

Feminism and Feminine Spirituality in Won Buddhism

Chung Nam Ha

Won Institute of Graduate Studies, Pennsylvania, United States

Won Buddhism is a reformed Buddhism founded by Chungbin Park (Sot'aesan, 1891-1943). After he got enlightened in 1916, he read main religious texts such as Taoist, Confucian, Buddhist, Christian texts. He thought they had great insights for helping human societies. However, traditional religions enforced the social system of patriarchy and hierarchy. Patriarchy is the family culture where the eldest son becomes head of the family, succeeds in the family lineage, and plays the central role in all decisions and hegemony. This kind of eldest son-centered family culture justified gender roles in households of the paternal family. It devised various tools to control women through the idea of the purity of women, the idea of the good wife and good mother, and the idealization of motherhood. This patriarchy produced social strata marked by discrimination between the gentry and commoners, between male and female, between legitimate and illegitimate children and between different races or ethnic groups; it produced a perpendicular human relationship structure of dominance and submission. Sot'aesan criticized that Korean culture did not allow women to have basic rights of education, property, occupation, and social engagement as human. Further, for Sot'aesan's time, industrialization, capitalism, and imperialism developed by Western countries became more powerful and escalate social hierarchy and increase the gap between poor and rich: then more people and more women could be driven into unsafety. I present the way how the founder recognized the unreasonable discrimination against women and how he wished to abolish the unreasonable discrimination against women.

Keywords: Androcentrism, dichotomous dualism, non-duality, post-patriarchal Religion, feminine spirituality

The Patriarchy of Religions and Dichotomous Dualism

Reflecting back on higher or world religions in history, the tenets of their doctrines have been male dominating, and they have been characterized by androcentrism. Under a male-dominating religious order, women are often excluded from essential rituals or hierarchy, their role consequently dwindling gradually. For example, the woman is just an audience and sometimes becomes the outsider in male-dominated sermons or rites. In holy orders, women are not allowed to enter the ministry. Even though some excellent women were available, there has been no serious effort to make their ideas known; so many women are hidden in history with few known. But it is also a fact that the overall population of women religious believers is larger in number than men's. Woman believers have participated in religious rituals or services as laity, and been regarded as important resources to support the male priests or religious organizations financially.

Women, despite their roles of central supporters for the religious order and male priests, have been looked down on in a negative sense by male leaders of religions. In religious traditions, men had to keep their minds from being morally corrupted in order to purify their souls and become nearer to God, or in order to be

enlightened. Yet their efforts sometimes proved unsuccessful, and women were regarded as the obstacle to their ascetic practice due to their fear of being tempted. With women being considered as wicked ones or the ones whose bodies are the tool of depravity, aversion toward women has been imbued in religious doctrines.

Behind this negative view of women, we can find the dichotomous thinking of male practitioners, the distinctions of the holy and secular, spirit and body, reason and emotion, male and female, and good and evil. The sacred world which male priests sought was separated from the secular world, and the purity of their souls could not coexist with their bodies. Women were regarded as having a different kind of existence from men and as the potential evil. Men who were pursuing the sacred and spiritual should maintain reason and not be involved in the temptations of passion. Men were regarded as having an existence that was pure, sacred, spiritual, good and reasonable, while women were seen as being worldly, fleshly, unwholesome and emotional. The former and the latter could not be compatible or mixed. The former were primary, while the latter were secondary and the object of control or elimination by the former.

This dualism in religious ideas permeated our society and culture. Actually, religions played a very influential role in old times, and that underlies our basic socio-cultural framework. This kind of dualism schematizing the subject and the object was used often for political purposes, and the strong came to rationalize their egocentric acts, creating the convention of masculine supremacy and exclusivism. Exclusivism among religions always went hand in hand with ambition for growth-centered national ideals and those in power justified various forms of aggression. Many traditional religions have taken a form which deviates from the essence of religion or the original intention of each religion's founder. The reason was thought more important, and emotion or flesh was neglected, and these issues have become more serious since modern states started to be established. Modern thought which puts more emphasis on reason has taken nature simply as matter and has justified the exploitation and destruction of nature in the name of development, thus creating the problems of the ecological system and threatening all beings on earth. Gender issues, sex discrimination, and so many other problems also basically originate in these underlying thoughts and religious conventions.

In this paper, the author will introduce a new paradigm based on the practices of Won Buddhism for the development of egalitarian society.

The Paradigm of Won Buddhism as Post-patriarchal Religion

Won Buddhism started from the Great Enlightenment of Sot'aesan Pak Chungbin (1891-1943) in 1916. He, at that time, clearly recognized the contradictions of the patriarchal socio-cultural system and the need to reform it. He felt the need of new religious teachings in order to change the old paradigms in human culture and society. After his enlightenment, he diagnosed the social disease and made out a prescription, which is well expressed in *The Canon of Won-Buddhism* (Chung, 2003).

In his new religious movement, Sot'aesan precisely diagnosed the problems at that time and where they came from, and made out a prescription, creating the new paradigm of religion. The essence of what he recognized and suggested is, in short, the criticism of patriarchy in the socio-cultural context and criticism of the dichotomous dualism that justified it. Therefore, Sot'aesan's search for a new religious culture has resulted in a post-patriarchal system.

Ultimate Truth Without Gender Discrimination

What is essential to understanding Sot'aesan's ideas that form the foundation of a new religion is the

concept of *Irwon* and its symbol, *Irwonsang*, or the unitary circular form. This represents the ultimate truth of Won Buddhism. Sot'aesan said that *Irwon*, or the truth of *Irwonsang*, is the inexpressible realm of *Samadhi*. This means that *Irwon* is the realm that goes beyond words, thoughts, or names. *Irwon* is the closest expression of Truth, which was already mentioned and described as the symbol of the Circle in Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism.

At the same time, *Irwon* is the original source of all things in the universe and the original nature of all sentient beings. From this perspective, men and women are the sublime beings based on and originated from the ultimate Truth of *Irwon*. *Irwon* is not inclined to men, nor to women; *Irwon* can be considered as the substance that transcends both sexes and at the same time as the substance that embraces both sexes. Thinking that *Irwon* is the origin of all things, *Irwon* is nearer to the aspect of the maternal rather than the transcendental being. Chungsan Song Kyu (1900-1962), who succeeded Sot'aesan as the second patriarch of Won Buddhism, expressed *Irwon* as the mother of all things.

The Spiritual Way Compatible With Women and Women's Experiences

The characteristic of the religions marked by patriarchy is that they all describe the ultimate Truth as something transcendental. And this accompanies the idea that all perceivable things are separated from transcendental existence. This is related with the characteristics of men and their experiences. Men are not able to experience giving birth and physically nurturing the child. Men's bodily experience makes it easier for them to cognize the Truth in an ideological, abstract, and separate fashion. This is different from women whose bodily characteristics enable their perception of Truth to be experiential and direct. From this viewpoint, the existing religions whose culture and organization are based on methods of Truth-recognition through separation and practice by male practitioners made it hard for females to become religious masters. Even if there were a female master, men would have had a hard time understanding her, or would not have approved of her because of their vested interests.

The expression of *Irwon* as the inexpressible realm does not mean that *Irwon* is the existence that transcends all beings. But *Irwon* should be understood from the context that human languages in various cultures are limited in many ways. The view of *Irwon* as the original source of all beings in the universe implies that the Truth was expressed through phenomenal things and the recognition of Truth can be made by actual experience in daily life. Therefore, Sot'aesan's way of Truth recognition can be said to be a feminine way, which emphasizes the actual experience and life rather than the manly method which is premised on the separation approach to Truth recognition.

Beyond the Dichotomy of the Holy and Secular

Unlike the manly method that is conditioned by separation in Truth recognition, the way of female practice does not lead the holy and secular to a dichotomous dualism because it is based on concrete life and experience. That means that the secular life is considered important in the field of practice and in Truth recognition. Thus, the religious spirituality of feminism holds the characteristic that it is not separated from secular life.

After Sot'aesan's Great Enlightenment, he said that Shakyamuni Buddha is the sage of all sages and the *Diamond Sutra* is the sutra of all sutras. Yet he added criticism of the monk-centered Buddhist organization and the traditional way of religious practice that sought awakening outside of real life. His ideas are specifically shown in his book *A Treatise on Renovation of Korean Buddhism* (Park, 1997).

As for the renovated parts, the imported Buddhism is to be changed to the Buddhism for the people of Korea, the Buddhism for small numbers of people to Buddhism for the masses, with the supreme and great way of Buddha remaining the same. The essential ways of humanity which secular lives need should be more illuminated. The expedients and institutions which enable the doctrine to function should be renovated according to the times and human thinking style. Following the General Introduction that can be said to be the prelude, the greatness of the Buddha and the true meaning of monastic practice were explained and the idea of new Buddhist Teachings, which are needed according to the needs of the times and the masses, was suggested. Further, the renovated aspect of Buddhism was clearly shown, adapted to modern times and ordinary life, and made accessible to the public. Sot'aesan's view and criticism of traditional Korean Buddhism should be viewed as his overall evaluation of the conventional religions rather than his opinion of Buddhism itself. It is the suggestion of a new religious culture, and this is clearly shown in "The Founding Motive of Won Buddhism" and "An Outline of the Teaching" in *The Canon of Won Buddhism* (Chung, 2003).

Overcoming the Dualism of the Spirit and Body

The religious idea that regards human daily lives as important and does not separate the holy and secular does not lead to the dichotomy of the spirit and flesh. This contrasts with the patriarchal socio-culture and religious ideas where women were excluded and their bodies considered impure. The root of dichotomous dualism starts with the dichotomy of the spirit and body and this has been supported by the patriarchy, as was mentioned before. Thus, the recognition of and viewpoint toward the female body is an important starting point for the research of religious culture which overcomes patriarchy.

If the so-called secular life is mainly related with giving birth, raising children and taking care of household affairs, these things cannot be separated from the female body. If secular lives are considered the practice area with no distinction of the secular from the sacred, misogyny cannot be justified; practitioners feared their practices being hindered by women, so they created hatred towards the female body. In addition, the practitioner's lifestyle of abandoning families and household responsibilities in order to practice the Buddha's teaching cannot be justified; it led to a life of dependence and idleness. Sot'aesan lamented that the evil custom of living idly without jobs prevailed among practitioners of the way and it greatly harmed individuals, families, societies, and nations (Chung, 2003).

If we say that *Irwon* is the original source of all things in the universe and the original nature of all sentient beings, the spirit and body cannot be separated from the standpoint of ultimate Truth; all originate from the Truth of *Irwon* and are important. The saying that the spirit and body should both be perfected means that the bodily life is as important as the spiritual life, so all human feelings and desires should not be denied. Sot'aesan criticized the culture of the past that negated all importance of bodily life. Of course, the self-indulgent life which does not control the desires of the flesh was also regarded as unrighteous, yet the balance and harmony between bodily life and spiritual life was thought to be a perfect and righteous one.

Sot'aesan's view of the wholeness of the spirit and body and his idea that the ultimate Truth should be related to actual life, is clearly shown in the doctrine of The Fourfold Beneficence (Chung, 2003). If *Irwon* is something supernatural or transcendental, this question can arise "What is the real essence of *Irwon* then?". The content of *Irwon* is the Fourfold Beneficence, which is the beneficence of heaven and earth, of parents, of fellow beings, and of laws; it does not exist separately from phenomenal things. One of Sot'aesan's disciples asked, "How do we practice our faith in the Truth of *Irwon*?". He answered that *Irwon* is composed of the

Fourfold Beneficence, and the Fourfold Beneficence comprises all beings in the universe. All things that we see in the universe are nothing but Buddha. Therefore, at all times and in all places we must be very respectful and cautious toward all things, keeping a pure mind and a pious manner as if we were before the real Buddha (Chung, 2003). The saying that all beings originate from *Irwon* is equivalent to the fact that they come from the Fourfold Beneficence.

Sot'aesan's saying that *Irwon* is composed of the Fourfold Beneficence and the Fourfold Beneficence comprises all beings in the universe implies two important points. One is that all beings in the universe, including humans, are holy. Our body and spirit that originate from *Irwon* are not only holy but also the unified entity. The other is that all individual things in the universe arise from the Fourfold Beneficence, and they exist depending on each other separately. In this idea regarding Truth and the world, the justification of the dichotomy of self and others loses its ground. All beings are subjects by themselves and become objects to others and this produces the pluralistic relation; this is the basis of the idea of the Fourfold Beneficence in Won Buddhism. This idea of beneficence means every individual exists in relation to others. The viewpoint that regards all things in the universe and humans as connected with each other under the beneficent relation gives rise to the ethics of feminism that is based on interdependence and caring.

Feminist Ethics Based on the Organic Worldview of Interdependence

The idea of beneficence in Won Buddhism is totally different from the idea of creation appearing in Judaism or Christianity. It shares similarities with the thought of dependent arising in Buddhism, yet a big difference remains. According to creationism, the creator and creature are separated. And the essence of the creator is utterly different from that of creatures. Thus, the essence of our Maker was regarded as impossible to be grasped and was thought to be the existence that lies outside. The creator and creatures rely on the relation to give order and it requires absolute submission. Disobedience to our Maker's order is regarded as sin. Accordingly the ethics of Judaism or Christianity is in accordance with the Law or Commandments, and it has the typical patriarchal ethics. In contrast to this, the idea of dependent arising in Buddhism is based on the idea of no self. This says that there is nothing that has permanent, unchanging self. Buddha observed that sentient beings suffer because of their attachment to perceivable things. From the enlightened perspective, all things arise depending on other things directly and indirectly, and they are all temporary existents as they perish when certain conditions arise. In that sense, the basic teaching of Buddhism is the idea of emptiness. Yet the emptiness here does not imply the denial of the world, but it is some encouragement to awaken the deluded sentient beings.

Sot'aesan accepted the idea of no self, which originates from the doctrine of dependent arising of Buddhism, which says that all arise and perish according to causes and conditions. Sot'aesan developed that to arrive at the idea of mutual beneficence, or the relational ethic between all things. The pillar of beneficence is the Fourfold Beneficence of heaven and earth, parents, fellow beings and laws. All things exist depending on others of the Fourfold Beneficence and remain permanently as interdependent entities. Nothing in this world can arise without the Fourfold Beneficence, nor lead its life or existence without it. Nothing can exist without others and all things depend on each other. One who does not have a deep knowledge of Buddhism may perceive the doctrine of dependent arising as meaning no self and emptiness as the doctrine of nihilism, for it teaches that everything is impermanent and evanescent. The concept of dependent arising in Won Buddhism, on the contrary, was developed as the idea that affirms life positively, by saying that everything arises

depending on the beneficence of other things. And the relation between perceivable things is dynamic; each being is a living organism and coexists together (Ha, 1997). The female ethic of taking care of and looking after was changed to the Way of Interdependence. The time of Sot'aesan was marked by the social system of discrimination between gentry and commoners, male and female, legitimate and illegitimate children, consequently producing the relation of hatred and resentment, conflict and confrontation; the strong trampled the weak and raised war and pillaged, creating the death link. Sot'aesan thought that these all came from the people's ignorance of beneficence and their ingratitude to beneficence. The ethic based on the idea of beneficence is to show gratitude to others and put the way of coexistence and cooperation into practice. This is shown in "The Essentials Regarding How the Strong and Weak May progress". While the ethic of patriarchal socio-culture is said to be the power-centered social status and supremacy, the female ethic is the thought supporting mutual respect between humans, and equality and coexistence among them. In this respect, the patriarchal system that maintains racial discrimination results from the ignorance of the fundamental beneficence. Sot'aesan, being aware of the fundamental beneficence, yearned for a new social order of coexistence and equality, which brought forth The Four Essentials (Chung, 2003). This is the new principle to renew society. Sot'aesan did not think the problems of society and that of the household were separate. He thought that the social order of equality and coexistence starts from the relationship of husband and wife, so he suggested as his first item of The Four Essentials, equal rights between husband and wife.

The Equal Rights of Men and Women for the End of Patriarchy

Equal Rights Between Husband and Wife, Between Men and Women, and Cultivation of Self-Reliance

Patriarchy is the family culture where the eldest son becomes head of the family, succeeds in the family lineage, and plays the central role in all decisions and hegemony. This kind of eldest son-centered family culture justified gender roles in households of the paternal family. It devised various tools to control women through the idea of the purity of women, the idea of the good wife and good mother, and the idealization of motherhood. This patriarchy produced social strata marked by discrimination between the gentry and commoners, between male and female, between legitimate and illegitimate children and between different races and ethnic groups; it produced a perpendicular human relationship structure of dominance and submission.

This man-centered family culture is the basis of patriarchy. And the relationship between husband and wife became that between masters and servants. Truthfully speaking, among various human discriminations, the discrimination between husband and wife was the fundamental thing and a widespread phenomenon; it provided the foundation to rationalize all the discriminative relationships of high and low. Nevertheless, the women's rights problem was raised most recently in the process of human liberation movements for eliminating various discriminations like democratic movements or the anti-slave movement.

Sot'aesan did not regard the disease of society and that of the household separately. He perceived that the problem in the relationship between husband and wife was deeply related with the link in various conflicts of human relationships in society. He thought that the first step for restoring peace and equality in human relationships was to establish equality between husband and wife, so the first chapter of The Four Essentials written for social change was "The Equal Rights between Husband and Wife". The Four Essentials when first published, was composed of The Equal Rights between Husband and Wife, The Discrimination between The Wise and The Ignorant, The Education of Others' Children by the One Who Does not Have Children, and Venerating Those who Are Dedicated to The Public Welfare. "The Equal Rights between Women and Men",

when *The Treasure Sutra of Six Essentials* (1932) was not yet published, was entitled “The Equal Rights between Husband and Wife”.¹ According to The Fourfold Beneficence and The Four Essentials in The Proposal on the Correction of the Doctrine,² the Fourfold Beneficence is composed of the indebtedness and gratitude to heaven and earth, parents, fellow beings and laws; The Four Essentials were The Equal Rights between Husband and Wife, The Discrimination between The Wise and The Ignorant, The Education of Other’s Children by the One Who Does not Have Children, and Protection of the Helpless.³ “The Equal Rights between Husband and Wife” was changed to “The Equal Rights between Men and Women” when *The Treasure Sutra of Six Essentials* was published in 1932, and it was once again changed to “Self-Empowerment”; its meaning was widened in order to overcome all discriminative structures in Korean society. Sot’aesan viewed The Equal Rights between Husband and Wife as the basis to establish The Equal Rights between Men and Women. And he thought that The Equal Rights between Men and Women was the foundation of equal rights for all humans, which enables them to discard dependence and lead a self-reliant life.

In “The Equal Rights between Husband and Wife”, we can find that Sot’aesan criticized the situation of women’s lack of rights and freedom.

What a deplorable situation it is to the past women who had no rights and no freedom. The property right, the inborn right of all humans, was withheld from women. The right of social intercourse which even animals want was not allowed to women. Women could not fulfill their filial piety to their parents they most revered and loved, and were treated unfairly by their Children. What a pity it is that women had no rights and no freedom. They could not carry out their obligations that should be done. Therefore they were not provided any rights because rights come from fulfilling one’s duty; rights without duties cannot exist and there are no duties without rights. It is natural that in the past women having no rights became irresponsible. As half of all humans are women and as they came to depend on men and become irresponsible, it was a big loss to household, community, and every sector of society! It was like one person doing some work which should be done by two, and it can be compared to lifting one heavy stone by five men, which could be moved up by ten. How deplorable it was. Thus we should carry out each and every item of The Equal Rights between Husband and Wife; women should be given equal obligation and must be endowed equal rights lest each party should be dependent on the other. In this case, men do not have to be hindered to perform their obligations due to women; and women are not restricted in their work by men. So it is necessary in terms of our practice or of our work or of our daily lives. Therefore I choose The Equal Rights between Husband and Wife as one of our regulations and endeavor to put that into practice.⁴

Sot’aesan soundly criticized the lack of estate right, no right to social intercourse, and the fact that women were not endowed with the right to support their parents; and he added that such a system produced a lot of loss in household, nation and in every corner of society. To solve these problems, Sot’aesan suggested that the equal rights of husband and wife should be fulfilled by giving women proper rights, and proposed the idea that husband and wife should perform their duties equally to prevent them from holding grudges toward each other.

In “The Equal Rights between Men and Women” appearing in *The Treasure Sutra of Six Essentials*, we

¹ Refer to “The Words on the Necessity why Husband and Wife need to have Separate Estate”, in 18th Issue of *Monthly Communication* in the 14th year of Won Buddhism.

² The 20th Issue of the *Monthly Communication* in the 17th year of Won Buddhism.

³ Yet in The 2nd Training Material which was written and published in the 14th year of Won Buddhism, we can see “Venerating Those who Dedicated Their Lives as Our Fathers” instead of “Protection of the Helpless” (in The Report of the Work in 14th year of Won Buddhism). In *The Treasure Sutra of Six Essentials* (first published in the 17th year of Won Buddhism), it was “The Equal Rights between Men and Women” instead of “The Equal Rights between Husband and Wife”. Considering these contexts, we can say that Sot’aesan’s first announcement of The Four Essentials, was, though not published, The Equal Rights Between Husband and Wife, The Discrimination between The Wise and The Ignorant, The Education of Others’ Children by the One Who Does not Have Children, and Protection of The Helpless.

⁴ The Whole Periodicals of Won Buddhism, Vol. 5, pp. 85-86.

can see specific items of equality and what we should do to gain them. To state them briefly, they are rights to support parents, to offer ancestral worship rituals, to become head of the family, to education, to social intercourse, to occupation, to estate and to control their bodies and minds.

The principle of The Equal Rights between Men and Women is to fulfill the personal duties and responsibilities incumbent on human beings; men and women should not be kept from fulfilling their ambitions and ideals or hold grudges because of the other party. Items of Women's Lifestyle in Choson are the following:

1. Women did not fulfill their duties to their parents who gave birth to them.
2. Women were treated discriminatively even by their offspring.
3. Women did not have the opportunity of education that all humans must have.
4. Humans should live with others, but women were not allowed the right of social intercourse.
5. Women did not have the estate right all humans are to have.
6. Women could not avoid facing constraints in whatever they did or did not do with their own bodies and minds.

An Agenda of Men's Encouragement for the Equal Rights between Men and Women is the following:

1. After marriage, each spouse should maintain financial independence.
2. Men should follow the teaching of women if the latter is superior to the former.
3. All matters should be handled according to the circumstances and the law and, not discriminating between men and women as in the past, everyone should be treated according to what they do.

An Agenda of Women's Preparation for the Equality of Rights between Men and Women is the following:

1. Women should receive an education that will allow them to function actively in human society.
2. Women should work diligently at their occupations to gain freedom in their lives.
3. Women should discharge their filial duties to their blood parents both during their lifetimes and after their deaths, just as did the eldest son in the past.
4. Women should not seek the particular love and dependence of men.
5. When the abovementioned four items are not sufficient, then women should follow the teaching of men.⁵ The equality of men and women starts from the family culture where the principle of The Equal Rights between Husband and Wife is realized. And The Equal Rights between Husband and Wife is to be applied to religion and society as well, transcending the boundary of family.

For the Communal Society Beyond Closed Family Egoism and Social Caste

In the patriarchal society, the responsibility of women was the household and the virtue of women was becoming a good mother and a good wife. On the contrary, in The Equal Rights between Husband and Wife or The Equal Rights between Men and Women, women's rights of social intercourse or occupation were allowed, so the household was no longer only the responsibility of women; women's places to stay should change from the household to the workplace. Accordingly, the virtue of women is not becoming good mothers and good wives, but becoming self-reliant and independent beings having the right of self-control. When the status of women has changed from the household to the workplace, the matters of taking care of and looking after children is no longer the dimension of the individual. This consequently results in a changing social structure. From this point of view, the rest of the three items in The Four Essentials were written with the orientation of transcending the boundary and concept of self and others; it is directed to the communal society of peace and

⁵ The Chapter of Research Society of Buddha Dharma in *Treasure Sutra of Six Essentials*, 1932.

equality.

The second item of The Four Essentials is The Discrimination of the Wise and the Ignorant (“The Wise First” in the current textbook). All these ideas are based on the concept of equal rights of all humans, yet in order for the society to develop, the discrimination of the wise and ignorant remains. However, it does not mean that we are to discriminate against people; we set apart people only when we are to accomplish something. In the patriarchal society, women, men of lower position or youngsters could not teach men, higher men or old people. As in western countries in old times, the black could not teach the white. Generally women, commoners, or African-Americans could not receive education, and could not show their knowledge to men of higher position despite their talent; they were only forced to obey. According to The Equal Rights between Men and Women, men should follow women if women are superior to men, fulfilling every item of The Equal Rights between Men and Women. This is the Discrimination between the Wise and the Ignorant. The essence of Discrimination between the Wise and the Ignorant is to abolish the social caste of the patriarchy and to widely use talented persons to develop a society, and to go after the opinion of precursors in every field.

The third item of The Four Essentials is Educating Others’ Children by Those Who do not Have Children. This supports the idea that in order for the society to advance, all younger generations should be taught, and all children in poor families should be given the chance to receive education; this overcomes the ideology of the blood-centered family. The rich people with no children thus are linked with persons who cannot afford to provide the chance of education. In this sense, the practice of the Godfather and Godmother was established and has been performed ever since.⁶ *Sot’aesan* encouraged rich people without children to educate the children of the poor, and at the same time admonished religions, social institutions, or organizations to set up educational institutions for teaching younger generations.

The fourth item of The Four Essentials is Venerating Those Dedicated to The Public Welfare (it is currently titled “Venerating the Public-Spirited”). The purport is to lead the rich to help the poor when they are ill or old, with the principle of self-reliant life remaining the same. In addition to this, when women move from the household to society, the responsibility of bringing up the children and helping seniors come to lie on the nation or society as a whole. In “Veneration for Those Dedicated to the Public Welfare”, *Sot’aesan* provides an ideal world of community. That is, all human beings are working for the public by spending their wealth not on their children but for the public, and they can basically enjoy their human lives with altruism by discarding family egoism.

In order to achieve the Equality of the Rights between Men and Women, we have to make a democratic culture in the family. In addition to that, it will be necessary to rectify our social system to share women’s responsibility to care for their children and households. The second, third, and fourth items of the Four Essentials provide a guideline for social and national responsibility. However, the Four Essentials based on the thought of the Fourfold Beneficence are not the only element necessary to achieve gender equality, but provide an ideal that we are beings who live together in interdependence knowing we could not live without the others. The patriarchal system made human relationships complicated by suppressions between men and women, and caused people to live with exclusivist egoism.

The Four Essentials based on the thought of the Fourfold Beneficence are the social ethics for all human beings to live autonomously in dignity and to keep their beneficent relationship. In summary, the Four

⁶ Refer to Amendments of Godfather and Godmother in *Monthly Communication* 14th Issue, April of 1929.

Essentials are seeking a social community based on human equality by overcoming closed family egoism and blood-kin centralism. The Four Essentials are co-dependently assisting to resolve the family affairs as well as the social problems.

Female Priests and the Women's Order Governed by Women

As mentioned above, the patriarchal culture is based on the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane, and the spirit and the body. Women have been excluded from becoming clergy members with full leadership, for their role of delivery and nursing of children is considered to link them to bodily and secular matters.

Sot'aesan synthesized secular life and spiritual cultivation in harmony in order to overcome the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane, and the spirit and the flesh. Also, he admitted women to join in the religious practice and to work independently in his religious organization. Sot'aesan provided equal opportunities for the laity and the clergy to participate in religious practice based on the guideline of the Fixed-Term Training and the Daily Training (Chung, 2003). He also permitted the clergy to have their own jobs. In that sense, there is no strong distinction between the clergy and the laity. Sot'aesan's approach is very important to overcome the barrier of the traditional customs of religions that exclude women from becoming clergy members with full leadership.

Sot'aesan broke this type of religious taboo for female priests and admitted women to the priesthood in equality with men. Furthermore, Sot'aesan made the male and the female clergy members to form their independent organizations to nurture their leadership and independence. For example, the members of the Supreme Council have been equally composed of nine men and nine women, in addition to one Head Leader. In the early history of Won Buddhism, it was also a new trend for the male leaders of Won Buddhism, following Grand Master Sot'aesan, to encourage women to enhance the women's capability of exercising free will. For example, Chusan Song Tosung preached "keep one's spirit of independence in order to achieve the equal rights between men and women". And, Kim Kich'on composed long poems (K. Kasa) about the equality of rights between men and women to encourage many people to realize the equal rights between men and women in their daily lives. These efforts of the male followers of Sot'aesan stimulated women to extend women's rights.

Thus, Sot'aesan had women disciples be ordained to priesthood. In addition, he planned to create the women's order, economically and politically independent of the men's order, with a woman as head master. According to the Annual Report of Won Buddhism in 1931, the members of Won Buddhism organized the Association for Educating Competent Women and opened its office to provide opportunity of education and leadership for women. Each industrial institution was also operated independently and suitably to manage its own capital in order to bring up the leaders among women.

In order to carry out his volition to establish a women's organization with equal qualifications to that of men's, Sot'aesan made it into a regulation which clearly is stipulated in the Buddha-dharma Research Society's Covenant of Governance and Group Formation (1935). The substance can be seen in Chapter 2—Separate Organizations for the Sexes and Chapter 3—Organization of Supreme Councils and the Method of Election; Supreme Councils are the joint councils of the Clergy and the Laity. Especially, Article 15 of Chapter 3 stipulates that there shall be a separate organization for women whose highest member would hold an equal level of status as her male counterpart. Here, the highest member, who is the Chief of the Joint Councils of the Clergy and the Laity, means the Head Dharma Master, the present supreme leader of Won Buddhism. In point

of fact, by putting in place separate organizations for both sexes and electing a Head Dharma Master for each organization as well as instructing the two sexes to practice and work separately, Sot'aesan had given consideration to women, not only enabling women to independently exhibit leadership, but also bringing into society the femininity that has been excluded from patriarchal culture and at the same time, fostering feminine leadership.

Separate Organizations for the Sexes

When members are organized to form a Group, they shall form a Group separated by genders and establish separate institutions of practice and work.

Organization of Supreme Councils and the Method of Election

Article 7. For the purpose of generally overseeing the affairs of the Groups, the organization to be formed shall be named Right Supreme Council. Male members shall form one such council, as their female counterparts shall as well, to become the first of all other Groups to follow.

Article 8. In terms of the qualifications for membership in the Right Supreme Council, the Group shall be formed with those who are most superior in understanding the doctrines, accumulating merits in performing the work, discriminating right from wrong, winning public confidence and acting accordingly, and in other practical wisdom and common sense.

Article 15. The Great Master shall be the Chief of both the male and female Supreme Councils until 36 years will have passed, after which new male and female Chiefs shall be elected for general supervision.

The significance of the above-stipulated regulations is that Sot'aesan decreed the co-leadership of both genders by organizing separate but equal Groups, instructing separate practice and work for men and women, and electing the highest leader from each sex. However, the position of Head Dharma Master who exhibits the supreme leadership and represents the Order has been held only by male members so far; the present members of the Supreme Councils consist of nine men and an equal number of women. The separate organizations for the sexes rule is being applied to the lay believers as intended, but the clergy are organized to form mixed Groups and, therefore, practice and work together. Has the issue of female gender been completely resolved within the Order and has gender equality been materialized, which no longer gives purpose to separating the sexes and organizing separate Groups for the men and women? Many of the female clergy members hold the view that there still remains gender-role ideology within the Order and that for many reasons, such as socio-cultural influence, gender equality is yet to be achieved.

Sot'aesan determined that 108 years from the time of his great enlightenment would be the period of establishment of the Order. He divided the 108 years into three 36-year generations which in turn were divided into three 12-year terms. The first 12-year of the first term of the first generation was the period in which Sot'aesan had met many of his major students; the second 12-year was the period in which he had major texts compiled; the third 12-year was the period in which he guided each member to achieve maturity in practice. Sot'aesan passed away in 1943 (Won'gi 28) prior to the end of the third term. After his passing, the Japanese oppression against all organizations of Korean people turned more severe during World War II before the country was finally liberated in 1945. Then, Korean society was divided into left and right and the country itself into north and south, followed by the war from 1950 to 1953. In the midst of such trying times, the circumstances of the Order had led Sot'aesan's notion of separate organizations for the sexes to pale into insignificance. In 1954, this issue was raised by senior women, who remembered Sot'aesan's prediction of a woman becoming the Head Dharma Master. With the reorganization of the clergy into Groups of mixed genders in 1992 (Won'gi 77), the dream of a female-centered religious order and Head Dharma Masters of both

sexes was put on a back burner for the time being.

In order to open up the world of equality and mutual nurturing, Grand Master Sot'aesan conceived a new religious ideology and established specific laws and a system to realize the concept. In the time of Sot'aesan, there had been no option for women other than marriage. In such times, he established the system of female priests who held qualifications and status equivalent to their male counterparts, leaving the option of marriage up to each individual. Owing to such a system, female clergy of the Won-Buddhist order have a high level of self-dependency and confidence and have made a great deal of contributions to the order. It is believed that a woman cleric with an in-depth practice can be elected as Head Dharma Master, the supreme leader of the Won Buddhist order.

Conclusion

So far, we have seen the post-patriarchal religious ideology of Sot'aesan and his efforts and specific actions to realize gender equality. He established strategies to achieve gender equality in households, society, and the order and put them into action. Thanks to him, religious women with full leadership could contribute to the development of the Order. Also, their image as religious leaders has affected Korean society under patriarchal culture. However, the author cannot say the present order has fully realized his notion of equality. The main reason is the patriarchal influence of Korean society. Women religious of Won Buddhism should examine their self-image that has been internalized in the patriarchal society and should make an effort to realize meanings which Sot'aesan wanted to achieve for the female clergywomen of Won Buddhism. In the further work, the author will examine this problem.

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