

Article

A Critical Examination of Research on the Legacy of Daehaeng

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Abstract: Over recent decades, Venerable Daehaeng has increasingly become a subject of academic research, much of which has been sponsored by her own followers in an effort to reinforce the legitimacy of her teachings and her authenticity as a Korean *seon* master. Nevertheless, since her passing several controversies have arisen with critics charging that Daehaeng's teaching fall outside of Korean Buddhist orthodoxy. Given the ongoing and often contentious debate over Daehaeng's identity as Buddhist master, this article scrutinizes these recent controversies along with the current trends in academic research surrounding both Daehaeng and the Hanmaum Seonwon. It then identifies critical questions within this growing field of Daehaeng studies and suggests directions worthy of research exploration.

Keywords: Daehaeng; Hanmaum Seonwon; Jogye Order; Korean Buddhism; *seon* (zen)



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1. Introduction

Described by Buddhist studies scholar and former monk Robert Buswell as “one of the most renowned and respected figures” in modern Korean Buddhism and “one of the most influential nuns” in the whole of Korean history (Buswell 2007, p. IX), Zen Master Daehaeng (1927–2012, hereafter “Daehaeng”) has shaped contemporary Korean Buddhism possibly more than any other single modern Buddhist figure. Growing up in extreme hardship and rural isolation, Daehaeng wandered South Korea's mountains as a solitary ascetic for a decade before beginning her half-century-long public ministry, first as a healer, then as a teacher, and finally as a leader of one of the country's largest Buddhist institutions. Founded in 1972 as South Korea's first post-war urban Buddhist center catering to the laity, over the span of 40 years, Daehaeng's *Hanmaum Seonwon* or “One Mind Zen Center” (hereafter OMZC) would grow to over 150,000 members with 15 branches around the country and 9 abroad. The OMZC owes its unprecedented success not only to Daehaeng's charismatic personality, but also to her innovations in teaching, organizing, and leading her growing number of lay disciples. Through such innovations Daehaeng inadvertently overturned the narrow roles traditionally accorded to Buddhist laity in Korea and successfully reached a wide spectrum of society, including demographics largely ignored by mainstream Korean Buddhist temples. Over the subsequent decades, Daehaeng's innovations would permeate Korean Buddhism, cementing her legacy as a trend-setter and visionary who redefined Buddhist practice for the nation's modern, urban laity.

Nevertheless, due to her unconventional biography and modern innovations, Daehaeng's identity within the mainstream of Korean Buddhist tradition remains ambiguous. Although recognized as a respected *seon* (J. zen) master within Korea's Jogye Order (K. *Daehan Bulgyo Jogyejong*, hereafter “JO” or “the order”), the nation's largest Buddhist order, her spiritual biography and innovative teachings arguably share more commonalities with those of the founders of Korea's “new religions” (K. *sinheung jonggyo*) than with more conventional masters within patriarchal *seon* tradition so valued by the order. Over recent decades, Daehaeng has increasingly become a subject of academic research, much of which is sponsored by Daehaeng's own followers in an effort to reinforce the legitimacy of her

teachings and her authenticity as a Korean *seon* master. Nevertheless, since her passing, several controversies have arisen with critics charging that Daehaeng's teaching falls outside of Korean Buddhist orthodoxy. Given the ongoing and often contentious debate over Daehaeng's identity as a Buddhist master, this paper will survey these recent controversies along with current trends in academic research surrounding both Daehaeng and the OMZC. It will then identify critical questions within this growing field of Daehaeng studies and suggest directions worthy of research exploration. First, however, it will review the historical context of Daehaeng's ministry, her unusual biography, and her many contributions to modern Korean Buddhism to better inform the discussion that follows.

2. Daehaeng's Biography

2.1. Daehaeng's Early Life

Daehaeng's importance as a Buddhist teacher and innovator can be best understood within the context of her own life story. Described by Korean Buddhist Studies scholar Pori Park as a "self-made nun who had neither impressive formal schooling nor went through the usual regime of monastic training" (Park 2017, p. 420), Daehaeng's dramatic life story has been a major contributing factor in her lasting popularity. The daughter of a former Joseon government official, Daehaeng was born in 1927 into a wealthy aristocratic family. However, at the age of six, her family fled Seoul to the mountains to escape arrest by the Japanese secret police. Here, Daehaeng endured not only extreme poverty but also the abuse of her embittered father and the young child took to wandering the surrounding forest for days and nights on end to "escape her father's wrath" (http://www.hanmaum.org/eng/biography_early.html accessed on 17 July 2021). After two years of extreme deprivation, exposure, and neglect, one night her fear of sleeping alone in the mountains faded. Instead, the forest became "comfortable, warm and beautiful" and she experienced the voice of a "warm and wonderful" presence within. She named this presence *appa*, or "daddy", and emotionally relied on *appa* completely while living alone in the wild. At 18, while gazing into the mirror, Daehaeng realized that the voice of *appa* came from within her own mind. Even later, still as a Buddhist nun, Daehaeng would recognize *appa* as a manifestation of her own inner Buddha-nature (Sk. *Buddhadhātu*), which she described to her students as their inner *juingong*, or "master who is void" (Daehaeng 2007, pp. xiv–xv, 91–92; Daehaeng 2014, pp. 157–58).

Following Korea's liberation at the end of WWII, Daehaeng's inner voice led her to the ancient temple at Mt. Odaesan where she ordained as a postulant (K. *haengja*) under the renowned Korean Zen Master Hanam, who soon regarded Daehaeng as a "favored student" (Yi 2019, p. 232). However, the young nun-in-training shunned the routine and formal practice of the monastery and, instead, headed into the neighboring forests for intensive periods of meditation as in her youth. In 1950, Daehaeng formally ordained as a novice (K. *samini*) and, with the onset of the Korean War and Master Hanam's passing, Daehaeng moved to Busan where she personally witnessed the chaos and suffering caused by the war. Deeply troubled, Daehaeng vowed to practice harder and returned to an ascetic life wandering alone among the wilds of Korea's mountains (Daehaeng 2007, pp. xvi–xvii). Suffering "hunger, severe weather and lack of shelter", she often appeared like "a ghost or crazy person with ragged clothes and a body of skin and bones". Yet, Daehaeng felt little pain, focusing on discovering "her true nature" and gaining "an understanding of truth" from all she encountered. During this extended period of extreme asceticism, Daehaeng experienced a series of awakenings. During the last, she became surrounded by a "huge brightness" extending "in all directions" which "filled her with indescribable fulfillment and comfort". The experience left her in a permanent state of oneness with the universe along with the reputed ability to communicate with wild animals, ghosts, and spirits. Soon after, she began experimenting "with using the power of mind to cure diseases" and allegedly performed her first miracle by curing a woman of an epileptic fit (Daehaeng 1993, pp. 17–134; Park 2017, p. 421).

2.2. Daehaeng's Public Ministry and Founding of the OMZC

After nearly a decade of wandering, Daehaeng settled in a hut outside Sangwonsa Temple and, in 1961, received her full *biguni* ordination under Master Hanam's fellow students, Ven. Ujin and the renowned monastic scholar Ven. Tanho (Yi 2019, p. 232). Over the 1960s, her fame as a healer slowly spread, with Daehaeng purportedly curing cases of "tuberculosis, polio, palsy, leukemia, liver cancer, stomach cancer, mental illness and more", and she was soon receiving hundreds of visitors each day. However, unlike traditional Korean shamans (K. *mansin*), Daehaeng attributed her healing power to the "one mind" (K. *hanmaum* or *ilsim*) of the universal Buddha-nature within all beings. Realizing that her visitors' suffering was never-ending, Daehaeng began teaching them how to find their own solutions by discovering their own *juingong* within (Daehaeng 2007, p. xviii).

Those helped by Daehaeng left gifts of food, money, and materials, which funded much-needed repairs to her temple. However, in 1964, Daehaeng left her hermitage and moved to Wonju, a nearby city, to become more accessible to the public. Then, in 1972, Daehaeng moved again to Anyang, a suburb south of Seoul, and established the Korean Buddhist Center (K. *Daehan Bulgyo Hoegwan*) to accommodate more people (Park 2017, p. 427). Despite iconoclastic tendencies within her early teachings and practices at the center, Daehaeng chose to reaffirm her connection with the Jogye Order in the 1980s, identifying her center with the mainstream of Korean Buddhist tradition. With the encouragement of Ven. Tanho, Daehaeng restored her *bhiksuni* ordination in 1981, recovering her lost monastic registration with the order, and renamed her center the *Hanmaum Seonwon*, or "One Mind Zen Center", the following year. She started delivering Dharma talks to the public in 1984 and, beginning in 1986, her lectures were recorded and distributed on video tape, contributing to the spread of her teachings. Since the 1980s, the OMZC has expanded to 15 branches around the country and 9 more abroad, all supported by local members of the center. In 2001, Daehaeng retired from public speaking, with OMZC branches playing video recordings of her earlier talks at meetings—a practice which has continued since her passing in 2012 (Park 2017, pp. 426–27). At the time of her death, Daehaeng had almost 200 ordained disciples, approximately 50 of whom were monks, and 150,000 lay devotees registered with the OMZC—a testament to the "impressive growth" of OMZC under her leadership (Yi 2019, p. 231).

2.3. Daehaeng's Legacy of Innovation

Possibly more than any other contemporary Zen master, Daehaeng has shaped the public face of modern Korean Buddhism through her innovative teaching style and her pioneering lay outreach through the OMZC. By redefining the traditional role of Korea's lay Buddhists and working to address the suffering experienced in their daily lives, Daehaeng implemented numerous innovations in Dharma propagation, successfully reaching "a wide range of people, many of whom previously had little or no interest in Buddhism" (Chong Go 2010, p. 227). In doing so, Daehaeng helped launch wide-reaching trends within the Korean Buddhist community involving, not only teaching methodologies and practice, but also modern temple organization and missionary outreach.

As described by Robert Buswell, Daehaeng's teaching methods were "disarmingly simple yet remarkably profound" (Buswell 2007, p. X). Daehaeng would become the first post-war Korean master to popularize traditional Zen teachings and practices among the laity through her use of vernacular Korean and her emphasis on learning from one's own direct experience in daily life. Rather than prescribing formal *Ganhwa Seon* meditation, as practiced by career "meditation monks" on lengthy monastery retreats, Daehaeng taught her predominantly lay audience the practice of *gwan*, or "observing", meditation involving maintaining a constant awareness of our inner Buddha-nature within the "currents" of daily life. Pori Park describes this practice as similar to *vipassanā*. (Park 2017, p. 423; Chae Young Kim attempts a religious and psychological approach to Daehaeng's teachings. On this topic, see Kim 2019, 2021). Korean scholar Hyangsoon Yi additionally attributes Daehaeng's broad appeal, in part, to her "simple and lucid" teachings, "colloquial style",

and her reliance on “mundane” figures of speech instead of “obtuse jargon” derived from literary Chinese. This is exemplified by Daehaeng’s use of the vernacular Korean term *hanmaum*, as a translation of “one mind”, as opposed to the more traditional Sino-Korean term *ilsim* (Yi 2019, pp. 232–33), as well as her frequent use of the vernacular term *juingong* to encapsulate the often difficult-to-convey Mahayana teachings “emptiness” (Sk. *Śūnyatā*) and Buddha-nature (Sk. *Tathāgatagarbha*). Pori Park also notes that Daehaeng taught her lay followers not to “seek Buddhism apart from daily life”, giving them “easy and concrete solutions to their problems” though the “simple act of letting go” and trusting their inner *juingong* (Park 2017, pp. 424–25), with her “simple” and “colloquial” teaching style echoing that of legendary Zen masters and even Shakyamuni Buddha himself. Buddhist monk and translator Chong Go, an American disciple of Daehaeng, describes Daehaeng’s teachings as “accessible to nearly everyone and easy to put into practice” (Chong Go 2010, p. 241).

Daehaeng’s innovations using the Korean language went even further. Although the Buddhist scriptures had been translated into Korean from even the 15th century and through the modern period, Korean Buddhist temples used Classical Chinese scriptures to carry out Buddhist rituals until the 1980s. In the 1970s, the OMZC began translating key Mahayana ritual texts in Korea, such as the *Heart Sutra* (Sk. *Prajñāhṛdaya Sūtra*, K. *Banya Simgyeong*) and *Thousand Hands Sutra* (K. *Cheonsugyeong*), from Classical Chinese (K. hanja) into vernacular written in the Korean alphabet (K. *hangeul*) (Yi 2019, p. 233) for use in the center’s Dharma services. These Buddhist scriptures had been recited in Classical Chinese until then, but Daehaeng translated them into Korean and actively used them in Buddhist rituals. The center’s translations were finally published in 1987, followed by a translation of the *Diamond Sutra* (Sk. *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, K. *Geumgang gyeong*) in 1990. Joining other modern and Joseon-era efforts to translate key Buddhist scriptures into *hangeul*, the OMZC’s translations helped lay followers to understand what they recite in the Dharma services or ceremonies, which Yi describes as demonstrating Daehaeng’s “egalitarian and innovative attitude” (Yi 2019, p. 233). Consequently, as both the *Heart Sutra* and *Thousand Hands Sutra* are regularly chanted in temple ceremonies, Daehaeng’s translations transformed the chants from archaic and often unintelligible Sino-Korean syllables into a language understood by all (Park 2017, p. 429) and, beginning in the late 1970s, the OMZC became one of the first Korean temples to conduct chanting in vernacular Korean. (See Chong Go 2016 for further discussion). Echoing the success met by turn-of-the-century Protestant missionaries in translating the Christian Bible into *hangeul*, Daehaeng joined other pioneering translators in recognizing the desire among modern lay Buddhists to be able to read for themselves the texts central to the Korean Buddhist tradition.

One of Daehaeng’s more distinctive pedagogical innovations was her composition of original hymns, named *Seonbeopga* (K. 선법가), often sung by OMZC choir groups. With lyrics drawn from Daehaeng’s own poetry and lectures, Daehaeng’s *Seonbeopga* encourage her disciples to “entrust everything to the *juingong*” through simple and repetitive lyrics. However, unlike *chanbulga*, the devotional hymns traditionally sung at Buddhist temples praising the Buddha, *Seonbeopga* focus on the universal one mind within all. Emphasizing “self-reliant practice”, these songs were also intended to be utilized by her disciples in their daily *gwan* meditation. *Seonbeopga* soon became a regular part of OMZC services and their public performances by OMZC choirs soon became an integral part of the center’s proselytizing and fund-raising efforts (Park 2017, p. 429; Yoon 2021, pp. 193–242).

Through the OMZC, Daehaeng launched further innovations in Buddhist religious organization, lay outreach, and media that would be widely adopted through Korea’s Buddhist community over the coming decades. In fact, Pori Park describes the OMZC as a “pioneer in urban (Buddhist) propagation” which set “an example in creating a new urban Buddhist practice”, and praises Daehaeng as a “visionary in operating such a massive institution” (Park 2017, pp. 427–28). Although urban *pogyodang*, or propagation centers, were introduced during the Colonial Period (1910–1945) (for more details on *pogyodang*, see Nathan 2018), Daehaeng was among the first post-war Buddhist masters to establish

urban Dharma centers specifically serving the Korean laity. The OMZC would grow to become one of the foremost urban “mega temples” in the country and was soon followed by the opening of other urban *pogyodang*, including Bulgwang Temple (*Bulgwangsa*, 불광사) in 1974, Seokwang Temple (*Seokwangsa*, 석왕사) in 1976, Neungin Seowon (능인선원) in 1984, Tongdosa Seoul Missionary Hall (*Tongdosa Seoul Pogyodang*, 통도사 서울 포교당) in 1985, and a Pure Land Assembly (*Jeongtohoe*, 정토회) in 1988. These urban Buddhist centers differed from traditional Buddhist temples, not only in their appearance, but also in their mission of providing Buddhist education, services, and cultural events to the laity (Cho 2006, pp. 241–73). Although inspired by the urban proliferation of Evangelical churches in Korea in the 1960s and 1970s, Daehaeng’s launching of the OMZC in 1972 was even more remarkable considering that JO’s monastic establishment at the time was preoccupied with redeveloping its rural monasteries and temples. As described by Hyangsoon Yi, OMZC’s focus on urban mission work suggests “a fresh, new direction for the reclusive ‘mountain’ monasticism that has long dominated Korean Buddhism” (Yi 2019, p. 231).

A further organizational innovation of Daehaeng’s was to expand OMZC’s outreach to groups excluded from lay activities at traditional temples, which were largely patronized by Korean housewives—a situation derisively termed *chima Bulgyo*, or “skirt Buddhism”. Chong Go observes that, even now, the only laity visibly active at most Korean temples are “middle-aged and elderly women; there are very few laymen, and almost no teenagers” (Chong Go 2010, p. 228). According to Pori Park, Daehaeng, instead, had “unique interest in organizing men and young adults” (Park 2017, p. 428) and in 1990, the OMZC formed the Dharma Brother Association (K. *Beophyeongje hoe*) with the mission of promoting Buddhist practices among Korean “heads of household” in hopes of contributing “to family happiness”. The first contemporary Buddhist group of its kind, Daehaeng delivered a special monthly Dharma talk to the association. The OMZC’s men’s outreach was so successful that men soon comprised over 40% of the center’s lay membership and approximately one third of her ordained disciples were male—an accomplishment even more remarkable for Daehaeng’s leadership as a woman operating within a traditionally patriarchal religious culture (Park 2017, p. 428).

The OMZC’s lay outreach was not limited to men, however. Complementing the Dharma Brother Association, the center operated the “Local Buddhist Group” (K. *Jiyeksinhaeng hoe*) for women which similarly organized the center’s women into small groups based on region and profession, providing previously unavailable opportunities for urban Buddhist women to find spiritual community. Pori Park notes that Daehaeng “also paid special attention” to “young adults, children and students” to whom she also gave special monthly Dharma talks, believing that “through spiritual cultivation”, they would be “groomed to be confident and prepared leaders” (Park 2017, p. 428). The OMZC’s Youth Group (K. *Cheongnyan hoe*) organizes young people to practice Buddhist teaching through volunteer work and also plays a key role in designing and constructing ornate lanterns for annual Korean Buddhist festivals, like Buddha’s Birthday and Korea’s Annual Lotus Lantern Festival. The OMZC additionally operates a Students’ Association (K. *Haksaeng hoe*) and Children’s Association (K. *Eorini hoe*) to promote independence and Buddhist values among the young children of its laity through age-appropriate religious education and activities. By actively engaging demographics ignored by traditional Buddhist temples and organizing its lay memberships into associations, the OMZC successfully “drew people from all walks of life” (Park 2017, p. 428) and the center’s laymen’s and youth organizations became some of the “largest and most active” of any temple in Korea (Chong Go 2010, p. 228).

Although many of the organizational and outreach methods pioneered by the OMZC were already popular among Korean Protestant churches, Daehaeng’s innovations arose organically as she continually sought the most effective “expedient means” (Sk. *upāya-kauśalya*) to alleviate the suffering of the growing number of people who came to her for aid. As Daehaeng stated in a 1996 interview with the *Joseon Ilbo* the biggest newspaper in Korea, “Everyone is suffering, but they do not know that the way to solve it is to find

themselves truly . . . Believers often say I solve their difficulties, but I just lead them to solve themselves". (Joseon Ilbo 30 August 1996).

Daehaeng's half-century-long career as a Buddhist leader began in the 1960s—a time when South Korean society was under-going rapid change. Still recovering from post-war poverty, the nation was beginning its transition from a rural, agrarian society to an increasingly urban, industrialized one. Meanwhile, Korean Protestantism (K. *gidokgyo*) was experiencing exponential growth, expanding from just 100,000 believers at the start of the 1960s to almost 10 million by the 1980s. However, Korean Buddhism at the time was still struggling to overcome post-war poverty, lingering sectarian conflict, and rural isolation and, through the 1970s, its attention remained fixed on restoring its rural temples. Ill-equipped to address the challenges posed by increasing urbanization and religious competition, the JO left its lay supporters, largely uneducated housewives, to continue their traditional practice of *gibok Bulgyo*.

As a "self-made nun" with little formal monastic training, Daehaeng had little invested in maintaining the monastic traditions, hierarchies, and institutions, even if she eventually chose to rejoin the Jogye Order. This gave her the freedom to experiment with finding the most effective methods of teaching, leading, and organizing her growing body of predominantly lay disciples. By providing the laity with clear and accessible teachings, simple meditation practices, and supportive social organizations, Daehaeng inadvertently overturned the limited, subservient roles traditionally accorded to Korea's lay Buddhists. In placing the emotional, social, and spiritual needs of the laity at the forefront of OMZC's core mission, the center saw growth unparalleled by any modern Buddhist organization in Korea. Nevertheless, since Daehaeng's passing in 2012, the OMZC's innovations have largely ceased. Without the creative and charismatic leadership of their founder, the center's activities have remained fixed on propagating Daehaeng's teachings and preserving her memory, resulting in stagnation in the center's growth.

3. Academic Research and Controversy

Over recent decades Daehaeng and the OMZC have become growing subjects of academic research, much of which has been sponsored by the OMZC itself. In fact, the academic examination of Daehaeng's teachings began in the 1990s at Daehaeng's own behest with establishing the Hanmaeum Institute of Psychological Science in December 1996. Renamed as the Hanmaum Science Institute (*Hanmaum Gwahagwon*, 한마음과학원, or HanSI hereafter "the institute") in 2001, the institute is a nonprofit research institution which, according to its website (<http://www.hansi.org/introduce/vision.do> accessed on 6 June 2021) "conducts research that proves the principle of one mind, in which the physical world and the spiritual world are undivided, in various specialized fields" in order to disseminate "these principles and research results". Founded by over 100 university professors and "experts in each field, including humanities, society, nature, engineering, medicine, and education", the institute held its first academic conference in June 1997. Over the subsequent decades, the activities of the institute have been prolific, exploring the relationship between Daehaeng's conception of "one mind" and various contemporary fields of academic study. The institute has continued to sponsor a variety of activities including monthly seminars, newsletters, conferences, retreats, and youth education, holding its fifth conference, titled "The Concept of Agency and Contemporary Society", in October 2020.

Through the institute's work, Daehaeng hoped to promote a future where the mental and physical realms develop in harmony. In a talk given to the institute's third conference in 30 July 2000, Daehaeng stated that "study(ing) together like this is to cultivate our minds. We must make a thorough effort to research and practice to develop ourselves. It is not a religious event, it is the institute for research, so the ritual should be simple and just devoted to research. If the purpose was just to be religious, there would be no need to make this institute like this and study it . . . Most scientists believe and study that only the

material world exists, but in the future, they will have to study the mental and material worlds together”.

The institute’s work is not without critics, however. In 2014, a controversy arose over a strongly worded article published on a Korean Buddhist website, Bulgyodatcom, by a Pohang University of Science and Technology mathematics professor Byunggyun Kang. Kang criticized Daehaeng’s lack of formal education, charging that she held a faulty understanding of science, despite her frequent use of the terms “science” and “scientific” in her lectures. He additionally alleged that Daehaeng misunderstood the theory of evolution, leading to her teaching “bizarre biology” and further mocked Daehaeng’s claims that the *juingong* could cure disease, stating that, if that were true, it would be a “disaster” for the medical community. He further charged that Daehaeng’s concept of *juingong* was not authentically Buddhist, as it violated the doctrine of “no-self” (Sk. *anātman*) and was a mixture of Hindu and Christian spirituality. His article concluded that Daehaeng’s teachings had produced fanatical disciples who failed to question Daehaeng’s scientific misconceptions and errors (Kang 2014).

Kang’s article provoked strong reactions from Daehaeng’s followers, who replied that not only had Kang’s article misrepresented Daehaeng’s teachings, but that Kang himself demonstrated a misunderstanding of Buddhist basic doctrines and was apparently unaware of current research in biology, genetics, quantum physics, and psychology (Yongwoon 2014; Ha 2014; Hanmaum 2018). Regardless of the validity of Kang’s criticisms, the controversy highlights the need for the OMZC to better clarify their position on Daehaeng’s references to various scientific theories in their publications.

To further defend Daehaeng’s legitimacy as Korean *seon* master, in 2016, Daehaeng’s disciples launched the Center for Daehaeng-Seon Studies (*Daehaengseon Yeon’guwon*, 대행선연구원, hereafter “the center”) with the mission of organizing their master’s teaching and incorporating them into the mainstream of Korean Buddhism. The center additionally works to promote Daehaeng’s teaching to the general public by disseminating clear and simple distillations of Daehaeng-*seon*. Despite the center’s work, however, controversies over Daehaeng’s legitimacy have continued. In 2017, Jeyeol Lee, the director of the Buddhist Scripture Institute (*Bulgyo Gyeongjeon Yeon’guso*, 불교경전연구소) authored an article criticizing the center’s research, charging that it is academically rationalized teachings that are, in fact, based on faulty logic and non-academic understanding. Although Lee expressed high regard for Daehaeng’s character, he nevertheless claimed that her teachings were derived from a flawed understanding of Buddhism and that her principle of *juingong* should be regarded as “absolute delusion” (Lee 2017; further discussion of the doctrinal validity of Daehaeng’s teaching of *juingong* is beyond the scope of this article. The author plans to address this issue in further detail in a subsequent paper).

Redoubling its mission, in 2018, the center began holding regular academic conferences and launched the peer-reviewed *Journal of Hanmaum Studies* (*Hanmaum Yeon’gu*, 한마음연구) published semiannually. As of 2021, six volumes have been published containing 45 articles largely focusing on various aspects of Daehaeng’s teachings and life, written by scholars in various stages of their careers. Over half of these articles, 24 in total, analyze Daehaeng’s teachings and their relationship to mainstream Buddhist traditions. Notable examples include Soryung Park’s discussion of the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith* as a basis for Daehaeng’s teaching of “one mind (*ilsim*, 일심)” (Park 2018, pp. 132–72), Jiyeon Oh’s comparison of Daehaeng’s teachings to those of Cheontae Buddhism, the Korean branch of Tiantai Buddhism centering on the teachings of the Lotus Sutra (Oh 2019, pp. 71–119), and Junyoung Jeong’s examining the relationship between Daehaeng’s teaching and the Early Buddhist teachings of the “Middle Way” and “Three Trainings” (Jeong 2019, pp. 9–69). A further six articles in the journal adopted an interdisciplinary approach, discussing the relevance of Daehaeng’s teachings to various fields, including education (by Kim, Youngrae in vol. 4 February 2020), cultural therapy (by Kim, Eungchul in vol. 3 August 2019), and democracy (by Jung, Jaeyo in vol. 4 February 2020). An additional three articles examine Daehaeng’s innovations in Dharma propagation and missionary work, as with Sohee

Yoon's discussion regarding the current and future practice of *Seonbeopga* hymns (by Yoon, Sohee in vol. 6 February 2021).

Not all academic research concerning Daehaeng has been sponsored by the OMZC and its affiliates. However, thus far, most falls into the same three general categories: 1. analyses of Daehaeng's teachings in relation to mainstream Buddhist traditions, 2. examinations of Daehaeng's innovations in Dharma propagation, and 3. interdisciplinary studies discussing the intersection between Daehaeng's teachings and other fields of research. Pori Park's article "Uplifting Spiritual Cultivation for Lay People: Bhikṣuṇī Master Daehaeng (1927–2012) of the Hanmaum Seonwon (One Mind Sŏn Center) in South Korea" (2017) and Hyangsoon Yi's "Pomunjong and Hanmaum Sŏnwŏn: New Monastic Paths in Contemporary Korea" (2019) are excellent articles straddling the first and second categories. Korean-language examples of the second also include Kiryong Cho's "A Study of the Process of Growth of Modern Missionary Work in a City" (2006), Yonghae Yoon's "On Study of Great City Mission and Popularization of Korean Buddhism" (2007), and Jongwoo Lee's "The Characteristic and Meaning of Hanmaum Seon Center" (2013). Examples of the third include Chae Yong Kim's "Pragmatic Approach of William James and Seon Master Daehaeng towards Science and Religion" (2019) and his "Depth Psychological Elements in Seon Master Daehaeng's Dharma Talks, with Special Reference to Hanmaum Yeojeon" (2021). While the burgeoning field of Daehaeng studies has thus far established three clear areas of inquiry, there remain numerous issues that could perhaps be better addressed by other approaches.

4. Directions for Further Research

As demonstrated by the criticisms made by Professors Kang and Lee, ambiguities remain surrounding Daehaeng's identity as a *seon* master and her place within the Korean Buddhist mainstream. Indeed, there are many aspects of her remarkable life and ministry deserving of further research. Thus far, Daehaeng's critics have largely challenged the legitimacy of Daehaeng's teachings, charging they are not authentically Buddhist and based on flawed understandings of both Buddhism and science. Thus, as guardians of Daehaeng's legacy, academic research sponsored by the OMZC has focused on validating Daehaeng's teachings by demonstrating their relationship to established Buddhist doctrines. While such research presents a strong case that Daehaeng's teachings fall within the diversity of "skillful means" historically deployed within East-Asian Mahayana Buddhist tradition, her place within Korean Buddhist orthodoxy as inherited and maintained by the JO is less clear. Relying on its preservation of tradition for its own legitimacy, the order continues to equate the Korean Buddhist historical mainstream with the monastic practice of patriarchal *seon*, at least rhetorically. As much of Daehaeng's unique career and innovation teachings fall outside this tradition, there is much that needs to be clarified regarding her relationship to the order.

Instead of parsing lengthy publications of Daehaeng's lectures to evaluate the doctrinal legitimacy of her teachings, questions regarding Daehaeng's Korean Buddhist identity might be better clarified by a more historical approach. As almost all publicly available information concerning Master Daehaeng's life is derived from Daehaeng's own accounts published in OMZC materials, there is yet to be published an independent, critical biography examining the more controversial elements of her ministry. Although there has been no reason to question the honesty of Daehaeng's accounts, without a more thorough, objective examination of her life, Daehaeng's legacy as curated by OMZC remains vulnerable to criticism.

One key point deserving of clarification, as much by the Jogye Order as by the OMZC, is Daehaeng's status as *seon* master within the order. Robert Buswell has stated that Daehaeng possessed "impeccable credentials as a *seon* master", (Buswell 2007, p. IX) and, in a conference held in May 2017 honoring her 90th birthday, Daehaeng was repeatedly praised by senior members of the JO administration. Nevertheless, in bypassing traditional routes of monastic training and mentorship, Daehaeng never received "Dharma transmis-

sion" (K. *inga*, Sk. *avadhāraṇa*)—a *seon* master's formal acknowledgement of a disciple's full awakening granting official permission to pursue his or her own career as a teacher. Within the order's often-contentious political culture, rival Dharma lineages frequently question the legitimacy of the "transmission" received by their opponents' masters. Yet, since rejoining the order in the 1980s, none within the order has questioned Daehaeng's lack of "transmission". Instead, the OMZC presents Daehaeng as a "solitary Buddha" (Sk. *pratyekabuddha*) (Park 2017, p. 421; Daehaeng 1993, p. 226) who attained enlightenment independently without the help of a teacher. However, no tradition of *pratyekabuddha* exists in the history of Korean *seon*. It remains then for the Jogye Order to clarify Daehaeng status as "seon master" in relation to the value the order has placed on "transmission" within the lineage patriarchal *seon*.

In fact, there is much concerning Daehaeng's relationship with the Jogye Order during the 1970s and 1980s deserving further clarification, particularly regarding the circumstances surrounding Daehaeng's rejoining the order in 1982. During Daehaeng's early career as a healer in the 1960s and 1970s, she was derided as a *mansin* or "shaman" by JO monastics. Daehaeng, in turn, displayed strongly iconoclastic tendencies during this period, controversially burning introductory books on Buddhism and removing Buddha statues from the organization's Dharma halls (Park 2017, pp. 426, 430). While echoing iconoclastic and bibliophobic actions of Zen masters of legend, Daehaeng's actions nevertheless provoked criticism, even by her own followers, along with challenges to her authenticity as a Buddhist teacher. Nevertheless, in the early 1980s, Daehaeng deliberately chose to renew her ordination with the JO, establishing her organization as clearly Buddhist in ordination, and framing her teachings within the mainstream of Korean Buddhist tradition. Daehaeng's motivations for rejoining the JO remain unclear, while how both the OMZC and JO benefited from their affiliation and what compromises Daehaeng made when rejoining the order definitely warrant further clarification.

Furthermore, Pori Park has observed that Daehaeng's followers essentially practice "the religion of Daehaeng" or "of the one mind", more than identifying themselves with the more traditional forms of Buddhist practices within mainstream JO temples (Park 2017, p. 432). Park notes that Daehaeng could have easily launched her own independent Buddhist sect, as with the Jungto Society founded by Master Bomnyun in 1988 (<https://www.jungtosociety.org/about/> accessed on 10 July 2021), or even her own religion as one of Korean's modern, syncretic "new religions", such as Won Buddhism (K. *Wonbulgyo*) founded by Pak Chungbin (1891–1943, aka "Sot'aesan") in 1916. Daehaeng's life arguably shares more similarities with many founders of these Korean "new religions" than with other modern Buddhist masters. Perhaps it would clarify Daehaeng's position within the Korean Buddhist mainstream by examining her life alongside those of "new religion" leaders like Sotaesan or Choe Je-u (1824–1864), founder of the Korean new religion of Cheondoism (*Cheondogyo*, 천도교), to identify points of divergence.

Daehaeng's life and ministry pose as many questions for the JO mainstream, as they do for Daehaeng's followers. The order brands itself as the inheritor of Korea's patriarchal *seon* tradition, publicly emphasizing the primacy of *ganhwa seon* meditation practiced by specialized "meditation monks" in mountain retreats. In reality, however, the order functions as an umbrella organization encompassing a variety of monastic lineages, both large and small, which engage in a wide array of Buddhist practices. In fact, some of these practices fall outside the purview of Buddhism as historically practiced in Korea, as with the growing popularization of Theravadin *vipassana* meditation among the order's monastics since the 1990s. Daehaeng's innovations and the debate over the legitimacy of her teachings similarly raises the question of how the JO defines orthodoxy and whether, at least in practice, the limits of Korean Buddhism are wider than those defined in the order's literature.

Furthermore, since the turn of the millennium, the JO and Korean Buddhism as a whole have been facing a growing membership crisis. As discussed in a previous article (Kim and Park 2019), the order's monastic recruitment has been declining steadily over

past decades, dropping from 510 postulants in 1993 to only 151 in 2017, while according to the nation's 2015 census, only 15.5% of respondents described themselves as Buddhist, compared with 22.8% a decade earlier. The order is clearly struggling to remain relevant in contemporary Korean society and, unless it reverses these trends, it faces the real possibility of extinction. In its ongoing efforts to remedy this crisis, the order would do well to re-examine not only Master Daehaeng's innovations in Dharma propagation, but also her motivations and attitudes towards the laity. Although many JO-affiliated temples have implemented practices pioneered by Daehaeng, particularly in their lay outreach, the order as a whole has yet to redefine its "monastic monk-oriented" focus or reevaluate the subordinate, fossilized roles prescribed for its lay supporters on whom the order depends for financial donations (Kim and Park 2019).

Daehaeng's life and ministry would additionally serve as a rich subject of further examination for scholars researching Korean gender and women's studies. Not only did Daehaeng succeed in becoming a renowned and widely popular leader within an explicitly patriarchal religious culture, she also led successful men's outreach programs, notably becoming the first female Buddhist master in Korean history to have male monastic disciples. Interrogating the factors behind her success could help contribute to dismantling the institutional gender discrimination entrenched not only within the political culture of the Jogye Order, but in other mainstream Korean religions as well.

5. Conclusions

As surveyed above, Daehaeng's innovations as a Buddhist teacher and leader were manifold. In guiding her students to find the answer within themselves to their own suffering, she adopted a simple and direct teaching style utilizing colloquial language and everyday examples to communicate often-complex Buddhist ideas. Eschewing formal *ganhwa seon* meditation practiced by career monastics, she instead taught a flexible style of *gwan* meditation focused on observing one's experiences in daily life. Daehaeng additionally propagated the translation of Buddhist scriptures into vernacular Korean, allowing Buddhist laity to read key texts for themselves and transforming the archaic Sino-Korean chants used in Buddhist services into comprehensible language. In 1972, Daehaeng established the OMZC as one of the country's first post-war urban Buddhist mega-temples catering to the laity and the center soon became the model for other *pogyog-dang* that opened around the country over subsequent decades. The OMZC additionally organized lay associations for demographic groups typically ignored by traditional Korean temples, eventually growing some of the largest Buddhist men's and children's associations in the country. Through such efforts, the OMZC grew to 150,000 registered members—an unprecedented number of lay disciples equally remarkable for her leadership as a woman operating within a patriarchal society and religious culture.

Since the 1990s, Daehaeng's teachings have become the subject of a growing body of academic research, originally at the behest of Daehaeng herself who sought to establish links between her own teachings of "one mind" and contemporary research in the sciences and humanities. Yet, owing to lingering ambiguities regarding Daehaeng's identity within the mainstream of Korean Buddhist tradition, along with occasional accusations that her teachings fall outside of Buddhist orthodoxy entirely, the bulk of research since her death has focused on the legitimacy of her teaching in light of established Buddhist traditions. However, this paper suggests that such questions regarding Daehaeng's Buddhist identity and place in Korean Buddhism might be better clarified by a historical approach interrogating her relationship with the Jogye Order and her status as a *seon* master therein. Furthermore, given the order's ongoing membership crisis, the JO would do well to re-examine Daehaeng's innovations in Dharma propagation, as well as her inadvertent overturning of the limited roles traditionally accorded to laity in Korean Buddhism. In addition, scholars working in Korean women's studies could further investigate the factors behind Daehaeng's remarkable rise as a female Buddhist leader within a patriarchal religious culture subject to entrenched gender discrimination. Such varied approaches

to future research in the burgeoning field of Daehaeng studies would not only expand discussions regarding Korean Buddhist identity, legitimacy, and authority, but also inspire the very compassion, creativity, and innovation for which Daehaeng herself was famous.

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