

Kim, Hwansoo Ilmee: *Empire of the Dharma. Korean and Japanese Buddhism, 1877–1912*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2013. ISBN: 978-0-67406-575-8; 415 S.

**Rezensioniert von:** Dolf-Alexander Neuhaus, Ostasiatisches Seminar, Japanologie, Freie Universität Berlin

Japan's annexation and colonization of Korea remains a difficult matter within the historiography of both Japan and South Korea. While the dichotomy of resistance and collaboration has long held sway over post-liberation South Korean historiography, the Japanese narrative of the Korean Peninsula often had an apologetic tendency.<sup>1</sup> For a long time, both sides were influenced by strong nationalist sentiment and remained within the confines of the national paradigm.<sup>2</sup> In recent years, however, scholars have increasingly developed transnational perspectives on historical relations between Japan and Korea in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, highlighting the complexities of exchange, entanglements and interactions between both nations within a broader East Asian and global context.

Drawing on these recent developments, Hwansoo Ilmee Kim sets out „to provide a thorough revision and comprehensive understanding of the relationship between Korean and Japanese Buddhism from the late nineteenth century to mid-1912“ (p. 12). To this end, Kim delves into an extensive body of Korean and Japanese-language sources in order to examine zones of cultural contact and to assess the creativity and agency of Korean and Japanese Buddhism. Korean as much as Japanese Buddhist actors, he argues, were driven by their own interests which they were able to pursue even under the auspices of nationalism and Japanese imperialism. Ultimately, it was the Korean Buddhist monks who benefited more from the relationship in the pre-colonial period. Within this context, Kim identifies three major points that require reconsideration. Taking the diverging interests of the five major Japanese Buddhist sects into account, he strives to revise the universal assumption that the relationship of the two Buddhisms significantly changed as a result

of the annexation in 1910. In this sense, the infamous Sôtô-Wônjong agreement of 1910 did not constitute a religious takeover by the Japanese. Instead, the paradigm shift only occurred in mid-1912 when the colonial government actively enforced regulations to centralize religious policies in the colony.

Kim addresses these questions in seven main chapters, which are subdivided on a thematic rather than chronological basis. The first chapter provides the historical background of late Chosôn and Meiji Buddhism, contextualizing the framework of analysis. Although Korean Buddhism was able to maintain some degree of influence throughout the Chosôn era, it was socially marginalized by the Neo-Confucian elites. On the other hand, Japanese Buddhism was thriving again by the end of the nineteenth century after a brief period of anti-Buddhist policy in the wake of the Meiji restoration of 1868. By the 1890s, various sects of Japanese Buddhism had made themselves indispensable to the Meiji government in the process of building a modern nation-state. Against this backdrop, both the struggling Korean Buddhism and its more successful Japanese counterpart had their own motives to cooperate with one another. However, one is left wondering in what respect the pre-colonial relationship between Korean and Japanese monks related to pre-existing images and earlier forms of interaction.

At the beginning of the second chapter Kim discusses the scholarly debate on the discourse of propagation in modern Japanese Buddhism. He then focuses on the activities of three Japanese monks within the broader context of early missionary efforts. Here, Kim demonstrates – albeit from a primarily

<sup>1</sup> Kim Sunsök, Kündae Ilbon Pulgyo saeryök üi ch'im't'u wa Pulgyogye üi tonghyang [The Invasion of the Forces of Modern Japanese Buddhism and its Impact on Korean Buddhism], in: Han'gukhak Yôn'gu (2008), pp. 65–91. In Japanese historiography this tendency is still particularly prevalent in some works on the economic history of Japanese colonialism, see, e.g. a number of articles in Ramon H. Myers / Mark R. Peattie (eds.), *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895–1945*, Princeton, NJ 1984.

<sup>2</sup> Andre Schmid, Colonialism and the 'Korea Problem' in the Historiography of Modern Japan: A Review Article, in: *Journal of Asian Studies* 59 (2000), pp. 951–976, here p. 973.

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Japanese viewpoint – how religious, national and cultural identities were shared, debated and transformed between and among Korean and Japanese clerics. The third chapter explores the rivalry among Japanese Buddhist sects in Korea. It analyzes how Japanese Buddhist missionaries tried to exert influence on Korean Buddhists, the government and later on the Japanese Resident-General of Korea. The following chapter consequently addresses the diverse responses by Korean monks, the Korean government and the Resident-General's office to the occasionally aggressive attempts of Japanese monks to take over Korean Buddhism. Focusing on the agency of Koreans, Kim shows how clerics approached Japanese Buddhist missionaries and how the symbiotic relationship between the two groups transformed both Korean and Japanese Buddhism. Striving to improve their dire situation in the late Chosŏn period, Korean monks seized the opportunity to ally themselves with the influential and wealthy Japanese Buddhists.

Focusing on the actions of the notorious ultra-nationalist Buddhist monk Takeda Hanshi, Kim goes on to examine the emergence of the Sōtō school in Korea and its connection with Korean Buddhism and political authorities. Takeda was a key figure in the attempt at a Sōtō-Wŏnjong alliance, although the real driving force behind the agreement were two Korean monks of the Wŏnjong. This is an important finding, as it leads to the conclusion that the alliance was not a religious merger following the political annexation of Korea as understood previously, but rather the result of complex relationships among groups and individuals with converging and diverging interests and visions. Ultimately, Kim notes that the attempted alliance failed due to the politics of the colonial government; at the same time, he convincingly concludes that the „pre-colonial“ relationship between Korean and Japanese Buddhist only came to an end in mid-1912.

„Empire of Dharma“ is another important step towards a new perception of history moving beyond the rigid dichotomies that have long prevailed in the nationalist narratives of both countries. Such a new perspective acknowledges the hybrid varieties of

thought and practice that might link the two opposing poles. What needs to be addressed critically is not the content but rather some structural aspects, such as the all too extensive historical and biographical background at the beginning of the book or a slight imbalance due to the ample space provided for Takeda and the attempted Sōtō-Wŏnjong alliance in the last three chapters. It makes sense that this study attaches great importance to actors like the Japanese Buddhist monk Takeda in particular. However, devoting more attention to the lives and activities of Korean monks might have been even more beneficial in attaining the study's self-declared goal of highlighting the agency of Koreans within the colonization process. This is partly due to the book's pursuing several aims. Notwithstanding these minor limitations, this thorough portrayal of Buddhist relations between Korea and Japan during the pre-colonial period provides new insights into the intricately entangled history of the two countries. Furthermore, the book serves as an impressive example how the analysis of entanglements, networks and agency helps to unveil the complexity and reciprocity of cultural exchange that is oftentimes buried beneath asymmetrical structures of power. Its focus on Japanese-Korean interconnectedness within a religious framework will make the book appealing not only to scholars of Buddhism in East Asia, but to every historian with an interest in the transnational history of imperialism.

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