

The State of Wŏn Buddhist Propagation in Southwest Asia: Religion or International NGO?

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Abstract

This paper examines the state and problems of Wŏn Buddhist propagation in Southwest Asia. It examines relevant literature and references interviews conducted with Wŏn Buddhist associates. Wŏn Buddhist propagation in the three nations of Southwest Asia appears to be progressing passively under the auspices of international NGOs and encountering much difficulty due to local society, culture, and law. Wŏn Buddhism, along with other religious orders pursuing propagation, such as Protestantism, is bypassing legal restrictions in India and Nepal, primarily operating under the aegis of international NGOs and private corporations in order to mitigate cultural friction.

In the case of India, Wŏn Buddhist propagation is conducted mainly in the form of free education focusing on the poor rather than those in the upper castes. Delhi Temple, which is legally allowed to engage in propagation activities, is currently vacant due to unavoidable circumstances, but the free education center continues to operate. This demonstrates the potential for support activities at the NGO-level to continue, but also that there are many barriers inhibiting outright propagation. Since the caste system is strong within Indian society, clashing with the Wŏn Buddhist principle of human equality, this creates the awkward situation in which clergymen must be recruited from the upper social echelon. Moreover, there is also the problem of the lack of volunteers within the clergy, wherein younger clergymen display a decidedly less fervent passion for the calling toward mission work compared with older generations in the past. This situation is the same for Protestant missionary work.

In the case of Sri Lanka, Reverend Ch'oe Söyön has singlehandedly operated a “remote” propagation campaign, conveying Wŏn Buddhist teachings to migrant workers in Korea from Sri Lanka through varied support and a scholarship program. Reverend Ch'oe has adopted a patient position, emphasizing that Sri Lankans will need to absorb the teachings of Wŏn Buddhism before they are ready to establish a temple on their own. Meanwhile, unlike Wŏn Buddhism, Protestant missions typically accumulate local converts, educate them and endow them with a church, and then move on to another location. Nonetheless, all mission work is encumbered by the society, culture, and laws in Southwest Asia, and thus tends to opt for activities straddling the line between unofficial temples and official NGOs.

Key Words: Southwest Asia, Wŏn Buddhism, Propagation, NGO, International Aid.

I . Introduction

Dharma Master Sot'aesan Pak Chungbin founded Wŏn Buddhism on April 28, 1916. Now, having existed for just over a century, Wŏn Buddhism is counted among the most rooted of the new religious orders founded in twentieth-century Korea. Wŏn Buddhist propagation is underway in more than twenty nations worldwide, and as of 2018, there are twenty-two Wŏn Buddhist temples (*kyodang*) and thirteen affiliated administrative institutions in North America(Wŏnbulgyo ch'ongbu kukchebu, 2018).

Among Wŏn Buddhist foreign dioceses (*kyogu*), those in Southwest Asia are the most recent. This paper focuses on the state of these dioceses as of 2018 by analyzing Wŏn Buddhism Central Headquarters¹⁾ (*Chungang ch'ongbu*) publications, domestic and international media pertaining to Wŏn Buddhism, and interviews with former and current Wŏn Buddhist clergy.

At the moment there are no dioceses dedicated exclusively to Southwest Asia; instead, the region is under the jurisdiction of Southeast Asian dioceses. Reverend (*kyomu*) Paek Hyŏllin, who is also Central Headquarters Ministry of International Affairs Vice Director, is the Southwest Asian Diocesan (*kyogu chang*) and Reverend Pak Chinsu is the Diocesan Secretary General (*kyogu samu kukchang*). For the most part, these two are in charge of Wŏn Buddhist propagation in Southeast and Southwest Asia.

The current scope of the Southwest Asian propagation campaign extends to India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, there are no official temples or facilities. A Wŏn Buddhism Center, however, has been established thanks to a Sri Lankan who simply erected a sign on his home that reads “Wŏn Buddhism Center.” This Sri Lankan was a migrant worker who came to know Wŏn Buddhism while working in Korea. In India, there is Delhi Temple and its affiliated International Center located in New Delhi and Ladakh, respectively. In Nepal, there is Pokhara Temple and the New Life Wŏnkwang Social Education Center (*Saesam wŏn'gwang sahoe kyoyuk sent'ŏ*) in Kathmandu and

1) Located in Iksan, North Chŏlla province.

Samdong School in Lumbini. Reverend Mo Siŭn, a Korean, runs Pokhara Temple, while Nepal natives Wŏn Sŏngje²⁾ and Wŏn Sŏngch'ŏn run Samdong School and Wŏn Sŏngdo runs New Life Wŏnkwang Social Education Center.

The Won Buddhist order undertakes such international efforts through organizations like Samdong International,³⁾ a Wŏn Buddhist NGO that primarily engages in international aid projects in developing countries,” and United Relations, created by Third Dharma Master Kim Taegŏ(Chung, 1989: 142). Its justification for such work, moreover, is facilitated through Wŏn Buddhist principles like the “ethics of triple identity”⁴⁾ and the “religious union movement.” Therein, vitally important are the “three corresponding tasks” (*samdae saŏp pyŏngjin kyosi*) of “edification” (*kyohwa*), “education” (*kyoyuk*), and “charity”

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- 2) Natives of Southwest Asia who become Wŏn Buddhist clergymen or laymen are granted the Buddhist surname “Wŏn,” which comes from “Wŏn” Buddhism 圓佛教.
 - 3) Samdong International is the most recent Wŏn Buddhist non-profit organization. A Korean international relief organization, it was formed on December 17, 2008 with the purpose of establishing a sustainable development base for developing countries. It mainly operates in Nepal, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Mongolia, focusing on regional development and the cultural and education industries. It gets its name from the foundational Wŏn Buddhist principle of *samdong yulli*, which means “ethics of triple identity.” This principle hold that “the world is one and humanity is one family.” <http://sdi.or.kr/>.
 - 4) Second Dharma Master Chŏngsan Song Kyuga established the “ethics of triple identity,” which consist of three principles: the principle of *tongwŏn dori* holds that all religions of the world are of one nature; the principle of *tonggi yŏn'gye* holds that all living beings in the world are of one family; and the principle of *tongch'ŏk saŏp* holds that all enterprises of the world have one aim. One can say that this is a doctrine oriented toward the universal realization of humanitarianism and coexistence with respect to all people of the world, transcending individual communities, societies, and nations(Wŏnbulgyo chŏnsŏ: 989-991).

(*chasŏn*) stipulated by Dharma Master Sot'aesan. Based on these principles, the Wŏn Buddhist order has actively established and operated non-profit organization since its founding. Samdong International, spearheading propagation in Southwest Asia, is a typical example of this.⁵⁾

This paper examines the state of Wŏn Buddhist propagation in Southwest Asia. Considering the Wŏn Buddhist principles underlying international propagation, it examines relevant aims and problems. Furthermore, the paper compares Wŏn Buddhist propagation activities with those of Protestant missions, aiming at presenting a more universal perspective of mission work in Southwest Asia. Regardless of the religious order and its intentions, religious propagation often unfolds organically according to prevailing social conditions. In this respect, Wŏn Buddhist propagation in Southwest Asia—compared with the American, European, Russian, and Southeast Asian cases—is yet narrow in scope and institutionally underdeveloped. Nevertheless, examining the Wŏn Buddhist Southwest Asian propagation campaign may help one to understand not only the general character of the Wŏn Buddhist order but also the very societies in which this campaign is taking place.

5) The following are other representative Wŏn Buddhist non-profit organizations: Won Bong Gong Association, Blue Cloud Association (Ch'ŏngun hoe), Women's Association (Yŏsŏng hoe), Sewing Grace Movement Headquarters of the Public Welfare Department (Kongik pokchibu ŭi ūnhye simgi undong ponbu), Solsolsong Volunteer Group, Wŏn Buddhist Hospice Association, Realization of Fresh Water Distribution (Ch'ŏngsu nanum silch'ŏnhoe) (private corporation), Association for Helping African Children (Ap'ūrik'a ōrini rūl top nūn moim) (private corporation), and Samdong International. Outside of these there are a number of social welfare institutions(O, 2013: 98).

II. The Effort to Secure Local Manpower for Propagation

There are currently five Southwest Asian clergymen in the service of the Wŏn Buddhist order, which has considered the need for local personnel to deal with issues of language, culture, customs, and social structure. These clergymen each underwent a similar process. First, they spent a year in Korea training as “administrative assistants” (*kansa*),⁶⁾ a process that involves general study of Korean language, culture, and customs. They then completed undergraduate and Master’s degrees in Wŏn Buddhism at Wonkwang University,⁷⁾ and upon graduation, commenced the process of joining the Wŏn Buddhist clergy. Most of these clergymen came to Korea through personal ties, often completing their training with the support of a specific temple.

First, Reverend Wŏn Sŏngje (original name Keshab Sharma Paudel) was the Wŏn Buddhist order’s first Nepalese clergyman. He ended up in Korea in 2000 after becoming acquainted with Kim Pŏmsu, a professor of Buddhist art at Wonkwang University, where he began to study Wŏn Buddhism in 2002. He professes that he joined the Wŏn Buddhist order believing that the teachings of Wŏn Buddhism might benefit Nepal, a society characterized by a caste system, gender inequality, and the myriad faiths of diverse ethnicities. He currently works in Nepal for the Wŏn Buddhist international aid NGO Samdong International.

6) “Kansa” 幹事 are essentially “entry-level workers” who assist with Buddhist ceremonies or various chores at the temple or other facilities before becoming formal employees.

7) A four-year university established by the Wŏn Buddhist order.

Second, Reverend Wŏn Kwangjo (Tashi Dolma) is the only foreigner among more than three thousand clergywomen, which make up about half the Wŏn Buddhist clergy. She was born the youngest of eight in a Buddhist residence in Ladakh, India, which is located on a plateau connecting the Ladakh and Northwestern Himalayan Mountains. Many Wŏn Buddhist officials began to visit the Ladakh region after the Wŏn Buddhist order opened a hospital there in 1994. She is the younger cousin of Wŏn Sŏngje, whom she followed to Wonkwang University and into the Wŏn Buddhist clergy. She currently works as headmaster (*sagam*) at Han'gyŏre Middle and High School, which is for North Korean defectors (*saet'ŏmin*).⁸⁾ Since her position as headmaster was commissioned by the Wŏn Buddhist order, it is commensurate to that of a reverend.

Third, Reverend Wŏn Hyŏnjang (Ajita) was also born in Ladakh, nearby the Himalayas. He met Reverend Pak Ch'ŏngsu while studying abroad in India's Bangalore region and ended up studying Wŏn Buddhism at Wonkwang University. Desiring to translate and disseminate the Wŏn Buddhist scriptures in various languages, he studies foreign languages in his spare time. He was inspired to do this during his studies at Wonkwang University, finding the most difficult problem to be "language" rather "cultural difference." Finding Hanmun (literary Sinitic) difficult to understand and Korean food difficult to stomach, at one point he even took a yearlong leave of absence. However, he soon overcame this period of difficulty, and is currently working at Hawaii Temple(No, 2001).

8) The South Korean government designated "saet'ŏmin" the legal term for referring to North Korean defectors in order to avoid others like "t'albungmin," which have a discriminatory connotation.

Fourth, Reverend Wŏn Sŏngdo (Regmi Shuvash), another native of Nepal, is currently engaged in educational activities at the Wonkwang New Life Education Center in Kathmandu along with the Korean Reverend Yi Pŏban. Finally, the Indian Reverend Wŏn Chusŏng (Barua Dolan Kanti), formerly based at Delhi Temple, is currently taking time off to rest in his native Bangladesh due to health problems.

Clergy working at Samdong International, Wonkwang New Life Education Center, and temples in Southwest Asia are supported through activity and management funds granted by the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA)⁹⁾ and the private corporation People Working Together (*Hamkkeha nŭn saram tŭl*);¹⁰⁾ they do not receive any financial support from Wŏn Buddhism Headquarters. Therefore, while they are officially appointed by the Wŏn Buddhist order, their propagation activities are restricted insofar as their affiliation with organizations registered as international NGOs and/or that receive KOICA funding.

When questioned about monthly income, one reverend reported receiving about 500 thousand Korean wŏn (about USD 448) per month,

9) A Korean international cooperation NGO focused on fostering friendly international relationships and exchanges through support for the economic and social development of developing countries.

10) People Working Together is a Wŏn Buddhist non-profit organization that was established on October 11, 2002. It aims to contribute to childcare and early education, economic independence, and social development in developing countries in Asia such as Nepal. Since 2004 it has operated in the vicinity of the Nepalese capital Kathmandu and in Pokhara. With the help of local volunteers, it oversees development projects related to medical service, early education, youth activities, women's development, and roads and drinking water for local communities. In 2006, it opened a social education center for the poor, which continues to offer programs related to childcare, youth activities, women's development, and economic independence(O, 2013: 112).

a sum including base pay, bonuses, and a living subsidy. Moreover, conditions in Southwest Asia are not like in Korea, where residence at a Wŏn Buddhist temple or facility provides a means of attaining food, clothing, and shelter. This humble income is thus meant to cover the entirety of the expenses of clergymen and their families.

On the surface, it looks like the propagation strategy of bringing locals to Korea, providing them with education and credentials, and appointing them as reverends is ultimately succeeding. However, the prevailing practice in Southwest Asia, in which clergymen tend to work under an NGO rather than a temple, may be problematic not only in terms of propagation but also finance. This is due to the consistent conflicts these clergymen encounter between their calling as missionaries and their duties as NGO representatives and between engaging in propagation and dealing with daily hardships. This situation was similar for Protestant missionaries, who expressed as such in interviews. Apart from a number missions dispatched from large-scale churches in Korea, most operated under the auspices of NGOs managed with funds donated by church followers, engaging in various forms of volunteer work such as free education initiatives. Accordingly, the situation in which direct propagation is not an option and in which missionaries must conduct their daily lives on the basis of a small income provided by NGOs for their activities is a universal one for religious propagation in Southwest Asia.

III. Free Education for Poor Children and the Ladakh International Meditation Center: Propagation in India

The process of establishing Delhi Temple in India commenced under Reverend Pak Chöngsu, who began helping children studying at the Mahabodhi Society in Ladakh—an area located in Southern India’s Bangalore region—in November 1990.¹¹⁾ Master Sangasena invited Reverend Pak Chöngsu to Ladakh in 1991. After attending the ceremony commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Mahabodhi Society, Reverend Pak decided to sponsor the establishment of a boarding school in Ladakh. He then met Ajita (Reverend Wön Hyōnjōng) in Bangalore in December 1993, whom he invited to Korea to study Wön Buddhism at Wonkwang University. Ajita’s younger sister, Tashi Dolma (Reverend Wön Kwangjo), eventually underwent a similar process.

In consideration of Indian law, which stipulates that only an Indian national may purchase a temple site, the process of establishing a temple in Delhi began with registry of the “Won-Buddhist Charitable Society, India” in March 2004, which was later approved on June 2. Delhi law also stipulates that only a local may register as corporate

11) Reverend Pak Chöngsu donated more than 1 billion wön between 1990 and 2001 to help the Ladakh People. This money supported the dispatch of six containers of winter clothing and the construction of the Mahabodhi Boarding School, fifty-bed Mahabodhi Karuna General Hospital, thirty-room guesthouse for the economic self-reliance of Mahabodhi Boarding School, solar heating facilities, and the International Center.

chairman, barring any Korean from this position. Construction began in 2006, and after Reverend Yun Sumyŏng and layman (*tŏngmu*)¹²⁾ O Hyŏnjin arrived at their posts in February 2007, the temple was completed along with a two-story, nine-room (about 230 meters of floor space) guesthouse meant to supplement operation costs. Delhi Temple signified the establishment of a base of operations for the Southwest Asian propagation campaign, the driving force of which was to be locally recruited clergymen.

Reverend Yun Sumyŏng retired in 2015 and was succeeded by Reverend Yang Ch'ŏnik as Delhi Temple's chief reverend (*chuim kyomo*). In January 2016, Bangladesh native Wŏn Chusŏng (Barua dolan Kanti) became vice chief reverend (*pu kyomu*). With no attendees after six months, Reverend Yang decided to hire an interpreter and go door to door to assess local needs. Considering the poverty among residents in the temple vicinity, he had initially devised a program to appeal to housewives. Contrary to his expectations, however, parents expressed a desire to educate their children. He immediately hired five local teachers to teach Hindi, English, math, and many other subjects in after-school classes. He also implemented sewing classes targeting housewives and computer classes targeting students and the general public. The two reverends also supplemented this curriculum by giving ocarina lessons, organizing a choir, and teaching Korean(Yi, 2016).

12) Unlike with a reverend (*kyomu*), who has completed four to six years of study in the Department of Wŏn Buddhism, a “layman” (*tŏngmu* 德務) is a kind of “sanctioned adherent” (*chaega kyodo*) who serves the order in a professional capacity in such fields as education, administration, charity, etc. This position is similar to that of *tomu* 道務. See the Wŏn Buddhism Dictionary (Wŏnbulgyo sajŏn). <https://terms.naver.com/list.nhn?cid=50765&categoryId=50778>.

They thus converted the guesthouse—built as a means of raising money to pay for operation costs but that had found fewer and fewer tenants—into an education center offering free classes to local poor children.

Currently, the temple is temporarily vacant as Reverend Wŏn Chusŏng took a leave of absence due to health problems and returned home to Bangladesh. However, the free education center targeting local poor children continues to operate. Classes taught by locally hired teachers in computers, Hindi, English, math, and sewing are held from ten in the morning until seven in the evening. Teachers' salaries and operation costs are covered by the Won Buddhist Charitable Society India, a private corporation.

Indian society is characterized by a plethora of coexisting religions, making Wŏn Buddhist propagation no easy task. In order to mitigate cultural aversion as much as possible, its adherents emphasize the religion's roots in the teachings of the Buddha. Furthermore, using a common missionary practice, they make use of medicine—in this case oriental medicine (*Hanbang ūihak*)—for propagation. Visiting the Indian and Nepalese facilities at Wonkwang University's College of Oriental Medicine and Sanbon Hospital allows one a glimpse of how such volunteer service is carried out.¹³⁾

Established along with Delhi Temple was the affiliated Ladakh

13) The basis of religious propagation overseas in medicine and education in Korea arose in Protestantism. In order to avoid confrontation with the Chosŏn government, missionaries initially set aside any direct proselytization, adopting a more indirect mode of proselytization by engaging in medicine and education missions within the bounds of the law. This strategy was successful as it dovetailed with the need for “civilizing” in Korea at the time. Korean Protestants thus set a very important example with respect to religious propagation(Sin, 1998: 100).

Won-Buddhist International Meditation Center. Land (about 2000 square meters) was purchased for construction on September 6, 2004 in Leh, which is in the Ladakh region near the Himalayas of Northern India. Construction began on May 26, 2006, and the building (about 200 square meters of floor space), consisting of a Dharma hall (*pöptang*) and dormitory, was completed on August 21. It was hoped the International Meditation Center would catch the eye of trekkers flocking to the Himalayas during the summer season, who might stop in and leaf through scriptures translated into various languages. And with Leh Airport just an hour's flight away from Delhi Airport, the center was also conceived of as an alternate training center for Delhi Temple during the intensely hot summer months hindering the performance of regular duties. As of 2018, however, there are no clergymen present at the center. Its guestrooms were meant to provide shelter and refuge from the summer heat for those interested in Wŏn Buddhism, but they lie vacant with all staff having withdrawn. This is a saddening situation for those who were involved in this project. Regarding this situation, one interviewee made clear the fact that veteran clergy would unconditionally do all they could to fulfill an order from the Wŏn Buddhist order, but those among the younger clergy these days display a strong tendency to avoid work in difficult areas.

Delhi Temple has also been closed since Reverend Wŏn Chusŏng became ill and returned home to Bangladesh and local Corporate Chairman Reverend Wŏn Hyŏnjang went to work at Hawaii Temple. The temple will remain this way until a new manager is appointed in September 2018. Since the retirement of Reverend Yun Sumyŏng,

who oversaw the temple's establishment, no Korean clergymen have volunteered to work at Delhi Temple. Furthermore, although there are Koreans on the corporate board of directors, many issues such as property management require the oversight of a local according to Indian law. It thus looks as if Wŏn Buddhism Headquarters has adopted an accordingly cautious attitude. However, in the case of Protestantism, missions are initiated by Koreans, who, after teaching the locals the faith and how to manage a church, completely hand over all operations to the locals and move on. This is because their ultimate goal is "propagation," and they are not overly concerned with "material" things such as ownership of church buildings, properties, etc.

Meanwhile, even if an Indian comes to Korea, receives an education in Wŏn Buddhism, and returns to take charge of Delhi Temple, he will likely experience difficulty in propagating to the local people if he is not of the upper social caste. Regardless of education or family background, moreover, a Ladakh native will also be subject to regional discrimination in Delhi. This situation will continue to make Wŏn Buddhist propagation in India difficult. This is also a problem for Protestant missions, and unlike Wŏn Buddhism, which is at least based on Buddhism, Protestantism encounters many in the upper caste espousing an essential aversion to Protestant doctrine. Ultimately, one can say, in addition to the social class problem, persuasion needed with respect to doctrinal difference will remain an important issue for propagation in India.

IV. International Aid NGO Activity: Propagation in Nepal

While Nepalese society is fundamentally Hindu-based, it is also characterized by a diverse number of other religions including Buddhism(Paudel, 2010: 7). Aversion or tension toward foreign religions —such as Wŏn Buddhism—is accordingly muted. Construction of the Wŏn Buddhist Pokhara Temple,¹⁴⁾ which eventually opened on November 26, 2003, was preceded by the elevation of the Pokhara “clinic” (*kyochŏngwŏn*) to a “mission” (*sŏn'gyoso*) in January 2002. The temple was complemented by the New Life Wonkwang Education Center¹⁵⁾ in Kathmandu. Land for this project was purchased in 2004 and construction began on November 27, 2004(Paudel, 2010: 23). Samdong International has managed these institutions since September 2014.

Wŏn Buddhist activities in Nepal can better be described as NGO-supported social activism rather than religious propagation. First of all, Wŏn Buddhism Central Headquarters does not directly support any propagation. People Working Together, an NGO active in Nepal, supports Pokhara Temple and Samdong International supports operations

14) Established in the eighty-eighth year (2003) since Wŏn Buddhism's founding, Pokhara Temple is currently under the management of Reverend Mo Siŭn, who has been there for five years. It consists of four buildings, featuring a Dharma hall, classrooms, library, hospital, gymnasium, and meditation center. Local Nepalese teachers visit the temple once every two days to teach Taekwondo and Basic Korean classes. The temple has also managed to register a coffee and tea exporting business under the name of “Himalaya Dot Net.”(Min, 2018).

15) This is an education center established in Nepal to assist with the operations of the private corporation People Working Together.

in Lumbini and Kathmandu. Each of these is a private corporation.

Samdong General School, which is located in Bhairahawa region's Lumbini, opened in 2013. More than 200 students currently attend this school. Due to steady donations, the school acquired more than ten computers and a school bus and constructed a library in 2014, completing an initiative to improve the educational environment for students. The school also offers a traditional art class for developing Nepal's traditional culture and sponsors the Won Buddhist Children's Alliance Project focusing on students facing difficult family circumstances. In 2015, a building was added for middle school students.

There are five Wŏn Buddhist reverends currently active in Nepal, with two in the capital Kathmandu, two in Lumbini, and one in Pokhara. In Kathmandu, Reverends Yi Pŏban and Wŏn Sŏngdo are involved in NGO activities for the benefit of local residents. In Lumini, Reverends Wŏn Sŏngch'ŏn and Wŏn Sŏngje oversee youth education. In Pokhara, Reverend Mo Siŭn is engaged in regional and medical activities as well as regular temple duties

Pokhara Temple doubles as a residence for clergymen and locally hired administrative staff. The NGO People Working Together supports the temple. Recognizing that the most urgent problems in Nepal relate to medicine and education, the temple runs an education program at the Social Education Center and offers free oriental medical treatment at a clinic. The Social Education Center is a three-story building with roughly 594 square meters of floor space. It offers a night school and kindergarten to locals, and recently widened its scope of activities by adding handicraft and sewing, youth computer, and culture classes(Paudel, 2010: 24-25).

Religious propagation on the bases of education and medicine is not a mode of operation restricted to Wŏn Buddhism alone. In fact, these are the primary ways in which all religious orders proselytize. When Christian missionaries came to Nepal, for example, they also established educational and medical facilities in order to spread their religious message. Such facilities appealed to the children of wealthy families. In contrast, Wŏn Buddhism offers education programs to the Nepalese poor—particularly children and women—who encounter few educational opportunities due to economic or gender discrimination. That is why the Wŏn Buddhist order also established the Wonkwang Children's Education Center in Kathmandu(Paudel, 2010: 27).

The Wŏn Buddhist order's medical activities are supported in various ways. At Wonkwang University, for example, there are departments of oriental medicine, medicine, and dentistry, and medical staff at the university's associated hospitals engage in volunteer work. Samdong International-led initiatives also supplement such activity. The Wŏn Buddhist order also engages in various initiatives beyond the medical field. The Wŏn-Buddhist affiliated Round Sunlight Development Cooperative (*Tunggŭn haetpit palchŏn hyŏptong chohap*) and private corporation Friends of Peace (*P'yŏngwa ũi ch'in'gu tŭl*), for example, supported the installation of solar panels at Pokhara Temple to compensate for the frequent power outages that occur in Nepal(O, 2018). Not only did this solar power facilitate lighting, heating, and access to water with respect to each of the four buildings constituting the Pokhara Temple complex, it also allowed the supply of water necessary for a business venture involving the planting of three hundred coffee plants.

As evident in Round Sunlight Development Cooperative and Friends of Peace reports, Pokhara Temple is expected to capitalize on the Himalaya trekking craze. With the guestrooms able to hold as many as twenty people, they are potentially ideal for trekkers preparing before or relaxing after a climb. In particular, the temple could benefit in financial as well as propagative terms by promoting the guestrooms to Koreans visiting the Himalayas. The reports published by the temple's support organizations thus highlight the need for temples and facilities located in regions targeted for propagation to supplement operational funds through independent ventures.

Wŏn Buddhism Central Headquarters does not directly sponsor Wŏn Buddhist activities in Nepal. Rather, People Working Together, an NGO active in Nepal, supports Pokhara Temple, and Samdong International, a private corporate body, supports activities in Lumbini and Kathmandu. Nepalese locals involved in these activities are not paid by the same standards for clergymen working in Korea, and due to their many duties, are unable to engage in activities that might supplement their income. For this reason, which is not only the case in Nepal but all Southwest Asia, Wŏn Buddhist temples and facilities are constantly concerned with devising ways to help pay for operation costs.

Samdong International has four corporate staff member members in Kathmandu, two at Pokhara Temple, and twenty-five at Lumbini School, which it manages. Nepal legally recognizes Pokhara Temple as a private corporation, Lumbini School as a private school, and Kathmandu as an on-site NGO corporation. Accordingly, each of these must pursue ventures commensurate to their purview, engendering

various legal restrictions with respect to religious propagation.¹⁶⁾ One can say this is the outcome of the initial strategy to enter into Nepal: Clergymen who initiated the propagation campaign in Nepal judged that, in this religiously diverse society, NGO-led activity would be more expedient than outright religious propagation.¹⁷⁾ Considering that Nepal is a multi-ethnic and religiously diverse, albeit essentially Buddhist, nation, this approach was also considered advantageous to avoid conflict or tension. In other words, a focus on general social welfare rather than religious propagation, keeping within the bounds of Nepalese law, was seen as a means of avoiding religious conflict.

The character of Wŏn Buddhist activities in Southwest Asia, as described thus far, has been a cause for concern among some among the clergy who feel that religious propagation is being neglected. These critics also point out Central Headquarters' lack of concern for propagation in Southwest Asia. According to a Central Headquarters staff member, the direction of activities changes along with the frequent turnover of corporate administrators and managers providing support (Samdong International), making it difficult to establish long-term plans. Furthermore, there are often disagreements between Central

16) Despite being NGOs organized and sponsored by a religious order, they are limited to engaging only in activities corresponding with the content of their stated purposes. Accordingly, it appears that the dispatch of NGOs for the purpose of overseas religious propagation serves to offset conflict with the government and people but leads to many difficulties with respect to actually achieving the goal of propagation(Kim, 2014: 168-171).

17) Reverend Wŏn Sŏnje, who works in Lumbini, believes that NGO aid and volunteer service, rather than religious propagation, has set in as the preferred mode of operation because this is more convenient for the clergy, who are able to return home after serving a set term.

Headquarters in Korea and those active in the field. This is likely due to the disparity between Central Headquarter aims and the situation in the field and the fact that the opinions of on-site clergy are rarely shared with Central Headquarters.

Restrictions owing to the need for private corporations to act within the bounds of national and local laws are also considered problematic. Pokhara Temple, for example, is legally a private corporation and Reverend Mo Siŭn is an investor residing in Nepal on a business visa, and legal restrictions limiting religious propagation apply accordingly.¹⁸⁾ Meanwhile, other clergymen in Nepal affiliated with NGOs are also limited to acting within a particular purview. Currently, since Samdong International is an NGO meant to provide international aid, it is restricted in publicly engaging in propagative activities.

The Nepalese Reverend Wŏn Sŏngje lamented Central Headquarters' apparent overemphasis on propagation in advanced countries and apathy with respect to Southwest Asia. He strongly felt there was still hope for India and Nepal, which exhibit a great need for Wŏn Buddhist teachings, but that a lack of progress more than a decade since the propagation campaign's initiation perhaps signified insufficient effort. However, he also expressed optimism, recognizing that such problems will not be solved overnight; with time and effort, he affirmed, perhaps a brighter future is on the horizon.

18) A clergywoman is expected to wear the official Wŏn Buddhist uniform only when performing ceremonies.

V. Migrant Worker Connections and a Scholarship Initiative: Propagation in Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, there are not yet any Wŏn Buddhist NGOs or temples. Propagation is primarily linked with a foreigner center in Korea run by Reverend Ch'oe Sŏyŏn. Reverend Ch'oe Sŏyŏn has been active in educating foreign migrant workers in Seoul since 2001.¹⁹⁾ She currently oversees operations of the Seoul Foreigner Center and Yangchŏn-Kangsŏ Residence for Migrant Women. While these are both open to all foreigners, at the moment, mainly married migrant women (Vietnamese, Filipino, Cambodian, Chinese, Sri Lankan) and their children make use of them. In any case, the Seoul Foreigner Center—a Migrant Workers Council (*Oegugin iju nodongja taech'aek hyŏbŭihoeŭi*) member (2001-2007)—endeavors to protect the rights of migrant workers, providing counsel related to such diverse matters as delayed wages, industrial accidents, health checks, and international marriage. It also provides council to women who come to Korea through international marriage regarding Korean language, childrearing, and daily life, offers human rights education programs, and organizes Korean cultural events. Altogether, the primary business of Reverend Ch'oe Sŏyŏn's Seoul Foreigner Center, outside of

19) The Wŏn Buddhism Seoul Diocese Standing Committee (Sŏul kyogu sangim wiwŏnhoe) approved the establishment of the Seoul Foreigner Center on August 16, 2001. It opened on October 21, 2001. The Yangchŏn-Kangsŏ Residence for Migrant Women opened on October 26, 2005.

providing Korean language education to the families of migrant workers, is helping foreigners with the problems they encounter in their daily lives in Korea.

The foreigner center receives no compensation or support from the government. It rather covers its operation fees through donations made by temples, dioceses, and associated organizations like Seoul Bounhoe and Samsamhoe and their staff and members.²⁰⁾ However, the center does not aim to provide material support for foreign workers. Instead, those who frequent the center look to Reverend Ch'oe for spiritual and moral sustenance. While of course material support would be helpful, in Reverend Ch'oe's view what is really important is providing the education and courage that will help these people to become independent.

Reverend Ch'oe's path to becoming Seoul Foreigner Center manager began with the semester she spent abroad in Sri Lanka doing volunteer work when she was a graduate student at Wonkwang University. In 2001, she began work on a Sri Lankan youth scholarship fund. Currently, she spends about a week in Sri Lanka every year in order to deposit scholarships directly into recipients' bank accounts. The scholarship amounted to 121 thousand rupee when it was initiated in 2002. But it has gradually increased over the years, and in 2017 it amounted to as much as 1,003,000 rupees.

Scholarship recipients are required to write to Ch'oe three times a year, conveying account books that report on the use of the

20) It is possible to register at the District Office to receive government support. However, the process is so complicated and time consuming that it would require the hiring of a separate employee just to complete. The center thus opted to rely only on donations.

scholarship money. The reason for this is to determine whether parents are using the money for matters other than their children's education. Students are told in advance that if they do not fulfill these requirements they are eligible to lose the scholarship. Besides writing letters and making account books, students are also required to keep "daily diaries" (*sangsi ilgi*).²¹⁾ This is a training exercise to help one monitor one's state of mind on a daily basis, allowing observation of the self from an objective perspective.

Reverend Ch'oe's Seoul Foreigner Center currently grants 120 thousand wŏn to each Sri Lankan scholarship student per year. This is quite a substantial amount, considering that ten thousand wŏn in Korea is equivalent to about 100 thousand wŏn in Sri Lanka. But it is less than the amount granted to medical students, which is 450 thousand wŏn per year. According to Ch'oe, more than forty past scholarship recipients now work as doctors. The center donates to students in all four Sri Lankan regions, accepting requests from Sri Lankan workers in Korea to support poor students in their native regions.

Rather than building temples and recruiting Sri Lankan clergy, then, propagation in Sri Lanka exhibits a decidedly more "remote" style, revolving around scholarships and religious ceremonies indirectly leading to an understanding of Wŏn Buddhist teachings. Visits to scholarship recipient families, for example, began in 2009. Meanwhile, special Chŏndo rituals were offered specifically for those who died in the civil war until 2011 and for all spirits since 2012 at the Sri

21) These are diaries recording self-reflections on how one applies the Wŏn Buddhist principle of "mind cultivation" (*maŭm kongbu pŏp*) in behavior on a daily basis.

Lanka Wŏn Buddhist Center. Furthermore, “prayer visits” involving migrant workers who have returned to Sri Lanka and scholarship students began in 2011 and 2013, respectively. Observing such propagation activities in Sri Lanka, it is evident that Wŏn Buddhist operations have expanded over time.

Reverend Ch’oe Sŏyŏn believes that, essentially, “propagation is social.” Over the course of her visits to Sri Lanka, she has met and talked with as many Sri Lankan people as possible to propagate the teachings of Wŏn Buddhism. With regard to the matter of constructing a temple in Sri Lanka, then, she is not necessarily eager. This will require time and the Sri Lankan people’s greater understanding of Wŏn Buddhism. In other words, she believes a temple will be constructed when Sri Lankans desire and a Sri Lankan clergy emerges.

While there is currently no temple in Sri Lanka, there is a Wŏn Buddhism Center. Tilak, once a migrant worker in Korea who met Reverend Ch’oe Sŏyŏn through the Seoul Foreigner Center, established this center after assisting Reverend Ch’oe on her trips to Sri Lanka. The center is actually his home, on which he has erected a sign reading “Wŏn Buddhism Center.”²²⁾ In the early stages of the scholarship fund initiative, since there was no temple in Sri Lanka, there was no place to stay, and Reverend Ch’oe and Tilak would appeal to others whom she had met through the Seoul Foreigner Center. Tilak was thus inspired to build his own house. When he fell short of funds, the Wŏn Buddhist order gave him 5 million wŏn to finish the house.

22) Talak says that he helped Reverend Ch’oe to repay all the help he received from Wŏn Buddhism during his time as a migrant worker in Korea.

According to Reverend Ch'oe, an on-site religious corporation is needed for overseas propagation. She also expressed concern that native recruits often follow the requests of the order faithfully at first but later have a change of heart. She thus sees recruiting proper management rather than raising enough funds as the most important issue related to establishing a temple. In any case, considering that there are no clergy in Southwest Asia at present, building a temple would be meaningless. She thus does not have any plans for constructing a temple in Sri Lanka at the moment, regarding this as a task best left for her successor.

Overall, Reverend Ch'oe makes two significant points. First, activities in Nepal should reflect careful consideration of what is needed. If material assistance is provided, then locals may approach the religion with hopes of gaining money rather than enlightenment. It is better to begin small and gradually teach Sri Lankans about Wŏn Buddhism over time, she says. Second, Korean government policy reflects only the concern with using migrant workers as laborers, ignoring human rights issues. From the position of one engaged in religious propagation in Southwest Asia, the experiences and impressions of foreign workers in Korea are intimately related to propagation. She is thus especially sensitive to the shortcomings of government policy in this regard.

VI. Conclusion

Looking at the state of Wŏn Buddhist propagation in the three countries of Southwest Asia, it looks as if this effort straddles the line between religious propagation and international aid. Nonetheless, perhaps the latter description is more accurate; this is an international aid effort sanctioned by Wŏn Buddhism Central Headquarters and carried out by Wŏn Buddhist clergymen.

Activities performed under the aegis of NGOs and even private corporations in India and Nepal appear a tactic for getting around legal restrictions and mitigating cultural confrontation. In the Indian case, the Wŏn Buddhist order is focusing on education for the poor, lower classes in Delhi rather than the well off. While Delhi Temple, which is free to engage in propagation activities, is currently vacant, the education center continues to operate. It thus looks like social welfare projects supporting and supplementing work under NGO jurisdiction will continue while propagation will struggle.

Viewing the case of Ladakh, the caste system is still powerfully evident in Indian society, entailing that local clergy be drawn from the ranks of the upper classes in order to be effective. Furthermore, a Ladakh native appointed to work at Delhi Temple will also encounter difficulty in the form of regional discrimination. Perhaps this signifies a contradictory situation, in which propagation cannot but take into account local class dynamics and recruit clergy from the upper classes despite the Wŏn Buddhist principle of universal quality.

A more desirable situation might be for Koreans, able to evade class

or regional discrimination, to undertake the propagation effort. However, none within the Wŏn Buddhist order have volunteered for this task. In addition to difficulties related to climate, culture, and language, then, some claim that propagation in Southwest Asia is also hindered by the problematic attitude of a younger generation. According to one interviewee, veterans of the order would not even consider questioning a dispatch by Central Quarters, but the younger generation is a little more opinionated. In any case, it has become difficult for Southwest Asian clergymen, who have devoted themselves to the Wŏn Buddhist order, to work at Delhi Temple. And since there has been no one to replace those who have retired, Delhi Temple and Ladakh Meditation Center are vacant. Less fervency with respect to the call to propagate among younger clergymen compared to their older counterparts is a phenomenon occurring among Protestant missions too.

In the case of Sri Lanka, by helping Sri Lankan workers in Korea and organizing a scholarship program for Sri Lankan students, Reverend Ch'oe Sŏyŏn—a single person—has made gradual progress in disseminating Wŏn Buddhism. As she describes, Sri Lankan workers and their families who come to Korea sew the seeds of propagation upon returning home. Meanwhile, she continues to inform scholarship recipients and their families of Wŏn Buddhist teachings as she visits Sri Lanka year after year. One might call this a form of “remote propagation,” where humanitarian aid projects are linked with potential propagation in the future. Rather than recruitment of locals into the clergy and establishment of a temple, Reverend Ch'oe recommends patience; there is no rush and it will be worthwhile to see where the

current situation leads. Meanwhile, the Wŏn Buddhist order's concern with the issue appointing clergymen to establish and manage temples provides a contrast with Protestant propagation, wherein missionaries teach locals about the faith, endow them with a church, and then move on to another area.

In conclusion, upon examining the state of Wŏn Buddhist propagation in Southwest Asia, other than the blurring of the boundary between propagation and international aid work, the most striking point is that even when temples are established the difficult problem of raising funds to pay for operation fees remains. Pokhara Temple, which is a registered private corporation, is preparing a coffee- and tea-selling venture, while Ladakh and Delhi's guestrooms remain vacant.

This means that, for the Southwest Asian propagation campaign to gain a foothold, the Wŏn Buddhist order must provide direct and consistent support. NGO-affiliated clergymen currently do not receive funds from the order and thus lead very difficult lives. Meanwhile, temple clergymen use their own salaries to help perpetuate temple operations. Ultimately, they are confronting an unfamiliar climate, daily hardships, difficult duties, and social problems in Southwest Asia. Wŏn Buddhism Central Headquarters should thus no longer shirk the responsibility of supporting these hardworking clergy by delegating to NGOs.

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원불교의 서남아시아 포교 현황: 교당 혹은 국제원조 NGO?

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본 논문에서는 원불교 교단을 중심으로 문헌조사와 관련자 인터뷰의 방식을 통해 서남아시아지역 포교 현황과 문제점을 들여다보고자 했다.

현재까지 원불교 교단에서 진행하고 있는 서남아시아 지역 3개국 포교 현상을 들여다보면 국제원조 NGO 단체를 통해 소극적으로 진행하고 있으며, 각국의 사회문화와 법률로 인해 어려움을 겪고 있는 것으로 보인다.

원불교를 비롯하여 개신교 등의 교단에서는 인도와 네팔의 법률적 제한을 비껴나가고, 현지에서의 문화적 충돌을 최소화하기 위해 NGO 내지 현지 주식회사 법인으로 활동하는 방식을 주로 선택하고 있다.

인도에서의 경우, 상층 캐스트보다는 주로 빈민계층을 대상으로 하는 무상교육 중심으로 진행하고 있다. 포교 관련 업무를 할 수 있는 델리교당은 현재 여러 사정으로 인하여 교무가 없이 비어있는 상태이지만 무상교육센터는 계속 운영되고 있다. 이는 NGO 차원에서의 원조사업은 지속할 여건이 되지만, 포교 사업은 여러

가지로 장애가 많다는 것을 보여준다.

인도사회에는 아직도 카스트 관습이 강하기 때문에 만인의 평등을 말하는 원불교의 교법에 어긋나지만, 교화를 위해서는 상위계급 출신 교무가 필요하게 되는 모순적 상황이 발생하기도 한다. 또한 여러 요인 때문에 교단 내에서 지원자가 없다는 것도 문제인데, 젊은 세대 교무들이 중견 이상의 세대에 비해 선교적 소명의식이 강렬하지 않은 현상은 개신교에서도 마찬가지로 나타나고 있었다.

스리랑카의 경우에는 최서연 교무 1인이 한국에 온 스리랑카 출신 이주노동자 지원과 장학금 사업을 매개로 하여 서서히 원불교 교법을 전달하는 원격포교 형태로 진행되고 있다. 최교무는 스리랑카 현지사람들이 원불교 교법을 이해하고, 자체적으로 교당 설립을 추진하기 전까지 기다리겠다는 입장이다. 한편, 원불교와 달리, 개신교 측에서는 현지인 신도가 생기면 교육시켜서 교회를 물려주고 다른 곳으로 다시 떠나는 방식을 선택하고 있는 점이 눈에 띈다.

결국 어느 교단도 서남아시아 사회의 계급문제와 법률로 인해 자유롭지 못한 포교를 진행하고 있으며, 비공식적인 교당과 공식적인 NGO 활동 사이에서 줄타기를 하고 있는 것으로 보인다.

주제어: 서남아시아, 원불교, 포교, NGO, 국제원조