

**Moon-Suk Heo, *Der koreanische Buddhismus im Westen: Studien zur Adaption mit besonderem Blick auf die Lehre von Seon; Meisterin Daehaeng***

Berlin, Münster: Lit Verlag, 2019. 282 pages. Paperback \$44.48; eBook, \$39. ISBN: 3643141330 (paperback); 3643341334 (eBook).

Buddhism in the West has grown tremendously during the past thirty years, in terms of number of centers and their members as well as in public awareness. Likewise, academic studies on the varied Buddhist traditions and schools have appeared in rising numbers in North America, Europe, Australia, and South Africa. Korean Buddhism in a Western country, however, has not been the subject of a proper study, with the exception of the overview for Germany by Manfred Hutter (2014). Moon-Suk Heo, a nun in the Korean Hanmaun Seon tradition, founded by the female Buddhist master Daehaeng Kunsunim, provides detailed information on ten Hanmaun centers outside of Korea and also highlights the achievements of Daehaeng. Her study is strong in presenting a detailed and highly informed portrayal of Seon master Daehaeng and her numerous Buddhist reforms in light of the larger history of Korean Buddhism. However, the study does not provide adequate contextualization within the literature on the present state of research on Buddhism in the West, nor does it employ any theoretical or analytical lenses.

In the history of Korean Buddhism since the fourth century, nuns and female masters were rarely recorded. Monks of the Jogye order, founded in the fourteenth century, dominated and represented Buddhism. It is no exaggeration when Moon-Suk Heo claims that the Seon master Daehaeng both tremendously changed the situation by bringing female voices to the fore and by profoundly reforming the approach of Seon Buddhism. Seon is the Korean term for the sitting meditation called Chan in China and Zen in Japan. Daehaeng (1927–2012) was for a short time a novice in a Jogye monastery but quit the strict routine of textual study and sitting meditation to spend years of solitary life in the Korean mountains. Based on these experiences, Hanam Sunim, former leader of the Jogye order, ordained her as a nun, but again Daehaeng left the monastic institution to finally achieve Buddhist enlightenment through nature. Several years later, Daehaeng established a Buddhist place of practice, which developed into the Hanmaun-Seon center, which was admitted to the Jogye order in 1982.

The nun continued on her own path of reinterpreting Seon teachings according to her understandings and continued to change meditation practice to a more flexible style. This study by Moon-Suk Heo very well expounds the main teachings of Mahāyāna philosophy and the scriptures on which Daehaeng based her teaching of “Hanmaun,” or the discovering of the “Buddha nature” in oneself. Likewise, reforms of practice and fellowship are well explained. Importantly, Daehaeng brought traditional Seon sitting meditation out of the monastery in order to teach lay people to apply meditational practice to everyday life situations. Buddhist ceremonies were also simplified. The traditionally large numbers of Buddha and bodhisattva figures, for instance, were reduced to one in Hanmaun-Seon centers, and the main Buddhist scriptures, the *sūtras*, were translated from commonly unintelligible Sino-Korean to the modern Korean language. Daehaeng accepted both nuns and monks as her disciples, taught monastics and lay people jointly, and appointed laypersons as Dharma (Buddhist) teachers.

Unfortunately, Moon-Suk Heo's study remains on the descriptive level and does not venture into comparative analyses. For example, Daehaeng's fundamental reforms of Seon Buddhism can be compared to the reformation of Christianity brought about by Martin Luther in the sixteenth century and to the reform of Ceylonese Buddhism inspired by Anagarika Dharmapala in the late nineteenth century. In theoretical terms, however, the reformation brought about by Daehaeng is not so much a reform back to the roots of Seon Buddhism but rather an adaptation of formalized monastic Seon to a rapidly modernizing and prospering South Korea. Furthermore, the author does not mention whether, and to what extent, the fundamental reforms that she introduced met opposition from the strong Jogye order, and whether tensions arose as a result.

The essential changes of Seon Buddhism in Korea enabled the spread of Daehaeng's teachings and practices to different places like the United States, Argentina, Germany, and Thailand. While the author provides well-structured descriptive accounts of the different Hanmaun-Seon centers, she again fails to incorporate analytical perspectives into her descriptions. First, an embedding of her account in the existent state of research would have highlighted that previous reforms in the Asian home country had been important prerequisites for any subsequent spread abroad. Japanese Zen and Thai-Burmese *vipassanā* meditation serve as well-fitting comparative cases of both a new orientation toward the laity as well as reinterpretations of fundamental terms and doctrines. Second, studies such as those by Richard H. Seager (1999), Charles Prebish and Martin Baumann (2002), and John S. Harding et al. (2010) provide basic accounts of the new receptiveness and interest in Buddhist practices and ideas in North America and beyond. These and other studies successfully show why Buddhist centers and monasteries in the West thrived, and this applies likewise to the Hanmaun-Seon centers. Finally, the author does not systematically analyze in which way the different cultural-religious settings of primarily Protestant (North America), Roman Catholic (Argentina), Christian secular (Germany), and Theravāda Buddhist (Thailand) may have influenced the strategies of self-representation adopted by the Hanmaun-Seon centers in each geographical context. Seager (2006) has presented a masterful study of how such adaptive strategies have been utilized by Buddhist centers to adapt to different cultural settings in his account of establishing Soka Gakkai Buddhism in places as far afield as Brazil, Germany, and the United States.

Moon-Suk Heo is both a scholar and Buddhist practitioner. Overall, her primarily descriptive study is strong in placing the fundamental reforms in the course of Daehaeng's life and the rapid modernization of South Korea. Her study can be recommended to Buddhist practitioners and scholars who are looking for a basic account of Daehaeng's life and Hanmaun Buddhism in a Western language. However, scholars and people interested in analytic and comparative perspectives will be disappointed.

---

#### REFERENCES

- Harding, John S., Victor Sōgen Hori, and Alexander Soucy, eds. 2010. *Wild Geese: Buddhism in Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Hutter, Manfred. 2014. "Koreanischer Buddhismus in Deutschland." In *Handbuch de Religionen*, edited by Michael Klöcker and Udo Tworuschka, 1–14. Hohenwarsleben, Germany: Westarp Fachverlage.

Prebish, Charles S., and Martin Baumann, eds. 2002. *Westward Dharma: Buddhism beyond Asia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Seager, Richard Hughes. 2012. *Buddhism in America*. New York: Columbia University Press.

———. 2006. *Encountering the Dharma*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Martin Baumann  
*University of Lucerne*