

International Symposium on “Religions in Traditional Korea”

From 25th–28th June 1992, an international workshop/symposium with the title, “Religions in Traditional Korea”, was held at the University of Copenhagen (KUA), organized by Dr. Henrik H. Sørensen (Seminar for Buddhist Studies) under the auspices of AKSE (Association for Korean Studies in Europe) and with generous support from the Korea Research Foundation (Seoul). The participants, all of whom are noted specialists in their respective fields, came from Great Britain, France, Korea (R.O.K.), the U.S.A., the Netherlands, and Denmark. A total of nine papers were presented, ranging from purely Buddhist topics to those of Shamanism and popular religion, and were as follows:

- Prof. Han Ki-du (Wŏngwang University, R.O.K.):
“A Study of the Popularization of Korean Buddhism during the Unified Silla Dynasty”
- Prof. Kim Young Ho (Inha University, R.O.K.):
“Yi Nung-hwa’s Approach to the History of the Religions in the Korean Tradition”
- Dr. B. C. A. Walraven (University of Leiden, the Netherlands): “Shamans and Popular Religion Around 1900”
- Prof. Ch’oe Pyŏng-hon (SNU, R.O.K.):
“Buddhist Societies under the Koryŏ”

Dr. James Grayson (University of Sheffield, Great Britain):

“Popular Cults and the Kuksa Shrine”

Dr. Alexandre Guillemoz (EHESS, France):

“The *Naerim Kut* of Mister Kim”

Prof. Jonathan Best (Wesleyan University, U.S.A.):

“Comparative Analysis of the Implication of Material and Written Evidence for Understanding the History of Buddhism’s Role in Paekche”.

Dr. Pak Youngsook (SOAS, Great Britain):

“Chajang and the Wutai Shan/Mt. Odae Cult in Korea”.

Dr. Henrik H. Sørensen (University of Copenhagen, Denmark):

“The Worship of the Great Dipper in Traditional Korean Buddhism”.

Although the majority of the presented papers dealt with various aspects of Korean Buddhism, the direction of the general discussion was towards the recognition of the importance of popular religion’s transcending the artificial boundaries of sectarian doctrines and practices. With the exception of the field of anthropology, the study of popular religion has been relegated to a secondary and inferior position in contrast to so-called “high” religion characterized by doctrinal studies and important positions in the social hierarchy of traditional Korea. For this reason it became clear in the course of the meeting that more attention would have to be paid to the role of popular beliefs and practices in order to get a more complete understanding of the development of Korean religion. Questions relating to the concepts of religious “syncretism”, “harmonization”, and “accommodation” as seen in the history of Korea’s religions were also discussed. Among the suggested future topics to be dealt with in the study of the Korean religions was that of “Sacred Geography in Korea”, which was thought to be an important theme for a future workshop.

(HHS)