

## Minjung (the Oppressed) Buddhism in the Context of Korea

Kim, Eun-Kyu Micah

### Religious Dialogue in the Context of the Global Empire

We are living in the early 21st century, and the new millennium when it began was a big turning point in the history of civilization. We call this the post-modern times, an era of ex-authoritarianism which we are escaping from the authority of feudal culture, imperialism and the World Wars. However, religious conflicts are rising to the surface of the water. Christianity and Islam and Judaism which came from the same roots in the desert of the Middle East, have become the world's major issues of religious conflicts.<sup>1)</sup> Nevertheless, religions are still enjoying an authoritarian era, and are trapped in the confines of the doctrinal and ruling ideological constraints. As religion has become institutionalized and vested with selfish interests or benefits, it has become closed internally, and has been aggressively and exclusively expanding outside. Paradoxically religion has ruled humans and showed dysfunction rather than freedom and liberation in history. Of course, the scriptures of each religion speak of

---

He is an Anglican priest and professor of the Old Testament in Sungkonghoe (Anglican) University, Seoul, Korea. He is interested in dialogue with Buddhism and Minjung theology. Email: micahkim59@yahoo.co.kr

- 1) Kim, Eunkyū Micah, "Religious Dialogue and Co-operation in the Context of Globalization : Global Ethic, New Liberalism and Empire," *Madang: International Journal of Contextual Theology in East Asia*, Vol. 5. (June 2006), 45-61.

eternal love and forgiveness and of mercy to humans, but this was possible only in the narrow sphere of religion; it seems that it is difficult to go beyond it.

In history, we have seen how European Christian countries occupied and ruled Africa, Asia and Latin America during colonial and imperial period, and deprived of the huge and mass of the materials, the spirits of indigenous religions, and the resources of precious traditional, cultural inheritances. This was made the fundamental basis that European countries were grown in the high level of economic development in today. We can see the fruitful results in the British Museum in London and the Louvre Museum in Paris well. European Christianity expanded its mission ignoring and destroying indigenous cultures and religions with 'the Bible and imperialism' around the world for over the past 1500 years. I can say that the Bible contributed to supply the exclusive and aggressive ideology for dominating colonial continents. After Emperor Constantine, the Roman Empire legalized the persecuted Christianity from 312 A.D., the empire power and Christianity power were supported by the ruling theology and ideology justified the making of war and violence, and expanded their territories, exploiting their massive resources through the crusades and colonial wars, using of biblical verses and words of 'do not believe in other gods,' 'the prohibition and abolition of idolatry,' 'God's kingdom.' 'my witness in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of earth.' This is continuing until the present day in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The worst result was that the Christianity power of Europe helped to expand imperialism and Western cultural superiority. Exclusive and conservative Christianity has also cut off dialogue between the religions, exposing the dormant conflicts between religions.<sup>2)</sup> Dualism (good and evil, white and black, light and darkness), Western thought background of Christianity has been made use of taking aggressive to the global South countries with the military power and political, economical power in world history. I think that dualism was an effective philosophy, an ideology, god to oppress the weak. God, monotheism of Christianity has existed to show the omnipotent power through dualism ruling indigenous gods, actually extending colonial territories.

---

2) Ibid., 47-53. In here I critically treated global ethic and Hans Küng's slogan about 'peace between religions,' and his 'global ethic project.'

The German theologian Hans Küng has contributed much to interfaith dialogue, making the slogan, “without religious peace, no world peace” as a way of focusing on the need for reconciliation and peace in religious conflicts. His ideas have helped that religious groups make efforts for peace and interfaith dialogue. However, I think that there is a limit to Hans Küng’s claim. On the opposite side, I would like to ask, “If there is religious peace, is there world peace?” We have to see the religious conflicts which are linked with capitalism and global empire, because we can evade or conceal the nature of the problem if we see only the religious issues.

Today, we all have to live in a capitalist world and a world of capitalist thought. World capitalism progresses further the gap between Global North and South widens even further. The forces of world capitalism are spreading totally across the globe. Capitalism digs itself deeply inside rural seclusion, and the countryside has become part of the structure of the food chain of the world economy. The United States has emerged as the economic superpower of the world and requires that powerless countries open the doors of their economy to the USA. In addition, since all matters of substantial and high technology in military strength and the economic, scientific, medical, cultural, and aerospace industries of USA are based on the dominant global empire, there are no other forces to divert this. In human history one single nation has never before ruled the entire world in this way.

While America’s world domination would bring economic benefits to America, the economic results generated by other economies, such as those of Asia, Africa, and Latin America are dependent on the United States. The United States makes a stand of ‘peace,’ however, at the same time her military power is enormous. In fact, the United States possesses more nuclear bombs and a larger manufacturing capability than other countries. That the United States dominates the world clearly shows the nature of empire. Religions see these problems exactly, and will present the wisdom and ideas by which global society can live in peace and equality.

The damage caused by global capitalism and the empire eventually affects the people of Asian, African and Latin American countries including the lower classes of Europe and North America. It is reported that three quarters of the world’s population suffers such damage because the world capitalist system and global empire policies make a victim of the Minjung and contribute to spreading AIDS, prostitution, hunger, illiteracy and

racism. It is particularly women and children who are the victims of this. Local disputes and religious conflicts are also a serious situation.

Religious dialogue has to focus on the realities of the world according to these issues. If not, interfaith dialogue will fall to being merely scholarly doctrine discussions in the limited dimension of a comparison of differences and similarities. How can these common challenges be resolved by developing an awareness of the global situation? Religion starts in the personal dimension, but also participates in society and history, and further is able to generate a vision for the future.

This paper will treat Buddhism and Christianity of Korea in the context of global empire and religious dialogue on the focusing Minjung theology.

### **The Minjung Understanding of Buddhism in Korea**

Interfaith dialogue with Christianity and Buddhism in Korea was started through the democratic movement and human rights movement in the 1970s-90s. Minjung theology had an effect on the Minjung's hermeneutical approach to Buddhism academic fields. The Minjung theologians, Suh, Kwang-Sun explained about the notion, "Minjung is a Korean word, but it is a combination of two Chinese characters 'min' and 'jung.' 'Min' may be translated as 'people' and 'jung' as the mass. Thus 'Minjung' means the mass of the people. Minjung is a term which grew out of the Christian experiences in the political struggle for justice against the dictatorship which oppressed the people. Minjung theology is an accumulation and articulation of theological reflections on the political experiences of Christian students, laborers, the press, professors, farmers, writers and intellectuals. It is a theology of the oppressed in the Korean political situation, a theological response to the oppressors."<sup>3)</sup>

Minjung theology was born in struggling democratic and human rights movement against military regime of Korea in 1970s. It started in theological, faithful reflections of the progressive theologians<sup>4)</sup> and

3) Suh, Kwang-Sun, "A biographical sketch of an Asian theological consultation," in Kim, Yongbok (ed.), *Minjoong Theology* (Singapore: CTC-CCA publication, 1981), 15-37, 17-18.

4) Suh, Nam-Dong; Ahn, Byeong-Mu; Hyun, Young-Hak; Suh, Kwang-Sun; Gim, Chan-Gook and Kim, Yong-Bok created Minjung theology, and Noh, Jung-Sun;

Christian students resisting the oppressed and persecuted contexts which were arrested, detained, violenced by military regime. Labors, farmers, city poor people also resisted to improve their low income, long hour labor work, difficult conditions of factory with political struggles. Minjung theologian mainly interpreted the prophetic message, social justice, social gospel and participated in the fields of street demonstration, labor and agriculture areas. They saw Jesus as a liberator accompanying with the poor, the oppressed for social salvation. Namely they said, "Minjung is Jesus." Minjung theology tried to overcome western theology. Today Minjung theology concentrates global empire, new liberalism, ecological concern, migrant workers, feminism, religious dialogue, peace movement for reunification of the divided Korea, etc.

### **Buddhist Idea : New Interpretation of Minjung**

A founder of Minjung Buddhism in Korea is the poet Ko, Eun acquainted with Minjung theologians well, who presented the paper, "Maitreya<sup>n</sup>ātha (the Buddha of the future) belief and Minjung" (1970). He said, "The Buddhist should practice for the Minjung's liberation and reform Buddhism through actions of the bodhisattvas (enlightenment)." <sup>5)</sup>

He mentioned that the Minjung movement of Buddhism has to declare that Buddhists participate in realistic life - in pain, in the fields, in streets - to achieve democracy, and that they will take a low place in other people's lives.<sup>6)</sup> Yeo, Ik-Gu contributed to supporting the ideas and philosophies for making Minjung Buddhism. The Minjung theologian, Suh, Nam-Dong founded Buddhist Messianism, related to the hope of the suffering Minjung's expectations.<sup>7)</sup> Now I will examine the origins and history of Minjung Buddhism in Korea.

Buddhism is a religion in the heart of humanity and teaches of the

---

Yim, Tae-Soo; Kwon Jin-Kwan; Kang Won-Don; Kim Hi-Heon; Choi Hyung-Mook; Jung Ji-Seok succeed.

5) Ko, Eun, "Mahāyāna Buddhism Belief," *Literary and Intelligence* (Korean), Spring 1979.

6) Byeon, Seonhwan archives, *Interfaith Dialogue and Theology in Asia* (Korean) (Byeongcheon: Korea Institute of Theology, 1996), 333-334.

7) Suh, Nam-Dong, *Search of Minjoong Theology* (Korean) (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1983), 77.

restoration of peace and the search for peace of mind. Buddhism is more human centered and focuses on humans. True happiness is not only in satisfying an individual's mental and physical condition, but also in the social environment - political, economic, cultural, ecological - which should be obtained to reach this ideal.<sup>8)</sup>

### *Law (Dharma)*

Buddha means 'realization,' 'I know lights.' Immediately after the Buddha realized enlightenment, he went through a life time of practice. A pilgrim can achieve the peak of enlightenment by saving the people as an act of kindness and compassion (maitrī-karunā).<sup>9)</sup>

Enlightenment is of the individual's consciousness, but can never be private. Conscious awareness is truly holistic. This holistic awareness has to include both society and history. The awakening human cannot be said to come to practice in society.<sup>10)</sup> A contemporary social practice itself comes from the anguish of sympathy and gentle affection for those who suffer.<sup>11)</sup>

The core idea of Buddhism is that of Dharma (Law). Dharma cannot be expressed in ideology or -ism.<sup>12)</sup> Buddha realized Sūnyatā (emptiness, void), anātman (non-self), madhyamā-pratipad (the Middle way), and prafitya-samutpāda (interdependent arising). In short, all the changes and movements in the presence and commitment are related to each other. Emptiness and non-self are not fixed. Decisions are not made based on one side only with the insistence there be no flexibility. Changes in activity and exercise are freely made in this progress and development. What gets caught up in a fixed way of thinking makes for a bias, from which conflict and hatred occur. Buddhism's ultimate purpose is harmony and a desire to build world peace on the basis of emptiness and non-self.<sup>13)</sup>

8) Yeo, Ik-Gu, *Introduction to Minjoong Buddhism* (Korean) (Seoul: Pulbit, 1985), 33.

9) Jeong, Ui-Haeng, *The History of Korea Buddhism* (Korean) (Seoul: Hanmadang, 1992), 14.

10) Yeo, Ik-Gu, "The Faith of Minjoong Buddhism: Philosophical Religion and Religious Philosophy," in *National Buddhism* (Korean) (Seoul: Dongkwang Press, 1989), 110-119, 119.

11) *ibid.*, 119.

12) Yeo, Ik-Gu, *Introduction to Minjoong Buddhism*, 37.

### ***Enlightenment (Bodhisattva)***

Bodhisattva is combined from ‘bodhi’ of awakening, and ‘sattva’ of living beings, history, the reality. Bodhisattva means individual wisdom and the will to add historicity. Namely, it is in Mahāyāna Buddhism that one vows to attain Buddhahood for oneself and to assist all others in doing so. Buddhism is going from the level of enlightenment to the world of history, time and space to the world, and the realities of today.<sup>14)</sup> ‘Bodhi’ is a logical understanding of existence, and ‘sattva’ speaks of concrete reality and the corresponding action. So Mahāyāna Buddhism is a positive and warm heart in history and society. Bodhisattva has to meet the practical spirit, the humanities, sociology and philosophy.<sup>15)</sup>

### ***Human-centered idea***

Buddhism is a human religion. The most fundamental human-centered idea is respect for private life and personality. The thought of respect for human life expands to all creatures. The respectful life idea prevents racism, ethnicity and division by social classes or exploitation. In the era of the Buddha, because of the caste system of India, mixed marriage, eating, working or education was prohibited.<sup>16)</sup> He opposed and denied the class and irrational system, and desired India to become a peaceful country.

### ***Personal and Social Liberation***

A human goes to the source of his/her human nature, and finds not his/her own greed and lies, but the real human being. That is human salvation.<sup>17)</sup> A human being awakes the nature of the human itself. The non-self spirit of Buddhism requires a human being’s desperate practice towards living beings (sattva). These are the actions of the Bodhisattvas. These Bodhisattvas should be implemented in social and historical realities. This behavior is a reality of ‘enlightenment.’ Only the actions identify and

---

13) Ibid.

14) Hyun, Eung, “The Practice Idea of Mahāyāna Buddhism,” in *National Buddhism*, 120-132

15) Ibid.

16) Yeo, Ik-Gu, *Introduction to Minjoong Buddhism*, 51.

17) Ibid., 24.

represent the truth, and then you can save anyone or anything from anguish.<sup>18)</sup> ‘Salvation’ is not given, it is to be taken, and it is not a notion but an action. This is the action of the bodhisattvas as the remedy for the Minjung. Humans themselves in this behavior are completely free and liberated. Salvation of the self and the Minjung’s liberation can be completed simultaneously. This is the goal of Minjung Buddhism.<sup>19)</sup>

### ***Interrelated Idea***

One of the key ideas of Buddhism is ‘Interrelatedness.’ It is generally defined as follows: “All things rely on each other and are tied to each other.” Thus nothing in the universe can be raised by itself, but needs necessarily to be in combination with cause and effect. This theory is related to each other and the changes in functioning able to be generated, by which everything is done within the law itself of all the phenomena of the universe, the reality of any existence, the human spirit and substance, even awareness, etc. The reason why this idea is important is that a root of grass could affect the whole planet. According to this, I can say that this is an alternative idea against today’s materialism, capitalism and global empire contexts.

This interrelatedness idea is closely connected with the individual and society. Minjung Buddhism spoke of social participation. Social participation of Buddhism means to change in social structure and social environment in global empire contexts, because the suffering of all human beings is related to society and nation. Enlightenment shows that any mental salvation is liberation from all fetters. And ‘compassion consciousness’ is the key of Buddhist practice. The goal of a Buddhist nirvana or enlightenment (Bodhi) will be socialized.

### ***Social Suffering***

The Old Testament prophets criticized the corrupt high class society and Jesus was opposed to the high priests, high classes, Roman Empire, and finally was victimized by them. The Buddha also did not rest on the social order, but went on the ascetic way to discover the truth.

---

18) Ibid., 65.

19) Ibid.



One of the fundamental ideas of Buddhism is ‘everything is a state of mind.’ Buddha struggled through his life to resolve the mind of suffering. So the scriptures of Buddhism are well described and classified in the subject of ‘suffering,’ and systematically analyze and overcome some of the steps.<sup>20)</sup>

When regarding ‘mind and suffering’ in the Christian Bible we can find it to be a common denominator expressed in most of the Old Testament stories and ideas, and also highlighted through the Cross of Christ in the New Testament. The Old Testament does not show the colorful and elegant private life or the history of the nation of Israel, but its myths, prose, legends, heroes, dynastic history, epics, proverbs, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, prayer, and entire literary genres show how anyone can sin. This ‘mind and suffering’ of the Old Testament is one of the key themes. The Old Testament uses כָּעַץ (‘etsev) as ‘suffering,’ expressing suffering caused by war, the nation’s destruction, disease, early death, physical pain, rejection, loneliness, and spiritual suffering, sorrow, oppression, harassment, agony, and a wide range of meaning. It is said that human greed and selfishness cause suffering which is against God’s good will, and all human beings, through their desires, competition and instincts, have experienced ‘suffering’ regardless of religion.

### ***The Pure Land***

The purpose of Buddhism is the insight of ‘enlightenment’ about the truth of life. When all human beings become ‘Buddha,’ the Pure Land will be achieved, similar to the social vision of the Kingdom of God. Individual completion means the entire liberation from individual human suffering. Here the concept of liberation or freedom (vimutta) represents the escape from bondage, and a bound, locked state.<sup>21)</sup> However, an individual’s awareness and completion are reached not as just an individual, but as a part of society and country. Therefore, the individual is not satisfied with the self-completion of enlightenment, and works forward to the reform of society. Without progressing or reforming society, individual enlightenment

20) Cho, Joon-Ho, “Social Practice Movement in the Early Buddhism,” in *The Idea and History of Practice Buddhism* (Korean) (Seoul: Hangwon Press, 2002), 13-60, 34-50.

21) Yeo, Ik-Gu, *Introduction to Minjoong Buddhism*, 30.

cannot be completed.<sup>22)</sup> The construction of the pure land is done at a place of difficulty and suffering. There are lies and deceptions, spite, jealousy, malice, greed, domination and exploitation, oppression and violence. Even though the war does not stop, love and mercy and compassion enrich the human place and mind. When a society is filled with individuals on the way of this recognition, then people are going to create an equal, peaceful and free society.<sup>23)</sup> Therefore, as we are living, this society can make balance and harmony for its restoration.

### **Minjung *Mahāyāna* Buddhism in Korea**

Several hundred years after Buddhism was established, it became a lifestyle of the Indian Minjung. But the Buddhist community got much richer and with its prosperity received extensive political and economic assistance from kings and nobility.<sup>24)</sup> Buddhism changed into a conservative formal notion. The life of monks became higher than ordinary people and came to form one of the social upper classes.<sup>25)</sup> Mahāyāna Buddhism then developed in opposition to these attitudes which had arisen in Buddhism. It was a movement of coming back to the original meaning of freeing all beings from suffering.<sup>26)</sup> Mahāyāna Buddhism developed first, in opposition to the economic prosperity and corruption of Buddhism, and second, in reaction to the disappointment of Buddhism's helplessness in the context of political persecution.<sup>27)</sup> Because humans cannot live alone, all people are social animals. Everyone will have the possibility of becoming Buddha.<sup>28)</sup> Then the Bodhisattva person will use their body for the ultimate salvation of others, holding back their own enlightenment.

Buddhism and most of the Korean temples remained isolated around 600 years because of the suppression policy of Confucianism in the Choseon Dynasty (1392-1910, AD) and Japanese colonialism (1910-1945). It's only in recent days that Korean Buddhism has turned to the Minjung

---

22) Ibid., 30.

23) Ibid., 31

24) Ibid., 205

25) Ibid., 206.

26) Ibid.

27) Ibid., 208.

28) Ibid., 209.

and social point of view. In the 1980's, Minjung Buddhism participated against the political oppression of the military dictatorship and outside economic unequal structures, and promoted the reform of some corrupt administrative systems inside Buddhism. Minjung Buddhism is a democratic movement and progressively recognizes the history, society and reunification of Korea.<sup>29)</sup>

***The features of Minjung Buddhism are as follows***<sup>30)</sup>;

Firstly, it is a Minjung centered idea. Minjung means the concept of going one step further from the current suffering and alienation of social, political, economic, and cultural life.<sup>31)</sup> Buddhism should emphasize the Minjung, and be involved and resolute at the forefront of social issues. So the Pure Land and Buddhist community speak of the resolved society of all the Minjung's suffering. The Buddhist doctrine of the concept that 'living beings are Buddha,' in Minjung Buddhism comes to be 'Minjung is Buddha.' Secondly, it is the strong will of a social reformation. Minjung Buddhism is different from traditional Buddhism which looks passively toward society and history. As Minjung Buddhism participates in resolving social change for the oppressed life of the Minjung, it builds a new society through social action, for example street demonstrations for democracy. Thirdly, the Pure Land and Buddha's world will be achieved in this world and not beyond in a transcendental world. Pure Land means that all Minjung will have equality, happiness, peace and freedom in this land. 4. The practical fields are not only temples in the mountains, but also in society, particularly in poor areas where laborers and peasants live. Minjung Buddhism is to overcome the demerits of capitalist exploitation and strive to approach an equal society.

### **History of Minjung *Mahāyāna* Buddhism in Korea**

Korean Buddhism was imported from China, 4-5 AD. At that time the Korean peninsula was divided into three kingdoms which were established in 1 BC. Before Buddhism, there existed ancestor worship, shamanism,

---

29) Ibid., 123.

30) Ibid., 124-125.

31) Ibid., 124.

slaves, class and tribal leagues, and wars of conquest. These Kingdoms made use of Buddhism for the new ruling ideology in contrast to the past tribal leagues' systems and philosophies. The royal groups, nobility and ruling classes who had built the kingdoms made use of shamanism and Buddhism as a national religion for maintaining their political power and economic wealth. From the beginning of time, Korean Buddhism had become a dominant power in order to defend the nation rather than bring enlightenment.<sup>32)</sup> The early Buddhism of Korea was subordinated to the power and order of the ruling class, to the avoidance of the Minjung's realities. It emphasized only the afterlife or spiritual peace of salvation. Originally Buddhism pursued the independence and equality of human nature and the sacred. However, Korean Buddhism, on the side of ruling class, came to evade the oppression of the Minjung and their suffering. Buddhism got the dominant power, stability and order which it used to defend the dominant ideology.<sup>33)</sup> The Buddhism of the Three Kingdoms expanded the Pure Land so that it came under the active support of the royal and noble faith. Buddhism persisted in maintaining the paradise of the afterlife, while distorting the Minjung and paralyzing their ability to resist and revolt, and hiding the oppression and exploitation of the ruling class.<sup>34)</sup>

### ***Minjung Maitreya Buddhism (Future Buddha)***

Minjung Buddhism - the Maitreya faith - appeared against the ruling Buddhism. Maitreya Buddhism opposed the oppression of the feudal ruling class, and it gave hope to Minjung who had lost their land and were deprived of their possessions. The ruling class changed Maitreya faiths so that they were used for supporting the nation and rulers, and not for developing the Minjung religion. Then the Maitreya faiths came to be responsible for the interests of the ruling classes and contributed to helping the brave young warriors who fought the national enemy in the era of the united Silla dynasty (57 BC-935 AD).

Maitreya was originally the faith that emphasized the Minjung's practical role rather than Armitābha (Infinite Light) faith. The Maitreya

32) Jeong, Ui-Haeng, *The History of Korea Buddhism* (Korean) (Seoul: Hanmadang, 1992), 14.

33) Ibid., 16.

34) Ibid., 29.

Buddha goes down on the ground in the imminent reality of old society and selfish people, and he lives together comforting the Minjung and seeking their new lives.<sup>35)</sup> But the Maitreya faith in the Three Kingdoms period came to serve the feudal rulers. One hundred years after the Baekje Dynasty(18 BC-660 AD) was destroyed by the Silla Dynasty, the old monk Jin Pyo appeared as a Minjung hero of Maitreya in the Baekje area.<sup>36)</sup> The Baekje Minjung who were persecuted and discriminated against under the feudal rule of Silla accepted him coming down as a Maitreya Buddha. It meant that a new world had opened, and that regional, class discrimination and exploitation had disappeared.<sup>37)</sup> The Maitreya faith of Jin Pyo was never for individual salvation, but for social salvation. He raised a collective movement in the marginalized area of Baekje.<sup>38)</sup>

### ***Wonhyo : Minjung Buddhist***

Wonhyo (617-686) played a large role in popularizing the Pure Land faith. He was the highest priest in the history of Korean Buddhism. He entered into the Minjung class, shedding his noble status as a scholar in a temple.<sup>39)</sup> He was of the aristocratic class, yet he boldly broke the ties with Buddhism, and lived together with the Minjung going down to the bottom of society. He preached peace and freedom to the suffering Minjung. He was criticized and blamed by the rulers and nobles.<sup>40)</sup> In turn he criticized theorists who followed the idealism of Chinese Buddhism, and he was said to take care of the suffering Minjung with concrete action.<sup>41)</sup> Wonhyo was considered to get through life by putting forward Pure Land faiths rather than strict precepts and metaphysical theories. This was a kind of reformation. Buddhism changed from the exclusive possession of the royal ruling class and aristocracy to Minjung Buddhism. The Minjung, including slaves, could never dream of becoming a Buddha, however the thoughts and

35) Jeong, Ui-Haeng, *The History of Korea Buddhism*, 157.

36) Ibid., 159.

37) Han, Jong-Man, *The Thought of Korea Buddhism* (Korean)(Seoul: Minjoksa, 1998), 74-76.

38) Jeong, Ui-Haeng, *The History of Korea Buddhism*, 160.

39) Ibid., 134.

40) Ibid., 135.

41) Ko, Young-Uup, *Search of Wonhyo* (Seoul: Yongisa, 2001).

actions of the humble monk, Wonhyo, spread in the Minjung and they came to know that they too could become a Buddha. Wonhyo's unified and harmonious philosophy influenced and became integrated into the ideology of the united dynasty. He criticized both positive and negative, and analyzed the convergence of the two values, and found a new higher level. What he called 'One Mind' was the combining of contradiction and conflict in a system. This 'One Mind philosophy,' which was a unified, harmonious, clean and comprehensive peace philosophy, came from his belief.<sup>42)</sup> His One Mind philosophy is that all things in the universe happen to raise the cause of conflict with each other together in endless time and space.<sup>43)</sup> It represented the order of the universe, but at the same time was a symbol of national unification. Wonhyo's teachings contributed to a unified generosity that avoided the conflict between the ruling classes and the Minjung.<sup>44)</sup>

Then what is the place of the concrete 'Pure Land' ? The Pure Land will bring about the disappearance of social oppression, discrimination, violence, hunger, poverty, exploitation and slavery and will ultimately achieve equality.<sup>45)</sup> Literally it is a 'clean' (pure) society. Wonhyo succeeded in doing away with the authority of the noble and ruling Buddhists and Buddhism and also influenced Buddhism in China and Japan.

### ***Goryeo Dynasty***

The Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392 AD) expressed Buddhism as the national religion. According to this, Buddhism was developed into the national faith.<sup>46)</sup> When the Mongol Empire or Japanese troops frequently intruded into the Korean peninsula, the national faith was further developed. The economy of Goryeo was under the power of the temple and Buddhism. As the Goryeo Dynasty had a capitalistic characteristic being based on commercial trade, temples increased their wealth and were protected by the royal family and nobles.<sup>47)</sup> The temples and Buddhism itself had strong

42) Nam, Dong-Shin, *Wonhyo* (Seoul: Saenuri, 1999).

43) Jeong, Ui-Haeng, *The History of Korea Buddhism*, 136..

44) Ibid., 137.

45) Han, Jong-Man, *The Thought of Korea Buddhism*, 84-94.

46) Lee, Byung-Wook, *The Thought of Goryeo* (Korean)(Seoul: Hyeon, 2002), 33-38.

power economically, politically and religiously, but at the same time were corrupt, and lazy in religious training, and first of all they ignored the Minjung.<sup>48)</sup>

### ***Chosun Dynasty***

As Buddhism in the Goryeo Dynasty had become corrupt, and had acquired enormous temple possessions, the Minjung turned back with disappointment. The Chosun Dynasty (1392-1910 AD) which succeeded it adopted a policy of suppressing Buddhism, and adopted Confucianism because of the enormous corruption in Buddhism. The new Chosun Dynasty through the policies of its political, economic and administrative base was propelled to freeze the property of temples and confiscate temple land.<sup>49)</sup>

However, there were large-scale Japanese invasions in the 16th century. At this time the Minjung had to endure double sufferings caused by the aggressions of foreign powers outwardly and the oppression of the feudal rulers internally. Buddhist monks and the Minjung actively participated in and defended Korea in the wars, and resisted oppression by revolt against the feudal rulers.<sup>50)</sup>

#### **Uprising of Minjung Maitreya faith in the 17th century**

Two Japanese invasions had brought big changes in the social order. The ruling class was helpless in front of the invasions and its authority had failed, leading to anger among the Minjung who became motivated and stronger to liberate themselves from their oppressed status. The Minjung came to get aspirations for freedom in the contexts of the exploitation of feudal loyalty, natural disasters, epidemics and famine.<sup>51)</sup> The ruling class exploited more taxes from the Minjung from the beginning of the 17th century, severely ruining the lives of many Minjung and farmers and driving a large number of them from their homes.<sup>52)</sup> At this time the Minjung widely expected and spread the emergence of the Maitreya

---

47) Ibid., 48-49.

48) Yeo, Ik-Gu, *Introduction*, 248.

49) Ibid., 249.

50) Ibid., 315-336, 334.

51) Ibid., 339.

52) Ibid., 340.

Buddha. In spite of that the Buddhist rulers oppressed and destroyed Maitreya Buddha faith and statues. The Minjung constantly expected the Maitreya Buddha to come like a messiah and make a new world. Maitreya Buddhism let the Minjung endure these social sufferings through legends, festivals, etc. At the end of the 17th century, Maitreya faith led to a nationwide peasant uprising. "If Maitreya Buddha comes, the world will be changed to replace the old world."<sup>53)</sup>

Because Minjung thought that Buddha was for the ruling class and the oppressed Minjung, the Minjung expected the end of the world and predicted the coming of a new world with Maitreya Buddha.<sup>54)</sup> The Minjung looked exactly at the structure of the conflict between Buddha and Maitreya Buddha, and tried to change history. It is a rare thing in Buddhist history that the Maitreya Buddha appeared to be in conflict with Buddha. It is similar to the emergence of a prophet, and the eschatology and expectation of the Messiah are also the expectations for a new world of the Minjung in Old Testament times. If Christianity was corrupt, and represented the ruling class, then the Minjung would be disappointed and frustrated, and expect an eschatological messiah.

## Conclusion

I slightly described Minjung Buddhism of Korea for dialogue with Minjung theology. I think that religious dialogue is based on Minjung surrounded by global capitalism and empire. Otherwise dialogue is remained in abstract and idealism.

Global capitalism is very powerful in the processing of globalization. There is only one country now who dominates the world and that is the United States. The power of the global empire is trying to monopolize all areas of economy, education, science, space, technology, agriculture, culture, etc. The World Trade Organization, centered on United States interests, is achieving the legitimate removal of international barriers. This is based on the US military presence around the world. Religious dialogue will reflect on these themes for world peace.

Ancient Israel was damaged by the empires of ancient Egypt and

---

53) Ibid., 341.

54) Ibid., 342.



ancient Assyria, Babylon and the Roman Empire, but since the Roman Empire 312 AD until today Christianity has been the dominant ruling ideology in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Here, I would like to ask whether Western European theology has contributed to the ruling ideology and its historical imperial expansions. Has European and American theology come to have supremacy in Asia, Africa, and South America? Christianity has to respect these continents' long histories, traditions, religions and cultures. And also there is an urgent work that Asian, African and South American theologians have to become independent of Western Christianity and colonial consciousness.

In the Korean context, most of the conservative missionaries who came from Europe and the United States to Korea 150 years ago have been a large influence even until today's church. But the conservative church in Korea is losing its social conscience because of its emphasis on individual selfish faiths, lack of social consciousness, mega churches, having a lot of real estate and riches, corruption, exclusive attitude to neighbor religions, and theological dualism of Europe and the USA. We need to learn to look back to the history of Korea Buddhism which had secular power, wealthy temples, conservatism, and which turned away from the Minjung's life.

In addition, many Korean churches interpret the Bible through a fundamental doctrinal approach, and have aggressive and exclusive attitudes to other religions. Korean churches have sent some 30 to 50 thousand conservative and fundamental missionaries to Asia, Africa, Latin America, Russia and China for the 'Kingdom of God,' in the same way as the Western imperialistic mission in the past. They spread conservative and fundamental faiths worldwide. Because some Korean missionaries make religious and cultural collisions, this results in conflicts with the native people of those countries they travel to. It is increasingly the case that Korean missionaries are excluded and isolated from these native people because of their materialism, fundamental attitudes, stressing only conversion to Christianity and their very narrow prejudices. This is the result of the Korean church having accepted and become dependent on the conservative churches of the USA, and then of Korea sending missionaries in the same way. They focus on spiritual warfare, combating mission as playing a role at the forefront of imperialism for the purpose of the conversion of all religions.

Finally, Christianity is no longer limited to Deuteronomy's idea which

presents an exclusive attitude based on the prohibition of idolatry, but has to be open and in exchange with Buddhism, Eastern philosophies, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, etc., for world peace and reconciliation in the 21st century.<sup>55)</sup> Minjung Buddhism and Minjung Christianity in Korea have to focus on global peace and religious conflicts, and furthermore on the new liberalism, ecological and environmental concerns, women, poverty, the global empire war and other issues. For these, all religions have diversity, openness and comprehensiveness with neighbour religions. Minjung theologians and church leaders expect to create a new theological paradigm on the view of the Minjung, the oppressed. First of all, Christianity has to overcome the dualist thought (the good and the evil) of Western Europe which raises the conflicts and opponents according to its power. It is time to need to look through the eye of Minjung from Asia, Africa and South America of Global South.

---

55) Kim, Eun-Kyu Micah "The Prohibition of Idolatry and the Rejection of Empire," *Interreligious Insight*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (July 2005), 41-48, 47. I mentioned about the phenomenon of globalization and empire, and how to overcome the consciousness of the prohibition of idolatry in the Hebrew Scripture for religious dialogue.

## **Abstract**

Minjung Christianity and Minjung Buddhism in Korea focuses on global peace and religious conflicts, and furthermore on the new liberalism, ecological and environmental concerns, women, poverty, the global empire war and other issues. For these, all religions have diversity, openness and comprehensiveness with neighbour religions. Minjung theologians and church leaders expect to create a new theological paradigm on the view of the Minjung, the oppressed. First of all, Christianity has to overcome the dualist thought (the good and the evil) of Western Europe which raises the conflicts and opponents according to its power. It is time to need to look through the eye of Minjung from Asia, Africa and South America of Global South. We can see that religion has to rely on not the ruling class or ruling ideology, but on the Minjung.

### ***Key Words***

Minjung Buddhism, Minjung Theology, Wonhyo, Global Empire, religious dialogue, global ethic, Dharma, Interrelated Idea, Mahāyāna Buddhism, Maitreya Buddhism.