

Social Welfare Dimension of Won Buddhism in Modern Korea

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Abstract

Korean society witnessed tremendous upheavals in the twentieth century as a result of colonial administration which led to the rise of new religious movement. There has been a comprehensive debate over the modern social engagement of Buddhism. James E. Deitrick cites Christopher S. Queen's assertion that 'the shape and style of contemporary engaged Buddhism is a recent phenomenon, made possible by the infusion of Euro-American religious and political thought into the veins of Buddhist Asia. However, Professor Jo Bo-gak has argued that the concept of social welfare should be explored through the historical course of Buddhism in general and Korean Buddhism in particular. There are several Buddhist Orders and Buddhist organizations in Korea which have made significant

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contribution to modern Korean society. However, Won Buddhism is the only Buddhist organizations of Korea which is listed with the “**United Nation**” as a Buddhist NGO. Therefore, it needs to scrutinize the activities of Won Buddhism as a vehicle of social change. Won Buddhism is not confined to the monastic practices; rather they are deeply engaged with the modern society of Korea as well as abroad. Moreover, social empowerment of downtrodden people has been the main objective of Won Buddhism, and they have been playing an important role since the inception of Won Buddhism. Their social welfare agenda focus on education and welfare of the youth and other social welfare undertakings. Therefore, this paper focuses on the educational endeavors, social welfare of youth and its mechanism. Efforts would be made in order to critically examine the objectives of educational endeavors and welfare programs in a historical framework. The significance of the paper lies in the role of Won Buddhism with regard to educational contribution, social empowerment and formation of social capital in Korea.

Key Words: Buddhist NGO, Social Capital, Community, Education, Welfare

Introduction

Korean societies witnessed tremendous upheavals in the twentieth century as a result of colonial administration which led to the rise of new religious movement. Won Buddhism in Korea appears to be the offshoot of colonial rule and its profound impact on contemporary society. Remarkably, the socio-economic policies of colonial governments led to the rise of the religious reform movement in Korea in the twentieth century. On the one hand, the colonial industrial demand transformed the mode of production from subsistence farming to commercial farming. Subsequently, colonial administration promoted both regional and global migration which deeply influenced the contemporary society and further elevated the class consciousness. On the other, existing social and religious structures articulated the interest of feudal (yangban) class of Korea by undermining the concerns of underprivileged class. Moreover, colonial society of Korea was subjugated to the interest of upper class that drew inspiration from Confucianism in order to preserve their

superiority over the lower classes. Therefore, the common people were deprived from the access of spirituality and subsequently welcome the new ideas and contributed to the rise of new religions and religious reformation movement.

Won Buddhism is not confined to the monastic practices; rather they have a new social dimension and are deeply engaged with the modern society. Moreover, social justice and empowerment of marginalized people became the central objective for Won Buddhists who have been playing an important role since the inception of Won Buddhism. Therefore, the educational contribution and social welfare endeavors of Won Buddhism in the process of social change in Korea remains an understudied field of study.

Regarding ongoing debate on engaged Buddhism, particularly in Korean context, the observation of Nelson Foster, who admits that the early Buddhism may have been socially involved, but he claims that the East Asian Buddhism, which he had studied was not socially involved.¹ Traditional Buddhists refute their claims by arguing that Buddhism has constantly been connected with society. Furthermore, in Korean perspective, Professor Jo Bo-gak has argued that the concept of social welfare should be explored through the historical course of Buddhism in general and Korean Buddhism in particular. He further notes that the scholars generally traced the roots of social welfare through the historical account of 'Elizabeth's verdict over the Church and State of 1601', though Korean Buddhists struck a strong alliance with the state during the Koryo period so as to pursue social work.² Moreover, the social engagement of Won Buddhism appears to be reinterpretation of Buddhism. Evidently, the socially engaged Buddhists have started modern social welfare works by establishing Buddhist NGOs throughout the world. There were, however, only

1. Thomas Freeman Yarnall, "Engaged Buddhism: New and improved? Made in the USA of Asian materials," in *Action Dharma: New Studies in Engaged Buddhism*, ed. Christopher Queen, Charles Prebish and Damien Keown (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 296.

2. Jo Bo-gak, "Pulgyo Sahoepokji Inyeomgwa Hwaldongsarye," in *Hanguk Pulgyo Sahoepokjichongfam*, ed. Hanguk Pulgyo Sahoepokjichongram Pyeonchanwiwonhoe, (Seoul: Hanguk Pulgyo Jongdanhyeobui. Daehan Pulgyo Jogyejong Sahoepokjijaedan Pulgyo Hoepokjibojiwan Center, 1999), 10, 59-61.

four Buddhist groups registered as NGOs with the United Nations at the end of 20th century, and Won Buddhism is one of them along with Rissho Koseikai, Soka Gakkai International, and Association of American Buddhists.³ That is why; the work of Won Buddhism as a Buddhist NGO necessitates an independent study so as to place Won Buddhism in the category of 'Socially Engaged Buddhism' rather than considering it as a distinct religion.

Likewise, on the doctrinal level, there has been a wide-ranging debate as to whether social engagement of Buddhism is the product of Western reformist or modernist⁴ influence. The modernists consider that the contemporary socio-political engagement of Buddhism is a byproduct of colonial rule; more specifically, Euro-American colonial influence.

It is significant to mention that Won Buddhism is one of the leading Buddhist movements in Korea, which has been deeply engaged with educational and welfare agenda for children and youth since its inception. It has evolved its own functional model to cater to the downtrodden students. The Won Buddhism has been enthusiastically involved with a variety of social issues including education, health, and poverty elimination. The founder of Won Buddhism prescribed four obligatory ethics for Won Buddhist followers where Education of the Children of Other was one of them.⁵

The educational endeavors of the organization effectively seized the attention of common masses because it offers diverse educational programs for the all strata of Korean society. Since educational equality has been a core philosophy of Won Buddhism, which has

3. The Hawaii Association of International Buddhists has applied for NGO status, this data is based on 1999, see notes-30, David W. Chappell, "Buddhist Peace Principles," in *Buddhist Peacework: Creating Cultures of Peace*, ed. David W. Chappell (Boston: Wisdom Publication, 1999), 222, 230.

4. For ongoing debate over modernist and traditionalist, see Phil Henry, "The Sociological Implications for Contemporary Buddhism in the United Kingdom: Socially Engaged Buddhism, a Case Study, *Journal of Buddhist Ethic*, Vol. 13 (2006): 6-11.

5. Wonpulgyo Kyojeon, Part Two, Chapter Two, (Iksan: Wonpulgyo Publication), 1977, 46-47.

attempted to educate those who have interest to educate others. Quality education, non-sectarian education and deeper ties with students reflect towards the leading motifs of organization. Therefore this section focuses on the contributions of Won Buddhism in the area of education, and further in the formation of social capital in modern Korea.

The educational endeavors of Won Buddhism can be divided into two parts: Spiritual and secular. Both spiritual and secular education programs became foremost tool applied to uplift the common people since the inception of Won Buddhism. The focus of spiritual education has been to eradicate the misconceptions over blind faith and promote Buddhist ideas of social activism through canonical interpretation. Therefore, it needs to understand as to how Won Buddhism has applied religious teachings in order to bring common people to a religious platform and further convinced them to work for community development. The secular education was meant for establishment of modern, semi-autonomous institutions of primary, secondary and higher education for the children, youth and disable of the rural and underprivileged background.

Since the foundation, Won Buddhism has been establishing various educational institutions for its members and common people. As per record, presently about 8 educational foundations are functioning,⁶ which operate universities, colleges, high schools, primary schools and kindergartens so as to meet the expectations of common people. Moreover, Won Buddhist temples enjoy hugeland possession in the rural, sub-urban and urban vicinity, which has been instrumental behind the successful implementation of educational agenda. As locations of institution expose, majority of the educational and welfare centers appeared to be positioned in the backward and rural extents far from the capital of Korea.⁷ It needs to be pointed out that about 40% of total population of South Korea residing in

6. International Affairs, Won Buddhism, *As a New and Active Buddhism: A Modern Way* (Iksan: Headquarters of Won Buddhism), 2010, 29.

7. See the list of established centers, Seomgum Seong, comp; *Sam Jeong Won 20 Nyeon Sa* [20 years History of Sam Jeong Won] (Iksan: Sahwaibokjibeobin Samdonghwe Sam Jeong Won), 2005, 51-53.

the surroundings of Seoul Metropolitan City where Won Buddhism centers are merely visible. Therefore, the focus predominantly confines to the rural settings where a large number of people are being engaged with these centers as a movement which primarily engrossed the rural people. Leveraging this connotation, the Won Buddhists have made significant efforts for attracting the rural and suburban children and youths.

Higher Education and Youth Welfare

Keeping commitment for education in view, the organization is running higher education institutions such as Wongwang University, Wongwang Health Science University, Wongwang Digital University, and Youngsan University of Son Studies. The primary and secondary education has been the foremost goal of the organization which accounts for several educational establishments focusing on primary and secondary school students. About 11 educational centers are dedicated to cater the need of junior and senior high school students and about 150 kindergartens are dedicated so as to meet the need of common people in general and working people in particular.⁸

Won Buddhism founded an educational center called Yuli Hakrim in 1946 followed by the establishment of Wongwang Junior College in 1950s, which recognized to university status in 1970s and then known as Wongwang University, a center for excellence located nearby the Headquarter of Won Buddhism in Iksan. This institution provides both secular and spiritual education and committed to produce socially accountable and morally high people for modern civil society. For that it envisaged an education system that strategically accommodates cultural heritage, folk culture and moral education as an ambitious blueprint. It is in this regard that the Museum of Wongwang University embrace the largest collection of Korean folk art in Korea. The university offers courses for undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral degree programs in liberal arts and sciences, law and politics and medical science. Since 1946, the university administers 15 colleges, 29 divisions and

8. International Affairs, *Won Buddhism, As a New and Active Buddhism: A Modern Way* (Iksan: Headquarters of Won Buddhism), 2010, 29.

20 departments where about 25 thousand students are enrolled in various programs. During the last six-decades, Wongwang University has developed its reputation for excellence and stunning campus. The university has been conceded as one of the leading moral universities by Korean Government.⁹ It also claims for over 100,000 alumni and huge investment for infrastructure development especially modern buildings with high-tech amenities.

Along with modern educational endeavor, a decade before establishment of western style Medicare, the administration recognized the necessity to recuperate the Korean oriental medicine and therefore founded three interdependent institutions in 1970 known as Kwangju Hospital of Oriental Medicine, College of Oriental Medicine Hospital, and further a College of Agriculture and Oriental Medicine focusing to endorse the herbal farming in rural Korea. These rural centered initiatives were to promote practices of traditional medicine as an alternative of costly occidental medicare, which have been diverse implication especially in terms of promotion of herbal medicine, generating employment in the farming sector as well as monetary savings. By captivating attention of farmers, the university showed keen interest to engage foreign experts and academicians specialized in agriculture science and aspired to assist local students and farmers. Keeping importance of farming sector, they engaged a foreign agricultural scientist to teach the farm management, soil management and agricultural science and its practical implementation to university students and local farmers in 1967.¹⁰ Such innovativeness and active assistance of students steadfastly enhanced the efficiency and profitability of farmers and opened new trails for organic and commercial farming.

Won Buddhism leadership strongly considered that their higher education institutions should embrace moral education and community welfare through its compact education curriculums. Therefore, they founded College of Won Buddhism by stating that modern society needs moral sensibility and moral principles should

9. Ibid

10. Won Kwang College, "News Corner", *Won Buddhism Quarterly Magazine* Vol.1, No.10, 1967, 9.

be applied in delivering social responsibilities by its future leaders. Yeongsan Sonhak Daehakgyo [Yeongsan Institute of Son Studies] was one of the first educational initiatives of Won Buddhism, which was founded in 1927 with objective of preparing a pool of spiritual mentors formally known as Won Buddhism Ministers and social workers. Moreover, this institute also contributed to promote literacy among local people since establishment, but primarily considered to produce postulants. With government approval as an Institution of Higher Education, further it broadened scope of scholarships and presently offers intensive courses on ethical studies, religious propagation, juvenile education and social welfare.¹¹ Among the graduated students, a major segment is engaged with the projects of Won Buddhism, and especially the trained women have displayed enormous interest towards the establishment of Agi Hakkyo [kindergarten] and old-age centers along with their spiritual responsibilities.

Based on similar pattern and with international aspiration, they established Won Institute of Graduate Studies in USA in 2001. This institution aims to educate western people who are interested in becoming pre-ministers of Won Buddhism and to further spread spirituality in USA. Along with courses on Won Buddhism, Applied Meditation Studies, Herbal Medicine and Acupuncture Studies are the major departments, which propose stress management and alternative medicines for patients. The herbal medicine program provides profound information about the distinctive natural plants and their application. The courses combine acupuncture and herbal medicine together in order to treat the diseases related with gynecology, fertility, pediatrics and neurology. However, these traditional practices are commonly popular for those suffering from psychosomatic problems such as depression, drug addiction and chronic pain.¹² The institute provides three-year Master Degree for Acupuncture Studies and two-year of Certificate Degree in Herbal Medicine, which provides internship for students during the courses,

11. Editor, "Education for the Future Leaders", *Living Buddha: The Won Buddhist Review Vol.1*, 2005, 114-115.

12. <http://www.woninstitute.edu/index.php?page=acupuncture-clinic>, accessed on 9th January 2014.

thus promotes learning-earning method in order to financially support the students. There are master and certificate programs for Applied Meditation courses that are designed to deal with the patients of drug addiction, depression and mind-body related problems. The students are professionally trained and aimed to practice mindfulness with stressed working people, students and other social groups. The meditation program is focused to integrate mind, body, spirit and community. The local community members formed a Board of Trustees who hold the management therefore it give the impression of a semi-independent institute.¹³ This institution played a key role in the image making of Korean people in the United States and introducing Korean tradition and culture there. In view of that, to some extent, it has been successfully connecting with western people through social networking.

Primary and Secondary Education and Children Welfare

Korean Buddhist temples attest a long practice to house orphans and abandoned children. According to chronological accounts of Won Buddhism, children's education and welfare was the primary objective of its founder. The basic foundation to carry out welfare work were initiated in 1939 when they first established Goawon in Iksan, and further a well-thought-out children welfare program started in 1941, where Great Master Sotaesan emphasized the importance of children education and further propelled Buddhist followers to come forward to educate children of neighbors. In the beginning, Iksan Bohwawon was established in 1951 which comprised about 40 kindergarten children, 10 junior school children and 80 other children.¹⁴ The growing numbers of orphanages and war victims after Korean War (1950-53) placed a new set of challenge to Korean people. Keeping leading role in view, the Won Buddhism

13. For more details on programs see International Affairs, *Won Buddhism, As a New and Active Buddhism: A Modern Way* (Iksan: Headquarters of Won Buddhism), 2010, 29. Also see Editor, "Education for the Future Leaders", *Living Buddha: The Won Buddhist Review Vol.1*, 2005, 114-115

14. Shim Dai-Seob, "Won Pulgyo Sahwepokji Saeob 60 Nyeonui Maikrakgwa Seongchal [60 Years of Won Buddhism Social Welfare: Context and Retrospection] " in *Won Pulgyo Sahwepokji Chongram* [Council of Wonpulgyo Social Welfare] (Iksan: Wonpulgyo Gyeongwon Gongbokjibu), 2008, 60.

established a distinct nursery school in Iksan in 1953, which further interweaved with the Wongwang Higher Civil School established in 1955. This institution subsequently promoted mutual cooperation among students and particularly endorsed senior students to share resources with junior students.¹⁵ By 1965, the Wongwang Junior and Senior High Schools in Iksan city and two Civic Schools in rural areas were established and one functioning successfully. The expenditures incurred to maintain these educational institutions mostly derived from the income of orchards, farms and other commercial enterprises of Won Buddhism.¹⁶ Here it needs to mention that Won Buddhism movement launched several agricultural cooperative projects for associated farmers since its inception, which gradually developed as a backbone for the financial structure and social welfare programs of Won Buddhism. The educational institutions sent their students enthusiastically to participate and contribute by laboring in the farmland along with farmers of the community.¹⁷ Thus a mutual understanding developed during the beginning of movement without any clash of interest, subsequently this triangular nexus of Won Buddhism, farmers and students played a pivotal role in the shaping of future course of social welfare agenda of Won Buddhism.

Through the various social experiments and steady growth of followers, the organization established several educational institutes in the different localities. As per available data of last sixty years (1948-2008), there are 152 Wongwang Child Education Center located in the different regions of Korea. Moreover, majority of the centers are placed either in the rural areas or the vicinity of suburban. For the pursuance of children welfare, as per chronological records of Won Buddhism; the Iri Boyukwon [Iri Nursery School] was established with 25 children in 1934 for the elementary education, which further accommodated 300 children just after the Korean War. After independence, other centers such as Gaiseong Boyukwon

15. Ibid, 69-70.

16. *Won Buddhism Quarterly Magazine*, Vol.1, No.6, 1964, 92.

17. All the Won Buddhist staffs, farmers and students planted rice in the large rice field of organization in the mid-summer and considered it as a real live religion. see *Won Buddhism Quarterly Magazine*, Vol.1, No.3, 1963, 47, and Vol.6, No.6, 1964, 93

(1937) which later reestablished as Changcheon Eurinijib, Hanguk Boyukwon (1950) in Gyeonggido were established outside Iksan of Jeollabukdo area.¹⁸ The Hanguk Boyukwon appears to be the largest center that accommodated about 1,000 war victims including children.¹⁹ These primary centers served as a prime platform to carry out elementary education and socialization of children, and considered to be the role model for the children welfare programs of Won Buddhism. Moreover, during the last three decades of twentieth century, the organization established barely two nursery schools called Urin Eurinijib, Seoul (1981) and Changcheon Eurinijib, Seoul (1985) were established.²⁰ Nevertheless, the last decade of twentieth century and the first decade of twenty-first century witnessed progression in establishment of a series of modern nursery schools by Won Buddhism. Moreover about 90% nursery schools became operational in last two decades, which facilitate day-care services. As a matter of fact, the year 1997 witnessed the Korean economic crisis where many people encountered with conspicuous socio-economic change and consequently seek out pecuniary support from social welfare organizations. Keeping this predicament in view, Won Buddhism came forward with helping hand by providing scholarship, medical assistance, educational assistance and new centers to children and youth.²¹

The Iri Boukwon, Gaiseong Boyukwon and Hanguk Boyukwon

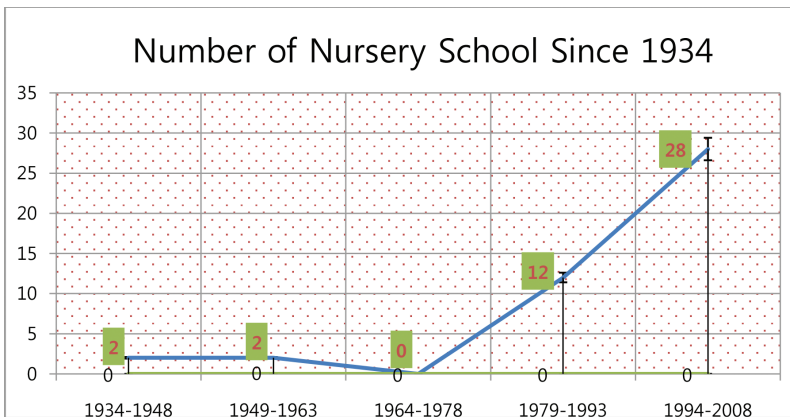
18. Perhaps the Iri Boyukwon was discontinued for some time since there has been some differences over the establishment dates of these two centers; the Won Buddhism chronological records establishment of Iri Boyukwon in 1934 and Hanguk Boyukwon in 1950, however some books records the establishment of Iri Boyukwon in 1953 and Hanguk Boyukwon in 1951 see Lee Hye Suk, *Chonggyo Sahoe Pokji [Religious Social Welfare]* (Seoul: Dongguk Daehakyo Publication), 2003, 358

19. Han Gil Ryang, Ed., *Won Pulgyo Sahwepokji Chongram [Council of Wonpulgyo Social Welfare]* (Iksan: Wonpulgyo Gyeongseongwon Gongikbokjibu), 2008, 856.

20. For details of each nursery school see Ibid, 672-755.

21. U Se-Gwan, "Chunggang Bong Gong Hwe 30 Nyeon Sa" [30 Years History of Central Bonggong Hwe] in *Yeongyuksangjeonui Koch Bong Gong Hwe [Spirit and Flower of Bong Gong Hwe]*, Chief Compiler, U Se-Gwan (Iksan: Won Pulgyo Central Bong Gong Hwe), 2007, 56.

were the primarily residential centers and consisted with the orphans and war victim children. Besides that they also focused on the children with absolute and relatively poor background by providing residential care service in order to protect them from any deprivation and social segregation. Though the Iri Boyukwon accommodated about 300 children soon after independence in 1945, however as per 2008 data, it accommodates 140 boy and girl students of different age groups.²² The Hanguk Boyukwon accommodated thousands of war orphans and provided elementary to secondary education as well as vocational education to about 3,000 children by 1970. In this context, the war orphans not only received vocational education but programs for social integration and moral education by the competent instructors were truly instrumental for their employment prospect. As per 2008 data, about eighty children of diverse upbringings are being benefited with the available facilities.²³ And the phenomenal changes, especially decreasing number of orphan, reshaped the nature of centers established in last two decades, and majority of nursery schools function as a day care center.



Source: Won Pulgyo Sahwepokji Chongram, 2008.

The following chart exhibits as to how swiftly the nursery schools of Won Buddhism have grown inside the Korea after 1990. The total number of nursery school has increased more than ten times during the last twenty years. Remarkably, the establishments

22. Han Gil Ryang, 728.

23. Ibid, 756.

of nursery schools are deeply interlinked with the rapid growth of manufacturing and service sectors that brought equal working opportunity for female. Therefore, modern economic development left no other option than to send children to nursery schools which assume accountability for taking care of children of working people. In this regard, the visible presence and appealing educational initiative of other religions may be a motivation behind the rapid growth of nursery schools of Won Buddhism. Particularly after 1990, the modern nursery schools ascended with some ingenious creativities such as Aagabang [Kid Room], playing room, Doseosil [Library], Aadong Sangdam [Children Counseling], Ginungsil [Functional Classrooms], and gradually added Gombubang [Study Room], computer room, and Kumdoribang [Children Café Room-after school].

The notion of *Kumdoribang* was propelled by the Wongwang Central Social Welfare Center in 1993 seeking maximum utilization of available facilities and time. This designated space has been operational even after school time and during vacations. It appears to be a substitute of Korean Hakwons which are mushrooming everywhere in Korea. The only difference is that the institution offers additional assistance for students' homework. The curriculum includes counseling for parents who usually underscores parental behavior towards children and minimum parental interference. The purpose of this initiative is primarily about confidence building, emotional integration with society as well as to prepare students to become a 'civilized democratic civilian' with profound inclination towards social welfare work. For this purpose, an appropriate space is operational with the modern facilities, well trained instructors including native English teachers for assistance and ample freedom is provided to interact and engage with the society.²⁴ The center understandingly considers concerns of students and frame prerequisite courses. It is in this context that a special class for the English language proficiency is gaining popularity among secondary

24. Wangwang Chonghap Sahoe Pokjigwan 10 Nyeon Sa Pheonjib Wonhoe, ed., *Wangwang Chonghap Sahoe Pokjigwan 10 Nyeon Sa* [10 Year History of Wongwang Central Social Welfare Center] (Iksan: Sahoe Pokji Beopin Sam Dong Hei), 2000, 69.

and college students. In addition to it, extra classes in mathematics and other challenging subjects are in great demand, which appears to be byproduct of mounting pressure on students. The students are promoted for group study, teamwork and mutual collaboration so as to meet the national and international competitiveness. Thus, the process for nurturing social capital begins right from the primary school.

As per nursery schools syllabus, the education system seems to be a blend of traditional and modern education where courtesy with general subjects extra curriculum activities, folk game, music, art, languages and field-trips is incorporated. In addition to that the similar programs have been offered for summer and winter vacation with nominal charges.²⁵

Area	Centers	Area	Centers	Area	Centers
Jeonbok	33	Dae-jeon	14	Gyeonggi Incheon	7
Gwanggu Jeonnam	16	Seoul	13	DaiguGyeong-bok	7
Gyeongnam	15	Jeju	11	Gangwon	4
Chungang	14	Pusan	9	Chungbok	1
Total Precentage	51.3%		23.4%		25.3%

Sources: *Wonpulgyo Sahwaibokji Chongram (Council of Wonbulgyo Social Welfare)*²⁶

As the preceding table shows, Won Buddhists have primarily focused on the underprivileged of backward regions of Korea. The most populated and prosperous areas include Seoul, Pusan and

25. Ibid, 38.
26. For the details of the centers see Han Gil Ryang, 936-945.

Daejeon that accounts for approx. 23% of total education centers for children. Jeonbok, Gwanggu, Gyeongnam and Chungang are the main agricultural areas of Korea that accounts for the rest of 51% of educational centers. It needs to mention that agrarian people has been the core base for the Won Buddhism since its inception. Therefore, even after tremendous development of Korea the Won Buddhism is interlocked with the welfare of rural backward people.

Social Welfare and Formation of Social Capital

Within this sphere the Won Buddhist Youth Alumni founded in 1964 was a leading organization which played important role to trained and engage the youths especially those war victims who entered to South Korea from North Korea and Japan in 1945. The Won Buddhists extended helping hand by providing shelter, food, medical assistance in the first hand and professional training program for carrier building and social empowerment on the other. For deeper socialization of youth, they launched several movements to build public amenities and volunteer services. They made cooperative effort for community development for next two decades, their social contribution accounts Greenery Work of Seongju, Albongmyeoji and Yeongsang Areas (Jellodo), Aquatic Farm Cooperation Work of Sugae Area especially promotion of pisciculture, and Yanggu Park Development in Seoul area. This organization also collaborated with Jeonbuk University Alumni Association and Jeongdohwegwon Organization for volunteer services and organized numbers of dental camps for rural people further provided volunteering services to night schools and to those suffering from psychosomatic problems in the hospitals.²⁷ During 1960s-70s, the youth association members enthusiastically partook in social development programs by offering labor services, medical assistance, children and women counseling and improving the living condition of rural people of Korea. Therefore, their devotion and zeal of social work successfully trapped the attention of then Korean government who rewarded them with Presidential Award, Prime Minister's Award and Education Ministry Award for community development and social

27. Chang Ha-Yeol, Won Pulgyoui Cheongsoneyon Pokjihwaldong [Won Buddhist Youth Welfare Effort] in *Won Pulgyo Sahwepokji Chongram*, 365-367.

activism in 1960s.²⁸ The Won Gwang University Youth Association received excellence award from Ministry of Culture for social work and regional development in 1971.²⁹

During the period of 1970s-1980s Korean society encountered with a high dropout rate among school students nationwide. Keeping the parlous state of education in view, both government and private players came forward with numerous innovative educational programs. The Won Buddhists sincerely undertook the national mission of literacy by predominantly focusing on the problems of students; especially those came from rural backgrounds, farming sector and downtrodden background. They joined nation's *Daian Hakyo Undong* (Alternative Education Movement) by launching several *Yahakhwaldong* (Night School) and *Daian Hakyo* (Alternative Education Schools) to educate and engage the young students especially middle and high-school dropout and further provided technical skill programs for diverse employment.³⁰

The Samdong and Sindoon Night School³¹ and Yeongsan Seonwon³² were the representative centers, which practiced lofty catchphrases such as, learn to refresh spirit, sensible wisdom and practice of righteousness. It appeals students to join the education and become a novel, wise, pioneer, appreciator, courageous human being with a fresh body and mind.³³ The foundational objective was to induce an

28. Chang Ha-Yeol, 414-415.

29. "Won Gwang Daihak Ususang Pada [Won Gwang University Received Ministerial Award]", *Won Pulgyo Sinmun [Won Buddhism Newspaper]*, April 1, 1971.

30. Chang Ha-Yeol, 438.

31. There is dearth of data over the number of Night Schools, however Samdong (1980) and Sindongan (1982) are the central centers, see Chang Ha-Yeol, 370.

32. Some Won Buddhist temples were also used for Night School, see "Yeongsan Seonwoneseo Yahak [Night School at Yeongsan Seonwon]", *Won Pulgyo Sinmun [Won Buddhism Newspaper]*, October 1, 1970.

33. Wangwang Chonghap Sahoe Pokjigwan 10 Nyeon Sa Pheonjib Wonhoe, 127. Also see "Samdong Yuli Silheyon Wihan BongGong Jeongsinuro", *Won Pulgyo Sinmun [Won Buddhism Newspaper]*, May 6, 1982.

openingfor educationally deprived downtrodden people in order to empower them to become independent and socially accountable. The classes were held during 7:00pm to 9:30pm where students were between the age group of 10-40 years. The curriculum consist with traditional and modern subjects; where physical education, agricultural education, technical education, classical Chinese, and folk art has been offered as optional subjects; and social science, natural science, languages and moral education courses are the integral parts of program. As per available data, about hundreds of students graduated during the period of 1985-2000.³⁴ Though the Samdong Night School was first commencement with about 50 students in 1975³⁵ butthe average success recorded was about one-fourth.³⁶ The exertions were made to persuade successful students to undertake vocational courses and further assistance extended for employment. Remarkably, these engaged students became a pillar for social capital formation of Won Buddhism, which progressively volunteering for welfare projects.³⁷

The engaged Daian Schools include Seongjin Godung Hakyo [Seongjin High School], Hwarang High School, Wongyeong High School, Heonsan Chun Hakyo [Middle School], Jipyongseon Middle School and Hangyere Middle and High School. The Alternative Education Program has been an outstanding experiment of Won Buddhism which incorporates moral and social welfare education along with general subjects as a substitute of competition based education. It premeditated to offeran opportunity to financially weaker students, lessbright students and to those lost interest in study. The Won Buddhism educational philosophy and spirit has been

34. Wangwang Chonghap Sahoe Pokjigwan 10 Nyeon Sa Pheonjib Wonhoe, 131.

35. "Jeonggie Yahakwon Gaiseoul," *Won Pulgyo Sinmun [Won Buddhism Newspaper]*, March 10, 1975.

36. "Samdong Yahak Joreoub [Graduation Ceremony of Samdong Night School]," *Won Pulgyo Sinmun [Won Buddhism Newspaper]*, September 16, 1985. Also see "Samdong Yahak Joreoub [Graduation Ceremony of Samdong Night School]," *Won Pulgyo Sinmun [Won Buddhism Newspaper]*, September 6, 1987.

37. Samdong Yahak Gaihaksik [Semester Opening Ceremony of Samdong Night School]," *Won Pulgyo Sinmun [Won Buddhism Newspaper]*, September 16, 1988.

applied for personality development, and further mentally prepare them for study. The schools are inclined to develop social adaptability and sociability in emotionally distressed students by offering special courses and capable instructors. The school administration persuades students to discover one's true nature and up-bring students with self-esteem and self-possession. The school curriculum broadly laid emphasis on moral and physical growth of students by proposing both formal and informal education. The students have a domestic ambiance and opportunity for open debate on various topics and study trip to popular historical sites. The students have been learning courses related to science, social science, languages and being encouraged to advocate notion of social welfare.³⁸

Though, Won Buddhism endeavors to empower children and youths began in 1970s however, it has been continuing with several experimental modifications. As per records of Wongwang Central Welfare Center 2000, along with general subjects, Toraijibdan Gyosil [Art and Peer Group Room], Hwemang Hakyo [Volunteering School], DukgiJeokseong Gyeouk [Special Aptitude Education], Namyong Gyeouk [Drug Abuse Prevention Education] and Dongaari Hwaldong [Social Clubbing] programs are included.³⁹ These programs generally held during the vacations, and active participation of youths and women in social activism is greatly emphasized. Therefore, the formation of social capital begins right from admission and continued even after graduation. In this perspective, they founded Daian Hakyo Yeonguhwe [Alternative Education Research Society] in 2006 seeking enduring social bond with graduates.⁴⁰

Conclusion

Sotaesan- the founder of Won Buddhism is the representative leader who provided religious remedy for common people of Korea. Though, he was well-versed to both the Eastern and Western spiritual traditions but opted Buddhist tradition as a tool to meet the contemporary

38. For more details over program see Chang Ha-Yeol, 365-85.

39. Wangwang Chonghap Sahoe Pokjigwan 10 Nyeon Sa Pheonjib Wonhoe, 38.

40. "Daian Hakyo Yeonguhwe Balgokhaja [Lets Start Study Club of Alternative Education]," *Won Pulgyo Sinmun [Won Buddhism Newspaper]*, February 24, 2006.

socio-spiritual demand where his key objective was to help needy and downtrodden people. As a matter of fact, Won Buddhist movement emerged from the backward regions and secured backing of common masses, uneducated and agrarian people of contemporary Korea. The contemporary social apathy, economic distress and spiritual distinction were the key factors which motivated common masses for active socio-religious engagement. The founder of Won Buddhism instantly sensed the spiritual need of modern times and therefore, mobilized the masses by interpreting Buddhist ideas of social activism and provided spiritual leadership. Won Buddhism social welfare agenda focuses on education and welfare of the children and youth, thus they engaged community by several educational and welfare undertakings.

The innovative educational notion has inspired thousands of people and signaled a noticeable advancement in the educational field. The initiatives of Won Buddhism have contributed to increase the national literacy rate as well as to curb the number of school dropouts. Modern nursery schools are not only taking care of children of working people but also providing a quality of education. Traditionally they have been focusing on the problems of rural people and downtrodden people. The Won Buddhists volunteering works were recognized by the government agencies that awarded them for excellence in the field of social welfare. Social activism not only influenced the contemporary society but had a deep influence on Won Buddhist followers. The higher education centers especially Wongwang University has positively contributed by providing quality education to rural students.

Through their distinctive educational effort it also generated a pool of social capital which has progressively volunteered and engaged for several social welfare projects. Socio-religious transformation in contemporary society will guide in a bond of harmony among the nations, and in this perspective the role of Won Buddhism as a vehicle of social empowerment is worth considerable.

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