

Timeline of Notable Developments and People in Korean Buddhist History

THE THREE KINGDOMS AND KAYA CONFEDERACY PERIOD (18 BCE-688 CE)

- Koguryo (37 BCE-668 CE)
 - First awareness of Buddhism probably arrives from Central Asia sometime before 372
 - Koguryo Court formally imports Buddhism from Former Qin China (372)
- Paekche (18 BCE-660 CE)
 - Paekche officially adopts Buddhism (384)
 - Paekche becomes major transmitter of Chinese Buddhism, culture, and technology to Kyushu, Japan
- Silla (57 BCE-668 CE)
 - Silla formally adopts Buddhism (527)
- Kaya Confederacy (42-532/562 CE)
 - Also a major exporter of things Chinese and Buddhist to Kyushu, Japan

UNIFIED SILLA AND THE NORTH-SOUTH STATES* (668-918/936)

- Maitreya Bodhisattva (*Miruk-bosal*) cult gains lasting popularity at all levels of society
- Korean Buddhism splits into 5 doctrinal schools; Hwaom (Ch. Huayan, Sk. Avatamsaka) becomes and remains dominant doctrinal school
- Wonhyo (617-686)
- Uisang (625-702)
- Son (C. Chan, J. Zen, V. Thien) and Ch'on-t'ae (C. Tiantai, J. Tendai) arrive in Korea
- Silla, at its cultural peak, constructs [Sokkuram](#) Grotto and [Bulguksa](#) Monastery (751)
- Son is organized into "Nine Mountains"
- Korean Buddhism becomes divided between textual study (*kyo*) and practice (*son*) schools

*This period is politically messier than the classic "Unified Silla" chronology lets on because it includes the kingdom of Palhae in northern Korea and Manchuria, as well as "Later Paekche" in the southwest and "Later Koguryo" in the northwest.

KORYO (918/936-1392)

- Buddhism reaches its apogee of power and prestige in Korea
- Government institutes examinations for Buddhist monastics
- Number of large, wealthy, and powerful monasteries with extensive land holdings and many serfs
- Uich'on (1055-1101)
- Chinul (*Bojoguksa*) (1158-1210)
- Restrictions put on monastic involvement in secular affairs (12th century)
- Mongol invasions begin 1231
- Koryo completes the second *Tripitaka Koreana* (Preserved today at Haein-sa monastery), the most comprehensive and oldest intact version of the Buddhist canon in Chinese script (1251) and basis of the Japanese *Taisho Tripitaka*, the definitive modern edition of the Chinese Buddhist Canon
- T'aego (1301-1382)
- Most major characteristics of Korean Buddhism have been set

CHOSON (YI DYNASTY) (1392-1910)

- Neo-Confucianism replaces Buddhism as state ideology
- Buddhism is stigmatized and severely restricted; monastic lands and serfs are confiscated; monastics are limited to countryside and mountains, not allowed to enter the capital, and reclassified at lowest level of society

- King Sejong the Great (1419-1450) consolidates Buddhism into two schools: (1) Son and Ch'on-'tae, (2) Hwaom and 3 other doctrinal schools
- Korea is plagued by invasions from Manchus and Japanese (under Toyotomi Hideyoshi in 1592)
- Monks form defensive militias
- Christianity appears: some knowledge of Catholicism in 1603 with introduction in 1785, Presbyterian Protestantism is introduced in 1884
- Son has some revival in the late 19th century due to masters Kyong Ho (1849-1907) and Man Gong (1872-1946), who teach monks, nuns, and lay people. One of 25 Dharma heirs, Mansong, founds the most respected Buddhist nunnery in Korea: T'aesong-am near Pusan.

JAPANESE COLONIAL PERIOD — 1910-1945

- Japanese try to establish State Shinto also use Buddhism to influence public opinion; Nichiren-shu and Jodoshin-shu sects proselytize in Korea
- Japanese try unsuccessfully to absorb Korean sects into Soto Zen and then Pure Land
- Won Buddhism is founded (1916)
- Monks increasingly involved in anti-Japanese activities
- Japanese encourage monks to end celibacy and adopt Japanese model of married clergy; government forces monasteries to eliminate rules requiring celibacy in 1926, but some rural monks remain celibate
- Son and Kyo sects overcome differences and unite in Chogye Order in 1935

KOREAN WAR, DIVISION, AND INDEPENDENCE — 1945-PRESENT

- **North Korea:** Very little known, an official temple in Pyongyang
- **South Korea (Republic of Korea, ROK):**
 - After 1954 Korean War armistice, celibate rural monks regain control of most monasteries, and married clergy form T'aego Order with fewer monasteries
 - In addition to Chogye Order, T'aego Order, and Won Buddhism, 15 other small orders, almost all of which have married clergy
 - Korean nuns have 2 independent orders; nuns more prominent and will probably become majority of clergy
 - Monastics and lay practitioners learning about other forms of Buddhism, esp. Theravada, Insight meditation, and the Tibetan traditions; considerable international travel
 - Unified annual ordination is controlled by government regulations; a high school diploma is required; more monastics getting higher education; Buddhist university in Seoul: Dongguk University
 - Buddhists proselytizing at home and abroad, e.g., Seung Sahn and Kwan Um Zen School with 50 worldwide centers
 - An increasing number of people identifying with Buddhism, but numbers lag far behind those of Christians, who have powerful political support
 - "Sunday" schools, Han'gul (Korean alphabet) Tripitaka, computerized Tripitaka, more monastics in social services, esp. nuns counseling prisoners, running homes for aged, hosting radio shows, and doing other social work
 - Problems:
 - Chogye Order's wealth and power have led to charges of financial and political corruption
 - Challenge of South Korea's modernization (industrialization and urbanization), secularization, and technological sophistication
 - Christian persecution: The incessant fundamentalist and evangelical Protestant hostility toward Buddhism has increased in recent years with continued vandalizing of Buddhist temples and other properties

Main Sources: Wikipedia | Buswell, Robert, Jr. *Turning Back the Radiance: Chinul's Korean Way of Zen*. | Mu Seong Sunim. *Thousand Peaks: Korean Zen—Tradition and Teachers*. | Robinson, Richard H., Willard L. Johnson, Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Buddhist Religions: A Historical Introduction*, 5th ed.