We imagine that when we visit a Korean restaurant in a foreign country only the head chef cooks the various dishes. On the contrary, we imagine that other chefs cook dishes together under the guidance of the head chef. Though the same dishes are prepared in both cases, there can be a delicate difference in taste. Also, in the former case, it is possible for the head chef to make other dishes that highlight his best cooking. In the latter case, it is possible that what is cooked by the chefs is under the direction of the head chef. In either case, the evaluation of the guests can be diverse.

The previous paragraph’s example can be compared to the cases of researchers writing books on Korea. In one instance, a researcher can write a book on Korea by himself. In another case, many researchers can contribute to a book on Korea based on one researcher’s plan. The former case can provide readers with a particularly consistent viewpoint and composition and the researcher’s field of expertise can be addressed. In contrast, the latter case can provide readers with various viewpoints and research on a variety of subjects. However, in comparison with the former case, it is difficult to maintain a consistent viewpoint and composition. *Religions of Korea in Practice*, planned and published as the thirteenth book in the series Princeton Readings in Religions, is an example of the latter case and is a collaborative work by researchers of Korean studies.

According to the preface, this book aims to provide “a systematic overview of Korean religious practices” as “the first anthology on Korean religions.” And it has the significance of “the first step toward (1) providing a systematic overview of Korean religions as a whole and (2) addressing the dearth of basic source materials on Korean religions in Western languages.” With the book, the editors expect to help “build the field of Korean religious studies in the West and to broaden interest in Korean religions in all their diversity.” This book can be thought very meaningful as it can provide those interested in Korean religions with various viewpoints.
Robert E. Buswell, Jr., editor of *Religions of Korea in Practice*, is a philosopher of Buddhism at the University of California in Los Angeles. He is a well-known researcher because of his book *The Zen Monastic Experience: Buddhist Practice in Contemporary Korea* (Kim Jongmyung, tr. 1999. Yemunseowon). The book was based on monastic life at Songgwang Temple from 1974-1979. In 2008, he was inaugurated President of the Association for Asian Studies and won the Manhae Grand Prize in the department of propagation of religion. Recently, he has attracted public attention in Korea. These facts indicate that *Religions of Korea in Practice* will raise intellectual interest in Korean religions.

The twenty-one contributors to *Religions of Korea in Practice* are important researchers of Korean studies in North America, Europe, and Korea. Some of the contributors are: Don Baker, the University of British Columbia; Boudewijn Walraven, Leiden University; Sem Vermeersch, Keimyung University; Richard D. McBride II, Washington University in St. Louis; Antonetta Lucia Bruno, the University of Rome “La Sapienza”; and Timothy S. Lee, Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University. Most belong to Asian studies departments. James Huntley Grayson from the University of Sheffield has already been introduced to Korea through *The History of Korean Religions* (Kang Don-gu, tr. 1995. Minjoksa).

*Religions of Korea in Practice* is composed of six topics: Buddhism, Confucianism & Neo-Confucianism, Shamanism, Christianity, New Religions, and North Korea. For Buddhism, there are nine chapters including the making and meaning of Mireuk Temple by King Mu of the Baekje dynasty; for Confucianism & Neo-Confucianism, four chapters including rituals of Confucianism and disputes between Confucianism and Buddhism; for Shamanism, six chapters including the sending of a smallpox deity and village deities of Jeju Island; for Christianity, six chapters including Catholic rituals and ceremonies and the response of Protestantism toward ancestral rites of Confucianism; for New Religions, six chapters including rituals of Cheondogyo and ascetic practices of Won Buddhism; and for North Korea, one chapter treating the religious phase of Juche philosophy as a socio-political mechanism. *Religions of Korea in Practice* can also be divided by themes: seven chapters about religious foundation; two, manipulating the physical world; three, worlds beyond; seven, rituals; six, contemplative and devotional practices; four, women and gender; four, polemics, proselytization, and conversion.

One characteristic of description is the presentation of the subject in the beginning, and another is to provide further reading. Footnotes and endnotes
aren’t used in this book, but further reading plays an important role in enabling us to find materials related to the subject. The third characteristic is that additional information related to the subject is included after further reading. For instance, in “King Mu and the Making and Meanings of Mireuksa,” additional information about King Mu is provided separately after further reading and in “Won’gwang and Chajang in the Formation of Early Silla Buddhism,” biographies of Won’gwang and Chajang are provided separately. They help us to understand the writings. Overall, the structure of the writings is similar. The presence of a subtitle depends on the writing, and there is also a difference in the length of the writings.

As a researcher of Korean religions, it is not easy to evaluate all the contents. For instance, in the Introduction by Don Baker, there are some points that I disagree with. First is the argument that he pays attention to Korean religions because of their characteristics not as religious pluralism, religious changes, and various religions of the state of multiple races but as various religions of the state of a single race. However, such a circumstance cannot always be found in Korea.

Second is the argument that he can come up with an understanding of religion that is generally applicable to the Korean situation by confirming religious acts of Koreans and paying attention to the reasons for the acts instead of trying to define religion and then applying that universal concept to specific components of Korea’s religious culture. To a certain degree, I agree; however, the concept of “religious” applicable to the Korean situation is not clear. Actually, it is never entirely clear what is the understanding of religion that is generally applicable to the Korean situation.

Third is the argument that new religions such as Cheondogyo, Won Buddhism, Daejonggyo, and Tongilgyo were created in response to the challenge of Christianity. In part, even Korean religious researchers agree; however, it is not easy to determine the foundations of such an argument up to now. For instance, there is a clear distinction in the theory of Hwanin, Hwanung, and Dangun of Daejonggyo that derived from Dangun mythology and there are also some points which are difficult to connect directly to the Christian theory of the Trinity.

In addition, arguments like Korea could be more religious without explaining the stagnant phenomenon of influence of Korean religions since 1995 and Korea has become a religious nation cannot be easily agreed upon. Nevertheless, the writing is important as it shows the writer’s viewpoint toward Korean religions.
There are a few problems with the book’s composition and its writers. They are: First, there is a problem with the book’s composition. Buddhism is placed first before the other topics of Confucianism, Shamanism, Christianity, New Religions, and North Korea. The reason why Buddhism was arranged in front instead of Shamanism is described in the Preface. However, the number of chapters devoted to Buddhism exceedingly outnumbers those on other religions. Despite Buswell’s counterargument, this could cause the reader to connect Korea with Buddhism.

Also, though it is not easy to incorporate all the religions of Korea, it would be easier to understand Korea if there was a description of the Greek Orthodox Church, or Cheoligyo. Because of a lack of description of this and other such religions, Religions of Korea in Practice presents a limited view of religions in Korea. Moreover, there is no distinction of religions between North and South Korea before 1945, and religions of North Korea were excluded after 1945 because of a lack of information. Nevertheless, it should be taken into consideration that research on religions of North Korea has been carried out to a certain degree, and this is a matter connected with composing a complete picture of religions of Korea.

Second, there is a problem with the composition of writers. There are twenty-one researchers who wrote thirty-three chapters. It suggests the possibility that a disproportionate emphasis might have been laid on the composition of writers. In reality, while some writers contributed one or two chapters, others contributed three to five chapters. There is also the possibility that a disproportionate emphasis might be laid on the composition of writers in each domain. For instance, while eight writers contributed chapters to Buddhism (9 chapters), there were only three writers for Shamanism (6 chapters). Of its six chapters, three were written by Boudewijn Walraven and two were written by Antonetta Lucia Bruno. Only two writers contributed to New Religions’ six chapters: five of which were from Don Baker. The lack of more writers shows the present situation of the field of Korean religions: there is a lack of overseas expansion in the field and a lack of academic exchange between domestic Korean and international researchers of Korean religions.

Finally, it is thought that Religions of Korea in Practice was planned to serve the need of informing foreign readers about Korea’s religions and that it would meet this purpose with a critical mind despite some problems. At the same time, it is thought that Religions of Korea in Practice will create an interest in Korean religious culture as part of the globalization of Korean studies that has happened
recently in Korea and abroad. Nevertheless, it is necessary for self-reflection beyond “necessity” to be included. This means not merely a curiosity and knowledge on Korea’s religions but also the necessity of self-reflection through them. In the future, it is expected that because of *Religions of Korea in Practice* an exchange between Korean and foreign researchers will be vitalized and many research papers that pass through self-reflection will appear.

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