

# Re-thinking Married *Bhikṣu*: Examination of *Bhikṣu* Ordinations and Clerical Marriage in 1920s Korean Buddhism\*

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One of the most controversial issues to arise during the colonial period in Korea was the rise of clerical marriage and meat-eating among Korean monks. Given that sexual congress and meat dishes were prohibited in *bhikṣu* and bodhisattva precepts respectively, any examination of the issue of clerical marriage and meat-eating requires a careful exploration of the ways in which Korean monks understood and practiced *bhikṣu* and bodhisattva precepts not only in the colonial period but also in the late Chosŏn period. The Chosŏn period saw a weakening of the *bhikṣu* ordination tradition, whose ordination lineage was broken until the monk Taeŭn and the monk Manha established their own lineages by bestowing *bhikṣu* precepts in the eighteenth and the late nineteenth centuries, respectively. According to the *Tongsa yŏlchŏn* 東師列傳 (Biographies of Korean monks) written by the monk Pŏmhae in 1894, the number of *bhikṣu* and bodhisattva ordinations gradually increased in the nineteenth century. Because the government had overturned Buddhist institutions such as the monk examinations and certificates, monks had to secure their clerical identity by taking precepts from renowned preceptors, such as Ch'oŭi and Pŏmhae. The early Japanese colonial period also witnessed the rise of *bhikṣu* and bodhisattva ordinations in major Korean monasteries in part because the head-branch temple laws, a set of monastic laws, now specified that *bhikṣu* and bodhisattva ordinations were requirements for higher clerical positions, such as head monk or branch temple abbot. However, an examination of two cases of head temple elections, one in the T'ongdosa parish and one in the Magoksa parish, reveals that, though these requirements were in place, the way that monks understood the status of *bhikṣu* as it pertained to clerical marriage led to a rise in the number of *bhikṣu*

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ordinations that was surprisingly contemporaneous with the increase of clerical marriage during the colonial period.

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