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Broken Buddhas and Burning Temples: A Re-examination of Anti-Buddhist Violence and Harassment in South Korea

Young-Hae Yoon[1] and Sherwin Jones[2]

1. College of Buddhist Studies and Culture, Gyeongju Campus, Dongguk University
2. Pāramitā College, Gyeongju Campus, Dongguk University

yyh@dongguk.ac.kr; sherwinjones@gmail.com

From 1982 through 2016, Korean media outlets have reported over 120 instances of vandalism, arson and harassment targeting Buddhist temples and facilities in South Korea. An extension of on-going tensions between South Korea's Buddhist and Evangelical Protestant communities, this one-sided wave of violence and harassment has caused the destruction of numerous temple buildings and priceless historical artifacts, millions of USD in damages, and one death. This article surveys these incidents of anti-Buddhist vandalism, arson, and harassment, analyzing their general characteristics and summarizing major instances of each, before examining the frequency of these incidents within the wider chronology of recent Evangelical-Buddhist tensions. It then examines the responses from South Korea's Buddhist and Evangelical communities and various government agencies, as well as the effects of these responses, before investigating the relationship between these incidents and the mainstream Evangelical doctrines of religious exclusivism, dominionism and spiritual warfare. The article closes with a discussion of the need for further research into these incidents and the wider Evangelical-Buddhist tensions surveyed herein as well as the relevance of such research to inter-religious conflicts outside Korea.

In the early morning of April 19th, 1996, unknown assailants set fire to two buildings at Seoul's Ponwŏnjŏng Temple.[1] The ensuing blaze completely destroyed the temple's Hall of Brilliant Illumination which housed over 500 hand-painted statues of the Buddha's disciples, classified as national treasures, causing over $5.6 million USD in damages (Parry 1998; Tedesco 1997, 191). One of three arson attempts on Buddhist temples that same night, the Ponwŏnjŏng fire was the most damaging in a series of arson and vandalism attacks which have targeted Buddhist temples

1. McCune–Reischauer Korean transliteration will be used herein, with the exception of proper nouns commonly transliterated otherwise or done so in sources quoted.

Keywords: Korean Buddhism, Korean Protestantism, religious violence, temple arson, spiritual warfare

and other religious facilities in South Korea since the early 1980s.[2] Causing millions of USD in damages and the destruction of priceless historical artifacts, these attacks occurred within the context of on-going tensions between South Korea's Buddhists and Evangelical Protestants; tensions involving incidents of harassment, 'hate-speech' by Evangelical fundamentalists, and accusations of anti-Buddhist discrimination (Tedesco 1997).[3] This article will examine these incidents of anti-Buddhist violence and harassment within this wider context.

Recent government reports have described South Korea as a 'religious supermarket', while scholar Don Baker observes that South Korea maintains an unusually wide degree of religious diversity for an ethnically homogenous society (2016, 8, 11).[4] The 2015 census identified approximately 15% of South Koreans as Buddhists, 19% as Protestants, 8% as Catholics, and 56% with no religion, while many Koreans engage in traditional Confucian and Shamanistic rituals regardless of personal religious affiliation. Although scholars and politicians have praised the largely peaceful coexistence of South Korea's religious communities, there remain underlying inter-religious tensions, especially between the Buddhists and Evangelical Protestants (Kim, Andrew 2002, 292).[5] Buddhist scholar Frank Tedesco notes that Buddhism and Protestantism are 'so equally represented' in 'no other country in the world' while scholar and missionary James Huntly Grayson describes Buddhism as Protestantism's 'principle rival' in South Korea (Grayson 2001, 71; Tedesco 1997, 181). Scholar Kang-nam Oh characterizes relations between the two religious communities as 'gloomy' and 'even ugly' (2006, 375), while Dr Sŏn-hwan Pyŏn, late dean of the Korean Methodist Theological University, has blamed 'aggressive' and 'militant proselytization' by 'fanatical Christian believers' for inter-religious hostilities (Pyŏn 1995, 48–49).

Since the mid-1980s, such 'aggressive' and 'militant proselytization' by Korean Protestants has occasionally escalated into harassment and even violence targeting Buddhists. From 1982 through 2016, Korean media outlets have reported at least 63 incidents of vandalism, 9 cases of arson, 27 suspicious fires, and 51 incidents of religiously-motivated harassment targeting Buddhist facilities.[6] This violence and harassment has been almost entirely one-sided as there have been no reports of similar attacks on Evangelical churches or of Korean Buddhists harassing or retaliating against Christians during the same period. This study will examine the incidents of violence and harassment targeting Buddhists as reported in Tesdesco's 1997 article 'Questions for Buddhist and Christian Cooperation in Korea' and additional media

2. Statues of Tan'gun, Korea's mythical progenitor (Lee, Timothy 2010, 150), Shamanistic shrines (Mason 1999, 157–159), and Catholic churches (I, Sa-ra, 2016) have also been targeted, but with less frequency.

3. Although worthy of further investigation, a detailed examination of religiously-motivated discrimination and 'hate speech' in Korea is beyond the scope of this article.

4. Approximately 98% of South Korean citizens are ethnically Korean (Baker 2016, 11).

5. Scholar Timothy Lee (2006, 330) notes that Evangelicalism 'so predominates' Korean Protestantism that the two are 'more or less synonymous'. Thus the two terms will be used interchangeably herein.

6. The term 'harassment' herein denotes unwanted, demeaning, hostile or threatening contact.

accounts. Following a review of relevant Buddhist and Protestant history in Korea, this article will examine the general characteristics and trends surrounding these reported incidents of anti-Buddhist arson, vandalism, and harassment, and summarize notable instances of each. It will then survey the frequency and chronology of these incidents, from the early 1980s onwards, in relation to wider political events and trends affecting Korean Evangelical-Buddhist relations. After analyzing the responses from various government agencies, as well as Korea's Buddhist and Evangelical communities, we will then interrogate the possible relationships between these incidents and the mainstream Evangelical doctrines of religious exclusivism, dominionism and spiritual warfare. In the conclusion we will discuss the need for further research into anti-Buddhist violence and harassment, along with wider Evangelical-Buddhist tensions, in South Korea.

1. Historical background

As current Evangelical-Buddhist tensions in South Korea are a product of Buddhism and Protestantism's intersection in modern Korea, this section will survey the relevant histories of both to establish the historical context for the issues and events examined in later sections.

1.1 Korean Buddhism

Introduced in the fourth century CE during Korea's 'Three Kingdoms' period (trad. 57 BCE to 668 CE), Buddhism flourished for almost a millennium as a state religion sponsored by the Unified Shilla (668–935 CE) and subsequent Koryŏ Dynasties (918–1392 CE), which constructed and maintained an extensive network of Buddhist temples throughout the peninsula. However, in the fifteenth century the Neo-Confucian Chosŏn Dynasty (1392–1910 CE) progressively stripped Buddhist temples of their wealth and political power, leaving Buddhism 'virtually quarantined in the countryside' for five centuries, to be patronized by the rural peasantry (Buswell 1992, 22–23). By the turn of the nineteenth century the Chosŏn-era restrictions on Buddhism began to loosen. However, competition from foreign missionaries and political interference from colonial authorities during the Japanese Annexation (1910–1945) hindered efforts to reform and modernize Korean Buddhism. Overcoming sectarian conflict and rural isolation following the Korean War (1950–1953), South Korean Buddhism has grown significantly over the past 50 years and, since the 1980s, Buddhist organizations have greatly expanded their urban presence, social involvement, and media outreach (Buswell 1992, 33–34). By 2005 Korea Buddhism claimed over 10 million adherents and, of the approximately 265 Buddhist orders in Korea, the Jogye Order (*Taehan Pulgyo Chogyejong*, hereafter JO) remains the largest, with approximately 12,000 ordained clergy. Representing Korean Buddhism's historical mainstream, the JO maintains over 3,000 Buddhist temples and centers in Korea, 840 of which are historically recognized by the government and house 65% of South Korea's designated national and local treasures (Baker 2016, 28; Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism 2014).

1.2 Korean Protestantism

Korean Christianity's rapid growth over the last two centuries has been the subject of much research and discussion, especially by Evangelical 'missiologists' (Chong 2011, 101). While Catholicism was immediately suppressed upon its eighteenth century introduction, Protestant missionaries were welcomed a century later by the weakening Chosŏn Dynasty. Described by scholar and missionary Daniel Adams as 'men and women of Puritanical zeal and Wesleyan fervor', these missionaries imparted Korean Protestantism with its distinctive fundamentalism and theological conservativism, while their emphasis on self-propagation among Korean converts (aka the 'Niveus method') culminated in the Korean-led 'Great Revival' of 1907 (Adams 1995, 18). A foundational event for Korean Protestantism, this Pentecostal 'outpouring of the Holy Spirit' swept the peninsula, with 1% of the population becoming 'born again' (Adams 1995, 16–20; Grayson 2006, 13; Lee, Timothy 2010, 19).[7] Foreign missionaries additionally taught converts that native religions, including Buddhism, were '"heathen superstitions"' and '"demon worship"', instructing them to burn such shrines and religious paraphernalia. Inspired by missionary John Nevius's accounts of demon possession and exorcism in China, itinerant evangelists additionally toured the Korean countryside attacking 'devil houses', 'tearing down and destroying fetishes', and publicly burning 'idols', including Buddhist icons, and other instruments of 'devil worship' (Lee, Timothy 2010, 29–31; Oak 2013, 143–145, 147–150, 172–174). Through dramatic healings and exorcisms, these 'power evangelists' sought to demonstrate the superior potency of the 'Holy Spirit', thus supplanting Shamanism's (*Musok*) traditional role in Korean society and popularizing the doctrine and practice of 'spiritual warfare' among converts (Adams 1995, 19; Chong 2011, 101, 103; see also Oak 2013, 177–187).[8]

Supported by the succession of anti-Communist regimes governing South Korea following the Korean War, Protestantism grew from 600,000 adherents in 1950 to almost six and half million by 1985, in the process hosting the largest Evangelical gatherings ever recorded and growing some of the largest churches in the world (Lee, Timothy 2010, 85–86). In the mid-1960s, President Chung-hee Park (r. 1961–1979) permitted the launch of a series of large-scale evangelistic 'crusades', including 'Explo '74' and the '77 Holy Assembly', which saw millions of attendees and drove Korean Evangelicalism's exponential growth (Lee, Timothy 2010, 93–104). By the 1980s, many Korean Protestants had become convinced that their nation was the center of a global '"spiritual renewal"' and a divinely-chosen instrument

7. Following scholar John Weaver (2016, 10–11, 265), 'Pentecostal' herein refers to a broad movement emphasizing the 'work of the Holy Spirit' and it's 'gifts', including glossolalia ('speaking in tongues'), prophecy, healing, and exorcism. 'Pentecostal' will be used interchangeably with the more contemporary term 'Charismatic'.

8. Defined as the 'view of the universe as a cosmic battlefield where divine and satanic forces struggle to influence the course of human history and everyday life' (Lindhartd 2011, 15), Weaver observes that Pentecostals emphasize spiritual warfare to 'an extent unheard of since at least the Dark Ages' (2016, 13, 268). See also Brouwer et. al (1996, 198) regarding 'power evangelism' and Lindhardt (2011, 15–19) concerning how spiritual warfare has aided Pentecostalism's indigenization within non-western cultures.

through which "'the world will be saved'" (Adams 1995, 26; Brouwer *et al.* 1996, 114).[9] It was during this peak in South Korea's church growth movement that reports of violence and harassment targeting Buddhism and other religions began to appear in the media.

2. Characteristics and summaries of anti-Buddhist violence and harassment

2.1 Vandalism

The incidents of anti-Buddhist violence reported in the Korean media since the early 1980s share several key characteristics. Almost all were limited to acts of property violence, classifiable as vandalism or arson, which targeted Buddhist facilities, temples, and iconography. With one exception, no fatalities or major injuries have been reported (see section 2.3 below). Including Tedesco's research and additional media reports, at least 63 incidents of vandalism targeting Buddhist facilities have been reported from 1984 through 2016. These incidents typically involved smashing, burning, or destroying Buddhist statues (53 incidents), defacing statues and altar paintings with crosses and pro-Christian slogans (13 incidents), slashing alter paintings (12 incidents) and urinating or defecating at Buddhist temples (3 incidents).

In February 1984, in the first major reported incident, 'priceless' altar paintings in Muryang and Ilson temples, near Seoul, were vandalized with crosses and mud, and an ancient stone Buddha relief was also damaged (Tedesco 1997, 185). Then, in May 1990, two men assaulted and restrained a guard at the recently opened Buddhist Broadcasting System (BBS). The pair then threw the station's bronze Buddha statue through the recording booth window before destroying over $100,000 USD worth of electronic equipment, closing the station for several months. The BBS had previously received a threatening letter demanding that they cease broadcasting 'the sound of the devil', however no arrests were made (Seoul Shinmun 1990; JoongAng Ilbo 1990). In 1991 a Pusan Christian attempted to attack Kyŏngju's 1,300 year old Sŏkkuram Buddha Grotto, designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1995, for being 'heretical' and promoting 'idol-worship' (Tedesco 1997, 188). In March 1996, unknown vandals defaced a large topiary swastika on the Kyŏngju Campus of Dongguk University, Korea's oldest and largest Buddhist university, by cutting the shrubbery into the shape of a cross. The incident prompted protests from the faculty and students along with university-wide religious education campaigns (Pulgyo Shinmun 1996; Nam, Bae-hyŏn 2004). Also in 1998, following several weeks of 'threatening behavior', including aggressive attempts to convert the temple's abbot, a 23-year-old Protestant vandalized a Buddha statue at Seoul's Podŏk Temple with a hammer. Although detained at the scene, the man was originally released without charge, but rearrested following public outcry (Welsh 1998). That June, a Bible-carrying Protestant made national news by smashing the heads of 753 granite Buddha statues at Wŏnmyŏng Zen Center on Cheju Island, causing an estimated $110,000 USD in damages. Upon arrest, he confessed to attempting

9. Adams quoting Korean-American Protestant theologian Jung-Young Lee (1986, 17).

to convert the temple into a church (Welsh 1998; Lee, Timothy 2010, 150). Over a week-long period that November, unknown vandals attacked a dozen temples in the North Ch'ungch'ŏng Province, slicing 'X's into altar paintings and smashing Buddha statues (Lee, Mi-min 1998). In June 2000, an iconic bronze Buddha statue in the central courtyard of Dongguk University's Seoul Campus was spray-painted with a large red cross and the words 'Jesus Only', which again prompted protests by students and faculty (Kim, Hyŏn-t'ae 2011; Ohmy News 2000). Then, in December 2003, two men were arrested for vandalizing 20 Buddhist temples and several Catholic churches in the Kyŏnggi Province. In the early morning of December 8 th, after smashing several statues at Yongin Bo Kwang Temple, the pair woke the temple's abbot to declare 'Jesus has been doing a lot of things, but Buddha has been doing nothing', before fleeing by car (Kim, Wŏn-u 2003). In 2011, in another series of attacks, windows were broken and pagodas, altar paintings, and Buddha statues vandalized with red paint at four Buddhist temples near Haeundae Beach, in Pusan, causing an estimated $180,000 USD in damages. A suspect, reportedly suffering from psychological problems, was arrested and charged (Chu 2011; Hayakawa 2012; Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism 2011). On August 20th, 2012 CCTV cameras at Taegu's Tonghwa Temple recorded a Protestant pastor ripping up prayer books, urinating in incense bowls, and defacing altar paintings with a permanent marker. Arrested 10 days later, he confessed to attacking the Buddhist texts for being 'filled with false words', yet was released without charge (Hayakawa 2012; Kim, Cha-euk 2012). In January 2016, after receiving a believed 'revelation from God', a Protestant man was arrested after verbally abusing a resident monk at Gaŭn Temple, in Kimch'ŏn, and causing significant damage to the temple's Dharma hall (*pŏptang*) (I, Sa-ra 2016).

2.2 Arson

In addition to vandalism, Korean media outlets have reported 36 suspicious fires and incidents of arson occurring at Buddhist temples since the mid-1980s. However, unlike vandalism, the exact causes of the majority of these fires have been impossible to confirm without eye-witnesses, as any physical evidence of arson is often destroyed in the ensuing fire. This difficulty has occasionally been a source of disagreement and distrust between police investigators and temple authorities (see section 4). Thus, of these 36 reported temple fires, nine involve eye-witnesses accounts or material evidence indicating arson, while 27 fires lack such evidence yet are regarded by Buddhist authorities as being possible or probable arson.[10] Although uncorroborated by the authors, the Committee to Counter Religious Discrimination has additionally claimed that, of 20 arson attacks on Buddhist temples that occurred in 1997 alone, in 13 of these cases Christian perpetrators were apprehended (Parry 1998; Welsh 1998).

In December 1986, in the first major reported incident, Kŭmsan Temple's ancient Dharma hall burned to the ground, making national news. While a local Christian man was apprehended and reportedly confessed, police claimed all evidence had

10. Accidental temple fires, such as the 2005 destruction of Naksan Temple by wildfire, have been excluded from this study.

been lost in the fire and no charges were filed. Registered as a national treasure, the hall was quickly rebuilt at the government's expense (Tedesco 1997, 185). On the night of December 30th 1987, a local Jehovah's Witness was arrested for burning down the Dharma halls at Kwanŭmjŏng and Taegak temples on Cheju Island and charged with an additional 13 counts of vandalism against Buddhist temples and Catholic churches (Oh, Dong-sic, 1988). In July 1989, the Dharma hall and dormitory of Seoul's Pota Temple were destroyed by arson, causing an estimated $1.1 million USD in damages, and the perpetrator was arrested at the scene. Then, in April 1991, the Dharma hall of Pongwŏn Temple, national headquarters of the T'aego Order, burned down, destroying Buddha statues and altar paintings registered as national treasures. While a guard observed two men fleeing the scene, police attributed the fire to an 'electrical short circuit'. From 1988 through 1995 five suspicious fires occurred at Buddhist facilities at Dongguk University's Kyŏngju Campus, including the destruction of the university's Chŏnggagwŏn Dharma hall in 1988 and again in 1992, with both events making national news. While no perpetrators were identified, university authorities regard these incidents as arson (Nam, Baehyŏn 2004; Tedesco 1997, 185–186). On April 6th 1996, in a failed arson attempt, ten separate buildings were set fire at Kyŏngju's ancient Pulguk Temple, also a designated UNESCO World Heritage site. Although the perpetrator was apprehended on-site and confessed to having religious motivations, he was released without charge (Tedesco 1997, 190). In addition to the aforementioned arson of Ponwŏnjŏng Temple, in the spring of 1996 three arson attempts were made on the neighboring Hwagye Temple, home of Seoul's International Zen Center. Despite a large police presence, on May 14th the arsonists set fire to the temple's Taejŏkkwang Dharma Hall, causing $775,000 USD in damages. No arrests were made (Parry 1998; Tedesco 1997, 190–192). Then, on December 29th 1999, an explosion and ensuing fire destroyed Kwangdŏk Temple's Dharma Hall, housing ancient Buddha statues and altar paintings registered as national treasures. Although initially blamed on a short circuit, authorities subsequently discovered physical evidence of arson (Kim, T'ae-hyŏng 2004a). While no major incidents of arson were reported over the following decade, on December 20th, 2009, three buildings at Yŏsu's historic Hyangil Hermitage were destroyed by fire, including a Dharma hall decorated in gold-leaf, ten days before the temple's annual New Year's sunrise festival. While temple authorities suspected arson, no physical evidence was found. However, a local Protestant woman had vandalized the temple earlier that year following a believed divine command to warn against 'idol worship' (Do 2009; I, Sang-il 2009). Most recently, in October 2012, CCTV cameras recorded an arson attempt inside Hwaŏm Temple's Kak'wangjŏn Hall in the Chiri Mountains. However, the fire was quickly extinguished and caused only minor damage (Hayakawa 2012).

When detained or observed by witnesses, the arsonists and vandals were almost entirely men acting alone (15 cases) or in small groups (five cases), apparently without connection to each other or any known extremist networks. Attacks additionally clustered near the Korean mid-spring celebration of Vesākha (*Sŏkkat'anshinil*), often targeting lanterns, floats, and decorations prepared for temple festivities.

In 1989 alone 10 temples were 'severely damaged or desecrated' at the time of the holiday, while, in 1994, temples around Seoul reported around 30 acts of vandalism prior to *Sŏkkat'anshinil* (Tedesco 1997, 186, 188–189). Furthermore, these attacks have posed a significant threat to South Korea's cultural heritage as numerous registered national treasures have been damaged or destroyed, including Kŭmsan Temple's Taejŏkkwang Dharma Hall, the 500 hand-carved statues of Ponwŏnjŏng Temple, and statues and paintings at Pongwŏn and Kwangdŏk Temples. Pulguk Temple and Sŏkkuram Grotto, both registered UNESCO World Heritage Sites, were also unsuccessfully targeted. Although estimating the total financial costs of these attacks is difficult, they have undoubtedly caused millions of US dollars in damages.

2.3 Harassment

In addition to vandalism and arson, at least 51 incidents of anti-Buddhist harassment have been reported in the media since the mid-1980s, including campaigns of threatening phone calls or letters and aggressive attempts to convert Buddhist clergy as well as proselytizing, hymn-singing, anti-Buddhist leafletting, and exorcisms (aka *ttangbapki*, or 'ground-stepping') at Buddhist temples (see section 5 below). During the 1980s and 1990s the majority of such incidents were reported preceding, or in conjunction with, additional acts of vandalism or arson. In October 1985, two men attacked the tires and engines of cars parked outside the Nŭngin Zen Center while disrupting Dharma services by singing hymns through an amplifier. Wŏnju's Pulcho Temple was also subject to a campaign of threatening phone calls prior to a vandalism attack in 1992 (Tedesco 1997, 185, 188). The arson attack on Ponwŏnjŏng Temple similarly followed several years of harassment and vandalism, including piles of excrement left on-site, while the previously-discussed Podŏk Temple vandal also subjected the temple to weeks of 'threatening behavior' prior to his attack (Parry 1998; Tedesco 1997, 190–192; Welsh 1998). Although only major incidents of harassment or those associated with additional acts of violence have attracted media attention, anecdotal accounts from Buddhist monastics suggest minor incidents of harassment have occurred more frequently as extensions of Evangelical proselytization campaigns.[11] The only reported fatality occurred in February 2004, when an elderly lay care-taker died of an apparent heart attack during a confrontation with two female Evangelical missionaries proselytizing at his temple. When stopped by the care-taker's son, the missionaries gave conflicting accounts of the altercation before declaring 'If you believe in Jesus, you will go to heaven'. Although the police released the missionaries without charge, officials condemned their 'fanatical missionary activity' (Kim, T'ae-hyŏng 2004b).

While media reports of anti-Buddhist harassment have decreased in frequency since the turn-of-the-millennium, videos of several recent incidents have ignited national controversies. In October 2010, students of Seoul's 'Praise Academy' published the YouTube video 'Conquering Bongeun Temple' which recorded a group of

11. See https://youtu.be/0mJ3pr_9X84 (accessed 8 November 2016) for an example of such an incident. The video records an Evangelical proselytizer verbally confronting a female Buddhist monastic seated on the Pusan metro.

students circling a well-known temple in Seoul while singing hymns, praying for the temple's collapse, and denouncing it as a 'useless and harmful' place of 'idolatry and idols'. Although the Praise Academy's head pastor apologized in-person, a separate group posted a similar video of hymn-singing and prayers inside Taegu's Tonghwa Temple two days later. The videos provoked public criticism of the Evangelical practice of *ttangbapki*, or 'ground-stepping' (see section 5) (Bae 2010; mrco7412 2010; Nam Su-yŏn 2015). The problem of Evangelical anti-Buddhist harassment has expanded beyond Korea's borders, as, in 2014, another YouTube video was published recording Korean Evangelical missionaries singing hymns and praying inside Mahābodhi Temple at Bodh Gaya, India, prompting an international controversy. When chastised by a Korean *bhikṣuṇī* meditating nearby, the missionaries replied that 'Only God is salvation' and '[they] pity those who have not been saved'. After initial denials, the head of Intercorp Missions issued a formal apology for the incident (Chŏng 2015; Nam Su-yŏn 2014; The Buddhist Channel 2014). Such incidents have not only damaged Evangelical-Buddhist relations in Korea but also public perceptions of Evangelical missionaries, which had additionally suffered from controversies surrounding the kidnapping of Korean missionaries in Iraq in 2004 and again in Afghanistan in 2007.

3. Chronology and incident-frequency

The frequency of these reported incidents of anti-Buddhist vandalism, arson and harassment has followed a general bell-curve; beginning in the 1980s, peaking in the late 1990s, and generally tapering off over subsequent decades (see Figure 1). Reports of these incidents began sporadically in the mid-1980s, during the apex of South Korea's church-growth movement, when Buddhism was also expanding its urban presence, placing the two religions in direct competition. Rising through the end of the 1980s, the incident-frequency increased significantly during the 1990s, particularly following the 1992 election of President Yong-sam Kim (in office 1993–1998), a Presbyterian elder who had promised that, if elected, 'hymns would continuously ring out from the [Presidential mansion]' (Lee 2006, 338; Welsh 1998). Tedesco directly attributes the increased incident-frequency in the 1990s to President Kim's public support for Evangelicalism, which he suggests was seen as a 'virtual "green light"' for anti-Buddhist discrimination, extremism, and violence' following the tradition of Korean leaders 'signaling ... "allowances"' for actions they cannot publically endorse 'but nevertheless condone' (1997, 190).

Responding to the vandalism of the Dharma hall at a military academy near Seoul in the spring of 1997, 21 Buddhist organizations joined to form the Committee to Counter Religious Discrimination (CCRD) to oppose religious discrimination and violence targeting Buddhists (Parry 1998; Welsh 1998). Also in 1997, during the peak of the violence, Tedesco's publication of 'Questions for Buddhist and Christian Cooperation in Korea' attracted national and international attention. Tedesco, along with Christian leaders, such as Professor Kyŏngjae Kim of Hanshim Theological Seminary, worked to increase public awareness and media coverage of the attacks, prompting the South Korean Ministry of Culture to host official meetings between

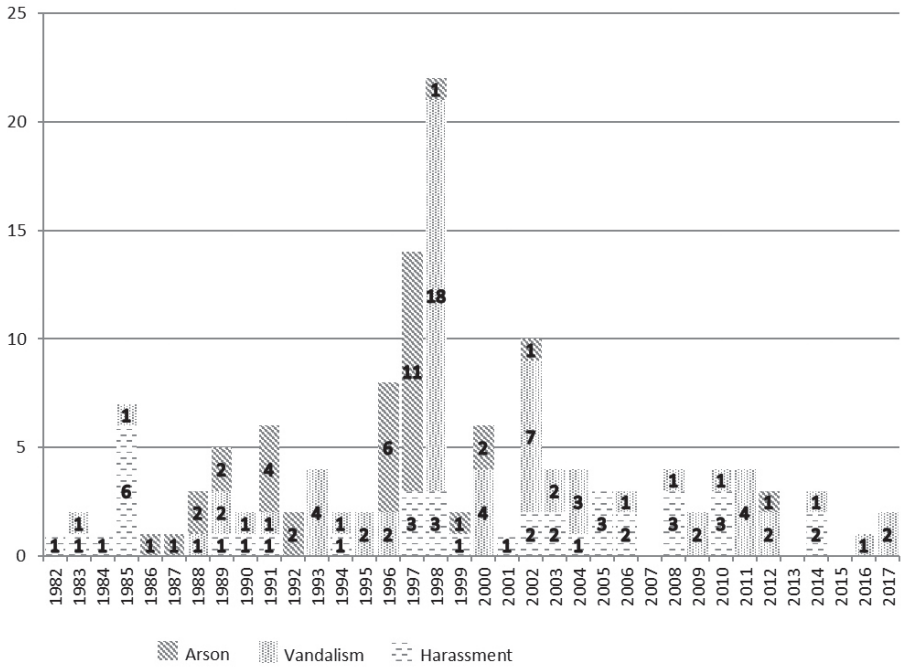

Figure 1. Number of reported incidents by year: 1982–2017.

Buddhist and Evangelical leaders in an effort to relieve tensions and end the violence (Tedesco 2017). The incident-frequency began to drop following the turn of the millennium, possibly in response to these efforts as well as the election of the Roman Catholic President Dae-jung Kim (in office 1998–2003).

Reports of anti-Buddhist violence and harassment remained relatively low, but steady, through the 2000s. However, 2007 saw the election of a second Presbyterian elder, Myung-Bak Lee (in office 2008–2013), as South Korea's President. As mayor of Seoul, Lee had publically consecrated his political career to God and, in 2006, had sent a personal video message to the 'Again 1907' revival in Pusan. A video of 'Again 1907' sparked national controversy as it recorded a worship leader leading attendees in repeated prayers for Buddhist temples in various Pusan neighborhoods to 'collapse' (Shim 2008; 'S. korean christians praying for Buddhist temple to collapse [sic.]' 2007). In the spring of 2008 Korean Buddhists launched a series of large scale demonstrations in Seoul protesting perceived anti-Buddhist discrimination by the newly-elected Lee administration. By that summer the demonstrators numbered in the hundreds of thousands and the protests had spread to temples throughout the country (Shim 2008). In response the Lee administration strengthened anti-religious discrimination regulations within the national government and additionally implemented religious tolerance education programs for government officials (Park 2009, 167). While these actions possibly prevented a re-escalation of violence, the low incident-frequency also reflects the wide-spread installation of

fire prevention systems and CCTV cameras at Korean historical landmarks following the 2008 arson of Seoul's 600-year-old Namdaemun Gate, an event popularly regarded as a national tragedy.

While the incident-frequency has remained low over the last decade, the problems of anti-Buddhist violence and harassment, as well as wider Evangelical-Buddhist tensions, remain on-going. Both the 2010 'Conquering Bongeun Temple' video and the 2014 video of Korean missionaries inside Mahābodhi Temple instigated national controversies over aggressive Evangelical proselytization methods. Furthermore, following the 'Conquering Bongeun Temple' controversy in 2010, Buddhist authorities supported a failed attempt to pass an Anti-Discrimination Law in South Korea's National Assembly (Lee, Jin-gu 2015, 204–205; see section 4). In November 2011, Dongguk University officially banned Evangelical proselytizing efforts on campus, citing recent incidents of vandalism, including a break-in and depositing of faeces in Chŏnggagwŏn Dharma Hall (Kim, Hyŏn-t'ae 2011). Also that year, the JO issued its '2011 Asóka Declaration' (*Asyok'a sŏnŏn*), in an effort to alleviate on-going inter-religious tensions by 'promot(ing) interreligious dialogue and social peace'. However the statement was met with criticism and controversy (Senécal 2014, 88–91). The 2016 vandalism attack at Gaŭn Temple demonstrates that the threat of anti-Buddhist violence in South Korea has not entirely abated (I, Sa-ra 2016).

4. Reactions and responses

4.1 Official responses

The responses by various government agencies to the incidents of anti-Buddhist violence and harassment surveyed herein have been varied. While police successfully arrested and charged the perpetrators with crimes in numerous incidents, authorities at victimized temples were disappointed or frustrated by police responses in others. In seven of the eleven reported cases wherein suspects were detained by the police, they were subsequently released without charge, in five cases despite having been detained on-site or having confessed to the attacks. These incidents, coupled with instances of police refusal to investigate suspicious fires, have been interpreted by some Buddhists as demonstrating police '"indifference"', if not intentional obfuscation (Welsh 1998). If true, such police inaction might reflect an official reluctance to pursue religiously-polarizing or divisive investigations for fear of further inflaming inter-religious tensions.

In the late 1990s increased media coverage and pressure from Buddhist organizations prompted the South Korean Ministry of Culture to host official meetings between Buddhist and Evangelical leaders to address the on-going violence. However, Tedesco recalls that the Buddhist leaders in attendance 'were not impressed' by the meetings, which they saw as insincere 'formalities' (Tedesco 2017). A decade later, widespread Buddhist protests in 2008 successfully pressured the Lee administration to strengthen anti-religious discrimination regulations and religious education programs within the national government. Implemented

in 2010, these intra-government programs countered any potential 'signaling' by President Lee's public support for Evangelicalism and aided the reduction of accusations of religious discrimination by government officials. However, South Korea's national government has yet to pass any comprehensive anti-discrimination laws or statutes affecting private businesses, organizations, or citizens, despite the introduction of several bills to the National Assembly in recent decades (Ock 2017).

4.2 Buddhist responses

Notably, the violence and harassment targeting Korean Buddhists has been almost entirely unidirectional, as there have been no media reports of similar attacks targeting Evangelical churches nor of Buddhists retaliating against Christians in any form. Instead, Korea's Buddhist community has largely responded to the incidents surveyed herein with public stoicism, in-part due to the wide-spread belief that revenge-seeking contravenes the spirit of Buddhism, as is taught in the *Dīghāvukumāra Vatthu* (Pali *Mahāvagga* 10.2.3–20, Thanissaro 1997). In the mid-1990s the late Dr Pyŏn observed that Korean Buddhist leaders enjoined lay Buddhists to '"practice the Bodhisattva way in silence"' when facing the 'slander' and aggression of 'Christian fanatics', while Tedesco similarly recounts that, at the height of the violence in the 1990s, Buddhist authorities tried to calm lay Buddhist anger with 'wise and peaceful Dharma talks' (Pyŏn 1995, 50–51; Tedesco 2017). While the urging of restraint helped prevent retaliation and the escalation of violence, Tedesco also suggests that the Buddhist Community's failure to express their anger more publically permitted Evangelical leaders to dismiss the violence as a 'minor issue' (Tedesco 2017).

Korean Buddhists have not remained entirely passive, however. Authorities at victimized temples frequently registered complaints with the police and advocated for criminal investigations and arrests, but often with limited success (see section 4.1). Failing effective government protection, Buddhist individuals and organizations deployed a variety of strategies to address the violence, harassment, and wider inter-religious tensions. Formed in 1997, the CCRD opened a hotline for victims of anti-Buddhist violence and discrimination and additionally demanded apologies from government officials for their failure to effectively protect Buddhist facilities, while Dr Tedesco's publication of 'Questions for Buddhist and Christian Cooperation in Korea' brought the attention of national and international reporters, scholars and religious leaders (Parry 1998; Tedesco 2017; Welsh 1998). These efforts succeeded in forcing official acknowledgement of the problem and apparently affected a reduction in violence and harassment. Similarly, wide-spread Buddhist mobilization and mass protests in the spring and summer of 2008, following Myung-bak Lee's inauguration, resulted in the strengthening of anti-religious discrimination statutes and religious education programs within the government (Park 2009, 167; Tedesco 2017; Welsh 1998).

In addition to backing a failed anti-discrimination bill in South Korea's National Assembly in 2010, Korean Buddhist leaders have advocated for the passing of a national 'Religious Peace Law' specifically banning religious discrimination by pub-

lic officials and proselytizing in public schools, to be enforced with heavy fines (Paek 2013). They also invited Korean religious leaders to jointly draft an inter-faith 'Declaration of Religious Peace and a Code of Religious Ethics'. However, these efforts have been met by resistance from conservative Protestants (Lee, Jin-gu 2015, 204–205). Likewise, the JO's '2011 Asóka Declaration' failed in its objective of alleviating on-going Evangelical-Buddhist tensions as it was both ignored by mainstream Evangelicals and criticized by prominent Buddhists, who felt it conceded too much to the aggressing parties and distorted Buddhist teachings. A frequent target of violence and harassment, Dongguk University has also responded with a variety of strategies over the years, including silent protests and the Buddhist religious education programs following the 1996 vandalism incident at its Kyŏngju Campus, and the banning of Christian missionary activities at the Seoul Campus in 2011 (Kim, Hyŏn-t'ae 2011). However, the impact and effectiveness of these measures warrants further investigation. Perhaps the most effective response over recent decades has been the wide-spread installation of CCTV cameras in Buddhist temples, which have provided a higher degree of public accountability, thus discouraging would-be assailants who fear shaming themselves and the Evangelical community (Tedesco 2017).

4.3 Evangelical responses

The Korean Evangelical community, in turn, has remained largely unresponsive and unreflective regarding these reports of anti-Buddhist violence or harassment by their 'extremist brethren'. When meeting with Buddhist leaders at the behest of the Ministry of Culture in the late1990s, Evangelical leaders dismissed anti-Buddhist violence as a 'minor issue', regarding the perpetrators as 'loose cannons' beyond their control (Tedesco 2017). Professor Kyŏngjae Kim has blamed Korean Protestantism's conservative orientation for discouraging Evangelical leaders from criticizing extremists within their ranks, while the few Protestant leaders who have advocated religious tolerance and inter-religious dialogue, such as Dr Sŏnhwan Pyŏn and former Kangnam University professor Dr Ch'ansu Lee, have faced criticism, censure, and even expulsion from their own denominations (Senécal 2014, 87–88; Tedesco 1997, 182–183; Welsh 1998).[12] As recently as 2017, Seoul Christian University professor Wŏnyŏng Son was fired after issuing an apology on behalf of Christians for the 2016 vandalism attack on Gaŭn Temple and organizing an online fundraising campaign for the temple's repairs. The remaining Evangelical leaders have largely refused to alter their rhetoric, engage in inter-religious dialogue, or even acknowledge anti-Buddhist violence, harassment, and discrimination as problems. Conservative Protestants have also been instrumental in blocking efforts to pass a comprehensive National Anti-Discrimination Law, due to its perceived legitimization of homosexuality, as well as the Religious Peace Law proposed by

12. Due to his 'sympathetic understanding toward other religions, particularly toward Buddhism', Dr Pyŏn was dismissed from his positions as minister, professor, and dean in 1992 and '(p)ractically excommunicated' until his death in 1995 (Tedesco 1997, 182). Dr Lee, in turn, lost his professorship for four years after bowing before Buddha statues in the EBS documentary 'Tolerance' (*T'ollerangsŭ*) (Senécal 2014, 87–88).

the Buddhists, arguing that such a law would 'restrict the freedom of Christian faith' (Ock 2017; Paek 2013). The Protestant magazine 'Church and Faith' (*Kyohoewa shinang*) has additionally described it as an 'evil law' designed to 'put a nail' in Evangelical missionary activities (Lee, Jin-gu 2015, 204–205; Ock 2017).

5. Relationship to mainstream Evangelical doctrines

Although only a small minority of Korea's 9.6 million Protestants have participated in the acts of violence and harassment surveyed herein, it is worth examining the relationship of these incidents to mainstream Evangelical doctrines, particularly religious exclusivism, dominionism, and spiritual warfare, and interrogate the roles these doctrines might have played. As Buddhism and Christianity do not signify ethnic, regional, or additional demographic divisions within South Korean society, the roots of on-going tensions between Korea's Buddhist and Evangelical Protestant communities are primarily religious and, while the majority of the incidents of violence and harassment surveyed herein remain unsolved, religious motivations are evident in a significant number. Protestant pastors reportedly participated in six incidents, while nine involved common Evangelical proselytization methods, and eight incidents of vandalism utilized crosses or pro-Christian slogans. Furthermore, in 16 reported incidents the perpetrators explicitly expressed religious motivations for their actions, some condemning Buddhism for being 'heretical', 'idol worship', 'useless and harmful', for 'doing nothing' or promoting 'the devil' and following books 'filled with false words'. Others have declared that 'only God is salvation', 'the whole earth' is 'God('s)', and 'believe in Jesus, as [Koreans] are all children of God'. These statements reflect attitudes and beliefs that are widespread within Korean Protestantism (see section 1.2; see also Pyŏn 1995, 50–51). Citing survey data from 1982, Timothy Lee observes that the majority of Korean Evangelicals hold an 'antagonistic stance towards other religions', while scholar Jae-Bhum Hwang blames Korean Protestantism's religious exclusivism on its 'inherent fundamentalist aggressiveness' (Hwang 2008, 114; Lee 2010, 116, 121). Such exclusivist and 'antagonistic' attitudes towards other religions are exemplified by Protestant theologian Hyŏng-yong Pak's infamous claim that,

> Christians' appropriate attitude towards other religions is not compromising with them, but conquering them ... [Christianity] shall not cooperate with, but attack and defeat, other religions ... Intention to conquer [other religions] is the nature of Gospel (Hwang 2008, 137).[13]

Such triumphalist attitudes were further amplified by Korean Evangelicalism's exponential growth during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s along with the spread of Government-sanctioned religio-nationalist rhetoric which presented South Koreans as 'God's chosen people' belonging to the 'final redeemer nation' (Adams 1995, 26; Lee 2010, 110–111). Reflecting the proliferation of 'dominion theology', many Korean Protestants saw President Yong-sam Kim's 1992 election as confir-

13. Hwang cites Park's 1966 article *Yigyo e taehan t'ahyŏb munje* ['The Problem of [Christians] Compromising with other Religions'] in *Sinhak chinam* 134; 7f.

mation of God's plan to establish Evangelical political control over the nation, as expressed by presidential aid Hwa-kap Han's claim that 'God gave us this government' (Lee 2006, 338; Welsh 1998).[14] As discussed previously in section 3, it is possible that such statements from high-ranking officials were interpreted as a '"green light"' by Evangelical extremists (Tedesco, 1997, 190).

The forms of anti-Buddhist property violence and harassment surveyed herein additionally reflect the re-popularization of spiritual warfare among Korean Evangelicals. Although controversial, mainstream Korean churches have increasingly incorporated Charismatic practices, including divine healings and demonic exorcisms (aka 'deliverances') into weekly services over recent decades (Chong 2011, 102–103). Evangelical leaders, such as 'David' Yonggi Cho, head pastor of the world's largest church, Yoido Full Gospel (Yŏŭido sunbomgŭm kyohoe), have additionally aligned Korean Charismatics with the New Apostolic Reformation (hereafter NAR), a global Charismatic movement emphasizing 'strategic-level spiritual warfare' (hereafter SLSW). Cho, as well as Ki-Dong Kim, head pastor of 60,000 member Seoul Sungrak Baptist Church (Sŏul sŏngnakkyohoe), and other Korean Charismatic leaders are noted proponents of SLSW (Brouwer *et al.*, 1996, 44–45, 116–119; Hovlast 2008, 139; Weaver 2016, 248–249).[15] According to NAR 'theorist' Otis Jr., SLSW involves '"intercessory confrontations with demonic power concentrated over given cities, cultures and peoples"'. Such 'demonic influences' are believed to be based in 'spiritually deceptive' locations, including Buddhist temples and the facilities of other religions, which must be exorcised before the surrounding communities can 'be fully blessed by God' (Weaver 2016, 74–75, 78). Although Korean Charismatic leaders do not advocate physical violence against other religions, SLSW literature does prescribe the burning of '"pagan" artifacts' to free them from occult influence, while John Weaver notes that SLSW 'promotes the destruction' of religious artifacts 'for fear they might be demonized' (Weaver 2016, 75, 265). Thus the identification of Buddhist temples and images as hosting demons requiring exorcism provides a direct motivation for the acts of burning temples, smashing statues, and defacing paintings surveyed herein; actions reflecting those of turn-of-the-last-century 'power evangelists' who similarly burned 'fetishes' and tore down 'devil houses' throughout Korea (see section 1.2). SLSW's influence is additionally evident in the videos of the 'deliverances' at Bongeun (Pongŭn) Temple, Mahābodhi Temple, and the prayers at 'Again 1907', as well as within the controversial Korean practice of 'ground-stepping' (*ttangbapki*).[16] Intended to suppress the Devil's power and estab-

14. 'Dominionism,' or 'dominion theology', Weaver (2016, 262) defines as '"the theocratic idea that... Christians are called by God to exercise dominion over society by taking control of political and cultural institutions"'.

15. Nominally the world's largest Baptist church, Seoul Sungrak has been expelled from mainstream Korean Baptist denominations due to Kim's unorthodox teachings on spiritual warfare and demons.

16. Citing Deuteronomy 11: 24-25, Yun-sik Noh (2011), Dean of the Holiness Church School of Theology, argues that 'ground-stepping' is biblically-based. However, the Korean Church Press Association denies that it reflects 'legitimate Christian doctrine or practice' (The Buddhist Channel 2014).

lish the Kingdom of God on earth, 'ground-stepping' is adapted from the Korean Shamanistic ritual of 'trampling' earth spirits (*chishinbapki*) and shares similarities with the SLSW practice of 'prayer-walking' (see Weaver 2016, 77). Responding to the destruction of Native American and Fijian artifacts by SLSW practitioners, Weaver contends that, by 'labeling of rival religions and cultures as demonic', SLSW 'has the potential to exacerbate ethnic and religious tensions' as the 'wanton destruction' of a culture's 'treasured artifacts' can exact 'devastating consequences' on its stability, especially in regions of 'great religious diversity' (2016, 75). Furthermore, in a study of the role of religion in intra-state violence, sociologist Jonathan Fox observes that the 'perception of being at war is crucial to explaining religious violence' as such violence becomes legitimized when 'the world is thought to be at war' (2004, 58). Clearly, the vast majority of Korean Evangelicals have not engaged in acts of religious violence; nor do they advocated physical violence targeting other faiths. However, the mainstream Evangelical doctrines of religious exclusivism, dominionism, and spiritual warfare do identify Buddhism as a religion to be 'attacked and defeated' and Buddhist temples as hosting demons requiring exorcism. As such, the role of these doctrines in inciting religious violence and harassment in South Korea warrants further examination. Regardless, many Korean Buddhists consider mainstream Evangelical rhetoric inspired by these doctrines to be directly responsible for the incidents of violence and harassment examined above.

Conclusion

Largely understudied by scholars, anti-Buddhist vandalism, arson, and harassment have had a significant impact on inter-religious relations in South Korea and have helped to shape the nation's contemporary religious landscape. As such, this article has surveyed these incidents of violence and harassment as reported in the Korean media, analyzing their characteristics and surrounding trends. We have also contextualized these incidents within both Korea's religious history and the recent chronology of Evangelical-Buddhists tensions in order to identify the origins of this wave of violence and harassment as well as its effects on the communities involved. While not as deadly or destructive as other religious conflicts around the globe,[17] the anti-Buddhist violence and harassment, and wider Evangelical-Buddhist tensions, in South Korea deserve further examination for a variety of reasons. Many of the incidents surveyed herein are criminal acts which remain unresolved. Furthermore, these inter-religious tensions remain an underlying problem within Korean society and, while the threat of anti-Buddhist violence has declined over recent decades, it has not abated entirely. In addition, with approximately 17,000 missionaries abroad, Korean Evangelicals have assumed a leading role in the global evangelization movement (Asia Sentinel 2008). Korean power evangelists, such as Yonggi Cho, have been instrumental in Charismatic Evangelicalism's 'phenomenal' growth within the global south over recent decades, while Cho and Ki Dong Kim have popularized Korean Pentecostalism's 'highly developed demonology' among

17. Jonathan Fox (2004, 63) defines a 'religious conflict' as involving opposing affinity groups of different religions.

African Evangelicals (Brouwer *et al.* 1996, 44–46; Hackett 2003, 62–63). Although Evangelical literature frequently highlights narratives of missionary victimization and persecution, South Korea's missionaries might reflect on whether they risk exporting beliefs and practices that have contributed to inter-religious tensions, conflict and violence at home. Moreover, those working to reduce inter-religious conflict elsewhere in the world could benefit from further examining the various strategies deployed by Korean Buddhists in response to the violence, harassment, and tensions surveyed herein, along with both the successes and failures of these strategies.

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Abbreviations

CCRD	Committee to Counter Religious Discrimination
JO	Jogye Order (*Taehan Pulgyo Chogyejong*)
NAR	New Apostolic Reformation
SLSW	strategic-level spiritual warfare

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