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**THE NATURE OF BUDDHIST ETHICS
BUDDHISM AND BIOETHICS**

Buddhism and Abortion

Edited by

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²⁰ For further discussion of the issue of women's agency and *mizuko kuyō*, see this author's article 'Women's Responses to Child Loss in Japan: The Case of Mizuko Kuyō' in *Journal for Feminist Studies in Religion* 11:2 (Fall 1995): 67-93.

²¹ The questionnaire consisted of four write-in questions: 1) Regardless of whether you have any personal experience or not, what do you think about *mizuko kuyō*? 2) Please tell us, in as much detail as possible, what led you to do *mizuko kuyō*. 3) What did you do for *mizuko kuyō*? Please be specific (for example: went to a temple and had a service done; offered a candle; purchased a paper amulet). 4) Please tell us your feelings after doing *kuyō*. Will you continue to do it? Although the responses were anonymous, the questionnaires were coded so we could identify the site from which each originated. For this paper, I am using only responses received from Buddhist temples. I have included the age of the respondent where it is known.

²² The Japanese word *tsunni* is commonly translated as crime or sin, and thus also as guilt. While those renderings are apt in certain contexts (legal or theological), I think that the broader sense of 'responsibility' is more correct here.

²³ This image comes from a genre of (probably) seventeenth-century hymn known as 'Sai no Kawahara Jizō Wasan'. No English translation exists as far as I know. For several early versions in Japanese, see Manabe Kosai, *Jizō bosatsu no kenkyū* (Kyoto: Sanmitsudō Shoten, 1975), 198-228.

²⁴ Jizō (Skr: Kṣiagarbha) is the most common, but by no means the only, Buddhist figure associated with protecting *mizuko*. The bodhisattva Kannon (Skr: Avalokiteśvara) and the more minor figure of Kishibōjin (Skr: Hariti) also appear in this role. More local figures, such as Saichō's mother, may also be used.

²⁵ A slightly different set of questionnaires was mailed with a monthly newsletter to members of a large feminist organization based in Kyoto. This quotation is from one of the feminist replies.

7

Abortion in Korea

Frank Tedesco

Introduction

This study is a first exploration of the subject of abortion and Buddhism in contemporary South Korea.¹ Abortion in Korea has been studied as a factor in family planning policy and population control,² as a legal matter³ and as an issue of sexuality and gender,⁴ but minimal attention has been given to the religious perspective and almost none to Buddhism, despite the fact that Buddhists form the majority of the religious population in the country.⁵

Buddhists themselves may be partially responsible for this lack of attention regarding the abortion issue in Korea. They have not been vocal in the sporadic public debates about the issue. No Buddhist figure has become nationally prominent for a stance on abortion. The great majority of the population, Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike, does not associate Buddhism with any clear view or sentiment on the issue. There is, however, growing concern about the prevalence of abortion in the Korean media,⁶ and a few Buddhist clergy and lay leaders have responded to this complex issue in books, periodicals and the Buddhist press. These publications have a rather limited readership, but the appearance of this material nevertheless reflects the Buddhist community's turn to social engagement in Korean public life in recent years, however minimal, in proportion to its size in Korea. Buddhist social welfare activities,⁷ a Buddhist environmental movement,⁸ the promotion of cremation of the dead as opposed to traditional Confucian burial practice,⁹ and concern for foreign workers' rights,¹⁰ are among the

issues which demonstrate the changing character of Korean Buddhism in the nineties. The 1994 reform movement within the Chogye Order administration has brought in a progressive, elected *sangha* leadership which has spearheaded the order's influence in the public domain.¹¹

'Socially engaged' activities are not unanimously endorsed by all members of the clergy, however. There are still many who assert that the pursuit of enlightenment through austere spiritual practice (mainly meditation and study) is job enough for the ordained clergy. These conservatives warn that celibate renunciates should not lose sight of their purpose by diluting their energies in the chaotic affairs of the day before they have realized their goal of Buddhahood. 'First attain Buddhahood, then save all sentient beings', is often heard. The issue of abortion, too, pertains to sex and physical desire, an area of life celibates have sworn to forego (and perhaps ought not be reminded of!). They bolster their argument with references to the lives of exemplary monks of the past. Many lay people, too, believe that the only place for monks is in the mountains. They are irked to see grey-robed clergy driving expensive sedans and living in the lap of luxury, fully compromised by their lay constituency and feeding off them. For the purists, all worldly involvements, even helping others in social service, amount to the same thing: distraction from the path. They resist calls to social action.¹² In response, some younger educated Buddhists and activists initiated a *minjung pulgyo* or 'peoples' Buddhism' movement in the 1980s—in some ways similar to the liberation theology movement of Latin America—in order to deal with the problems of Korea's modernization from a Buddhist value system.¹³ While only a very small movement, its ideas have been influential among leaders of reform in the mid-90s.

Missionary dharma teaching centres (*p'ogyodang*) have multiplied rapidly in tandem with the rural population's mass migration to urban centres in the last ten years. Many cities, too, like Seoul have expanded into the surrounding countryside and have encompassed the Buddhist temples long sequestered within its hills. Keep in mind that the urban population of Korea jumped from 28 per cent in 1960 to nearly 75 per cent in 1990! More frequent contact with lay people has inevitably brought their concerns to the fore,

and since the majority of regular visitors and to supporters of the temples are women, it is inevitable that women's issues and family concerns become paramount. Memorial services for family ancestors, prayers for children's success in highly-competitive university entrance exams, funeral ceremonies,¹⁴ healing rites,¹⁵ lay group guidance and other activities now occupy the days of urban clergy who once kept a strenuous monastic routine much of the year.¹⁶ In recent years, too, personal concern for aborted babies and the performance of ceremonies for them has begun to be mentioned publicly as women reflect more openly on the vicissitudes of their lives. While many women in Korea allege indifference to the lives of aborted fetuses, it is still a subject of deep consideration and shame for many religious women in the country. Korean women are nowhere nearly as outspoken about their bodies and reproductive functions as women in other countries, however. While married women with children have ample opportunities to express their private concerns and reservations among their peers in many formal and informal social gatherings and organizations, single women are especially isolated and fearful of tarnishing their virginal image prior to, and even after, marriage.¹⁷ The rate of abortion has been accelerating steeply among single women in the last five years however, and so, we may presume, their questions and anxieties about their decision and possible religious resolutions.

Buddhism in Korean Studies

Although Buddhism is the largest religion in contemporary Korea¹⁸ and has been an integral part of Korean history and culture for over 1,600 years, it has been rather neglected by scholars of religion and the social sciences. Specialists in Buddhism within Korean studies are very few, and their work tends to focus on the elite monastic tradition and its scriptures. The general literature on Korea in English provides little space for modern Buddhism and almost nothing on contemporary popular practices, except for Buddha's birthday lantern parade and tourist information.¹⁹ The daily life of Buddhists in lay society has gone unrecorded. That temple attendance on a regular basis has been rising continuously; that Buddhist youth groups and activities including social action organizations are becoming more prominent; that many urban

temples and mountain monasteries have been recently renovated or are being practically rebuilt;²⁰ that the outcome of recent nationwide elections for local officials seems to have been swayed by Buddhist voters' displeasure with the ruling party's heavy handed tactics with an internal Chogye Order matter;²¹ that a picture of the chief executive of the Chogye Order, Ven. Song Wolju, is now frequently found among those leaders of social reform movements and other national events in the major newspapers and news magazines, are obvious indications that Buddhism is alive and well, and a real force in the lives of contemporary Koreans. These factors suggest it should be monitored seriously by scholars and social commentators both inside and outside of Asia.

Why, then, has the social phenomenon of Buddhism been overlooked by the majority of scholars of Korea? This neglect seems to reflect the peninsula's tumultuous past caught between major political powers, the tensions of national division and geopolitical strategy, the South's embrace of aggressive capitalist values and affluent Western lifestyles, and the government's breakneck course of accelerated, economic development. Few can deny that the great social and material benefits of Christian affiliation associated with the very generous assistance of Western missionary organizations have been distractions which have deflected attention from Korea's Buddhist heritage.

A Brief Outline of Buddhism in Korea

Let us very briefly outline the history of Buddhism in Korea to help place it in the life of contemporary Korean culture for the average reader unfamiliar with the subject. The Chogye Order alone controls over 1,700 temples throughout the Korean mountains and cities, and there are many more smaller temples and some large monasteries possessed by other orders. It is generally accepted that Buddhism entered Korea in the late fourth century CE when monk Sundo arrived under orders from the king of Former Chin of China. He brought gifts of Buddha statues and Mahāyāna scriptures to the king of Koguryō and can be said to be one among many Buddhist missionaries from China to introduce Sinitic culture and thought to the Korean elite. Buddhism was soon adopted

by the aristocracy, and Chinese style temple structures and monastic organizations were established throughout the country under royal patronage. The religion was promoted from above rather than arising from the lower classes of the population, but accommodations were made to indigenous beliefs and practices as Buddhism has done in other areas where it has spread. Native Korean shamanism, in fact, borrowed much from Buddhism to add to its prestige and acceptability. Many temples, too, have small shrine buildings off to the side and out of the way of the main dharmahalls which are dedicated to the Korean Mountain God (Sanshin) and a Chinese Taoist Hermit figure (Toksōng) who remain popular with women believers.

Buddhism became the dominant cultural force and social authority on the peninsula during the Unified Shilla (668-935) and Koryō (937-1392) periods. Most of the largest temples which still exist in Korea were originally erected in these periods, and most of the finest works of Korean Buddhist art were produced in these times. The landholdings of the temples were enormous and their influence permeated all levels of society. Buddhism was the state religion and it was believed that the powers of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas protected the people from incursions from enemies and natural catastrophes. Temple reserves and armies of serfs were utilized in public works projects and also came to the assistance of the masses in periods of misfortune and emergency. It is claimed that 'the financial power of the monasteries was so immense that it severely strained the fabric of the Koryō economy, contributing to the demise of that kingdom and the rise of the Chosōn.'²²

Buddhism lost its pre-eminent authority at the beginning of the Chosōn (Yi dynasty) (1392-1910) and all social and political influence by its end. The pervasive 'Confucianization' of Korea from the middle of the Yi did much to undermine the Buddhist heritage of Shilla and Koryō in the social and institutional lives of the Korean people, but it could not eradicate its impact on the religious worldview of the majority—the women and the illiterate commoners.²³ These people helped support a small and more or less elite *sangha* of monks and nuns who practised and studied in mountain temples far from the urban centres from which they were banished. Centuries of ostracism and persecution by Confucian scholars and

administrators during the Yi reduced the once influential Korean *sangha* to total ineffectiveness in worldly affairs, and have left it with a negative image which persists in the minds of many Koreans today. Confucian ideals, too, infiltrated the minds and culture of the Buddhist population to the extent that women lost many of the rights and privileges they enjoyed in the Shilla and Koryŏ periods and the Confucian patriarchal, son-preferential family (patrilineal descent group) pattern, became the norm.²⁴ This remains so today.

With permission to enter the cities for the first time in three hundred years and open temples there again during Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945), monks and nuns began to reconstitute their position in Korean society. The *sangha* was put in turmoil, however, by Japanese colonial (Meiji) regulations which favoured a married Buddhist clergy and subordination to Japanese state ideology. Bitter discord between the celibate and married clergy upset the *sangha* for years after the Korean War (1950-1953) and did little to prevent a disillusioned lay following from experimenting with new and different religions offering immediate relief from their daily sufferings. Recovery from the civil war which levelled the entire country and caused massive dislocation of refugees was closely associated with very generous foreign aid from 'Christian' countries (especially the United States) which presented an extremely favourable image of Christianity in the eyes of the Korean population. Missionary charitable organizations from both Catholic and Protestant agencies dispensed food for the hungry, medical care and all sorts of rehabilitation and social support services. Most importantly, foreign Christian groups set up educational institutions which trained many subsequent national leaders who were very much awed by, and indebted to, their patrons. These pioneering missionaries were generally quite critical of traditional Korean religious beliefs. It is no wonder so many 'modern' Korean citizens know very little about their country's religious roots. These circumstances may also explain why they so rarely look to Buddhism for guidance or perspective on compelling social and moral issues.

Abortion Practice in Korea: A Brief Background Review

We know little about abortion practice in early Korean history. Like traditional, sedentary agricultural economies throughout the world, we may assume large families were highly valued as a labour force to share the toil of the fields and paddies. At present, this observer is unaware of any demographic research in Korea which suggests that abortion and/or infanticide was ever practised systematically or widely by any sector of Korean society during any historical period (except the present) in order to selectively limit family size, as is being debated now in Japan regarding the Edo period.²⁵ Anthropologists, however, have noted that female infanticide was not unknown in the recent past.²⁶ Out of wedlock conceptions or unwanted pregnancies in marriage would be dispatched with Chinese herbal medications,²⁷ physical assault and home remedies.²⁸

The indigenous folk beliefs of Korea and geomancy are closely associated with fertility. Visits to Buddhist temples to pray for children has long been resorted to by Korean women who have been barren.²⁹ The birth of sons became especially important in later Yi dynasty times when the society became decidedly more neo-Confucian and male-oriented.³⁰ Females were subordinated in all areas of life except within the family. A wife had to bear a son to fulfil her most important purpose of providing a first-born male to continue the family line and honour her husband's ancestors. It was her duty; her position was secure only if her first child was a boy. The large patrilineal family was the domestic ideal in the Yi dynasty, the Japanese colonial period (1910-1945) and the baby boom after the Korean War (1950-1953).

Abortion was strictly prohibited during the Japanese occupation of Korea as it was in Japan. Prosecution of induced abortion was sporadic during this period, with penalties inflicted on both women who had the surgery as well as on those who performed the induced abortions illegally.³¹ Japanese law, however, did allow the termination of pregnancy if it was due to rape or 'error'.³²

Korea was the third nation in the world, after Pakistan (1953) and India (1958), to adopt an explicit population control policy in 1961. A national family planning program was established in 1962 as a component of the Park Chung-Hee (Pak Chŏng-hŭi)

government's first Five-Year Economic Development Plan and it has been an integral part of population control policy in successive plans to the present. The government was convinced that without a proper population control policy it could not achieve economic development (per capita income increase and the elimination of poverty) within a short period of time. The general population's aspiration for a smaller family size emerged along with the government's campaign for family planning.³³

The government's programme, and the population's compliance, very speedily reduced the average number of children per family in South Korea. It dropped from nearly six in 1960 to less than two in 1990. This equates to an average reduction of two persons per family per one generation. The crude birth rate was over 40 per 1,000 in the population in 1960 but fell steadily in the last thirty years to 16.2 in 1990 and it has reached below replacement level in the last decade. Besides an increase in the average age of marriage due to the extension of longer education to women and more young female participation in the labour market, contraceptive devices were widely diffused and cheaply or freely available in this period. Incentives for vasectomy and sterilization were announced as well. Women were especially cooperative in the family planning movement and almost invariably resorted to abortion when contraception failed. Induced abortion rapidly increased with the active participation of physicians and their staff and the attenuation of judicial surveillance of the prohibitive Korean Penal Code.

According to the Korean Penal Code, articles 269 and 270, induced abortion is illegal. The government did not immediately legislate more liberal laws regarding abortion when it began its family planning campaign. Two attempts were made to legalize induced abortion with the pressure of Protestant religious groups and politicians in 1966 and 1970 but they were defeated. A Maternal and Child Health Law, however, was passed in 1973 by the Extraordinary State Council (marital law authority) which set out conditions in which abortions could be performed. According to the law, a physician is permitted to perform an abortion, with the consent of the woman and her spouse, in case of hereditary defect of the fetus and certain infectious diseases, when the pregnancy results from rape or incest and when from a medical point of view,

the continuation of pregnancy will be detrimental to the health of the mother. It did not permit abortion on socioeconomic grounds although the government had intended to do so in the earliest preparation phase of the law. It did not do so because of religious protest from Catholics and a few politicians.³⁴

The Catholic Korean Bishops' Association protested against the Maternal and Child Health Law of 1973 without success, but the Korean Association of Protestant Churches convened and officially accepted it in 1974. We do not know what Buddhists were thinking at that time as we have not found any record of their position in the literature available. Informants say there was no organized voice, neither from the *sangha* nor from lay groups. The Roman Catholic Church has continued to oppose any further liberalization of regulations pertaining to abortion throughout the past decades. The Protestant churches, which represent a spectrum of opinion on abortion, support legislation cautiously.

Even though the problem of abortion is mainly a women's issue, the majority of Korean women's organizations have remained unresponsive to it according to Sung-bong Hong, a researcher into abortion in Korea in the period.³⁵ There is really no strong reason for Korean women to protest against the restrictive Penal Code or the stipulations of the Maternal and Child Health Law because lack of enforcement has rendered them meaningless. So permissive is the prevailing public attitude to abortion that more than half of those who responded to a professional abortion survey in Seoul in 1991 did not know anything about laws regulating abortion and less than a quarter who had an abortion knew it was illegal at the time of surgery. And many of those who experienced an abortion in the past did not 'feel sorry or regret.' 49 percent 'felt good to have it done' while 26 percent 'did not have any special feeling about it.'³⁶

Unlike the strident and wrenching issue it is in the West, abortion in Korea is uneventful and is usually performed as a matter of course without second thought (except among the very religious) despite its illegality. The operation can be obtained very easily anywhere in the country at most private gynaecological clinics (small hospitals) or at larger institutions. A few personal questions are asked very perfunctorily. When pregnancy is positively

determined surgery can be performed hygienically and efficiently at relatively low cost even on the first visit. Since the great majority of abortions do not fall within the legally prescribed categories which qualify the procedure for national health insurance coverage, physicians need not be burdened with much record keeping for taxation purposes—transactions are in cash, tax-free and sought after by thankful clients. This business is very lucrative for ob-gyn specialists; some of whom are quite reliant on abortion clients for a large proportion of their income. Knowledgeable informants opine that private ob-gyn clinics depend on abortions for up to 30 to 80 percent of their income. One commented that his own clinic performed two abortions for every one live birth on average. Would it behove Korean ob-gyn physicians to advocate greater statutory legalization?³⁷

Korea has been called an 'abortion paradise' by some social commentators, for reasons set out above. Accurate statistics for induced abortion in the nation are unavailable because of its illegality. A common estimate cited in the press and by social commentators is that as many as a million to a million and a half abortions are performed annually in Korea; those who cite more (2-3 million) are accused of irresponsible sensationalism based on improper extrapolation from limited facts. We can, however, refer to professionally gathered sampling data compiled by government research institutes to get a clearer picture of abortion behaviour:

In spite of legal and social constraints, as well as extensive contraceptive services offered by the government program, the proportion of women who have had at least one induced abortion among married women aged 15-44 increased from 7 per cent in 1963 to 53 per cent in 1991 ... The total abortion rate of married women increased more than four times from 0.7 in 1963 to 2.9 in 1979, but it fell to 1.6 in 1988. However, the total abortion rate shows an increasing trend in recent years, particularly for women in their 20s.³⁸

The legal and social attitude toward abortion has been exceptionally generous and abortion has been a commonly used method to control fertility. Increasing premarital and teen pregnancies are likely to worsen the situation in the future. Though the abortion rate fell after its peak in 1979, the rate keeps on increasing for married women aged 20 to 24 and the rate for those

aged 25 to 29 remains high. The recent situation that the younger age group (20-29) were practicing less contraception but using more induced abortions, needs serious attention in the near future.³⁹

More than half of Korean wives have experienced an abortion and about one third have had two or more according to surveys.⁴⁰ It is noteworthy that the abortion rate among young married and unmarried women⁴¹ is accelerating sharply in very recent years as well. Regular abortion seems to have become part of the accepted cultural pattern of modern Korea.⁴²

Another characteristic of the abortion phenomenon of Korea must be mentioned—son preference. The frequency of sex selective abortion has become an important factor in the distorted sex ratio (number of males per 100 females) in the last decade, specifically since 1985. The current ratio is about 116 males to 100 females, far higher than the normal ratio of 106. Complex statistical procedures aside, 'the annual number of female fetuses aborted appears to range between 10,000 to 18,000, amounting to nearly 80,000 during the five years 1986-90. These "missing" girls represent about 5 per cent of actual female births'.⁴³ The implications of this sexual imbalance for future generations are manifold, not the least of which is finding mates. Already in Korea, the marriage market for males aged 5-9 in 1990 will be extremely tight; nearly 50 per cent of them will not be able to find spouses in the traditionally appropriate age range!⁴⁴ On this matter effecting the lives of males, the Korean government took quick action.

On 31 January 1990 Korea's Ministry of Health and Social Affairs suspended the medical licenses of eight physicians who had performed sex-determination tests on fetuses, an action that was widely reported in the media. In May the same year the ministry amended the regulations on medical care so that licenses could be revoked for performing sex-determination procedures ... some observers, however, believe that the harsh regulations would only raise the clandestine service of sex determination.⁴⁵

In response to this widespread, underground service, and the ever-deepening imbalance of the sexes in Korea, the Korean Medical Association (membership 40,000) launched a self-reform

campaign in February 1995 to stamp out medical tests that identify the sex of embryos. The association declared that 'it would take the lead in seeking out fellow medical practitioners who practice prenatal sex testing for sexual identification and report them to the authorities ... doctors have to go all out to bring this practice to a halt.' It noted: 'In this issue, the biggest obstacle has been the doctors' perception that the punishment of doctors is unfair because the tests are done at the request of the pregnant women.'⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the collusion of physicians and their son-seeking clients has led the number of selective female fetal abortions to climb to about 30,000 a year.

The KMA action received widespread news coverage on TV, the radio and the press. It is yet too early to determine whether this public information will affect long ingrained patterns of sex discrimination in Korea, however. Interesting, though, is a rare expression of anti-abortion sentiment which was expressed in a major Korean newspaper editorial in response to the doctors' action:

Prenatal sex identification for the purpose of abortion has been widespread under Confucian family norms preferring sons to daughters. A 1987 law authorized fetal tests only for the detection of genetic problems, including deformities, and the monitoring of fetal growth. But the tests have been widely used to identify the gender of embryos ... Pregnancy or birth is pure and sacrosanct. Life is more precious than any other thing. An individual's desire for convenience or pursuit of self-interest should not be left to control birth. As for doctors under any circumstances, killing a fetus for money can never be condoned.⁴⁷

The new goals of the national family planning program (including the Planned Parenthood Federation of Korea) are very much concerned with improving the quality of family life and levelling the numerical distortion of the sexes for future generations of Koreans. Korea has made remarkable progress in limiting population growth. It is now time to concentrate on 'the quality and use effectiveness of contraception, maintenance of a balanced sex ratio and the reduction of induced abortions ... the practice of selective abortions which is triggered by parental sex preference.'⁴⁸

Contemporary Korean Buddhism and the Abortion Issue

As stated earlier at the beginning of this chapter, Buddhists have been mute regarding the issue of abortion in Korea, at least until the last few years. The Buddhist populace in general seems to have unresistingly embraced government family planning directives and the ethos of rapid national economic development through small family size which arose in the sixties. Koreans wanted desperately to catch up with more advanced nations like Japan, and the post-war population boom was an impediment. Trevor Ling's 1969 remark that in Mahāyāna Buddhist Korea 'abortion is illegal, but widely practised and socially accepted'⁴⁹ is supported by results of the Korean National Abortion Survey of 1971 which indicated that Buddhists were, in fact, slightly more likely to have abortions than other segments of the population.⁵⁰ A later abortion survey conducted by the Korean Institute of Criminology in 1990 also found that Buddhists had as high or higher an abortion rate as the rest of the population (in the Seoul sample survey) and that the highest number of repetitive abortions (3 or more) were among Buddhists.⁵¹

While Korea's high abortion rate and the unquestioning practice of abortion among Buddhist women have slowly begun to be recognized as issues requiring attention by a small number within the Buddhist community within the past ten years,⁵² they are still largely dismissed by the majority today (Spring 1996). Many believers in Seoul with whom my wife and I have spoken have never reflected on the topic. They accept abortion as no more than an act of discretionary, personal hygiene or emergency surgical relief, such as an appendectomy or first aid. While there are a small but growing number of Buddhists who are quite concerned about the common practice of abortion among their peers, they are not very visible in the general Buddhist populace. To date, there is no common or public practice of rites for aborted fetuses in Korea as is practised in Japan. There are no red-bibbed statues of Kṣitigarbha (Japanese: Jizō; Korean: Chijang) to be found on streets and cemeteries in Korea as they are in Japan. Nor are there commercial newspaper ads for *mizuko kuyō* ('water baby offering rites') as found in the Japanese press. Japan has thousands of temples where

aborted fetuses are memorialized. Korea probably has no more than ten or twelve sanctuaries where ceremonies for aborted babies are performed. These rites are performed sporadically throughout the year as the need arises, if at all. There are no traditionally fixed dates on the annual ritual cycle for the ceremonies as there are for other religious events. Nor are there temples or cemeteries like Hase-dera or Purple Cloud Temple described by William LaFleur in *Liquid Life*, where services for aborted fetuses are a major or sole focus of religious activity.⁵² For the great majority of Korean Buddhist believers, if the spirits of aborted babies are remembered at all, it is at the time of *Uranpun-jae-il* (*Ullambana*)—Festival of the Hungry Ghosts—15th day of the 7th lunar month) when some Buddhists dedicate memorial tablets to the spirits of the aborted infant 'water child' or 'water babies' (*suja*—same Chinese characters as Japanese *nizuko*) along with deceased family members in their favourite temple. This, too, is only a recent trend. It is not a well known or solicited practice, however. These tablets for the miscarried or aborted children of married women are displayed openly and can be easily identified by family names, but are anonymously attributed or absent for the unmarried. At this date, it can hardly be characterized as a lucrative business. One must go out of one's way to discover *suja* among thousands of paper memorial tablets dedicated to ancestors or the 'mature' dead, which are pasted on the walls of the temple behind or near the altar for memorial services.

An awakening of concern for aborted fetuses occurred in Korea in early 1985 with the efforts of Venerable Sök Myogak, a Chogye Order *pigu* (Skt: *bhikṣu*) now in his late fifties. Myogak, formerly of famous Pulguksa Temple, incited great interest among a group of *posallim* (devout female supporters) in Seoul when he introduced them to parts of a first draft of his translation of a Japanese book on *nizuko*.⁵⁴ The book's depiction of the fears and suffering of the spirits of helpless, aborted children and their attempts to seize the attention of their parents through dreams and interference (misfortunes) in their daily lives resonated deeply among these pious Buddhist women. It appears to have brought to the surface feelings of uneasiness and guilt they had experienced for years but could not or would not identify. To quote a female

supporter of Myogak on a local radio broadcast this spring: 'We grieve over the death of our pet animals and even bury them. How much more so a baby in the womb which is aborted? We cannot ignore them'.⁵⁵

The *posallim* encouraged Myogak to continue his translation of the book which they eventually published as a paperback at their own expense in 1985. It is evocatively entitled *Agga-ya*, *yongsŏhaeda-o*, which can be translated as 'My Dear Baby, Please Forgive Me!' This volume was read eagerly among Ven. Myogak's followers and their circles of friends. The book's readership quickly spread from Seoul in the north to Taegu and Pusan in the Kyŏngsang provinces at the southern end of the country where, according to popular descriptions, 'there are many more devout Buddhists'. Readership quickly spread to other more rural parts of the country. News of the book also circulated in the *sangha*, and a number of clergy came personally to Myogak to purchase fifty or a hundred copies at a time to distribute among their followers. These monks began to offer rites for aborted fetuses on their own, modeling their rituals on what they learned from Myogak directly and through their reading and interpretation of his translation.

It appears that *Agga-ya* was a beginning, a first small step in the public expression of distress over the pain of abortion in Buddhist society. It remains an inspiration and catalyst for some monks and nuns to independently investigate the scriptures and innovate ritual practices they deem appropriate to the needs of their congregation. As the book has become more widely distributed, more and more people are asking to have *nak t'ae-a ch'ŏnda-jae* ('auspicious rebirth ceremony for aborted babies') performed at the ten or more temples which have initiated the rituals. It is difficult to estimate with any accuracy just how many more are performing or planning this unconventional rite.

Ven. Myogak claims that 'around 500 women have performed the ceremony at Kukch'ŏngsa—his apartment style temple in Sadangdong, Seoul—since his book was published. 'Since those people aborted two babies on the average, about 1,000 spirits have benefited from the ceremonies'.⁵⁶ As of May 1992, he records in a later edition of his book, he had about 500 telephone consultations, 147 correspondences by letter and 300 personal consultations.

'Most people who consulted with me tried to rationalize their behaviour and put the blame on others. Whatever the reason or the situation was, they should acknowledge themselves as responsible for their actions, be very clear about this, and perform *ch'ōndo-jae* offering for the little spirits with a very sincere heart', writes Venerable Myogak in the introduction of *Agga-ya!* (My Dear Baby!).

The people who come to Myogak share the belief that the act of abortion is unequivocally wrong, a grievous misdeed. One *posalim* said on radio, 'an old proverb says that if you "erase" your baby, you'll have no luck for three years. After I aborted my baby, nothing went well. I believe I was being personally punished for what I did.' Another mother revealed, 'I immediately got pregnant after my first baby was born. And I had an abortion. One day my elder sister bought a copy of *Agga-ya!* she found at a temple bazaar and lent it to me. After reading the book, I cried and cried and felt that I did a terrible thing. I went to see Venerable Myogak and performed *ch'ōndo-jae* for relief.' Yet another lady testifies,

I was too young and didn't know any better when I aborted my first baby. My second child died the day after she was born. I thought the baby was sleeping so I left her alone. My aunt came to visit but she didn't even want to see the baby. I was very upset. I assumed she acted that way because it was a girl. When I went in to change my baby's diaper, she was cold and stiff. Shocked out of my mind, I buried my baby with her soiled diaper on, with my father's help, on a small bank around a rice paddy (She begins to sob). It still breaks my heart that I left my baby like that, dead in a soiled diaper. I was foolish. I feel much better now after performing *ch'ōndo-jae*. The expression of repentance through confession and ritual offering undoubtedly had a healing effect for its performers.

Agga-ya! is mostly a recitation of many sad and shocking stories of abortion from both Korea and Japan. Although originally inspired by Japanese example, the sentiments expressed in the book well represent what I have experienced as the dominant Korean Buddhist 'pro-life' orientation toward abortion. It is concerned primarily with the suffering and neglect of aborted children and the deleterious effects of ignoring them in the unseen world.

Myogak's prologue first lays out a very simple and terse outline of the fundamental Buddhist understanding of existence—of past, present and future lives, of causality and the twelve links in the chain of dependent co-origination—and includes a diagram of the six realms of (life and death) existence. There is a special notation that only in the human realm can one perform spiritual practice and experience realization of Buddha nature. Myogak then presents his purpose with cultural and historical references (I paraphrase):

Like the solemn and complicated rites for the dying performed by Tibetan monks to assure that the spirit of the dead will not wander around in the other world or be restless, Koreans also perform *ch'ōndo* for the spirit of the dead.

Buddhist funeral rituals which were passed down from Koryŏ as indigenized custom were abolished by Chosŏn King Yejong and replaced with Confucian rituals. These Confucian rituals were merely a matter of form and procedure and not truly religious in the sense of real concern for the spirits of the dead. Buddhist rituals were performed in temples with the understanding of dependent co-origination and *samsara*. People reap the rewards of their karma, consciously or unconsciously, therefore the families of the dead thinking of the karmic result the dead will receive in the next life sincerely pray that the dead will choose not to re-enter *samsara*...

Whether Buddhist or not, people offered their entire hearts and minds for the spiritual rebirth of the dead. However, the young spirits that hadn't yet reached adulthood were neglected. For example, when children die in Korea they are usually cremated or buried without any funeral ritual. Those little lives which are aborted or miscarried without seeing the light of the world are treated as if they were vestigial organs (like an appendix) And, since many babies were conceived through immoral behavior, they are dispatched even more mechanically avoid discovery. If the baby is considered 'a problem' the parents' only thought is to rid themselves of it—they give no thought to the fetus at all. And, too, if the mother involuntarily miscarried, relatives and friends dote only on the woman's health and don't give a thought for the health or afterlife of the baby whose life was truncated abruptly. Yet when our pet animals die, we grieve for them so miserably.

I believe something is wrong here when we are indifferent to the lives which grow in our own bodies. Babies who have been aborted through artificial means should be guided to a better rebirth. At the same time, we should consider the condition of many women who suffer in so many different ways, sometimes inexplicably, and try to alleviate their anguish if even only slightly. More people should pay attention to the spirit of aborted fetuses. I hope many more women, especially those who have experienced miscarriage or abortion, will perform *ch'ondo* ceremonies for the spirit of these poor little ones. They should do it with devotion through chanting, recitation of names of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, appropriate offerings and deep repentance of their cruel deeds in order to rid themselves of their karma hindrances. And they should make greater efforts to nurture brighter and happier families for a brighter, happier society in the future.⁵⁷

Myogak's call to repent for aborting babies as exemplified in Japan is echoed by other Korean Buddhist leaders since the publication of *Agayae* in 1985. Cho Myöng-nyöi, a Japan-educated faculty member of Seoul's Central *Sangha* College, writes that 'the Japanese acknowledge abortion as an evil misdeed yet *mizuko* offerings allow the Japanese to dignify and revere life. The rituals provide an opportunity for people who committed abortion (all family members, sympathizers and doctors included) to rise above their suffering rather than be stigmatized as criminals. This practice is both rational and worldly-wise.' She notes that 'it seems that all religious groups in Korea except the Catholics are publicly silent on abortion. Rather than relying on government policy, the role of religion is to try to provide opportunity for people to raise above the problems of their daily lives through religious belief and to awaken them to an authentic ethics of life (bioethics?).'⁵⁸

It is apparent that despite bitter memories of Japanese cruelty during the thirty-five year colonial period, and a well-founded fear of Japan's economic clout and cultural influence on Korea's youth today, Korean Buddhist leaders are still amenable to learning from their imposing neighbour. Many older Korean Buddhist scholars were educated in Japan during the colonial period. They were deeply influenced by Japanese scholarly values and comprehensive grasp of Buddhist traditions of East Asia and India. The

younger Korean generation travels to Japan for graduate study and research at Buddhist universities. It is no surprise that they would respect Japanese traditions as worthy of serious consideration, yet emphatically affirm their own important Korean national heritage. This sentiment is expressed well by Professor Mok Jeong-bae, dean of the Graduate School of Buddhist Studies of Dongguk University when he suggests in the *Tabo* quarterly, an organ of the Korean Buddhism Promotion Foundation, that Koreans ought to 'find a way to transform Japanese *swija* belief into Korean form.'⁵⁹

Proof that Korean Buddhists are not accepting Japanese innovation unquestioningly can be observed in matters of terminology, for instance. The term *mizuko* in Japanese is composed of two Sinitic logographs which are pronounced as *swija* in Korean. Koreans are not happy with this expression because it is not a Buddhist term; they say it has no scriptural reference and sounds foreign to their ears. It may be used for convenience by those who are not familiar with Buddhist terminology in Korea or by those who read Japanese materials and go back and forth between the two countries often. One Korean monk told us he thought it was an invention of a Japanese lay woman and not to be taken seriously! The *mizuko* concept is apparently deeply enmeshed in ancient Japanese folk belief,⁶⁰ however, and has been only recently revived in Japanese Buddhist ritual tradition.⁶¹ It has not been picked up in popular Korean culture as a fashionable foreign trade name (yet)!

The Korean nun Venerable Söngdök who has been very committed to studying the abortion problem and leading ceremonies for her congregation over the past five years prefers to use the logographs which are pronounced *t'a-t'ae* in Korean. *T'a t'ae* is a Buddhist term for abortion which is found in Chinese Buddhist *sūtras*.⁶² The most commonly used and medically and legally acceptable term for abortion in Korean is *nak t'ae*. The Japanese expression *mizuko kuyō*, or *swija kongyang* in Korean ('water-child offering'), is unfamiliar to Koreans. The term *nak t'ae-a ch'ondo-jae* is more readily identifiable as an 'auspicious rebirth offering ceremony for an aborted fetus.' It is a kind of new variant of the common expression *yöng-ga ch'ondo-jae* which refers to 'an auspicious rebirth offering ceremony for spirits of the dead' which can be employed in both group and individual funerary occasions

for adults. Another expression employed by Venerable Söngdök for her forty-nine day long group ceremonies for aborted fetuses is *T'a t'ae agi-ryöng ch'öndo pöphoe* which can be rendered as 'a Dharma meeting for the auspicious rebirth of aborted babies.'

Venerable Söngdök was born in 1950. She left home (ch'ulga) to begin *sön* (Zen) training at the famous *piguni* (Sk: *bhikṣuṇī*) monastery Umnunsa at age nineteen. She is also sometimes called by the respectful title *kün swim* (great master), an honorific title for revered elder clergy despite her relatively young age, and is also known by her lineage designation title *Pangsaeng* ('release of living creatures', 'protector, saviour, of all living beings'). Söngdök is known for her devotion to social service and efforts in organizing the first Buddhist Volunteer Service Association in Seoul. She refrains from collecting offerings to use on expensive temple building projects but rather instructs her followers to use their time and money to help others. She has a vision to make Buddhism a visible, moral force in Korean society by engaging the energies of Buddhist laypeople who heretofore have had no Buddhist channels available to them to express their social commitment. She has studied Buddhism academically at Dongguk University and has done special study of Buddhist hospice care (*vihāra*) in Japan. She remembers being well warned by her Japanese teachers not to emulate the crassly greedy *mizuko* temples which operate there.

Söngdök has been leading long ceremonies for the spirits of aborted babies once a year since 1991. She began to lead similar rites before then on a case by case basis for individual mothers and families, much like the monk Myogak, but she found she could not accommodate all who asked for them. The magnitude of the abortion problem in Korea soon became clear, and as a consequence she and her family of nun disciples organized large group ceremonies in order to meet the requests of many women who felt they had to 'do something' about their abortions.

The ceremonies are more than just spectator events for lay believers. They are actually Buddhist consciousness-raising sessions in an active devotional and communitarian setting. Fifty to a hundred people have participated in the event every year since 1991. These ceremonies extend over forty-nine days, the same duration

as the funeral service for adults. They are scheduled to begin in late May after Buddha's Birthday and to end in July, just before school lets out for summer recess. This allows mothers of young children to attend the services more freely. The majority of the participants are housewives and mothers; unmarried women would be too ashamed to attend. Husbands attend irregularly because of job demands.

Prayers are led for three hours every morning by Söngdök and her disciples. They are joined by lay participants who can make the time. Most believers try to attend every day. In 1995, over thirty out a hundred participants had perfect attendance and most only missed a very few days. Those who must work away from home and far from the temple attend once a week, usually on Saturday, at seven day intervals. (There are also normal Sunday morning Dharma services for the entire congregation in conformance with the solar calendar work week, like Christian services).

A very modest fee is required for participation in 'auspicious rebirth ceremonies,' 49,000 *wön* or 1,000 *wön* (\$1.35) a day for forty nine days, the price of a litre of milk in Seoul. This sum goes to cover expenses of printing, altar preparations, and food offerings which are consumed by the congregation after every service. Participants in *t'a t'ae agi-ryöng chöndo* Dharma meetings share responsibilities for preparing the temple for service, meal preparations and clean-up. The atmosphere at the temple is very solemn during prayers and prostrations, which require considerable exertion, concentration and self-reflection, but quite convivial at lunch after the three hour service.

In preparing reading materials which are distributed consecutively each week, Venerable Söngdök covers the gamut of teachings related to life, death and rebirth in the Buddhist canon as well as introducing ideas about the spiritual world from other religions in Korea. One year she even devoted space to Tibetan views on *bar do* and rebirth, a topic inspired by the long visit to Korea by the charismatic nine year *tulku* Ling Rinpoche, the emanation (incarnation) of the present Dalai Lama's deceased head tutor. This is no doubt an innovative program in Korean Buddhism. Questions and answers about the nature of (re)birth and the beginning of human life in the womb at conception, why spirits of aborted babies cause

troubles for the living, what are these troubles in fact, the best method of performing *ch'i òndo*, and so forth, fill the weekly guide-books.

The following translation of an article from one of Sòngdok's *ch'i òndo* guidebooks was reprinted in the monthly magazine *Ōjin pōi* (Good Friend) of the Buddhist Volunteer Service Association. It provides the names of the *sūtras* which are most often cited in Korea regarding abortion and briefly lists what must be done to prevent further suffering for both the aborted child and its family.

On the Spirits of Aborted Fetuses

Among the 84,000 Buddhist *sūtras*, *Agui-po-ŭng Kyōng* (Ch: *E kuei pao ying ching*)⁶³, *Changsu myōl-jae Kyōng* (Ch: *Chang shou mieh tsui hu chu t'ung tzu t'o lo ni ching*),⁶⁴ *T'a T'ae Kyōng*,⁶⁵ mention the karma caused by abortion.

1) The spirits of aborted fetuses (*t'a t'ae agi-ryōng*) refers to the spirits of the fetuses who were intentionally, artificially aborted. All living beings including humans have Buddha nature created by the noble energy (*ki*) of the universe. To abort the precious life of the fetus conceived in the womb is against nature, undesirable morally, and very harmful to its mother medically. Besides, the life which is about to be born disappears from darkness to darkness without witnessing the light. It will become resentful and can cause harm and misfortune to the living who are related to the fetus.

2) Troubles or difficulties caused by aborted fetuses (*t'a t'ae-ai zi t'ad*)

a) Why do they cause difficulties?

The spirits of fetuses who have been suddenly thrust into darkness without witnessing the light of the world (through birth) are too shocked by their evil karmic momentum to find the true dharmic realm but instead find themselves besieged by unhappy phantoms. They strongly desire to be released quickly from wandering in the netherworld. They wish for spiritual peace, and to that end they insinuate themselves in the lives of people with whom they have a karmic connection by producing misfortunes. They cause troubles for their mother, father, brothers and sisters

and other relatives. These troubles will become aggravated as time goes on unless *ch'i òndo* rites are performed for them.

b) What are the troubles caused by the spirit of the aborted fetus?

The physical ailments caused by these spirits vary: chronic splenitis, breast cancer, uterine cancer, backache, hysteria, neuritis. Backaches, headaches and menstrual cramps are most common. Besides, 80 per cent of marital discord may be attributed to aborted spirits. Sometimes they are the root cause of bankruptcy or the destruction of families.

c) Do Buddhists acknowledge the fetus as human?

According to Buddhism, rebirth in a particular realm among the six depends on one's accumulated karma. The parent-child relationship is a very important karmic connection. In Buddhism, life goes through four temporal states in the repeating cycle of *samsara*:

1) Saeng-yu (*upapatti-bhava*)—the moment of conception;

2) Pon-yu (*pūrvakāla-bhava*)—from conception in the mother's body until the end of life;

3) Sa-yu (*marāṇa-bhava*)—the moment of death;

4) Chung-yu (*antara-bhava*)—from death until entering a body again according to karma.

Based on the aforementioned theory of four states of existences, receiving the human body is equivalent to *pon-yu*; the fetus is its beginning form. Therefore the fetus is duly recognized as a human being. In our Korean tradition, a child is considered a year old when it is born. A child in the womb for ten months is recognized as human. Since Buddhism encourages us to recognize the dignity of all life and regards killing the gravest evil of all, we Buddhists should protect the lives of fetuses at all costs. We should perform *ch'i òndo-jae* for those aborted fetuses whose deaths could not be avoided in the past in order to brighten their future journeys.

4) Best Ways for Aborted Fetuses to Attain Auspicious Rebirth

a) Enshrine Chijang Posal (Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva) in a temple and perform a *ch'i òndo* ceremony;

b) Participate in temple activities in the name of the fetus—for example, donating temple roof tiles with the baby's name painted on them, merit making in the name of the fetus;

c) Copy scriptures by hand and make Buddha statues;

- d) Recite the names of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas according to one's belief;
- e) Make prayers of repentance regularly;
- The most important of all is that the mother of the spirit of the fetus should perform auspicious rebirth rites for all her aborted babies so that they will be reborn in paradise (*wangsaeng gūng-nak*). She must offer deep, heart-felt apologies for the young lives who are buried deep within darkness rather than be concerned for her own suffering.

A detailed analysis of the ritual proceedings which are enacted during *ch'ondo* ceremonies will be described in a future study by the author. It is necessary to note that there is considerable variation in terms of length and degree of engagement by the participants. Venerable Sök Myogak offers the service over a twenty-one day period at his small temple. A younger monk, Venerable Hyönjang, offers weekend retreats and *ch'ondo* prayers for *swiaryōng* ('water-baby spirits') over 100 days. He also installed what may be Korea's first *Swia Chijangposal* monument—a statue of 'Kṣitigarbha of the Water-Babies' at his rural temple outside of Kwangju. (Hyönjang was deeply impressed by his visit to Japan seven years ago.) The traditional forty-nine day funeral period has been selected by Venerable Kang Chawu who began offering aborted fetus *ch'ondo* late this summer (1995) in conjunction with the publication of his new book.⁶⁶

Like at Venerable Sōngdök's Temple of the Four Guardians (*Sach'ōmwangsa*), Myogak's *shindo* (believers) in crowded Seoul bring offerings of milk, fruit, cookies, baby clothes, toys and candy. Since attendance is usually rather poor because of the busy schedules of the participants and the time-consuming traffic, he urges them to perform one hundred day repentance prayers privately at home. Psychologically innovative, Myogak has his lay-people draw pictures of the deceased infants on their infants' tablets, as they may imagine them. He also prescribes the ancient Buddhist custom of copying *sūtras* by hand (*sa kyōng*) and has the repentant follower recite the prayer (*dhāraṇī*) while he or she is copying it. Myogak also urges them to visit and contribute to welfare facilities like orphanages in order to make merit for the spirits of the dead children.

Learning about these ritual activities for aborted victims in the past, and the consolation of perpetrators in the present, a concerned observer may remark, 'Fine! All well and good for the living and the dead as in Japan, but what about the doomed fetuses alive for moments today and those who will be conceived tomorrow? Granted Buddhist scriptures condemn abortion as killing, what are you doing to prevent it from happening now?' The Korean Buddhist leaders who have concerned themselves with the issue of abortion in Korea realize that they have very real challenges before them. They recognize that it is one thing to preach that abortion is murder and that Buddhism is unequivocally committed to protecting life: It is another thing to provide answers and alternatives to devout Buddhists who come to them with unexpected or unwanted pregnancies. Korean society in general, despite the relatively strong anti-abortion laws, is clearly pro-abortion and this attitude has been promoted with undeniable government support to the private medical establishment and national health programs for over thirty years. Abortion is easy in Korea and the general populace is nonchalant about it, despite its illegality. 'Pro-choice' advocates, as they are known in the Western world, do not have much to agitate about on a practical level in Korea. Since restrictive laws on the books are basically unenforced,⁶⁷ Korean women's groups apparently do not see abortion as an issue. (Abortion is also easy to obtain in neighbouring Buddhist Japan, but it is legal.)

The strongest anti-abortion voice in Korea is the Catholic establishment. Concerned Buddhists are well aware of its position but there has been very little dialogue or cooperation so far on any level on the abortion issue. The famous videotape 'Silent Scream' and others have been freely distributed in Korea by the Sisters of Mary (*Maria sunyō-hoe*) for years.⁶⁸ Most Buddhist leaders have viewed one or more films. Hyönjang even writes in *Yōsōng Pulgyo* ('Women's Buddhism'), that he saw 'Silent Scream' in Seoul ten years ago. 'I passed out when I saw the fetus's head being crushed by forceps. Perhaps I was an aborted fetus in a past life. After that video, I cultivated the seed thought in my mind, 'I'll save your poor suffering spirits'⁶⁹ Catholics, however, were very surprised to learn that there was any interest at all in abortion among Buddhists when I met them for background information at

the start of this research. They know that Buddhists 'vow to save all sentient beings' and hold that 'even the lives of insects are to be respected.' They just haven't seen much action among Buddhists to prove they really mean it!⁷⁰

According to Kim Wan-ki, an editor of the Buddhist newspaper *Haedong Pulgyo*:

There are only nine facilities specially designated for unwed mothers in Korea nationwide. Four of them are run by Catholics, three by Protestants, one by the Salvation Army and one by a private social welfare organization. Eight of these are Christian facilities. No one Buddhist facility! It is said there are a million and a half abortions per year in Korea. And over ten thousand new unwed mothers per year. No doubt there are many Buddhists among them. Is there any way for Buddhists to avoid killing? Is there any way to help unwed mothers who are Buddhist? Must Buddhist women kill their babies or convert to other religions, or observe their rituals, in order to live at or use facilities run by other religious groups?⁷¹

Buddhist temples have been homes for orphans, the aged, and the unwanted from time immemorial in Korea, but they can no longer easily be so now. The requirements of society are more complex in recent times. But Buddhists can establish modern institutions to fill social needs. Venerable Myogak, for one, has raised funds to purchase land for the first Buddhist home for unwed mothers in Korea. It will be an important first step in providing an alternative to abortion or foreign adoption for some Buddhist women in Korea.

What other steps can Korean Buddhists take to be true to the first precept of non-killing which they universally agree to be the paramount virtue? As Professor Mok Jeong-bae has written, it is not enough to be concerned with attaining the Pure Land in the future, as so many Buddhists in Korea pray for. The uncertainties, contradictions and inconsistencies of traditional practices in modern Korean society have to be examined and dealt with. If there are physical and mental ailments afflicting us, they must be corrected. He has coined the term 'satvraism' to represent the Buddhist view of life, that 'the lives of all living beings are as precious as my own. We have to practice *pohyŏnhaeng* ('Samantabhadra action')

in the real world,' not just in sermons or prayers. This will prevent 'invisible killing' like abortion. Professor Mok suggests six practical measures to awaken the moral conscience of Buddhists in Korea through 'expedient means' (*pangp'yŏn*, Skt: *upāya*) which may have universal applicability throughout the Buddhist world. Briefly they are advice to:

1. Curb the tendency to regard fetal life nonchalantly by developing more effective ways to propagate the idea and spirit of protecting life i.e. to present more public lectures, dharma talks and pertinent research to develop and refine a modern philosophy of respect for all life founded on Buddhist doctrine.
2. Prepare abortion prevention legislation from a Buddhist perspective and in Buddhist language and strongly recommend it to pertinent authorities.
3. Explore ways to transform Japanese *suja* (*mizuko*) beliefs into Korean form.
4. Educate people to understand that life in the womb is human. It wishes to live and go on living just as we do. Prepare video presentations to illustrate this fact.
5. Hold more frequent special dharma practice assemblies dedicated to 'respect for fetal life' (*t'a-e-a saengmyŏng chŏnjung*) similar to masses to accumulate (intensify) merit in advance of death (*yesu-jae*) and release of living creatures ceremonies (*paengssaeng pŏphoe*) practised in Mahāyāna countries.⁷²
6. Produce and disseminate written literature which warns how today's immoral, unethical and conscience-less sexual indiscretion is correlated with the invisible murder of abortion.⁷³

In May 1995, the radio narrator of 'Death without Resistance', a feature programme on abortion, suggested that Buddhism seemed to be developing a compromise between the 'pro-choice' stance of women who wish to trust their own conscience regarding a decision to abort and that of the so-called 'pro-lifers' who emphasize compassion for the unborn child and its human rights.

That compromise was *ch'ōnda-jae*, the auspicious rebirth ceremony for the spirit of the aborted fetus wherein the parents repent their actions and the spirits are admonished to seek a higher plane of rebirth and be released of their anguish (*han*). Whether *ch'ōnda-jae* will serve as a call to conscience for those who have committed abortion and will lead them to make greater efforts to avoid unwanted pregnancies in the future (and lead others to be scrupulously careful with their sexuality) or whether it will be an easy way to assuage one's conscience and slide into the next facile decision to abort without guilt (rather than honour the first precept) is a quandary Buddhists must face with courage and honesty. Supreme Patriarch Most Venerable Wolha of the Chogye Order has taught, 'the value of life cannot be exchanged for the entire universe' (*saengnyōng-wi kach'i nūn ujū wado paktalsu ōpta*).⁷⁴ It remains to be seen if Korean Buddhists will resonate with this message and act in accord with it.

Notes

¹ I acknowledge with thanks research funding for this chapter received from the Daeyang Research Fund of Sejong University, Seoul, Korea in 1995.

² Such as, for instance, very recently in the seminar proceedings of the Planned Parent Federation of Korea (Seoul: Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1995), 'Seminar on the Development of Strategy for the Prevention of Induced Abortion', and Cho, Nam-Hoon (1993), *Demographic Transition: Changes in Determinants of Fertility Decline in the Republic of Korea*, Tokyo: Department of Demography and Health Statistics, Institute of Public Health, Japan. There is, of course, the very important early work of Sung-bong Hong and others. See Part IX Bibliography of Hong and Watson, *The Increasing Utilization of Induced Abortion in Korea* (Seoul: Korea University Press, 1976) 1161-162.

³ Shim, Young Hee (Shim Yōng-hŭi) et al., *An Empirical Study on Abortion in Korea: Focusing on the Extent and Attitude* (Seoul: Korean Institute of Criminology 90-08, 1991) and Shin, Dong Woon, *A Study on Adultery and Abortion from the Viewpoint of*

Criminal Law Reform in Korea (Seoul: Korean Institute of Criminology 90-22, 1991).

⁴ Eun-Shil Kim (Kim Ūn-sil) (1993), 'The Making of the Modern Female Gender: The Politics of Gender in Reproductive Practices in Korea', doctoral dissertation in medical anthropology, University of California, San Francisco and Berkeley, and Suk Gyung Lee (Yi Suk-kyōng) (1993), 'A Study of Unmarried Women's Sexuality: Focusing on Their Abortion Experience', Master's thesis, Department of Women's Studies, Graduate School, Ewha Womans University, Seoul.

⁵ According to the Republic of Korea's National Statistical Office Social Statistics Survey in 1991, Buddhist adherents account for 51.2 per cent (nearly 12 million) of the religious populace (over 23 million). Buddhists leaders will commonly cite a figure of 20 million or more in news releases and public addresses. Social scientists generally agree that figures for religious affiliation in Korea are questionable at best. Buddhist temples generally do not register their membership although there is a recent move in that direction. I have excluded discussing Christian publications in this brief study.

⁶ Especially as abortion directly pertains to the serious imbalance of the sexes among elementary school age children. September 24, 1995 *Korea Herald*, 3: 'Boys outnumber girls by some 200,000 in primary schools: education ministry.' Also *Korea Times*, March 26, 1995:3 'Survey Shows Current Population Policy Backfires: One in Two Housewives Has Abortion.'

⁷ Frank Tedesco, 'Buddhist Social Welfare in Korea: What is it and where is it going?' Research paper presented at the First Buddhist Social Welfare and Modern Society conference (Taipei) January, 1994. To be published in Chinese and English by Torch of Wisdom Press, Taipei, 1996.

⁸ As demonstrated in many serious articles published in *Taboo* 'Many Treasures' of the Korean Buddhism Promotion Foundation since its first issue in 1991.

⁹ Lack of available land for traditional Confucian style burial mounds is forcing many conservative Koreans to consider cremation as an alternative for the disposal of their dead. Lay Buddhists have generally not cremated in Korea, but there is a movement

arising to create columbaria for the ashes of the dead as in Japan. Young children and the unmarried have traditionally been cremated or buried without ceremony.

¹⁰ A severe labour shortage in Korea has led to the migration of labourers from so-called 'Third World' Asian and Pacific countries. They have had many problems with their Korean employers and have had to demonstrate their grievances publicly. The Catholic Church and Chogye Headquarters have supported them.

¹¹ Frank Tedesco: *The Korea Times*, (Seoul) 'Crisis in Korean Buddhism', Tuesday April 5, 1994, 1; 'The Buddhist Struggle Continues', 6, Saturday April 9, 1994. Also Jason Booth, *Far Eastern Economic Review* (Hong Kong) 'Bad Karma: Monks Fight for Control of Buddhist Order', April 28, 1994, 22.

¹² Frank Tedesco, 'Buddhist Social Welfare in Korea,' op cit. To quote Professor Venerable Im Songsan, *Pokji Pulgyo: Sasang-gwasarye* (Buddhist Welfare: Thought and Examples) (Seoul: Popsu Publishing Co, 1983) 'Monks themselves have gotten into the habit of receiving, they do not care to take active responsibility for society or they are too theoretical and unaware of social problems, and, as a consequence, they haven't established Buddhist social welfare properly.' See preface. Please note encouraging recent developments with the formation of the private Korean Buddhist Social Welfare Council which represents about 80 Buddhist facilities and the official Chogye Order For Social Welfare which has ambitious plans to promote social welfare in general throughout Korea by means of training programs, volunteer placement, extensive fund-raising and co-operation with international social welfare organizations to implement assistance overseas.

¹³ Shim, Jae-ryong, 'Buddhist Responses to Modern Transformation of Society in Korea,' in *Korea Journal* (Seoul) 33:3 (Autumn, 1993) 54-55.

¹⁴ For family members and for the victims of such misfortunes as the Songsu Bridge disaster, gas explosions in Taegu and Seoul, the Sampoong Department Store collapse in the summer, 1995, etc.

¹⁵ Don Baker, 'Monks, Medicine, and Miracles: Health and Healing in the History of Korean Buddhism,' *Korean Studies* (Honolulu) 18 (1994), 63-64.

¹⁶ Robert E. Buswell, Jr., *The Zen Monastic Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

¹⁷ Eun Shil Kim (Kim Ūn-shil) *The Making of the Modern Female Gender*, op cit., 73-89. See note 3.

¹⁸ See note 4.

¹⁹ Buddha's Birthday is an official national holiday which is celebrated in spring each year, the 8th day of the 4th lunar month. Pictures of the colorful celebration can be found everywhere but there is little explanation of its meaning in Korean belief and practice.

²⁰ Frank Tedesco, 'Sleeping Wisdom Awakens: Korean Buddhism in the 1990s' (Seoul: *Korea Journal* 33:3) 5-10.

²¹ *Korea Herald*, (Seoul) September 15, 1995, 2.

²² Robert Buswell, *The Zen Monastic Experience*, 23.

²³ Kwon, Kee-jong (Kwōn Ki-chong), 'Buddhism undergoes Hardships: Buddhism in the Chosōn Dynasty' in *The History and Culture of Buddhism in Korea* (Seoul: Dongguk University Press, 1993) 169-218. See also Martina Deuchler's analysis of the Confucian impact on Korea society in *The Confucian Transformation of Korea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992).

²⁴ Mark Peterson, 'Women without Sons: A Measure of Social Change in Yi Dynasty Korea' in *Korean Women: View from the Inner Room* (New Haven: East Rock Press, 1983) 33-44.

²⁵ See the interesting discussion of 'population stagnation' in Japan in the late Edo period in William LaFleur, *Liquid Life*, (Princeton, 1992) especially Chapters 5-7. Also his exchange with George Tanabe regarding a review of *Liquid Life* in the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 22 1-2 (1995). The review appears in *JIRS* 21:437-40.

²⁶ Roger L. Janelli and Dawnhee Yim Janelli, *Ancestor Worship and Korean Society*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982) 36.

²⁷ Cornelius Osgood, *The Koreans and Their Culture* (Tokyo: Charles Tuttle, 1951), 113.

²⁸ Informant interviews by the author. Popular lore has it that the mother of the assassinated dictator, President Pak Chung-hee (Pak Chōng-hŭi), tried to abort the future president when he was a fetus by drinking nearly five gallons of soy sauce!

- ²⁹ Janelli and Janelli, *Ancestor Worship and Korean Society*, *ibid.*
- ³⁰ See Mark Peterson, note 23.
- ³¹ Hong Sung-bong, *International Handbook on Abortion*, ed. Paul Sachdev (New York: Greenwood Press), 302.
- ³² George Devereux, 'A Typological Study of Abortion in 350 Primitive, Ancient, and Pre-Industrial Societies' in *Abortion in America*, ed. H. Rosen (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 140, 148.
- ³³ Nam-Hoon Cho, *Demographic Transition: Changes in the Determinants of Fertility Decline in the Republic of Korea* (Tokyo: Institute of Public Health, 1993) 2-3.
- ³⁴ The socioeconomic rationale for abortion was supported through government subsidies of menstrual regulation procedures for indigents beginning in 1974. Menstrual regulation is nothing but induced abortion in the very early stage of pregnancy. The number of MR recipients subsidized between 1974 and 1981, for instance, was reported to be about 327,000 and the number of birth averted as many as 236,000 according to a government publication.
- ³⁵ Hong Sung-bong, *ibid.*, 303.
- ³⁶ Shim, Young Hee et al., *An Empirical Study on Abortion in Korea: Focusing on the Extent and Attitude* (Seoul: Korean Institute of Criminology 90-08, 1991), 241-242.
- ³⁷ A similar lucrative business has been noted for Japan.
- ³⁸ Cho Nam-hoon, *Demographic Transition*, 9.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 131.
- ⁴⁰ Hong citing Lim and Byun 308-309.
- ⁴¹ Lee, Suk Gyung, *A Study of Unmarried Women's Sexuality, Focusing on Their Abortion Experience*, see note 3.
- ⁴² My undergraduate students in Korea, both male and female, discuss the abortions of their mothers and relatives without comment in the open classroom. As unmarried students, they are shy to discuss their own or their friends' abortions publicly, however. A middle-aged ob-gyn physician commented to me recently that unmarried women now visit his clinic without fear or subterfuge and without using false names as they did in the past before 1990.
- ⁴³ Chai Bin Park and Nam-Hoon Cho, *Consequences of Son Preference in a Low-Fertility Society: Imbalance of the Sex Ratio at*

- Birth in Korea*, East-West Center Reprints, Population Series No. 311, 1995. Reprinted from *Population and Development Review* 21:1, March 1995, 73-74.
- ⁴⁴ *Op cit.* above.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.
- ⁴⁶ *Korea Herald* (Seoul) February 5, 1995, 'Doctors vow not to identify sex of fetus,' 3.
- ⁴⁷ Editorial page of *The Korea Times*, February 18, 1995, 'Female Fetal Abortions' 6.
- ⁴⁸ Nam-Hoon Cho, *Demographic Transition*, viii-ix.
- ⁴⁹ Trevor Ling (1969) 'Buddhist Factors in Population Growth and Control,' *Population Studies* 23: 58.
- ⁵⁰ Sung-bong Hong and Walter B. Watson, *The Increasing Use of Induced Abortion in Korea*. (Seoul: Korean Institute of Family Planning/Korea University Press, 1976), 'Buddhists are more likely to have abortions than Christians, and Christians more likely than the two thirds of Korean women who profess no religion. Among Christians, Catholics are a little more likely to have abortions than Protestants, but sample size is small. On the whole religious differences are not great and are probably associated with socio-economic levels,' 12.
- ⁵¹ Young Hee Shim et al. (1991) *op cit.*, 158-159.
- ⁵² The earliest Korean publication we are aware of to address abortion from the viewpoints of Korean Buddhist belief is Venerable Sök Myogak's *Agga-ya, yongsöhaedao*. 'My Dear Baby! Please Forgive Me!' (Seoul: Ch'angusa, 1985). A 5th revised edition of 288 pages has been published. (Seoul: Kangyöngdogam, 1995).
- ⁵³ William LaFleur, *ibid.*, 3-10.
- ⁵⁴ Nakaoka Toshiya, *Mizuko rei no himitsu*. (Tokyo: Hutami Shobo, 1980).
- ⁵⁵ MBC Radio, Ch'öngju City, Ch'ungch'öngpukto, 'Yösöng silae t'ükjip pangsong' (Women's Age: Feature Program) Saturday May 13, 1995, 10:05-11:00 am.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁷ Sök Myogak, *Agga-ya!*, *ibid.*, 17-21.

- ⁵⁸ Cho Myöng-nyöl, 'Ipon-üi suja kongyang-ül t'onghae pon chonggyo-wa saengmyöng yulli' ('Religion, Life and Ethics Seen through Japanese Fetus Offering') in *Tabo* (Seoul) 1992: 4, 48.
- ⁵⁹ Mok Jeong-bae (Mok Chöng-bae), 'Pulgyo-üi saengmyöng chonjung undong-gwa t'ae-a ch'öndo' ('The Buddhist Respect for Life Movement and Auspicious Rebirth Ceremonies for Fetuses'), 55.
- ⁶⁰ See William LaFleur, *Liquid Life*, 22-29.
- ⁶¹ Domyo Miura, *The Forgotten Child* (Henley-on-Thames, England: Aidan Ellis, 1983).
- ⁶² See Han Pogwang, 'Pulgyogyöngjon-ae na'ananae nak t'ae mun-jae' ('The Abortion Problem as it appears in the Buddhist Canon') in *Tabo* (Seoul) 1992: 4, 32-39.
- ⁶³ L.R. Lancaster, *The Korean Buddhist Canon: A Descriptive Catalogue* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 299, K 763; Taisho 2154-716c:27.
- ⁶⁴ Lancaster, op.cit, p.484, KS 11.
- ⁶⁵ A very short *sūtra* within the Chap Aham Kyöng (*Samyuktāgama-sūtra*).
- ⁶⁶ Kang Chawu, *Ödum-üi pich'üro ünönan t'ae-anün ödirö kanünga* ('Where is the Fetus Going, that which was a Light in Darkness?'), (Seoul: Miral, 1995).
- ⁶⁷ Except for recent cases of divulging the sex of the embryo to, in effect, solicit the abortion of female offspring.
- ⁶⁸ Dubbed into Korean and with an appeal for donations.
- ⁶⁹ Hyöriang sünim, 'Sujiaryöng ch'öndo-e taeaesö' ('On the auspicious rebirth of spirits of water-children') in *Yösöng Pulgya* (Seoul: Tosönsa Women's Buddhist Association, 2539 BE: 7, July, 1995 No.194, 18).
- ⁷⁰ Hugh MacMahon, 'Return, O Spirit of Confucius' in the Catholic *Kyöng Hyang Magazine*. Reprinted in *Inculcuration*, Korea, (Seoul: Columban Inculcuration Center, V.5:3 Fall 1995), 5.
- ⁷¹ Kim, Wan-ki, 'A-i rül natgo sip'ün mihon ödirö kaya hanat' ('A Pregnant, Single Woman Who Wants to Bear Her Baby, Where Can She Go?') in *Yösöng Pulgyo* 1995:7 No.194, 31.
- ⁷² Venerable Myogak concludes the last day of his unique *ch'önda* ritual with the release of fish into the Han River in Seoul. For more on interesting ritual, see Holmes Welch, *The Practice of*

- Chinese Buddhism* 1900-1950 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 378-382.
- ⁷³ Mok, Jeong-bae, 'The Respect for Life Movement in Buddhism and the Auspicious Rebirth of Fetuses' in *Tabo* 1992:4, 55.
- ⁷⁴ Most Venerable Supreme Patriarch Wolha of T'öngdosa, the officially designated Buddha Jewel forest monastery of the Chogyö Order. MBC broadcast in Korean, Ch'öngju, May 13, 1995.