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The Accommodation of Korean Folk Religion to the Religious Forms of Buddhism: An Example of Reverse Syncretism

Abstract

Although syncretism as a cultural phenomenon is a widely recognized feature of the transmission of religion from one culture to another, the particular adjustment made by the folk religions to world missionary religions is not widely mentioned as such in the literature of the history of religions. In this paper, the author explores the accommodation made by the folk religion of Korea to Buddhism. In doing so, two different types of syncretism are examined, and the concept of “reverse syncretism” is discussed.

Key words: syncretism — reverse syncretism — Korean shamanism — Buddhism — sacred space — sacred — profane

IN a previous study (GRAYSON 1984) I have examined the question of the process of religious syncretism as an aspect of the transmission and development of Buddhism during the era of the Three Kingdoms in ancient Korea. The religious syncretism of that period is an example of a world missionary religion, Buddhism, accommodating itself to the fundamental religious ethos of the culture to which it has been transmitted. In this study I propose to examine another form of syncretism, a syncretism that is the reverse of the process that is normally observed to have occurred during the period of the Three Kingdoms: the accommodation of the autochthonous religion of Korea with the missionary religion, Buddhism. Although the historical evidence for the exact means by which this process of reverse syncretism took place is slim, syncretized Korean folk religion is an obvious, if often overlooked, feature of the religious scene in contemporary Korea. This paper is divided into three principal sections. In the first, I discuss a definition of religious syncretism; in the second, I present two models for the process of syncretism: High Syncretism and Low Syncretism; in the third, I examine in some detail the major shamanistic center in Seoul, which gives clear evidence of the effects of reverse syncretism.

WHAT IS SYNCRETISM?

Religious syncretism is a cultural process that may be understood as one part of the broader process of cultural diffusion. This has been long recognized to be the case by historians of religion and by cultural anthropologists. James Moffatt (1870–1944), Carsten Colpe, and others have observed that religious syncretism occurs as the result of the diffusion of culture or elements of culture from one ethnic group or cultural sphere to another ethnic group or cultural world. Moffatt speaks of syncretism as a “blending of religious ideas and practices” that are “often preceded and accelerated by a new philosophical synthesis as well as by a political re-arrangement” (MOFFAT 1921, 156). De-

fined in this way, religious syncretism is placed squarely within a particular historic, cultural, and political context. Colpe goes further and describes syncretism as 1) a condition or a process in which either the missionary religion or the indigenous religion predominates, or 2) a state in which a mutual balance between two religious traditions is achieved (COLPE 1987).

E. H. Pyle points out that syncretism can occur either as a spontaneous and natural result of intercultural contact, or as the result of some plan, which may have religious and/or political dimensions as well. In his view, not all syncretism is either unplanned or random. Pyle adds that it is important to understand this cultural process of religious syncretism in order to comprehend both the rise of the great, historic world religions and the emergence of various new religious movements that have appeared recently in the Third World and elsewhere (PYLE 1984, 317).

J. A. NORTH, in discussing the formation of syncretic cults in the Roman Empire, says that religious syncretism is "the merging of elements from different traditions, characteristically in circumstances of political or cultural dominance/subjection" (1984, 317). This definition, like Moffatt's, points beyond the simple concept of intercultural contact leading to religious mixture, and stresses the unequal political and cultural relations that may exist between two peoples during the period of intercultural contact.

As one example of the process of religious syncretism, North cites the modifications that were made in the beliefs and practices relating to the worship of the indigenous Roman deities after the Romans had come into contact with the Etruscans and the Greeks. According to North, this type of religious syncretism would occur when a significant cultural disparity between the two groups entering into contact is the principal nonreligious factor. North also cites the example of tribal peoples within the Roman Empire applying the names of the Roman deities to their own autochthonous spirits. Whilst there is an obvious cultural disparity between the two groups in this latter situation, it would seem that in this instance the political relations between the Romans and the tribal peoples would have been the dominant non-religious factor. North also cites a third case of religious syncretism, in which the Pax Romana, the condition of universal peace within the Roman Empire, provided a context in which the religions of subject civilizations (such as Egypt) could spread beyond the boundaries of their original nation and mix with the religions of the tribal peoples of the Roman Empire, and indeed of the Romans themselves (NORTH 1984, 317-18).

Outside the Roman Empire, the most frequently cited examples of religious syncretism by historians of religion are Manichaean religion and Ryōbu Shinto 兩部神道, both of which are also examples of intentional syncretism. In the case of the Manichaean cult, the founder Mani (216–277) was a Parthian who had been brought up in a family that practised one of the Gnostic cults. Through a series of revelations, Mani came to believe that he had been given the authority to create a new religion that would be the fulfillment of the three world religions of that era: Buddhism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism. In this case, Mani's religious syncretism was a conscious attempt to draw together the essential tenets of the principal religions of the Persian Empire.¹

Ryōbu Shinto, although a conscious attempt to create a syncretic religion, is different from the example of Manichaeism in that it was an attempt to harmonize a world religion, Buddhism, with indigenous religious practices, the Shinto cults of Japan. Following the introduction of Buddhism to Japan in the sixth century, there existed a state of tension between the foreign cult and the indigenous cults. This conflict was seemingly overcome during the era of Shōtoku Taishi 聖德太子 (573–621), when Buddhism was finally granted official recognition. Nonetheless, even though Buddhism spread throughout Japan during the course of the next two centuries, a state of uneasy peace must have existed between the practices and beliefs of the two religious systems. In the eighth century, the Shingon sect 眞言宗 of Buddhism, an esoteric sect, developed a concept called Ryōbu Shinto, or Shinto with Two Aspects. In the view of the Shingon practitioners, the native Shinto deities of Japan were particular manifestations of the Buddhas or bodhisattvas. Through the concept of Ryōbu Shinto, the Shingon Buddhists provided both a universalistic and a particularistic explanation for their own religious practices while at the same time aiding in the indigenization of Buddhism in Japan (ANESAKI 1930, 136–38; KITAGAWA 1966, 58, 68–69). The concept of Ryōbu Shinto as developed by Shingon priests is similar to the process by which the Romans identified their own gods with the gods of the Etruscans and the Greeks.²

TWO TYPES OF RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM

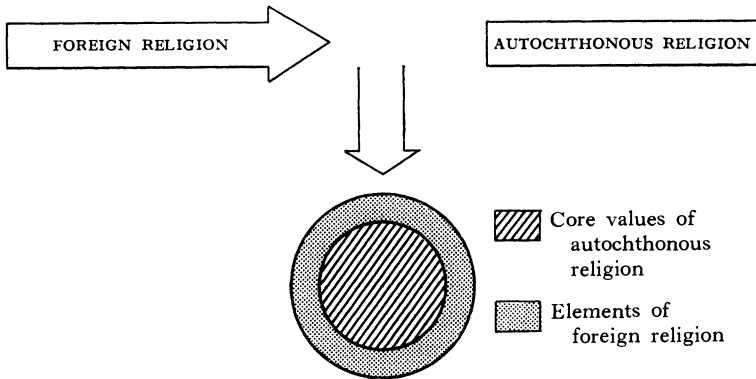
On the basis of my own experience, I have come to believe that there are at least two forms of syncretism that may occur as the result of sustained contact between a world religion (Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, etc.) and a religion indigenous to a particular people. When there has been a high degree of syncretism by the transmitted religion with the indigenous religion, the result will be that the core values of

the indigenous religion will constitute the center of the new religion, with the missionary religion providing many external or superficial features. On the other hand, when there has been a low degree of syncretism by the missionary religion with the autochthonous cults, the core values of the missionary religion will form the central aspect of the new religion, with the indigenous religion providing certain superficial features or details. I believe that every religion, whether a world religion, a higher religion, or a folk religion, has a certain core set of values, concepts, or beliefs. If these core values are altered, one can then say that syncretic change has been made in a certain direction away from the traditional belief system. Likewise, in the absence of significant change in the core set of values, however many superficial changes may have been made (i.e., changes in names of gods, and so forth), one can say that the process of syncretism was only superficial.

Figure 1 illustrates the case where significant change in the core set of values of the missionary religion has taken place, whilst figure 2 illustrates superficial, syncretic change in the cultural and religious features of the missionary religion. The type of syncretism illustrated in figure 1 I term High Syncretism, and the type of syncretism illustrated in figure 2 I term Low Syncretism. Although Korea provides examples of both High and Low Syncretism, in this paper I will be examining only a case of High Syncretism, the accommodation made by the autochthonous religion of Korea to Buddhism. As High Syncretism is the reverse of what is normally thought to be religious syncretism, I also refer to it as "reverse syncretism."

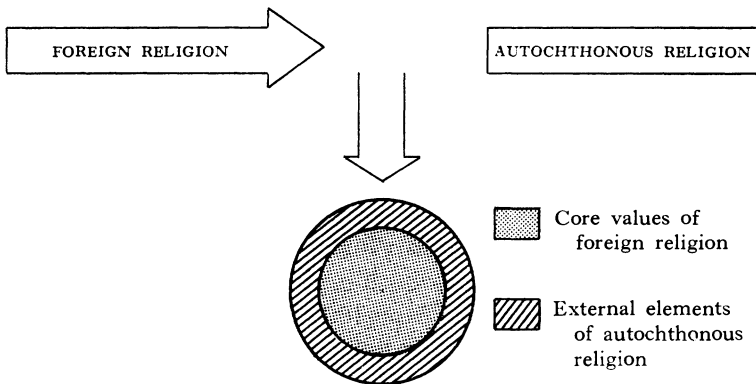
What I am calling here Low Syncretism, the more superficial accommodation made by a world religion with an indigenous cult, is usually what is understood to be the process of religious syncretism. The most obvious example in Korea of this particular process of syncretism may be observed in the case of Buddhist temples where the *sansin-gak* 山神閣 (mountain god shrine), the *samsin-gak* 三神閣 (three spirit shrine), or the *ch'ilsöng-gak* 七星閣 (seven-star <pole star> spirit shrine) have become constituent parts of the layout of the temple precinct. These shrines, which are dedicated to autochthonous deities, have become subsidiary shrines within the total temple complex, and the rituals practised in them have become one component of the total ritual system practised at the temples. These three spiritual figures—the mountain god, the three spirits, and the seven-star spirit—are all manifestations of the mountain god, a master spirit who has control of all the mountains of Korea, and who is also said to be a guise of Tan'gun 檀君, the mythical first king of Korea. These subsidiary shrines are a prime illustration in Korea of a conscious attempt made by a foreign

FIGURE 1: THE PROCESS OF RELIGIOUS ENCOUNTER:
HIGH SYNCRETISM



Core values of autochthonous religion unchanged. Elements of foreign religion absorbed.

FIGURE 2: THE PROCESS OF RELIGIOUS ENCOUNTER:
LOW SYNCRETISM



Core values of foreign religion unchanged. Only elements of autochthonous religion absorbed.

religion, Buddhism, to absorb the external forms of the indigenous religion without changing the essential character of the foreign religion.³

The reverse of "normal" syncretism—which I have referred to as Low Syncretism—is what I have termed High Syncretism. This latter form of syncretism, not often referred to as such by historians of religions, is a phenomenon widely observed by cultural anthropologists. It is, in short, the accommodation made by an indigenous

religion to the beliefs, practices, and imagery of a world religion. To cite one illustration, Gary H. Gossen, in an examination of the Roman Catholic practices of the Mayan people in a remote part of the Yucatan Peninsula, demonstrated that their current religious practices were the folk practices of a bygone era quite literally dressed up in the guise of Roman Catholicism. Names of saints, forms of rituals, and the dates for the performance of rituals, although ostensibly related to Roman Catholic usage, in reality only expressed the primal concepts of the Mayan people (GOSSEN 1972, 135-49).

We have seen another example of High Syncretism in the syncretic religions that emerged following intercultural contact between the Romans and the tribal peoples of the Roman Empire. The tribal peoples, in a state of political subjugation to the Romans, came to apply the names of various Roman deities to the gods they worshipped. A similar situation of political subjugation would have existed between the Spanish conquistadores and the Mayan people in the sixteenth century.

A third example of High Syncretism would be the Cargo Cults, especially the Christian-derived cults, which arose in New Guinea and other parts of Melanesia from the middle of the nineteenth century. In this case, unlike the two previous examples, high religious syncretism was enabled, not by conditions of political subjugation, but by conditions of perceived economic and cultural disparity.⁴

Although it is not often commented on in the literature of religious studies, there was a similar process of accommodation made by the indigenous religion of Korea to Buddhism. This process of High Syncretism must have begun at the time when Buddhism, a world missionary religion, first entered Korea. It is also my opinion that this form of High Syncretism would have occurred more or less contemporaneously with the accommodation made by Buddhism to Korean primal religion. Given conditions of geopolitical disunion in China and the relative political strength of the ancient Korean kingdoms of Koguryō 高句麗 and Paekche 百濟, the process of High Syncretism would have occurred in Korea under conditions of perceived cultural disparity rather than in a context of political subjugation. Although there is very little documentary evidence for the history of this process of high religious syncretism, nonetheless, the results of this process are obvious to the observer of the contemporary religious scene in Korea.

Perhaps the earliest evidence for reverse syncretism is a story contained in the book of ancient Korean tales, the *Samguk yusa* 三國遺事 (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms). In this story, it is

related that when a detached palace was under construction during the reign of King Chinhŭng 眞興王 (r. 540–576), a yellow dragon was discovered to be living at the bottom of a pool on the construction site. The construction of the palace was halted immediately. When construction was recommenced, the building was dedicated to the dragon but in the form of a Buddhist temple. The dedication of this shrine as the Hwangyong-sa 黃龍寺 (Temple of the Yellow Dragon) is a strong indication that by the sixth century, shrines that would have been unequivocally dedicated to indigenous spirits in a previous age were, in the new Buddhist era, disguised as Buddhist temples.⁵

I first began to recognize the existence of this “reverse syncretism” when I read Laurel Kendall’s anthropological study *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits: Women in Korean Ritual Life* (1985). In this book, Kendall mentions the close relationship between autochthonous shamanism and Buddhism. She states that the *mansin* 萬神, or shaman, and her clients “called their shrine worship Pulgyo, ‘Buddhism’” (KENDALL 1985, 84). She also remarked that the *mansin* with whom she was particularly friendly would introduce her to other people saying that Kendall was “a student of Buddhism” (KENDALL 1985, 84). I realized then that in examining the question of religious syncretism in Korea, I had been looking at it only from the aspect of the accommodation made by Buddhism to the indigenous religious practices of Korea. Kendall’s comments made me realize that there was another process, a process of reverse syncretism, in which the indigenous religion absorbed certain features of the world religion without altering its essential character.

Kendall’s book stimulated me to examine what aspects of the current Korean religious scene might reflect a process of reverse syncretism by the folk religion of Korea with foreign religions in Korea. There are numerous examples, some of which are well known, but because the difference between what I term High and Low Syncretism is not often distinguished, this remarkable process of the accommodation of folk religious practice with a missionary religion is seldom described in the literature. To exemplify what I mean by reverse syncretism, in the remainder of this study I will describe one of the major shamanistic centers in Korea, for it shows strong evidence of this process. The description will focus largely on the material aspects of the syncretic religious practice, rather than on the actual ritual aspects, which need further research.

A CASE STUDY: THE SACRED SITE AT MUK-TONG

Location and History of the Site

The principal shamanistic center for Seoul is located in the hilly, eastern section of Muak-tong 母岳洞 in Sodaemun-gu 西大門區 in western central Seoul. This area is just beyond and to the northeast of the Independence Arch 獨立門. The site of the shamanistic center is just outside the western wall of the old city of Seoul in the hilly flanks of Inwang-san 仁旺山 on the approach to the Muak Pass. The sacred buildings of the shamanistic center are built around the rim of a U-shaped valley.

It is said that when the walls for the capital of the new Chosŏn dynasty 朝鮮王朝 (1392–1910) were being laid out there was considerable discussion between two advisors to the king about whether or not a certain grouping of weird rocks should be enclosed within the walls of the new city. Chŏng Tojŏn 鄭道傳 (?–1398), the great Confucian scholar, argued that they should not be included within the boundaries of the new capital, whereas the king's religious preceptor, the monk Muhak 無學 (1327–1405), argued that they should be. Chŏng argued that because of the "superstitious practices" conducted in front of the strange rocks, it was inappropriate to enclose them within the walls of the new dynasty's capital. In the end, the king agreed with Chŏng and decided that the rocks should not be included within the city walls. This is the first known historic reference to the Sŏn pawī (Sŏn 禪 <Zen> monk rock), a tall basaltic rock group much ravaged by the elements into weird hollowed-out shapes. It is obvious from the arguments about the rock that even in the fourteenth century the Sŏn pawī was already a focal point for the practice of certain shamanistic rites. In the twentieth century, it was to become the nucleus of a major shamanistic ritual center.

The development of this sacred site around the Sŏn pawī was an unintended effect of the Japanese attempt to impose the State Shinto cult on Korea. When the Japanese colonial government decided to build the central Shinto shrine for Korea on the slopes of Nam-san 南山—the principal mountain in southern Seoul—a decision was also made to remove a shamanistic shrine on the top of the mountain that would have overlooked the site of the new Shinto shrine. This shamanistic shrine, called the Kuksa-dang 國師堂, was originally located on the site of the present octagonal pavillion that is on the top of Nam-san. In July 1925 the proprietors of the Kuksa-dang acceded to the demands of the Japanese governor-general to remove the shrine building. The Kuksa-dang was reerected below the sacred

site around the Sŏn pawī. During the interwar years, from the 1920s onwards, further private constructions were made on the slopes below the Kuksa-dang until, by the early 1960s, a village of temples and shrines had emerged. It would seem that the sacredness of the Sŏn pawī itself became a magnet that drew first the Kuksa-dang and then subsequent shrines, creating a complex, hierarchical sacred space composed of a variety of shrines and “temples.”

Description of the Site

Map 1 shows the three principal sections of the site: 1) the area around the gate that separates the entire sacred area from the profane world outside; 2) the outer sacred area comprising “temples” and shrines that have been built beneath the core area; and 3) the inner sacred area or core precinct comprising the Kuksa-dang and the Sŏn pawī. I will describe each section in turn.

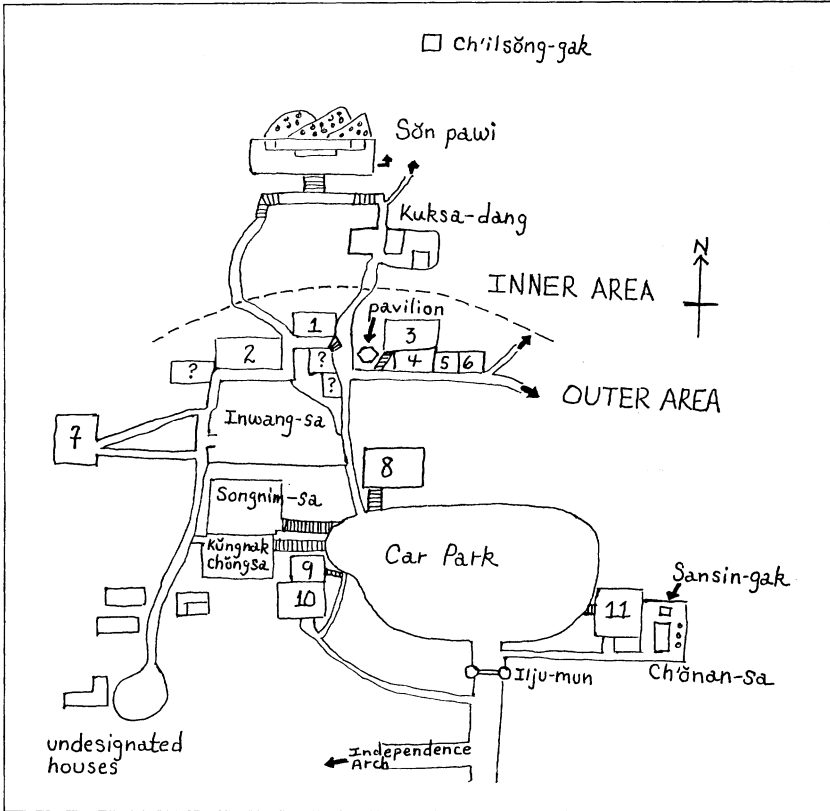
1. The Sacred Gate

Émile DURKHEIM (1912), Mircea ELIADE (1959), and other sociologists and historians of religions have made much of the distinction between the sacred and the profane. According to these authorities it is usual in the layout of a temple or shrine that there is some indication that the ground surrounding the shrine or temple is sacred, that it is “set apart.” In the folk religion of Korea a rope is used to indicate that the area is set apart, whereas in Buddhism the entrance to a temple precinct is marked off by a sacred gate called an *ilju-mun* — 柱門. The tradition of placing such gates at the entrance to Buddhist sacred precincts dates back at least to the practice of placing four gates at the four cardinal points around the stupas of Sanchi in India in the first century B.C.⁶

In the case of the sacred area of Muak-tong, the precinct is marked off by a large *ilju-mun* at the entrance to the sacred precinct. This gate has a large wooden placard on its principal crossbeam that bears the inscription “Inwang-san Inwang-sa” 仁旺山 仁王寺. The inscription on the placard follows the normal Korean Buddhist practice of giving both the name of the temple and the name of the mountain upon which it is situated.

It is important to note in the case of this temple placard that, although the words *inwang* in the name of the mountain and in the name of the temple are homophonous, they are not synonymous. Different Chinese characters with different meanings are used in the two names. The *inwang* (benevolent king) referred to in the title of the temple is the principal figure in the *Inwang-gyŏng* 仁王經 (Ch. *Renwang qing*,

MAP 1: THE SACRED SITE OF MUAK-TONG



- | | |
|--|---------------|
| 1. Inwang-sa Tae-ung-jön | 5., 6. Houses |
| 2. Inwang-sa Pogwang-jön | 7. Yönpur-am |
| 3. Songam chöngsa | 8. Sorae-am |
| 4. Shop | 9. Naksa-am |
| 10. Tae Han Pulgyo Chongt'to-jong Yongch'on-sa | |
| 11. Former "temple", new undesignated house | |

Sutra of the Benevolent King), one of the key scriptures of the esoteric schools of Buddhism that were introduced into Silla from the seventh century. This king (a guise of one of the Buddhas) promises protection to the nation that worships him with true devotion. The *Paekchwa-hoe* (百座會, Assembly of One Hundred Seats) of the Silla period was an important Buddhist ceremony dedicated to the adoration of this figure and to an explanation of the scripture dedicated to him.⁷ The appearance of the name of this figure from esoteric Buddhism, the *inwang*, on the temple name board is the visitor's first clue that shrines

within the sacred precinct do not belong to traditional, orthodox Buddhism. Mainstream monastic Buddhism in Korea is almost exclusively Sŏn Buddhism (Jap. Zen 禪), which places an emphasis on meditation for liberation and enlightenment.

2. The Outer Sacred Precinct

Within the outer sacred area there are a number of sacred structures, including 1) "temples," 2) ancillary shrines to various "temples," 3) separate shrines not designated as part of a particular "temple" complex, and 4) undesignated houses used for the performance of a *kut* (shamanistic ceremony). Until a few years ago one of the most striking features of this sacred area was the fact that none of the Buddhist "temples" claimed affiliation with any of the Buddhist orders that are legally registered with the government of the Republic of Korea. This is no longer the case, as two of the "temple" buildings now claim affiliation with two of the major Korean Buddhist denominations.

Every building that has a claim to being a "Buddhist temple" in this area has a signboard on the outer perimeter of its grounds announcing what temple it is. For example, the signboard for the Inwang-sa states in the Korean alphabet: "Tae Han Pulgyo Inwang-san Inwang-sa" (Korean Buddhism, Mount Inwang Inwang Temple). What is missing from the signboards of these "temples" is the denominational designation that appears on the placard of every orthodox temple stating its affiliation with a particular order of Buddhism. There is no such designation on the signboards of the "temples" in Muak-tong because such denominational affiliation does not exist. The "temples" are private property.

When I visited the sacred area of Muak-tong in August 1990, I noticed that there were now two temples claiming denominational affiliation with two legally registered Buddhist orders. The signboard in front of the Yongch'ŏn-sa claimed that the temple was affiliated with the Pure Land Buddhist sect. This legally constituted sect, contrary to the practice of its antecedents in China and Korea, is one of the esoteric sects of modern Korean Buddhism. A rather different case is the temple to the right of the entrance to the outer sacred area just beyond the *ilju-mun*. The signboard on the outside of the Ch'ŏnan-sa claimed that it was a member of the principal denomination of orthodox Korean Buddhism, the Chogye sect 曹溪宗.

One other feature of the "temples" in the outer sacred area is the fact that the majority of the signboards are written in the Korean alphabet rather than in Chinese characters. Consequently, although one can guess at many of the characters behind the alphabetically written

names, it is impossible to know for certain the exact designations of all of them.

There was some confusion, possibly deliberate, about the exact identification of the Inwang-sa temple mentioned on the *ilju-mun* at the entrance. There is one major complex of shrines in the outer sacred precinct that in its center has a large building designated as the *tae'ung-jön* 大雄殿, or principal shrine of a Buddhist temple. In an orthodox temple, this is the building that contains the figure of the historic Buddha, Śākyamuni. However, north of this major complex, across the alley and behind its principal shrine, is another building claiming to be the *tae'ung-jön* of the Inwang-sa. During my visit in August 1990 both of these shrines seemed to have a flourishing business.

Aside from the regular and irregular temples in the outer sacred precinct and their associated outer shrines, there were eight houses that had no signboards designating them as Buddhist temples. These buildings were houses used for the performance of shamanistic rituals. Each house had, set up in its courtyard and visible from the alleyway, a long bamboo pole that announced that this building was a place where a *kut* could be performed.

Among these undesigned buildings there was also one house that, during a previous visit of mine to this area in 1985, had been designated as a "Buddhist hermitage" and that in 1990 had no designation whatsoever. This change from a designated Buddhist structure to an undesigned building is an indication of the impermanence of some of these "Buddhist" institutions.

Among the buildings of the outer sacred precinct there are also a hexagonal pavilion providing a place of rest for visitors to the area, and a corner shop selling various household items and foods.

3. The Inner Sacred Precinct

The Kuksa-dang

Access to the Kuksa-dang⁸ is gained by leaving the outer sacred precinct and proceeding upwards through a shallow depression, passing the smaller of the two Inwang-sa *tae'ung-jön* on the left and the hexagonal pavilion on the right. Immediately before reaching the raised terrace upon which the Kuksa-dang has been reerected, there is a large tree, the limbs of which have been sawn back. On the stumps of the limbs are hung the brilliantly colored cloths that would have been used in a shamanistic ceremony. The placing of these cloths on the limbs of the tree next to the Kuksa-dang shrine is like the Korean custom of placing strips of cloth on trees or bushes just before the crest of a mountain pass. The latter act represents a pious offering to the mountain god,

petitioning him to bless the traveler's journey. In the case of the Kuksa-dang, passage beyond the venerable tree would indicate the passage from the outer to the inner sacred precinct and a wish for a safe journey.

The Kuksa-dang itself is a very old building, though whether it is as old as claimed can probably not be historically verified. It is said to date to the reign of King T'aejong 太宗 (r. 1400–1418). The shrine is known to have occupied a site on the highest part of Nam-san since at least the end of the nineteenth century until the first quarter of this century. Consequently, the Kuksa-dang is at least one hundred and twenty years old. The interior of the shrine consists of one large central room with two smaller rooms off to the left- and right-hand sides. Around the walls of the main room are hung twenty-eight different paintings. Twelve of these paintings are said to date to 1623, while the remainder date from the end of the nineteenth century. Among the figures depicted on the paintings are Ch'ŏn-sin 天神 (Spirit < Ruler > of Heaven), San-sin 山神 (Mountain God), Su-sin 水神 (Water Spirit), King T'aejo 太祖 (r. 1392–1398), founder of the Chosŏn dynasty, the monk Muhak, and the *obang changgun* 五方將軍, the guardians of the five cardinal points of the East Asian compass.

These spirits are powerful figures in the native pantheon, whose presence in the Kuksa-dang indicates a certain concern for the affairs of the nation. It is said that when the Kuksa-dang was still on Nam-san, the most powerful shamans in the nation would go there to perform rites for the protection, preservation, and prosperity of the nation. At the end of the nineteenth century, it is alleged that through the influence of Queen Min 閔妃 (1851–1895) shamanistic practices on behalf of the state were frequently performed at the shrine site on Nam-san.

The name of the Kuksa-dang may be translated as "the shrine of the national preceptor." *Kuksa* 國師 was a title accorded to certain eminent monks during the Koryŏ dynasty 高麗王朝 (926–1392) and was held by Muhak, the preceptor to the first king of Chosŏn. It is probable that the national preceptor referred to in the name of the shrine is Muhak himself. This supposition is strengthened by the presence of an ancient painting of the great monk amongst the oldest shrine paintings.⁹

Whatever the use of the Kuksa-dang may have been in the past, its present function is somewhat different. The shrine functions in many ways like a contemporary *yesik-chang* 禮式場 or wedding hall. Like the *yesik-chang*, the Kuksa-dang is a hall rented out for ceremonial purposes, in this case the performance of a *kut*. Along the back wall of the shrine is a fitted altar. In the central section, just in front of

one of the sacred pictures, there is a telephone and a box of business cards giving the address and telephone number of the Kuksa-dang. Time and space at the Kuksa-dang can be booked by a shaman for the performance of a particular rite.

The Sŏn pawī

Proceeding north from the Kuksa-dang, one climbs up a series of stairs until one comes out onto a concrete terrace with balustrades in front of the Sŏn pawī. Directly in front of this great pitted rock is a large altar, divided into three sections. The principal section is the long central altar itself. To the left- and right-hand sides of this altar are two cabinets in the shape of a tile-roofed pavilion. Inside these cabinets are sets of electric votive candles that are lit to offer perpetual prayers for the repose of various souls or to ask for a particular wish. In front of the large altar is a centrally placed, smaller altar that is the table for the incense burners. Although shamanistic, or folk religious, worship in front of strange rocks deep in the mountains is a common practice in Korea, I can think of no other example in Korea where the area around a grouping of sacred rocks has been clothed with Buddhist ritual paraphernalia.

On the right-hand side of the Sŏn pawī precinct there is a small iron gate that opens out onto a path that ascends the bare rock face of Mount Inwang. Some way up the mountain, this path leads to the final shrine of the entire sacred area, a *ch'ilsŏng-gak*—a shrine dedicated to the Spirit of the Pole Star. The picture within the shrine, however, is of the tiger, the messenger of the mountain god. This is not surprising, as it is common in Korea for the term *ch'ilsŏng-gak* to be used as an alternative name for a shrine dedicated to the mountain god.

The only other shrine dedicated to the mountain god is found on the grounds of the Ch'ŏnan-sa, the one temple that claims affiliation with the principal Korean Buddhist denomination, the Chogyŏ-jong.

Just beyond the precinct of the Kuksa-dang and within the precincts of several of the "temples," there are freshwater springs. While these springs serve the obvious purpose of providing water for thirsty hikers and attendants at the shamanistic rituals, it is also important to remember that worship of water spirits is an ancient practice in Korea. The story of the yellow dragon, whose presence in a pool of water led to the construction of the Hwangyong-sa, is one indication of the antiquity of the worship of water spirits in Korea.

4. Functions of the Shrines

All of the buildings in the inner and outer sacred precincts, whether

they are designated as Buddhist temples, hermitages, or shrines, or whether they are undesignated buildings, are known to be locations for the performance of shamanistic types of rituals. In the undesignated buildings, such as the Kuksa-dang or private homes, pure shamanistic rituals are performed. In the buildings designated as Buddhist structures, rituals are performed that are similar in format and intention to the *kut* of the undesignated buildings. The rituals performed in the buildings designated as Buddhist use Buddhistic elements. The spirits referred to in the rituals are Buddhist figures; the clothing worn by the ritual leaders is Buddhist in appearance; and many of the ritual paraphernalia and implements used in the ceremonies are similar to the ceremonial materials one would expect to see in an orthodox Buddhist temple. Prominent amongst the ritual items of all of these "temples" are Buddhist statues and paintings, which lend an air of authentic Buddhism to the shrines. Several of the orthodox Buddhist festivals, such as Buddha's Birthday, are also celebrated in these shrines.

Nonetheless, the format of the ceremonies performed in these "Buddhist" shrines, and the reasons for their performance, are comparable to the rituals performed in the undesignated buildings. It is for this reason that one can be justified in saying that all of these shrines and the rituals performed in them are collectively an example of syncretic shamanism, a product of the accommodation made by the indigenous religion of Korea to Buddhism.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

From observation of the layout of the sacred ritual area at Muak-tong and of its component structures, one may draw the following conclusions:

- 1) that the sanctity of the Sŏn pawŭ acted as a magnet that initially drew around itself the relocated Kuksa-dang and later a host of ritual structures originally unrelated to either the sacred rocks or the Kuksa-dang;
- 2) that there is a clearly differentiated, hierarchical layout of sacred space in the area around the Sŏn pawŭ, consisting of two areas: an inner sacred precinct encompassing the sacred rocks and the Kuksa-dang; and an outer sacred precinct comprising various "Buddhist" temples and undesignated shamanistic houses;
- 3) that, although the rituals, implements, and decor of the Kuksa-dang are characteristic of pure Korean shamanism, the superficial appearance of the paraphernalia in front of the Sŏn pawŭ is Buddhistic, indicating a Buddhist sacralization of even the most sacred

of the shamanistic ritual precincts;

4) that the predominant feature of the outer sacred precinct is the large number of "Buddhist" temples and ancillary shrines, even though there are also several undesignated buildings that are the venue for pure Korean shamanistic rituals;

5) that the rituals practised in front of the Sŏn pawi, in the Kuksa-dang, and in the various "Buddhist" temples and undesignated shamanistic houses, are wholly shamanistic in character, form, and purpose regardless of differences in superficial, external appearances; and

6) that the entire ritual area at Muak-tong is set apart as a sacred area, not by a rope (as in Korean folk tradition), but by an *ilju-mun*, a sacred practice clearly borrowed from Buddhism.

All of these points taken collectively would indicate that there has been a process of reverse syncretism in an area of high sanctity to indigenous Korean shamanism, the effect of which has been to clothe the entire sacred area around the Sŏn pawi in a Buddhist guise. Although this process of reverse syncretism in Muak-tong took place in the twentieth century, stories in the *Samguk yusa* would indicate that there is a precedent in Korea for this phenomenon as far back as the sixth century. The author believes that it is important that historians of religions, folklorists, and cultural anthropologists consider the question of reverse syncretism as an important element in studying the diffusion of culture and religion. In the case of Korea, further study of the rituals practised in "Buddhist" temples, such as those at Muak-tong, is important to show the degree to which certain practices have become "Buddhized."

NOTES

1. A good history and discussion of the consciously contrived syncretism of the prophet Mani may be found in GNOLI 1987.

2. The Tendai sect had a similar concept called Sannō Ichijitsu. For a discussion of this phenomenon, see KITAGAWA 1966, 68. For a fuller discussion of the process of syncretism in Japanese Buddhism, see KAMSTRA 1967.

3. The process whereby the cult of the mountain god was absorbed into the cultic practices taking place within Buddhist temple precincts must have begun sometime in the seventh century, as it was during that period that the major mountain ranges in Korea were given their present Buddhist-style names. See GRAYSON 1989, 53. A fuller treatment of the process of Buddhist syncretism in Korea may be found in my earlier work, GRAYSON 1985. See especially chapter 2.

4. Discussions of the history and anthropological interpretations of the Cargo Cults may be found in KAMMA 1972, STEINBAUER 1979, and WORSLEY 1957. In ana-

lyzing the phenomena of the Cargo Cults, distinctions must be made between cults that arose in areas under direct European colonial rule, and those that emerged in areas outside colonial domination.

5. This story and others related to the Hwangyong-sa may be found in an English version of the *Samguk yusa* in ILYON 1972. An extensive discussion of the Hwangyong-sa may be found in McCLUNG 1978.

6. For a description and discussion of the great monument complex at Sanchi, see LEE 1964, 84–86. A discussion of the diffusion of the sacred gate of Buddhism from India to East Asia may be found in KAIL 1975, 17–18.

7. A thorough discussion of this trend may be found in LEE 1969, 14–16.

8. A description of this shrine and its setting may be found in CLARK and GRAYSON 1986, 185–87.

9. This claim was first made in an article by the missionary scholar James Scarth Gale (1863–1937). See GALE 1902.

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