

The Growth of Korean Buddhism in the United States, With Special Reference to Southern California

by Eui-Young Yu

INTRODUCTION

Since the Immigration Act of 1965 removed the severe restrictions on Asian immigrants, the Korean population in the United States experienced an accelerated growth. The number of Koreans in the U.S. increased from about 70,000 in 1970 to more than 700,000 in 1988. Approximately 33,000 Koreans immigrate to the U.S. annually. About one-third of all Koreans in the U.S. live in California, concentrated especially in Southern California. As of 1988, approximately 150,000 Koreans reside in Los Angeles and Orange counties.

There are approximately 400 Christian churches, 15 Buddhist temples, 150 secondary associations, 32 newspapers, two television stations, and one 24-hour radio station serving Koreans in Southern California.¹ These organizations provide a basic network for the dispersed immigrants to interact with each other and form an associational community.² Their cultural and artistic activities are conducted through these organizations. They maintain strong ethnic ties and adhere to their linguistic and cultural traditions through these organizations.

Religious institutions play an especially important role in the Korean community. A number of surveys conducted in Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago reveal that about 70 percent of Koreans are affiliated with Christian churches.³ While the proportion of Buddhists is not clearly determined, a survey conducted in the Los Angeles Korean community in 1981 showed that 5.3 percent of the respondents identified themselves as

such.⁴ Do Ahn Sunim, a leading monk in the Los Angeles Buddhist community, estimates, however, that about 15 percent of Koreans in Southern California are Buddhists. Korean churches in America, whether they are Christian or Buddhist, not only respond to the spiritual needs of the community but also perform a variety of secular functions.

Churches are the focal point of social interaction for the majority of the immigrants and the center of their community life. Korean values and traditions are reinforced through church activities. Most large-size churches maintain Korean language and culture programs; worship and other church programs are conducted mainly in Korean. Buddhist temples, although small in number and membership compared to Christian churches, maintain similar functions and activities.

There are three distinct paths by which Korean Buddhism is being rooted in American soil. One is through the work of individual Zen teachers. They work on individual bases and their main targets are Westerners. Such activities began in 1964 when Seo Kyongbo Sunim came to visit America and started giving Dharma talks to small groups of people in the New York area. A few years later, in 1972, Seung Sahn Sunim began organized Zen activities in Providence, Rhode Island. Several other Zen masters have been particularly active in spreading Korean Buddhism to American, Canadian, and European audiences.

Another method of spreading Buddhism has been through the activities of temples located in

cities where Koreans are concentrated. Since the first Korean temple appeared (in Carmel, California in 1972), the number has since grown to sixty-seven with about 25,000 active members.⁵ The Won Kak Sa temple (Abbot: Bop An) in New York draws approximately 300 worshipers (one fifth of the 2,500 registered members) to its Sunday pophoe.⁶ Dae Won Sa in Honolulu also has 2,500 registered members.⁷ The average attendance at Sunday pophoe at the Kwan Um Sa temple in Los Angeles is about 150. The temple has 670 registered members. In Los Angeles, there are 15 temples that conduct their services in Korean and mainly serve the needs of first generation Korean immigrants.

The third path has been through research and teaching by scholars specializing in Korean Buddhism. These scholars are making contributions by writing books in English and teaching courses on Korean Buddhism in American universities. Several Ph.D.'s have been awarded to scholars specialized in Korean Buddhism.⁸

KOREAN ZEN TEACHERS

Several Korean monks have actively engaged in promoting Korean Son (Zen: meditation) Buddhism in North America. Due to their efforts, the number of Zen centers (as well as the number of American and Canadian followers) has increased greatly in recent years. Their activities are all on an individual basis and there has been no coordinated effort between them. Although they all stress meditation, their approaches and emphases vary significantly.

The Korean monk who started Zen teaching in America was Seo Kyungbo Sunim, who visited Columbia University in 1964 and stayed in the country for six years. He moved from one city to another giving talks on Korean Buddhism. "I employed a unique method of using the rented house as a temple site. So whenever I moved to a new place, I was able to meet more people and teach Buddha's messages to the American audience," he

recalled.⁹ Returning to Korea, he served as Dean of the Buddhist College at Dong Kuk University.

Since 1973 he has made frequent visits to America delivering Dharma talks to both Korean and American audiences. He also held numerous calligraphy exhibitions. He is President of the Il-Bung Zen Buddhist Association which coordinates activities of his affiliated groups. His American disciples number approximately forty.¹⁰ His selected poems and Dharma talks have been translated and published in the book, *Zen Mind Buddha Mind* (Seoul: Hoam Choolpan Sa, 1985, 135 pp.)

A disciple of Seo Kyung Bo Sunim, Kosung Sunim, came to America in 1969 and has been active in the East Coast cities. Later, he established the Bulkuk Sa (now Hankook Sa) temple in the Washington D.C. area. In 1976 he established the Seneca Zen Center and American Zen College on a large property in Germantown, Maryland, serving both the American and Korean followers.¹¹

Master Kusan of Songgwang Sa made his first visit to the United States in order to inaugurate the Sambo Sa temple in Carmel, California, in 1972. Some of the American audiences he met on the trip returned with him to Korea to receive a traditional Korean Zen training. Later he established the Bul-il International Meditation Center to coordinate the training activities of foreign followers interested in the practice of Korean Zen. Since then scores of his foreign followers have undergone Zen training in Songgwang Sa. In 1976, *Nine Mountains*, a collection of Master Kusan's Zen teachings, was published in Seoul.¹² Another book, *The Way of Korean Zen* by Kusan Sunim was published in New York and Tokyo in 1985.

In 1980, he inaugurated the Korea Sa temple in Los Angeles as the first foreign branch-temple of Songgwang Sa. The temple mainly serves Koreans in Los Angeles. He also delivered many lectures and speeches at universities and community gatherings. In 1983, he toured the United States and Europe delivering lectures and establishing the Bulsung Sa temple in Geneva.¹³

Samu Sunim (one of the two Dharma dis-

ciples of Solbong Sunim) came to the United States in 1967 and established the Zen Lotus Society in New York in 1968. Later that year he moved to Montreal. In 1972, he moved to Toronto and after a three-year solo retreat in his basement apartment he began to teach Zen. The current membership in the Toronto temple is about 170 (mostly Americans). Children's pophoe is conducted once a month.¹⁴

In 1981, Samu Sunim started a temple in Ann Arbor, Michigan.¹⁵ The director of the Ann Arbor temple is Sudha Sunim, a Canadian, who has been a Zen teacher for ten years. Two additional Zen workers reside at the temple, which is a four-story building including the basement. The living room is used as meditation hall, and there is no Buddha hall in the temple.¹⁶ The membership of the Ann Arbor temple is about 70 (all Americans). Sunday pophoe is attended by 20 to 60 members on the average. About twenty Korean students from the University of Michigan go to temple on Sundays and conduct their own pophoe (in Korean) when Samu Sunim is there. The children's pophoe (which began six months ago) is conducted in English with an attendance of about eight to ten. The daily meditation sessions are attended by 10 to 12 persons on the average. According to Sukha Sunim, Samu Sunim emphasizes the development of American Buddhism rather than focusing on ethnic Buddhism, and the groups under Samu Sunim's leadership are called the North American Buddhist Order.

In 1984, Samu Sunim visited Mexico, and in the following year El Centro Zen Loto de Mexico was born in Mexico City. The Mexican temple is directed by Doyun Sunim (Edith La Brely). Two additional Zen groups have recently been established in Mexico under the leadership of Samu Sunim, one in Moralia and another in Cuernavaca.

Samu Sunim serves as President of the Zen Lotus Society, which functions as the umbrella organization for eight meditation groups under his leadership: Zen Buddhist Temple in Toronto, Zen Buddhist Temple in Ann Arbor, meditation groups

in London (Ontario) and Ottawa, El Centro Zen Loto de Mexico, and two other meditation groups in Mexico.¹⁷

The Buddhist Institute of Canada, which was established by Sumu Sunim in Toronto, coordinates series of lecture and training sessions throughout the year. So far six people have completed Dharma teacher training programs at the Institute and eighteen people are currently undergoing the training. The training program at the Institute lasts between three to five years and consists of 300-day meditation, study, and practice sessions each year. Instructors are mostly affiliated with McGill University, the University of Toronto, and the University of Michigan, according to Samu Sunim.

The Ann Arbor temple sponsors Summer Lectures that are attended mostly by Americans. The instructors are poets, writers, and professors, many of who are affiliated with the University of Michigan.¹⁸

In order to channel meditation to social action, Samu Sunim established the Buddhists concerned for Social Justice and World Peace in 1987. He has actively voiced his concerns about various issues related to social justice, democratization, and world peace. He travels extensively and stays in Mexico for one month a year on the average.

Since 1981, the Zen Lotus Society has published a quarterly journal, *Spring Wind - Buddhist Cultural Forum*. The Society published a booklet, *Zen Buddhism in North America* (70 pp.) in 1986. The *Zen Lotus Society Handbook* (1986) includes a detailed autobiographic sketch of Sumu Sunim and describes activities of the affiliated temples and groups.

Myobong (formerly Daesoo) Sunim is the Dharma disciple of Hyeam Sunim (the last surviving Dharma disciple of the great Zen master Man'gong Sunim) and carries on the work of his teacher at the Neungin Sunwon temple (Hoso Son Academy: Western Son Academy) in Irvine, California.¹⁹ He first came to the United States in 1972. Feeling that his way of teaching Sohn (Zen) was

not going well, he went back to Korea and received Zen training under Hyeam Sunim at the Soodok Sa temple. He returned to the U.S. and established the Neungin Sunwon temple in Mission Viejo in 1980.

When he parted ways with another monk at the temple in 1982, one of his disciples invited him to open a temple in Huntington Beach. The temple moved to rented quarters again in Irvine in 1984.

Myobong Sunim feels that his emphasis on Whadoo (Kong-an: Dharma dialogue) has gained momentum since 1984. He emphasizes the importance of dialogue on an individual basis. So far ten of his disciples have become monks or nuns adopting his methods of Son (Zen). About twenty additional persons are regular members undergoing training at ten Zen groups he has established in California and Texas. Myobong Sunim travels frequently to lead Korean Son (Zen) sessions for these groups. He is currently working on a translation of *Iljo Tankyong*.

Myobong Sunim feels that the individual encounter through dialogue (Hwadoo) is the best approach to Zen. He regrets that most of the Korean monks and nuns working in the Korean community are not practicing Zen because they have to struggle to make a living. He strongly feels that in order for Korean Buddhism to take a firm hold in American soil, this situation must change. Myobong Sunim translated and published a bilingual (Korean and English) text on Master Hyeam's Sohn teaching in 1986.²⁰

Simwol Sunim (Julie Hoigaard: Myobong Sunim's first American disciple) is the Abbot of Neungin Sunwon. Its daily programs are coordinated by Yongjo Sunim, and Equadorian nun, who became Myobong Sunim's disciple in 1986 and became a nun after that. Daewoo Sunim (Ken King) is another regular member of the Sunwon. Daily meditation sessions are held at 10:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. Three people are staying in the Sunwon. They make a living and contribute to paying the rent by delivering papers in the early morning hours. The Sunday pophoe (they call it the "Retreat") consists of meditation, chanting,

Dharma talk, and feasting with a vegetarian diet. Approximately 30 people regularly attend the Retreat. The attendance increases when Myobong Sunim is present, according to Yongjo Sunim.

Seung Sahn Haeng Won Sunim (his foreign disciples call him Soen Sa num) has been the most active monk proselytizing Korean Zen Buddhism in North America and Europe. His emphasis on "doing-together" meditation is gaining a wide acceptance among westerners. With his pleasant personality and strong leadership, he is building a strong network to promote Zen Buddhism worldwide.

Seung Sahn Sunim came to America in 1972 at the invitation of Yu Young Soo, a friend and Dong Kuk University alumnus. He started Zen teaching in Kingston, Mass. to a group of college students whom Professor Jong Sun Kim brought. The number of followers grew and he soon moved to Providence, Rhode Island. On October 10, 1972, he established the first Providence Zen Center and the KBC (Korean Buddhist Chogyue Order) Hong Poep Won in Providence. This organization oversaw Buddhist groups under his direction. Chung Jung Dahr Sunim joined him briefly in Providence. He met Dr. Leo Pruden at Brown University, who came to his aid and provided the translation for his Dharma talks.

By 1975 three other Zen centers were established in New York, Cambridge and New Haven all under his leadership. By 1979, five more Zen centers had formed under his direction. By 1982, approximately 1,000 students were receiving meditation training in ten Zen centers established by him in the United States and Canada. The Head Temple (Providence Zen Center) in rural Cumberland grew into a respected residential training center and intensive meditation retreats (90-day Kyol Ches) were initiated.²¹

In August 1983, Seung Sahn Sunim founded the new Kwan Um Zen School in order to accommodate the western Bodhisattva monks who are married and Dharma teachers who are lay believers. The membership of the Kwan Um Zen School

as of 1986 totaled 285, the main body of which consisted of Dharma teachers.²² The School coordinates activities of the 45 Zen centers and groups established under his leadership. Jacob Perl is the abbot and Richard Streifeld is the director. The School publishes the monthly newsletter and the quarterly journal, *Primary Point*. The journal has become an important means for spreading the Seung Sahn's teaching world-wide.

In 1984, the Diamond Hill Zen Monastery was established at the Head Temple complex in Cumberland for the traditional monks who would remain celibate and follow the Korean style of training. As of 1986, there were eight monks and one nun of the School who were leading the lifestyle of the traditional monks of the Korean Chogye Order.²³

According to Seung Sahn Sunim, 45 Kwan Um Zen centers and affiliated groups have been established throughout the world: thirteen in the U.S., two in Canada, ten in western Europe, fifteen in Poland, two in Brazil, and three in Korea. Seung Sahn Sunim says that approximately 2,500 Americans and 1,500 Europeans have received O-Kye (Five Precepts) through these establishments. Additionally, more than 50,000 people became interested in Buddhism although they have not yet received O-Kye. According to Seung Sahn Sunim approximately 250 Americans, 60 Poles, and 20 Europeans have become Ilban Popsa (Dharma Teacher). Thirty of these are designated as Seondo Popsa, who counsel and teach Ilban Popsa. At the top of the lay leadership is Jido Popsa who acts as Seung Sahn Sunim's deputy in his absence. Seung Sahn Sunim has given *inga*, authorization to teach and lead retreats, to eight (seven Americans and one Pole) of his Jido Popsa (Master Dharma Teacher). They travel to different Zen centers of the Kwan Um Zen School to conduct the Yongmaeng Jongjim (intensive meditation retreat for three to seven days) and lead Kido (chanting retreat called "energy path").²⁴

The Dharma Sah Zen Center in Los Angeles was established in January 1976 by Seung San

Sunim. The Center is presently located at Cloverdale Ave: a quiet residential neighborhood in West Los Angeles. Lincoln Rhodes came from the KBC Hongpop Won in Providence to establish the Zen center. He was affiliated with MIT when he met Seung Sahn Sunim at the Cambridge Zen Center in 1974. He established a Zen center in New York City under the guidance of Seung Sahn Sunim in 1975.

Lincoln Rhodes is optimistic about the future of Korean Zen in America because many people are sick of the materialistic orientation of society and are seeking spiritual enlightenment, which Korean Zen offers. According to Rhodes, Americans are interested in Zen for various reasons. Some are interested in meditation to sleep well, others to obtain good health, and still others to find and understand themselves. He is not sure about reincarnation nor about the world of Nirvana after death. His main concern is how to live in the present world according to his interview with a *Hankook Ilbo* reporter (4/30/76).

The daily schedule at the Center starts with a 5:30 a.m. meditation; then comes 108 bows at 6:00 a.m., followed by 30 minute chanting (scripture recital) at 6:30 a.m. The morning meditation sessions are attended by three resident disciples and an additional three or four people from the outside. Kong-an sessions (intensive interviews with master Dharma teachers) are held on Wednesdays. There are 12 regular members participating in Wednesday sessions. Altogether, about 20 people (including irregular members) attend the Wednesday sessions. Their activities include meditation, testimonial, chanting, and Dharma talks. Most of the people attending the meditation sessions are Americans.²⁵

Intensive meditation sessions (Yong Maeng Jung Jin) are held from time to time in Seung Sahn's meditation centers. It is a three- or seven-day retreat involving 13 hours of formal meditation practice a day. Although the emphasis is on sitting meditation, the programs include bowing, sitting, chanting, eating, and working. Interviews

with the Master Dharma Teacher or Seung Sahn Sunim are conducted during the retreat.²⁶

Seung Sahn Sunim visited Poland in 1978 and established the first Chogye Zen Center in that country. In the opening ceremony 16 people received the O-Kye (*Habkook Ilbo*, May 19, 1978).

Seung Sahn Sunim's Korean style of teaching Zen is earthy, syncretic and vigorous, according to Samu Sunim, a Korean Zen teacher based in Toronto and Ann Arbor. Some describe Seung Sahn Sunim's method as an assimilated form suitable to the American setting, combining both Korean and Japanese ways of meditation.

Seung Sahn Sunim's disciples include some Koreans, but a great majority of his followers are Westerners. Altogether, 11 Koreans (including two second-generation Koreans) now hold the title of Popsa according to Seung Sahn Sunim.

Six books have been published in English bearing Seung Sahn Sunim's name: *Only Doing It for Sixty Years*; *Dropping Ashes on the Buddha*; *Only Don't Know*; *Bone of Space*; *Ten Gate*; and *Compass of Zen Teaching*.

RESEARCH AND TEACHING ON KOREAN BUDDHISM IN AMERICA

An important route by which Korean Buddhism is being transmitted to America is by way of research and teaching in universities and colleges. Several scholars are making significant contributions in this respect and are slowly building a solid theoretical foundation of Korean Buddhism in America.

Park Sung Bae, Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies from U.C. Berkeley (1979), is a professor and Director of the Korean Studies Program at the University of New York at Stony Brook. He teaches courses on "Buddhism," "Religious Traditions in Korea and Japan," and "Introduction to Korean Culture." He has incorporated Korean Buddhism (its history, the theories of Won Hyo, Jinul, Sosan, and Han Yong Woon, Buddhist arts, and Son Schools) in these courses. He also directs a graduate seminar, "Readings on Korean Bud-

dhism." His book, *Buddhist Faith and Sudden Enlightenment* (SUNY Press, 1983), has been popular as a textbook in many universities. He co-authored with Lewis Lancaster at U.C. Berkeley the book, *Descriptive Catalogue to Korean Canon* (University of California Press, 1979). He has another completed work, *Won Hyo: His Commentaries on Awakening of Mahayana Faith*, which will be published soon by SUNY Press.

In addition to these scholarly activities, Professor Park has been actively involved in promoting Buddhism in Korean communities on the West and East Coasts. He has delivered hundreds of lectures and talks on Korean Buddhism to Korean community groups since he arrived in the United States in 1969. He has been a leading member of the Won Kak Sa temple in New York. For several years, he led the general pophoe at the temple every second Sunday of the month.

Robert Buswell, also a Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies from U.C. Berkeley, is one of Kusan Sunim's foreign disciples who has become a productive Buddhist scholar. So far U.C. Berkeley has produced two Ph.D.'s in Buddhist studies with topics on Korean Buddhism. Robert Buswell is presently a professor at the University of California, Los Angeles. At UCLA he has developed and taught courses on Korean Buddhism: an upper division lecture class on Korean Buddhism, and a graduate seminar on Readings on Korean Buddhism. These are probably the first and only courses on Korean Buddhism ever offered as a regular curriculum in American universities. Cho Seung Taek is a Ph.D. candidate in Korean Buddhism working under his supervision.²⁷

Professor Buswell's *The Korean Approach to Zen: the Collected Works of Chinul* was published in 1983 by the University of Hawaii Press. The book is the most important work to appear in English on Korean Zen Buddhism.²⁸ His other book, *Vajrasamadhi Sutra and the Origins of Ch'an: A Korean Apocryphon and Sinification of Buddhism*, is to be published in 1989.

Professor Kim Kusan is another Korean who

has taught Korean Buddhism in an American university. He taught a course on Korean Buddhism to American and Third World students at the University of Oriental Studies, Los Angeles from 1981 to 1983, when the school was closed for internal strife.²⁹ Since early 1980's Professor Kim has been a regular lecturer on Indian philosophy and Korean Buddhism at Buddhist lecture series sponsored by the Kwan Um Sa temple.

BUDDHIST TEMPLES IN THE LOS ANGELES KOREAN COMMUNITY

The appearance of Buddhist temples in Los Angeles coincides with the growth of Koreatown in the early 1970's. Korean immigrants were arriving in Koreatown in large numbers, and for the first time monks were able to visit the United States in significant numbers. Soon afterwards

KOREAN TEMPLES AND ZEN CENTERS IN THE LOS ANGELES AREA, 1988

NAME	YEAR STARTED	ABBOT	ORDER	POPHOE
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Korean Temples

Sam Bo Sa ¹	1972	Mrs. Han Sang Lee	Cho Gye	Yes
Won Bul Kyo	1972	Rev. Suh Se In	Won Bul Kyo	Yes
Dahl Mah Sa	1973	Rev. Jung Do	Cho Gye	Yes
Kwan Um Sa	1974	Rev. Do Ahn	Cho Gye	Yes
Soo Doh Sa	1976	Rev. Kae Jeung	Cho Gye	
Yes				
Jung Hye Sa ²	1980	Rev. Jung Dhar	Cho Gye	Yes
Korea Sa	1980	Rev. Hyun Ho	Cho Gye	Yes
Ban Ya Sa	1981	Rev. Pyong Il	Cho Gye	Yes
Bo Moon Sa	1981	Rev. In Kwon	Bo Moon	Yes
Hae In Sa	1981	Mrs. Mu Jin Dung	Cho Gye	No
Bop Hwa Hong				
Tong Won	1981	Rev. Won Kyung	Bop Hwa	Yes
Bop Ryun Sa ¹	1985	Rev. Sul Song	Tae Go	No
Moon Soo Chung Sa	1985	Rev. Kyung Duk	Cho Gye	Yes
Bop Wang Sa ⁴	1986	Rev. Hyun Il	Cho Gye	Yes
Dae Sung Sa	1987	Rev. Kwon Pob In	Cho Gye	Yes
Bo Kwang Won	1988	Rev. Park Jong Mae	Cho Gye	Yes
Yun Hwa Sa	1988	Rev. Myung Soo	Cho Gye	Yes

Zen Centers

Dharma Sa	1976	Rev. Seung Sahn	Kwan Um Zen School
Hoso Son Academy	1980	Rev. Myo-bong	Cho Gye

1: in Carmel City
2-5: in Orange County

Buddhist groups began to establish temples.

The first Korean Buddhist temple established in Los Angeles was Dahl Ma Sa, which opened on February 1, 1973. Out of this temple have eventually sprung some 15 temples serving the Korean community in Los Angeles.

While activities of Zen centers targeting Westerners are focused on sitting meditation, ethnic temples are largely centered around Sunday pophoe, scripture studies, ceremonies, chanting, cultural, social, and fellowship activities. In contrast to the American emphasis on meditation, Korean practice is much more devotional and religious. Sunday pophoe attendance at Kwan Um Sa and Dahl Ma Sa temples averages more than 100 adults. The attendance at Pyong Hwa Sa, Soo Do Sa, Korea Sa, Jung Hae Sa, Pop Wang Sa, and Won Bul Kyo temples numbers between 50 and 100. Because of the Korean Buddhist tradition of not requiring members to attend Sunday services regularly, the pophoe attendance averages only about one fifth of the registered members. Regular attendants tend to be mostly officers and their families. General members attend the pophoe only occasionally and others attend on special occasions only. Some members never attend. On special occasions such as Buddha's birthday, therefore, several hundred worshippers flock to their respective temples.

The membership of Los Angeles temples has increased rapidly in recent years, and some former Buddhists who were attending Christian churches are now returning to Buddhist temples. For example, about 30 percent of the current membership in the Kwan Um Sa temple are former attendants of Christian churches, according to Do Ahn Sunim. About 20 percent of the members at Pyong Hwa Sa (Abbot: Sung Do Sunim) are former Christians, according to the abbot. The membership of Pyong Hwa Sa increased from 60 families in 1985 to 200 families at the end of 1987. Kwan Um Sa's membership was increasing by 150 families a year recently and now it has reached 670 families.

Until a few years ago all the temples in Los Angeles were using an apartment or single dwelling originally designed for residential use. The situation changed drastically when Dahl Ma Sa completed a spacious Korean-style bop dang (1986) and Kwan Um Sa purchased a large temple formerly used as a Jewish synagogue (1986). Dahl Ma Sa's Korean-style popdang is conspicuous in the middle of Koreatown, at the intersection of Olympic Boulevard and Wilton Avenue. Many local and national Buddhist events take place in the various meeting halls of the Kwan Um Sa temple, which occupies 37,000 square feet of floor space. Korea Sa, a Los Angeles branch of Song Kwang Sa, recently purchased a three-building complex (two two-story and one single-story building) at Ingraham Street. On the other hand, most other temples still use apartment buildings and experience problems related to zoning regulations.

Since 1974, Kun Sunims and other Buddhist scholars from Korea have given Dharma talks and lectures at Korean temples.³⁰ These talks and lectures provide unique opportunities for Southern California Koreans, both believers and non-believers, to hear the great monks of Korea. Sometimes several hundred Koreans flock to hear such talks. Bop Jung Sunim's appearance at the Hankook Ilbo auditorium on January 21, 1988, for example, drew a crowd of nearly five hundred.

Buddhist cultural festivals, lotus lantern festivals, musical events, Dharma painting and calligraphy exhibitions take place in parks, theaters, and galleries of Koreatown at frequent intervals throughout the year. The International Buddhist cultural festival was held in early 1988 at the Wilshire Ebel Theater and drew several hundred people. The festival was sponsored by Kwan Um Sa; six different national Buddhist groups took part, presenting their traditional music and dance. Buddhist study seminars are regularly held at Kwan Um Sa. A locally-based Buddhist newspaper, Mijoo Bulkyo, is also published, although at irregular intervals. Articles and news items related to Buddhist programs and activities frequently

appear in local community newspapers.

Several temples maintain Korean language and cultural programs and provide many types of social services such as family counseling and senior citizen support. Sunday school programs for children are being attempted at Dahl Ma Sa, Kwan Um Sa and Pyong Hwa Sa. The Federation of Young Buddhists meets regularly for pophoe and scripture study. Sunims contribute Dharma essays to local Korean newspapers and have been active in voicing concern about social justice and democratization in Korea.

The abbot Do Ahn of Kwan Um Sa has been the leading monk in the Buddhist community of Los Angeles. He frequently contributes Dharma essays to local Korean newspapers and magazines and publishes a Buddhist journal, *Bul Kyo Si Bo* (The Buddhist Times). He was instrumental in raising funds to purchase the \$800,000 former Jewish synagogue and convert it into a spacious temple, which houses the Buddhist Culture Center. He has actively promoted Buddhist culture in the community by sponsoring Buddhist music, dance and art festivals in the theaters and galleries of Koreatown since the early 1980's.

Do Ahn Sunim was elected co-chair of the American Buddhist Congress at its first convention hosted by the temple in November 1987. Other co-chairs elected were the Rev. Karl Springer of Boulder, Colo., and the Venerable Havanpola Ratanasara, a Sri Lankan monk living in Los Angeles. The convention represented some fifty Buddhist groups in the United States.

Abbot Do Ahn attributes the rapid growth of Korean Buddhist temples to the general increase in the size of the Korean population in Los Angeles and also to the modernization of activities at the temples. The abbot notes that church membership increased rapidly after he initiated several social service and family counseling programs, including marriage and youth counseling, hospital arrangement, hospital visits, arrangement for Social Security benefits, etc. The church's van provides transportation for the elderly members. The temple

operates with an annual budget of \$120,000, most of which is expended for the temple's programs. The abbot lives in the temple and does not receive a salary.

Under Abbot Do Ahn's leadership, Kwan Um Sa has sponsored a regular lecture series on Korean Buddhism starting in May 1980. The series were held once or twice a year, each lasting for one to three months. The 1980 series, which lasted three weeks, featured Professor Park Sung Bae (Buddhist scholar), Lee Nung Ka Dae Seonsa (Dharma master), and Dr. Ha Tai Kim (Methodist minister and scholar). The 1988 series lasted for three months with lectures given every Friday, Saturday, and Sunday for three hours each day. Shin Popta Sunim, Moo Jin Jang Sunim, and Professor Kim Kusan were regular lecturers and guest lecturers included Popjung Sunim, Professor Park Sung Bae, Professor Lee Young Moo, and Chung Kwan Ung Seon Sa Nim. The curriculum dealt with Buddha's life, the history of Korean Buddhism, Indian philosophy, early Buddhism, thought of Won Hyo and Jinool, Buddhist theories, and Kye Yool.

The Sunday pophoe in Korean temples is very much informal compared to Christian church services. People move in and out at ease throughout the service. The service normally consists of hour-long chanting by priests, several Buddhist hymns, scripture recital, yombul, and sermon. Daejoong Kongyang (fellowship lunch) follows the Sunday service in many temples. Most of the temples lack serious meditation programs, although a few are struggling to establish them.

CHALLENGES AND PROMISES

Korean Buddhism is slowly but firmly taking root in American soil. Through the works of Zen masters, Buddhist scholars, and monks working in the Korean community, the central message of Buddhism imbedded in Korean thought and culture—harmony, nonaggression, compassion and benevolence to all beings—is gradually being

transplanted to this new land. The number of Zen centers and temples spreading this message has increased to an impressive level and a growing number of Americans and Koreans are accepting this message.

There are, however, many problems and challenges that the Korean Buddhist body in America faces. The most serious lies in the creation of an effective organizational structure that can plan, coordinate, regulate, and improve Buddhist programs and activities. At the present time, most of the Korean Buddhist activities in the United States are conducted on an individual basis. Some individuals have shown remarkable strength in building their congregations, but there is no organizational network coordinating the works of Zen masters, monks in ethnic temples, and scholars. Many of the temples claim to be affiliated with the Korean Buddhist Cho Gye Order, but there is no formal connection between individual temples and the Order in Korea. Consequently, practices, behavior, and view of individual monks, Zen masters, and lay members are not being evaluated or regulated.

Another challenge lies with the developing of a legitimate credential system for monks and lay leaders working in the Korean community. There is no agency or organization regulating the standard of conduct or the qualification of monks. Almost anybody can claim to be a monk and establish a temple. As a result, some of those claiming to be monks do not have any formal training. In fact, there are some establishments in Los Angeles that practice something quite different from Buddhism.

There is also a need to provide monks the opportunity to adjust to the new situation in America. A majority of Koreans in the United States are college graduates and unless the monks' education level is at least on a par with them, it will be difficult to deal with the general public. Much of the conflict between priests and lay leaders in Korean temples is partly due to this discrepancy. Further, most of the monks serving Korean com-

munity temples do not speak English adequately and they cannot relate to the English-speaking younger generations.

Still another problem is related to the level of commitment of some of the monks working in the Korean community. Most of them came to the U.S. for purposes other than administering temples. Therefore, when they encounter problems, many simply leave the temple instead of trying to find a constructive solution. About 50 monks have left the priesthood after receiving the *youngjookwon* (permanent residenceship), according to an abbot of a Korean temple. In Los Angeles alone, there are about ten such former monks.

Additionally, there is a need to reach second generation Koreans and train some of them as monks or lay leaders; but training facilities are totally lacking. Developing an effective training program for lay leadership may be a practical alternative for this problem (like Seung Sahn Sunim's Zen centers). Second generation Koreans growing up in the U.S. would probably be more interested in meditation rather than the religious orientation of their parents and future programs designed to reach the young generation should incorporate meditation training.

Traditionally, the development and operation of programs at Buddhist temples is entirely left to the priests and lay participation has generally been limited. The rise and decline of a temple is attributable for the most part to the monk's individual ability. This tradition of temple operation tends to discourage many able lay people from actively involving themselves in church programs. Therefore, the modernization of the organizational structure of individual temples remains another big challenge.

Financial difficulties often force monks to engage in menial labor, particularly in the beginning of temple establishment. Consequently their images have been negatively affected. Sometimes, monks are not decently treated by lay leaders. Under these circumstances, able monks are dis-

couraged from coming to serve the Korean community. According to an abbot, there are not many incentives for able monks to immigrate to the United States to work in the Korean community.

If these challenges are adequately dealt with, the future of Korean Buddhism in America appears to be bright.

FOOTNOTES

1. 1986-1987 Korean Business Directory published by The Korea Times Los Angeles lists 339 Christian churches, 10 Buddhist temples, 32 newspapers, and 131 organizations. Figures given here are the author's estimates based on information from various community sources.

2. Ilsoo Kim, *New Urban Immigrants: The Korean Community in New York*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

3. Won Moo Hurh and Kwang Chung Kim, *Korean Immigrants in America* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1984); Bok Lim C. Kim, *The Korean-American Child at School and at Home* (Urbana, Illinois, 1980); Eui-Young Yu, et al., eds, *Koreans in Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Center for Korean-American and Korean Studies, California State University, 1981).

4. The survey covered 301 Korean households randomly selected from telephone directories of Los Angeles and Orange Counties. The author was a co-director of the survey.

5. According to Abbot Do Ahn Sunim of the Kwan Um Sah temple in Los Angeles.

6. Telephone interview with Park Sung Bae, March 1988.

7. Interview with Jinwol Sunim, November 11, 1987.

8. They are Seo Kyungbo Sunim (Temple University), Professor Park Sung Bae (UC Berkeley), Professor Robert Buswell (UC Berkeley), and Bop An Sunim (from New York University).

9. *Joong Ang Ilbo*, May 5, 1984.

10. *Joong Ang Ilbo*, May 5, 1984.

11. Sam-Woo Kim, *Zen Buddhism in North America* (Toronto: Zen Lotus Society, 1986) p. 18.

12. Sam-Woo Kim, *Zen Buddhism in North America* (Toronto: Zen Lotus Society, 1986), p. 21; Kusan Sunim, *The Way of Korean Zen* (New York: Heatherhill, 1985), p. 49.

13. Kusan Sunim, *The Way of Korean Zen*, tr. by Martine Fages and ed. by Stephen Batchelor (New York: Weatherhill, 1985), pp. 49-50.

14. Telephone interview with Samu Sunim, March 1988.

15. Sam-Woo Kim, pp. 26-28.

16. Interview with Sudha Sunim, March 1988.

17. Sam-Woo Kim, *Zen Buddhism in North America*, p. 28. Also telephone interview with Samu Sunim, March 1988.

18. Interview with Samu Sunim, March 1988.

19. Sam-Woo Kim, *Zen Buddhism in North America*, p. 29.

20. Hye-am Sunim ed., *Gateway to Son (Ch'an)* (translated by Myobong Sunim) (Irvine: Hosoo Son Academy, 1986), 360 pp.

21. Diana Clark, ed., *Only Doing It for Sixty Years* (Cumberland, Rhode Island: Kwan Um Zen School, 1987), p. 31.

22. Sam-Woo Kim, *Zen Buddhism in North America*, pp. 21-26.

23. Sam-Woo Kim, p. 26.

24. Sam-Woo Kim, *Zen Buddhism in North America* (Toronto: The Zen Lotus Society, 1986), p. 26.

25. Interview with Reonald Ross, March 1988.

26. Seung Sahn, *Only Don't Know* (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1982), p. 192.

27. Telephone interview with Professor Robert Buswell, March 1988.

28. Sam-Woo Sunim, p. 21.

29. Interview with Professor Kim Kusan, March 1988.

30. They included Seung Sahn Sunim, Kusan Sunim, Seo Kyungbo Sunim, Yun Koam Sunim, Pop Jung Sunim, Sohn Kyong San Sunim,

Chung Kwan Ung Sunim, Moo Jin Jang Sunim, Park Wan Il Kosa, Lee Nung Ka Dae Seonsa, and Professor Park Sung Bae.