교계의 압력을 받아 그들이 만든 영화들에서 불교승단과 종교적 이슈들을 자유스럽게 그리고 비판적으로 다룰 수 없었다. 예를 들어, 보수적인 불교도들은 영화제작자들이 한국불교를 비판적으로 그리고 부정적으로 다루는 영화들을 만들 수 없도록 사적 검열을 엄격히 실시하였고, 그러한 영화들이 제작될 수 없도록 법적으로 그리고 물리적으로 적극 막았다. 마지막으로, 노태우정권 하에서 만들어진 불교영화들을 검토해볼 때, 본 저자들은 관객들이 이해할 수 없는 그리고 심지어 불교전문가들도 이해할 수 없는 매우 어려운 대화, 비유, 이야기, 이미지, 그리고 전문용어들을 그 불교영화들에서, 특히 선불교영화들에서, 어렵게 얹게 찾아볼 수 있었다.

키워드: 한국영화사, 불교영화, 노태우정권, 임권택, 배용균, 검열, 영화정책, 표현의 자유