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Exploring the Characteristics of Modern Korean Buddhist Education: Focusing on the Religious Studies Lecture Notes from the Buddhist Central Seminary (*Pulgyo Chungang Hangnim*, 佛教中央學林)

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Abstract: This study examines the identity and characteristics of modern Korean Buddhist education through an analysis of the religious studies lecture notes of a student from the Buddhist Central Seminary (*Pulgyo Chungang Hangnim*, 佛教中央學林), preserved at Songgwang-sa Temple. Established in 1915 and operating until 1919, the seminary introduced a significant shift from traditional scripture-centered monastic education to a modern academic system. Western and Japanese academic traditions, religious studies, philosophy, and the general educational system influenced its curriculum. The lecture notes provide insight into the adoption of modern academic disciplines within Korean Buddhist education, revealing the influence of Japanese religious studies and Western comparative religion. They also demonstrate the possibility of early introduction of religious studies as an educational field in Korea. The seminary played a dual role as a hub for national education and reflection of the colonial context, embodying the complexities of nationalism and colonial influence during Japanese occupation. This study underscores the need for further scholarly exploration to understand the multifaceted nature of modern Korean Buddhist education and its unique role within the broader historical context of East Asian Buddhist history.

Keywords: modern Buddhist education; monastic education; Buddhist Central Seminary (*Pulgyo Chungang hangnim*, 佛教中央學林); religious studies; Korean Buddhism

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1. Introduction

The essence of modern education, the development of religious education[1] in Korea, and its contemporary interpretation form the core questions of this study. Ultimately, this research addresses the definition of modern education, the emergence and growth of religious education in Korea, and its modern interpretations. Efforts to understand the origins and impacts of religious education during the modern period can be approached from various perspectives and disciplines. Previous studies on the history of education in Korea have primarily focused on the agents, systems, and policies that introduced modern education. These studies have provided substantial insights into the nature of modern education in Korea and have established a general consensus that religion and modern education in Korea were dynamically interrelated during this period.

If the late 19th century is considered the beginning of modernity, the introduction of Christianity into Korean society brought about new forms of education. Although there

are differing opinions on when modern education in Korea began, most scholars identify the 1880s as the starting point, with the establishment of various schools during those decades (K. Yi 2008, pp. 17–21). Many of these schools were founded by Christian missionaries, leading to the widely held view that modern education in Korea began alongside religious education (Son 1998, pp. 541, 563). By the late 19th century, missionary activities had increased, and by 1910, 796 of the 2250 schools officially accredited by the Ministry of Education were mission schools, enrolling more students than government-established schools. This highlights the significant role of Christianity in the development of modern education in Korea. However, while missionaries are often credited as pioneers of modern education, they are also criticized for collaborating with imperialist agendas.

In response to the above externalist perspective (colonial modernization theory), an internalist approach (indigenous development theory) emerged, emphasizing the nation's aspirations for independence and modernization. As a traditional religion, Buddhism has been highlighted as a representative case of this internalist view. While preserving the traditions of monastic education, Korean Buddhism actively sought transformation toward modern education. It was characterized as a self-reliant effort independent of the colonial government or Western missionaries. The modern Buddhist schools that emerged from this transformation have maintained their identity as national education institutions. For instance, studies on the *Myŏngjin School* (明進學教), regarded as the pioneer of modern Buddhist education, often emphasize Buddhism's role in fostering autonomous modern education and safeguarding national pride (H. Kim 2006, p. 31). This interpretation is contrasted with the diminished role of Christianity in nationalist movements after the 1920s and the closure of Buddhist schools following the March 1st Movement (K. Yi 2008, pp. 46–47), thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of such claims.

However, such nationalist narratives risk oversimplifying the complex historical dynamics of modern Buddhist education. This study aims to capture the multilayered and intricate relationships that defined this period. In particular, this study critically examines whether the prevailing historical assessment of Buddhist educational institutions as centers of national education is justified and investigates their specific characteristics and content.

To this end, this study analyzes the handwritten lecture notes of Im Sŏkchin, a student at the Buddhist Central Seminary (*Pulgyo Chungang Hangnim*, 佛教中央學林, hereafter *Chungang Hangnim*), preserved at Songgwang-sa Temple. This research moves beyond a mere analysis of historical records, focusing instead on *Chungang Hangnim*'s attempt to establish an independent academic system for modern education in Korean Buddhism. Ultimately, this study aims to deepen the understanding of modern Korean Buddhist education while offering fresh perspectives that move beyond the constraints of current interpretations.

2. Characteristics of the Buddhist Central Seminary (*Pulgyo Chungang Hangnim*)

The development of modern higher Buddhist studies institutions followed a trajectory in Korea. The first attempt by the Buddhist community was the *Myŏngjin School* (明進學校), which operated from 1906 to 1909. In the 1910s, institutions such as the Buddhist Teachers School (*Pulgyo sabŏm hakkyo*, 佛教師範學校, 1910–1914), the Buddhist Academy of Higher Education (*Pulgyo kodŭng kangsuk*, 佛教高等講塾, 1914–1915), and the Buddhist Central Seminary (*Pulgyo Chungang Hangnim*, 佛教中央學林, 1915–1919) were established in succession. During the 1920s and 1930s, the Buddhist Specialists School (*Pulgyo chŏnsu hakkyo*, 佛教專修學校, 1928–1930) and the Central Buddhist Specialized School (*Chungang pulgyo chŏnmun hakkyo*, 中央佛教專門學校, 1930–1940) were founded. In the 1940s, Hyehwa Specialized School (*Hyehwa chŏnmun hakkyo*, 惠化傳問學校, 1940–1944, 1945–1946) emerged, eventually evolving into Dongguk University (東國大學校), one of the leading private in-

stitutions in present Korea. These Buddhist institutions aimed to provide an advanced level of higher education at the time and focused on cultivating modern talents (Uri 2015, pp. 74–79).

The most notable characteristic of modern Buddhist educational institutions was their change from old-fashioned *kangwŏn* (講院) monastic education to the adoption of modern curricula. Traditional *kangwŏn* education was a monastic curriculum established during the Chosŏn Dynasty. It followed a tiered system that comprised the following levels: (1) novice course (沙彌科), (2) the intermediate course (師執科), (3) the advanced course (師教科), and (4) the great advanced course (大教科). However, amid the waves of Westernization and modernization in the late 19th century, the Korean Buddhist community recognized the need for a new educational system to establish a modern religious identity and to modernize the Sangha. While *kangwŏn* education primarily focused on teachings mainly from sutras and commentaries, modern Buddhist schools sought to integrate general knowledge with modern Buddhist studies. This shift demonstrated the incorporation of modernity into traditional Buddhist education, resulting in a qualitative transformation. In particular, these changes did not signify the complete abandonment of traditional *kangwŏn* education system but rather reflected a pursuit of harmony between tradition and modernity.

At the time, the Buddhist community allocated more than half of its organizational budget to education, prioritizing modernization through educational reform (S.-y. Kim 2010, p. 25). Monastic education was deemed essential for establishing Buddhism's religious identity and nurturing leaders capable of managing the Sangha, underscoring the need for an in-depth analysis of the specific features of modern Buddhist education. The establishment of the Buddhist Central Seminary (hereafter *Chungang Hangnim*) can be traced back to Myŏngjin School, the first modern Buddhist educational institution. *Myŏngjin School* was led by the Buddhist Research Society, which was influenced by the Japanese Pure Land (Jōdo) School. The *Myŏngjin school* was established with approval from the Korean Empire government under the guidance of figures such as Hong Wŏlch'o (洪月初) and Yi Podam (李寶潭). Article 1 of the 12-article school regulations established by the Buddhist Research Society (佛教研究會) stated, "This school aims to educate monks in the essential teachings of their school (宗乘) and other schools (餘乘), as well as new knowledge, to cultivate wisdom and virtue (智德) and to nurture talents for missionary work" (Tongdae Paengnyŏnsa P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe 2006, p. 69). This demonstrates that early Buddhist educational institutions focused on monastic education through modern pedagogical methods. This educational approach continued with the *Chungang Hangnim*[2], as confirmed in the recollections of its graduate, Im Sŏkchin (Im 1966).

The 1910s, when *Chungang Hangnim* was operational, was a period of intense reform discourse within Korean Buddhism following the Japan–Korea Annexation Treaty. Representative examples include Han Yongun's (韓龍雲) *On the Revitalizing Reformation of Korean Buddhism* (*Chosŏn pulgyo yusillon*, 朝鮮佛教維新論) and Kwŏn Sangno's (權相老) *On the Reform of Korean Buddhism* (*Chosŏn pulgyo kaehyŏngnon*, 朝鮮佛教改革論). Both emphasized the importance of monastic education, focusing on monks as the primary recipients of training. Within this context, *Chungang Hangnim* was established as a modern educational institution for monks. Meanwhile, Japan enacted the Chosŏn Education Ordinance (朝鮮教育令) in 1911, which stipulated that the highest level of private schools be limited to specialized schools. While *Chungang Hangnim* was not officially recognized as a regular institution, it adhered to a curriculum aligned with specialized schools. Admission was restricted to graduates of the regional seminaries (*chibang hangnim*, 地方學林) in the mountain monasteries or preparatory course completers who were at least 19 years old. Preparatory courses

required candidates to be at least 18 years old, have completed the intermediate *kangwŏn* course, and be "physically healthy, resolute, and of upright character".

This system established a new educational model in which students advanced from local *chibang hangnim* grounded in *kangwŏn* education to *Chungang Hangnim* for further study in modern disciplines and specialized Buddhist research. This model enabled the Buddhist community to achieve its long-standing aspiration of a modern Sangha education system by establishing *Chungang Hangnim* as a specialized school at the central level and local seminaries as middle and high school equivalents. In particular, *Chungang Hangnim* systematized the "general studies" component of monastic education, addressing the reformist agenda proposed in Buddhist reform discourse (S.-y. Kim 2023, p. 138). This success was supported by the institutional backing of the Nationwide Thirty-Head Temple Association, which underscores *Chungang Hangnim*'s role as an integrative educational institution for the entire Buddhist community.[3]

It is undeniable that *Chungang Hangnim* was influenced by the educational and religious policies of the Japanese colonial government (K.-s. Kim 2003). However, this influence cannot be simplistically interpreted as a form of collaboration. This is demonstrated by the active participation of *Chungang Hangnim* students in the March 1st Movement, which led to the school's temporary closure, and reflects their sense of national consciousness (H. Kim 2006, p. 10).

3. Characteristics of *Chungang Hagnim* Through Its Students: Im Sŏkchin's Perspective

To gain a deeper understanding of Chungang Hangnim, it is essential to examine the backgrounds of its students. Among them were prominent figures who later made significant contributions to the development of modern Korean Buddhist studies, including Dr. Baek Sŏnguk (白性郁), Kim Pŏmrin (金法麟), and Kim T'aehŭp (金泰洽). After graduating, they pursued further studies in Germany, France, and Japan, continuing their academic endeavors. Meanwhile, a notable graduate who remained in Korea and played an active role in the Buddhist community was Im Sŏkchin (林錫珍, 1892–1968), whose dharma name was Kisan (綺山).

In 1904, Im Sŏkchin received novice ordination at Songgwang-sa Temple and began his monastic life at the age of 13. When the *Chungang Hangnim* opened in Gyeongseong (京城) in 1915, he enrolled as part of its first cohort and later graduated in 1919. Subsequently, he held key roles in Korean Buddhism, including serving as the administrator (kamwu, 監務) of Songgwang-sa Temple in 1928 and its abbot in 1932. He also held other significant positions, such as Head of the Education Department of the Chosŏn Buddhist Jogye Order (朝鮮佛教曹溪宗)[4]. After Korea's liberation in 1945, he stepped down from his roles as a senior executive and abbot. Nonetheless, he remained a prominent figure in Korean Buddhism, serving as the head of the Jeonnam district in 1949, the Chief Executive of the Korean Buddhist Central Administration in 1954, the Chair of Dongguk University's Board of Trustees in 1961, and the President of the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism in 1962.[5]

The operational period of the *Chungang Hangnim* closely coincided with his time as a student. Yi Chonguk, a fellow graduate of *Chungang Hangnim* who later served as Chair of Dongguk University's Board of Trustees, described Im Sŏkchin in his memoir as an exemplary student with outstanding academic performance (C. Yi 1966). Notably, in the absence of historical materials on *Chungang Hangnim*, Im Sŏkchin's 1966 article titled "The Era of Chungang Hangnim" (中央學林時代), published in *Dongdae Sinmun* (東大新聞) when he was 75 years old (Im 1966), is considered a critical source for understanding the institution's operations.

Initially, Chungang Hangnim was planned to be established at Wŏnhŭng-sa Temple, where Myŏngjin School and the administrative office of the Wŏnjong Order were located. However, due to the Japanese Government General of Korea's approval of a lease, it was relocated to Ch'angsin-dong, outside Dongdaemun Gate. From the second semester onward, students attended classes and resided at the new campus.

Im Sŏkchin outlined six characteristics of *Chungang Hangnim* as follows:

- Nature of the seminary: a reformed *kangwŏn*;
- Admission restrictions: only monks were eligible to enroll;
- Student composition: primarily older students with teaching qualifications from *kangwŏn*;
- Dining system: communal meals;
- Uniforms: traditional Korean attire (traditional monk's black robe), with Western-style clothing prohibited;
- Language restrictions: the study of English was forbidden.

Chungang Hangnim offered a one-year preparatory course and a three-year main course, with a total enrollment capacity of 120 students (Table 1).

Table 1. The curriculum of the *Chungang Hangnim*[6].

Academic Year	Classes
Preparatory course (one year)	*Sushin* (修身 Moral Cultivation) *Jongseung* (宗乘): *Fǎjiè guānmén* (法界觀門 Contemplation on the Dharma Realm), Seon Practice (參禪), and Geonhaeng (勤行 Monastic Routine) *Yoseung* (餘乘): *Baekbeopron* (百法論 Treatise on the Hundred Dharmas), *Bāshí guījǔ jí yīnmíng lùn* (八識規矩及因明論 Treatise on the Eight Consciousness and Buddhist Logic), Wéishì lùn (唯識論 Treatise on Consciousness-Only Doctrine) *Guk-eo* (國語 Korean Language) *Hanmun* (漢文 Classical Chinese) *Bojogwa* (補助科 Supplementary Courses): Overview of Natural Sciences, Mathematics, Geography, and History
Main course (three years)	*Sushin* (修身 Moral Cultivation) *Jongseung* (宗乘): *Sŏnmun ojong gangyo* (禪門五宗綱要 *Essentials of the Five Schools of Seon Buddhism*), *Huāyán jīng* (華嚴經 *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*), *Lèng qié jīng* (楞伽經 *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*), Seon Practice (參禪 Meditation) and *Geonhaeng* (勤行 Monastic Routine), Chanting Practice (念誦) and Didactic Narratives (說話), *Chuándēng lù* (傳燈錄 Record of the Transmission of the Lamp) *Yoseung* (餘乘): *Ch'ŏnt'ae sagyoŭi* (天台四教儀 Outline of the Tiantai Four Teachings), *Fànwǎng jīng* (梵網經 Brahma Net Sūtra), *Zōngjìng lù* (宗鏡錄 Record of the Mirror of the Teachings), *Fózǔ tōngzài* (佛祖通載 Comprehensive Records of the Buddhas and Patriarchs), *Sìfēnlǜ* (四分律 Four-Part Vinaya), *Nièpán jīng* (涅槃經 Nirvāṇa Sūtra) Religious Studies and Philosophy: *Chosŏn Chonggyosa* (朝鮮宗教史 History of Religions in Chosŏn), Chonggyohak (宗教學 Religious Studies), Yullihak (Ethics 倫理學), *Tongyang Pulgyosa* (東洋佛教史 History of Eastern Buddhism), including *Kakjong gangyo* (附各宗綱要, Essentials of Each School), General Philosophy, and History of Philosophy Propagation Methods and Legal Systems (포교법 및 법제) *Guk-eo* (國語 Korean Language) *Hanmun* (漢文 Classical Chinese)

The curriculum of *Chungang Hangnim* reflects a balanced educational system, integrating general education subjects with a variety of Buddhist studies (Table 1). However, according to Im Sŏkchin's recollections (Im 1966), certain Buddhist texts, mathematics, and supplementary courses were not actually taught.

Im Sŏkchin graduated from *Chungang Hangnim* in 1919 at the age of 28. It was the same year the March 1st Movement took place. He was among the students at Pagoda Park who listened to the reading of the Declaration of Independence and spent the day chanting for independence before dispersing. As a result of this involvement, he was required to return

to Songgwang-sa Temple approximately 20 days before his graduation, and his diploma was delivered to him.

He belonged to the early generation receiving systematic higher education in Korean Buddhism. He studied under Japanese teachers and administrators. Concurrently, he demonstrated his national consciousness by participating in the Independent movement. However, his later life contrasts with his youthful involvement in the independence movement. He pursued a pro-Japanese path during the colonial period (Im 1942) and remained a key figure in Korean Buddhism after liberation. His life serves as a symbolic representation of the complexities and multifaceted aspects of modern Korean Buddhism during that era.

4. The Identity of Modern Buddhist Education Through the Lecture Notes

The first officially recognized university was Gyeongseong Imperial University in Korea. Religious studies, as a modern academic discipline, is known to have begun in 1926 with the establishment of a religious studies major within the Faculty of Humanities at the Imperial University. Meanwhile, Korean Buddhism frequently highlighted the introduction of "religious studies" and similar modern classes as evidence of their pioneering attempts at modern higher education. Although not officially accredited, it is highly likely that Korean Buddhism was the first to introduce higher-level religious studies education in Korea.

The inclusion of religious studies can be traced back to the curriculum of *Myŏngjin* (明進學校), the first modern Buddhist school (Tongdae Paengnyŏnsa P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe 2006, p. 70). This subject was later offered at *Chungang Hangnim* as well (Tongdae Paengnyŏnsa P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe 2006, pp. 107–8). Previously, only the subject titles in the curriculum were confirmed, with little information on how the courses were conducted.

In this context, the recent disclosure of the *Chonggyohak* (宗教學 religious studies) lecture notes cover images (Figure 1) through the catalog for the Modern Historical Materials Special Exhibition (Songgwangsa Temple 2019, p. 47). The subsequent release of the religious studies lecture notes (hereafter notes) housed at Songgwang-sa Temple through the *Sŏkchŏn Pak Hanyŏng Collected Works* Research Project (J.-J. Kim 2024, pp. 223, 226) provide an opportunity to further explore the practical aspects of the religious studies curriculum.

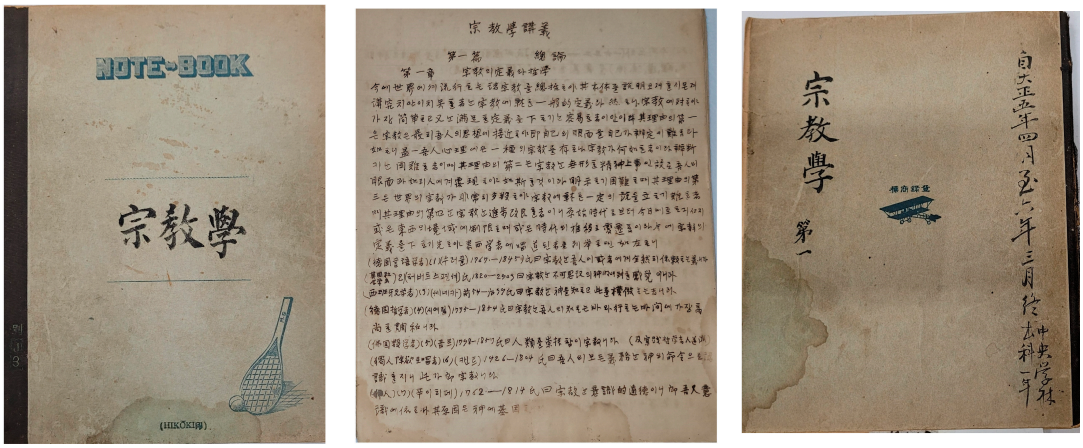

Figure 1. Sample pages from the lecture notes (dimensions: 20.5 × 16.3 cm)[7].

4.1. General Features of the Lecture Notes

These notes were written by Im Sŏkchin, a student of *Chungang Hangnim*, during his religious studies classes, as previously mentioned. The back cover of the notes bears the

inscription "宗教學 第一" (Religious Studies Volume 1), "自大正五年四月至六年三月終" (From April of the Fifth Year of Taishō to March of the Sixth Year of Taishō), and "中央學林 本科一年" (*Chungang Hangnim*, Main Course, Year 1). However, the lecture notes do not specify the primary textbook used or the identity of the lecturer.

Excluding the cover, the lecture notes consist of a total of 91 pages written in the *Hanjugukjongche* (漢主國從體) script.[8] The content is divided into two main sections: *chongron* (總論 general theory) and *gakron* (各論 specific theory). The notes are further organized into a systematic framework of *p'yŏn* (篇, part), *jang* (章, chapter), and *jeol* (節, section). A summary of this structure is provided in the following table (Table 2).

Table 2. Table of contents.

Parts	Chapter and Pages
Che 1-p'yŏn Ch'ongron (第一篇 總論 Part 1: General Theory)	Chapter 1: Definition of Religion and Philosophy (pp. 1–3) Chapter 2: The Origin and Development of Religion (pp. 3–7) Chapter 3: Rituals and Fundamental Facts of Religion (pp. 7–9) Chapter 4: Classification and Study of Religions (pp. 9–12) Chapter 5: The Value and Future of Religion (pp. 12–15)
Che 2-p'yŏn Kakron (第二編 各論 Part 2: Specific Theory)	Chapter 1: Judaism and Christianity (pp. 16–22) Chapter 2: Islam (pp. 23–32) Chapter 3: Greek Religion (*Kirisha*) (pp. 32–39) Chapter 4: Roman Religion (pp. 39–46) Chapter 5: Zoroastrianism (pp. 46–56) Chapter 6: Egyptian Religion (pp. 56–63) Chapter 7: Ancient Religions of Western Asia (pp. 63–64) Chapter 8: Vedic Religion and Brahmanism (pp. 64–78) Chapter 9: Confucianism (pp. 78–90)

The systematic organization and content of the lecture notes suggest that they were delivered by someone with expertise in religious studies. According to Im Sŏkchin's recollections (Im 1966), a person named Kang Mae (姜邁) was the instructor for a course on the "history of religions".[9] However, no course exactly matched that title in *Chungang Hangnim*'s curriculum. Alternatively, it is also possible that Pak Hanyŏng (朴漢永) was the lecturer, one of the instructors at *Chungang Hangnim*.[10] The lecture notes' emphasis on comparative religious frameworks and the analysis of different traditions means the instructor likely had formal training in religious studies. Further research is required to determine the precise details.

4.2. Possible Influence from Japanese Academia

Regarding the religious studies course, books with the same title from the 1910s have been identified in the Dongguk University Central Library. An investigation is needed to ascertain the possible connection between these publications and the course, as they may have been used as teaching materials at *Chungang Hangnim*. However, some library materials collected before 1951 were lost due to the Korean War and the temporary relocation of the school to Busan during the retreat of the allied forces. Among the remaining religious studies texts in Dongguk University's collection, those published before *Chungang Hangnim*'s establishment are all written in Japanese.

For instance, works such as *Religious Studies* (Genchi 1912) by Katō Genchi (加藤玄智) have been discovered, but its table of contents does not align with that of the lecture notes. Similarly, *Religious Studies* (Masaharu 1900) by Anesaki Masahiro (姉崎正治) and a Japanese translation of a work by Friedrich Max Müller (Bunyū 1907) were reviewed, but their content also does not match the lecture notes. Although the library's resources do not match the lecture notes' structure, it is highly plausible that the materials used in

the religious studies course at *Chungang Hangnim* originated from Japanese academic publications. This conclusion is supported by the fact that Europe was the center of religious studies research at the time, and Japan had already published numerous translations and original studies on the subject.

The early 1900s marked the formative period of modern religious studies in Japan, during which Western theories of religious studies were introduced and became established. Some consider the start of religious studies education in Japan to be 1891, when Inoue Tetsujirō (井上哲次郎) offered lectures on "Comparative Religion and Eastern Philosophy". However, it is generally accepted that the field began in 1905 with the establishment of a religious studies course at Tokyo Imperial University, followed by a similar course at Kyoto Imperial University in 1906.

The major works of religious studies published in Japan at that time often consisted of translations of Western comparative religion theories or studies on Japanese traditional and world religions. Considering this context, it is reasonable to assert that the religious studies course at *Chungang Hangnim* in the mid-to-late 1910s was influenced by Japanese academia. Furthermore, the term *chonggyo* (宗教, religion) as a translation (Aiha 1938) and the establishment of religious studies as a field of academic inquiry were also formulated in Japan. This suggests that the early formation of modern religious studies in Korea partially incorporated Japanese academic influences.

This trajectory is similar to how modern Buddhist studies in Korea adopted Western theories that were introduced through Japan. However, while modern Buddhist studies in Korea gradually rediscovered the value of traditional Buddhism and sought to establish their academic independence (Y. T. Kim 2010, pp. 319–32), the study of religious studies within the Korean Buddhist community has yet to achieve a fully independent academic identity. This remains an unfinished task, requiring further research into how the Korean Buddhist community expanded its engagement with the academic field of modern religious studies.

4.3. The Academic Aspects of the Lectures

The table of contents and text of the lecture notes offer valuable insights into the curriculum's structure and focus, revealing several noteworthy characteristics.

First, the structure is divided into general theory (*chongron*) and specific theory (*gakron*). The general theory addresses topics such as the definition, origins, rituals, classification, and value of religion, while the specific theory analyzes major world religions individually. Japanese academia was influenced by Western academic methodologies. It has traditionally employed a framework that categorizes and introduces Eastern and Western religions separately. The structure of these lecture notes follows this approach by first discussing general theories of religion and then providing detailed descriptions of religions by region in the specific theory section. The logical classification of philosophical elements, origins, and developments of each religion reflect the typical structure adopted by Japanese academia in establishing religious studies as a modern discipline.

Second, the specific theory section demonstrates a multidimensional approach by distinguishing religions based on region and culture, including the following aspects: (1) systematic descriptions of the origins, rituals, and philosophies of religions, (2) comparative analyses of similarities and differences among religions, (3) exploration of the connection between mythology and philosophy, and (4) descriptions of the evolutionary processes of various religious ideologies. This perspective portrays religion not merely as an independent system of belief but as a complex phenomenon intertwined with philosophical, cultural, and political factors.

Third, the specific theory section does not mention Buddhism. It suggests that Buddhism may not have been treated as an objective academic subject or included within the scope of comparative religion at the time. By contrast, Confucianism is included as a religion, which is notable given the East Asian tendency to regard Confucianism as "Ruxue" (儒學) and not as a religion.

Fourth, the term for Islam used in the notes is *Hoegyo* (回教), a term common in Chinese-character cultural spheres, while Greece is referred to as *Kirisha* (ギリシャ), and the Zoroastrian scripture Zend-Avesta is transliterated as *Jŏndŏ abuesŭda* (ゼンド・アヴェスタ), reflecting Japanese pronunciations. This usage of terminology indicates that religious studies in Korea were not directly influenced by Western academia but were mediated through Japan as an intermediary.

Fifth, the final section of the specific theory, Chapter 9 on Confucianism, contains incomplete sentences, and no continuation appears on the subsequent page. This means that either pages were missing during the collation of the original notes or some parts were lost.

Sixth, the final page of the notes includes additional handwritten memos. The upper part contains references to topics such as Zoroaster's religious thought, the origins of Greek religion, Roman views on deities, and the philosophical trends and contributions of two major Greek philosophers. The lower part mentions concepts such as Confucius's *Ren* (仁), Zhou Lianxi's cosmology, the creation of the universe in Brahmanism, and a summary of worship practices and religious conditions in ancient Egypt. These notes may have highlighted topics emphasized by the lecturer during the conclusion of the course or could represent subjects the student intended to explore further for in-depth study.

5. Closing Remarks

This study analyzed religious studies lecture notes to shed light on the identity and characteristics of modern Korean Buddhism. These lecture notes serve as an essential historical source for exploring the origins of religious studies education in Korea and provide a fresh perspective on the process of adapting modern academic disciplines to a Korean context. Through this research, several significant features and implications of modern Korean Buddhist education have been identified.

The lecture notes offer insights into the curriculum and structure of *Chungang Hangnim*. The notes' table of contents and composition reflect influences of modern Japanese academia's adoption of Western religious studies while simultaneously presenting an early example of religious studies education within the Korean context. They illuminate the process by which religious studies as a discipline took root in Korea. Moreover, the lecture notes show that modern education in Korean Buddhism was not simply an extension of traditional monastic schools but rather a qualitative transformation that incorporated Western scholarship and Japanese academic influences. This shows that *Chungang Hangnim* aimed to establish a comprehensive academic system beyond merely training Buddhist professional monks.

Also, this study is not without its limitations. The textbooks and the identity of the instructor for the course could not be definitively determined, and some pages of the notes were either lost or omitted during the scanning process, posing challenges to the analysis. To overcome these limitations, future research should cross-reference oral histories and related archival materials to verify the lecture content and identify the instructor. Additionally, uncovering records from *Myŏngjin School* and other modern Buddhist educational institutions could help explore their connections with *Chungang Hangnim*. Furthermore, a deeper examination of the relationship between modern religious studies discourse devel-

oped in Japanese academia and Korean Buddhist education would clarify the extent of Japanese influence on the early formation of religious studies in Korea.

In conclusion, framing modern Korean Buddhist education solely within the binary lens of collaboration or nationalism imposes significant limitations. While the modernization of Buddhism inevitably entailed some level of collaboration with Japanese influences, there were simultaneous efforts to develop independent national education within the Korean context. Recognizing this complexity allows for a more nuanced understanding of the history of modern Buddhism. Modern Korean Buddhist education indicates a unique identity formed within the broader currents of East Asian Buddhism. Despite incorporating modern academic disciplines, it sought to maintain traditional Buddhist elements while constructing a new educational framework. This effort can be evaluated as a deliberate attempt to secure an independent position within the context of East Asian Buddhism, transcending the mere adoption of foreign academic frameworks.

This study reexamined the multifaceted nature of modern Korean Buddhist education and its place in East Asian Buddhist history, providing a foundation for future academic and historical inquiries. Modern Korean Buddhist education remains a critical yet underresearched subject, necessitating further multifaceted studies.

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Notes

1 Dewey argued that "a religion", "religion", and "the religious" are distinct concepts (Dewey 1966, p. 87). Based on this distinction, Pak proposed three dimensions of religious education: education of the religion, education about religion, and education of the religious (Pak 2006, pp. 117–25). In this research, religious education is used as a comprehensive concept encompassing all these dimensions.

2 For an in-depth study on *Chungang Hangnim*, see Kim (2003).

3 In related studies, the evolution of modern Buddhist educational institutions is broadly categorized into three stages. The first stage corresponds with the emergence of Buddhist higher education in the early 1900s. The second stage, during the 1910s, saw the establishment of a unified educational system comprising primary schools (elementary level), *chibang hangnim* (secondary level), and *Chungang Hangnim* (higher education). The third stage, beginning in the 1920s, involved the expansion of the target audience for education from monks to the general public. *Chungang Hangnim* symbolizes the second stage as an educational institution that developed its distinct Buddhist education by Korean Buddhism (S.-y. Kim 2023).

4 During his tenure as abbot of Songgwang-sa temple, Im, Sŏkchin actively cooperated with the policies of the Japanese Governor General. For example, he described the Pacific War as a "holy war" in his article (Im 1942). Due to these activities, he was listed in the "Dictionary of Pro-Japanese Figures", published by the Center for Historical Truth and Justice in Korea.

5 A more detailed account of his career can be found in the collected works compiled and published by his disciples (Im 1998).

6 The curriculum can be briefly summarized as mentioned, based on Im Sŏkchin's recollections (Im 1966), the History of Dongguk University (Tongdae Paengnyŏnsa P'yŏnch'an Wiwŏnhoe 2006, pp. 107–18), and an article in *Maeil Sinbo* (每日申報) dated 22 February 1917.

7 See Songgwangsa Temple (2019, p. 47), and presentation materials from the Seokjeon Park Han-young Project Workshop 2024.

8 *Hanjugukjongche* (漢主國從體) refers to a writing system widely used in Korea during the late Chosŏn Dynasty and early modern period. It primarily employs Classical Chinese as the main text, with supplementary annotations (*kugyŏl* 口訣) in Korean Hangul. This system enabled Korean scholars and students to study and interpret Chinese texts while incorporating native Korean linguistic elements into texts and integrating native linguistic elements.

9 The subject presumed to correspond to "history of religions" may have been either *Chosŏn Pulgyosa* (History of Korean Buddhism) or *Chonggyohak* (Religious Studies). Kang Mae was a teacher at Paejae Higher Common School and a contributor to nationalist publications. His background suggests he may have been primarily knowledgeable about Christianity, raising doubts about his

expertise in other religions. Additionally, as Kang Mae was not listed in the initial faculty roster in Im Sŏkchin's memoirs (Im 1966), it is unlikely that he was the instructor for the religious studies course offered in the first year of Chungang Hangnim.

[10] Pak Hanyŏng began his teaching career at *Myŏngjin*, the first modern Buddhist school, and it has been confirmed that he taught courses such as *Kakchong kangyo* [Essentials of Each School] and *Pulgyo saramyo* [Essentials of Buddhist History] at Chungang Hangnim (Y. T. Kim 2024, p. 57).

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