

Preface

This volume was conceived with the intention of breaking new ground in a neglected area of Korean history and culture—the tradition of female Buddhist practice—for those in the broader academic community already focused on the topic of women and religion. It addresses the roles and accomplishments of women in Korean Buddhist history, including the role and status of nuns in the Three Kingdoms, Koryŏ, Chosŏn, and modern periods, and also examines the systemic and organizational aspects of nuns' lives. The contributors to the volume detail the sorts of education and training the nuns received in their lecture halls and meditation rooms, as well as the relations between that system and the modern order of nuns.

All the chapters except chapters 4 and 6 originated as papers presented at the May 2004 international conference entitled “More Than Women: Korean Nuns within the Context of East Asian Buddhist Traditions,” held at and sponsored by the HanMaum Seonweon (One Mind Zen Center) in Anyang, Korea. As the first international conference on Buddhist nuns and female practice in Korea and East Asia, this gathering drew attention from both academic and religious communities inside Korea, which consequently led to a surge of interest on this topic of the lives and practice of Buddhist nuns. Considerably more papers were delivered at the conference, yet not all were included in this current volume. Our focus in narrowing the selection targeted only those papers devoted to Korean tradition. Thus, papers on Chinese and Japanese Buddhism that had been presented with the intention of providing comparative and contextual material were not included. A few papers pertaining to cultural studies, art history, and literature in the Korean tradition were not included as well, as we decided to limit our focus to historical overviews specifically addressing the development of female Buddhist practice in Korea.

Some chapters have been previously published elsewhere. An earlier version of chapter 2 was originally published in the *Seoul Journal*

of *Korean Studies* 22, no. 1 (June 2009), as “Reinventing Female Identity: A Brief History of Korean Buddhist Nuns.” An earlier version of chapter 3 was originally published in Korean in the journal *Ihwa sahak yŏn’gu* (Study of History at Ehwa Womans’ University) 30 (2003), as “Koryŏ Chin’gak kuksa Hyesim ūi yŏsŏng sŏngbullon” (Koryŏ Master Chin’gak Hyesim’s Theory of Women’s Attaining Enlightenment). An earlier version of chapter 5 was originally published in Korean in the journal *Chŏngsin munhwa yŏn’gu* (Study of Intellectual Culture) 27, no. 4 (2004 Winter), as “Chosŏn ūi Chŏngyu wa Koryŏ ūi Chinhye.” An earlier version of chapter 7 was originally published in *The Review of Korean Studies*, 11, no. 4 (December 2008). I thank these publishers for their generous permission to use them.

As the first collection of its kind in the English-language press, this volume was compiled through a group effort to identify and appreciate the unique tradition of women in the Buddhist monastic communities of Korea. The contributors sincerely hope that this book will shine light on heretofore undiscovered aspects of the lives and practices of Korean Buddhist women. We also hope that it will illuminate Korean culture, religion, and thought through the experiences of Buddhist nuns and laywomen, both modern and premodern. Women remain seriously underrepresented in Korean culture and history, especially in books on Korean religion and thought, even while interest in Korea has been growing steadily in the West, so we hope this volume will contribute to filling in the gap.

Several people led me to this new area of interest, which contrasts with my earlier research on Buddhist doctrinal thought. Through his own writings on the topic and personal encouragement, Samu Sŭnim, a Korean monk who moved to America a few decades ago, inspired me to study the remarkable tradition of female practice in Korea. He is indeed a pioneer in this area of research, and, to the best of my knowledge, his articles on three Korean Buddhist nuns in the 1986 issues of *Spring Wind*, a Buddhist magazine that he headed, should be recognized as the first English-language publications highlighting Korean nuns’ lives. I was also influenced by the nun Sukdham Sŭnim who helped me more directly understand Buddhist nuns’ practice and ways of life. She showed me her own personal essays about leaving home to become a nun when she was young and this impressed upon me the importance of the determination of these brave female practitioners. Another friend, Shi Zhiru, also a Buddhist nun and an academic in Buddhist studies, has given me advice at various stages in the publishing of this volume.

Many people and friends have contributed to this venture: Matty Wegehaupt, my former student at the University of Michigan, extended his unlimited helping hands without considering his own busy schedule, from the initial stage of organizing the conference to correcting transliterations and grammar mistakes of nonnative writers. Victoria Scott, a freelancer copy editor, also improved the manuscript considerably by copy editing most of the chapters. I would also like to thank Nancy Ellegate of State University of New York Press, to whom I am deeply indebted for her encouragement throughout this long process and especially for her crucial advice in sharpening the focus of the volume at the time of its initial submission. I must also thank my students Sangyop Lee, Ahrim Won, and Inga Kim Diederich for their assistance in providing proofreading to the text as well as their help in the laborious process of indexing this multi-faceted project. Many thanks are due to Joo Myungduck for sharing his fine photograph, which captures the spirit of the community of Buddhist nuns in Korea, for the cover of the volume.

Last but not least, without the sponsorship and support of HanMaum Seonweon, led by Reverend Daehaeng, my aspiration to reveal the significance of this religious tradition of practice would never have materialized. Many other people—including the Venerable Hyewon Sunim of Dongguk University and another Hyewon Sunim, the abbot of HanMaum Seonweon—also provided the initial connections that enabled me to organize the 2004 conference. The present volume is dedicated to the Reverend Daehaeng and her community.

Eun-su Cho
Seoul, Korea