

**The 6th International Conference on  
Ganhwa Seon  
:Seon and Contemporary Society**

**Institute for the Study of the Jogye Order, Academi of Buddhist Studies,  
Dongguk Univ.**

**Center for Buddhist Studies, UCLA.**



# The 6th International Conference on Ganhwa Seon

- Date: Tuesday, July 17, 2018
- Venue: UCLA 314 Royce Hall, Humanities Conference Room, Bunche Hall
- Topic: Seon and Contemporary Society

Date	Time	Schedule	Appendix
<b>7.17. (TUE)</b>	09:00~ 09:30 am	<b>Opening ceremony</b> <b>Welcoming remarks</b> by Professor Robert Buswell (Center for Buddhist Studies, UCLA) and Ven. Jeongdo Sunim(Institute for the Study of the Jogye Order, Dongguk University) <b>Subul Scholarly Awards</b> presented by the Ven. Subul Sunim (Anguk Seon Center)	Moderator: Jennifer Jung-kim  314 Royce Hall
	09:30~ 11:30 am	9:30 <b>“Ethical Action through ‘Ambiguity’ in Existentialism and <i>Kanhwa</i> Chan”</b> Wendi L. Adamek (University of Calgary)	Moderator: Jennifer Jung-kim  (Subul Scholarly Awards Winner Presentation)
		10:10 <b>“Taming the Tiger of <i>Hwadu</i> Absolutism: <i>Kanhwa</i> Practice and Its Experiences as Ritual Practice and Ritual Experiences”</b> Sung-Eun Thomas Kim (University of British Columbia)	
		10:50 <b>“Origin of Sudden Awakening”</b> Bhikkuni Thogu (University of Peradeniya)	
11:45 am ~ 1:00 pm	<b>Lunch</b>		243 Royce Hall & 10383 Bunche Hall

<b>7.17. (TUE)</b>	1:00 ~ 4:00 pm	1:00 <b>“Bringing <i>Kanhwa</i> Sōn into Contemporary Society: Sot’aesan’s Re-invention of <i>Kanhwa</i> Meditation in Won Buddhism”</b> Sung Ha Yun (UCLA)	Moderator: Jennifer Jung- kim
		1:40 <b>“Renarrativizing Chan/ Sōn/ Zen Buddhist Studies for the Twenty-First Century”</b> Albert Welter (University of Arizona)	
		<b>2:20 ~ 2:40 Break for refreshments</b>	
		2:40 <b>“Kanhwa Sōn Practice among Buddhist Nuns in Contemporary Korea: Sōn Master Inhong (1908–1997) and the Sōngnam-sa Monastery”</b> Pori Park (Arizona State University)	
		3:20 <b>“Chan is Alive and Well and Living ... Just About Everywhere”</b> Steven Heine (Florida Internation University)	
	4:00 ~ 5:00 pm	<b>Joint Discussion of all papers</b>	Moderator: Robert Buswell
	5:30 ~ 7:00 pm	<b>Dinner</b>	Faculty Center Sequoia Room
7:00~ 9:00 pm	<b>Roundtable discussion,</b> with keynote address by Subul Sunim “Buddhism and Seon in Contemporary Society”	Faculty Center Sequoia Room	



# Welcoming Remarks

**Robert Buswell**

Director of the Center for Buddhist Studies, UCLA

The Center for Buddhist Studies at UCLA is pleased to be able to host this sixth in a series of international conferences on Ganhwa Seon, in collaboration with the Institute for the Study of the Jogye Order at Dongguk University. We are honored to have with us today several of the most prominent and influential senior scholars of the wider Chan/Seon/Zen tradition, as well as a number of especially promising junior scholars of Seon and Buddhist Studies. Together, we will be discussing the theory, practice, and impact of Ganhwa Seon on Buddhism in Korea and beyond.

Ganhwa Seon 看話禪, the “Seon of examining the meditative topics,” has a history of over eight hundred years in Korea, going back nearly to the time of the systematizer of the practice, Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089-1163). Korean interest in Ganhwa Seon began with Jinul, State Preceptor Bulil Bojo 佛日普照國師知訥 (1158-1210), and his successor, Hyesim, State Preceptor Jingak 眞覺國師慧諶 (1178-1234), and it continues to be a flourishing meditative practice still today on the peninsula. As a living tradition, the technique of Ganhwa Seon is ardently debated among its monastic practitioners, and Korean Ganhwa masters advocate a variety of approaches and teaching styles. Ganhwa Seon has also been the subject of an ongoing initiative within the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, which has sought to present Ganhwa Seon as a distinctively Korean Buddhist meditative tradition. For these

reasons, Ganhwa Seon has proven to be an especially promising topic (*hwa*) of scholarly examination (*gan*)—a scholarly “ganhwa,” as it were.

What I believe has been distinctive about our series of conferences has been the presence and active participation of some of the most distinguished adepts of Ganhwa Seon in Korea today, a trend that continues here with Subul Sunim. By providing a place for Seon adepts in what can sometimes be the arid discourse of an academic conference, we are seeking to turn the “dead words” (*sagu/siju*, 死句) of doctrinal scholarship into the “live words” (*hwalgu/huoju*, 活句) of Ganhwa examination. Our hope, as it has been throughout these series of conferences, is to open a meaningful dialogue between scholars and adepts, in which scholarship can inform Sōn practice and Sōn practice can vivify scholarship. This goal has motivated Korean Buddhist practice for over a millennium. As Jinul exulted at the time of his second awakening experience, “What the World Honored One said with his mouth is doctrine. What the patriarchs transmitted with their minds is Seon. The mouth of the Buddha and the minds of the patriarchs perform are not in contradiction to one another.” (世尊說之於口即為教, 祖師傳之於心即為禪. 佛祖心口, 必不相違. *Hwaeomnon jeoryo*/華嚴論節要)

This is the first time we have held one of our international conferences outside of Korea, in a country where there is barely a presence for “Zen,” let alone a tradition of Ganhwa Seon practice. It therefore seems fitting that our topic this year is “Buddhism and Seon in Contemporary Society.” Subul Sunim will address this issue this evening and will join us for an extended roundtable discussion on this topic with a few of our most eminent academic participants. For its support in funding both the conference and the

roundtable, all of us are deeply grateful to the Anguk Seonwon organization and the on-going encouragement of its founder, Seon Master Subul Sunim. We are especially honored that Subul Sunim was willing to be with us to deliver the conference's keynote address and to recognize personally the talented junior scholars who are this year's recipients of the Subul Prize. We hope this conference will make at least a small contribution toward Subul Sunim's lifelong goal of bringing the practice and experience of Ganhwa Seon to ordinary people pursuing active, engaged lives in the world, rather than just to cloistered monks and nuns.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge our co-sponsor, the Institute for the Study of the Jogye Order, its director, Ven. Dr. Jeongdo Sunim, and its new assistant director, Dr. Seona Gwon, for all they have done over this past year to make this conference a reality. I also want to recognize the vision and tenacity of the founding director of the Institute, Ven. Dr. Jongho Sunim, who organized the last four of these conferences. I would also like to extend my personal thanks to Dr. Jennifer Jung-Kim, the assistant director of UCLA's Center for Buddhist Studies, and our staff person, Ms. Peyton Park, without whose help this conference would not have been possible. Whatever merit may derive from this conference is due to the selfless labor and deep commitment of all these covert—and, in many cases, overt—bodhisattvas.

Thank you very much— 成佛 하십시오.





## INDEX

1. **Ethical Action through ‘Ambiguity’ in Existentialism and *Kanhua* Chan** \_\_\_\_\_ 1  
Wendi L Adamek  
(University of Calgary)
2. **Taming the Tiger of *Hwadu* Absolutism: *Kanhwa* Practice and Its Experiences as Ritual Practice and Ritual Experiences”** \_\_\_\_\_ 48  
Sung-Eun Thomas Kim  
(University of British Columbia)
3. **“Origin of Sudden Awakening”** \_\_\_\_\_ 77  
Bhikkuni Thogu  
(University of Peradeniya)
4. **Bringing *Kanhwa* Sōn into Contemporary Society: Sot’aesan’s Re-invention of *Kanhwa* Meditation in Won Buddhism”** \_\_\_\_\_ 128  
Sung Ha Yun (UCLA)
5. **Renarrativizing Chan/ Sōn/ Zen Buddhist Studies for the Twenty-First Century”** \_\_\_\_\_ 191  
Albert Welter (University of Arizona)
6. ***Kanhwa* Sōn Practice among Buddhist Nuns in Contemporary Korea: Sōn Master Inhong (1908–1997) and the Sōngnam-sa Monastery”** \_\_\_\_\_ 206  
Pori Park (Arizona State University)
7. **Chan is Alive and Well and Living ... Just About Everywhere”** \_\_\_\_\_ 222  
Steven Heine  
(Florida International University)
8. **Keynote Address**  
**Buddhism and Seon in Contemporary Society”** \_\_\_\_\_ 254  
Ven. Subul Sunim  
(Anguk Seon Center)



# Ethical Action through “Ambiguity” in Existentialism and *Kanhua* Chan

Wendi L. Adamek  
University of Calgary

## I. Introduction

In this paper I discuss resonances and disparities between the “doubt” (*yi*; 疑) evoked in the dialectic of Chan “examining the topic” (*kanhua*; 看話, Kor. *ganhwa*) practice and the phenomenology of ambiguity that Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) explores in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.<sup>1</sup> de Beauvoir begins her work with an eloquent claim for this common human existential condition:

Man<sup>2</sup> knows and thinks this tragic ambivalence which the animal and the plant merely undergo. A new paradox is thereby introduced into his destiny. “Rational animal,” “thinking reed,” he escapes from his natural condition without, however, freeing himself from it. He is still a part of this world of which he is a consciousness. He asserts himself as a pure internality against which no external power can take hold, and he also experiences himself as a thing crushed by the dark weight of other things. At every moment he can grasp the nontemporal truth of his existence. But between the past which no

---

<sup>1</sup> Published as *Pour une morale de l’ambiguïté* in 1947; English translation published in 1948. “Ambiguity,” we may note, is based on the Latin *ambiguitas*, doubt and uncertainty.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout, de Beauvoir uses masculine pronouns for the human condition, the then-normative discursive practice that her famous manifesto of feminist philosophy, *The Second Sex* (1949), helped to call into question.

longer is and the future which is not yet, this moment when he exists is nothing.<sup>3</sup>

I take de Beauvoir as a voice from the turning point into modernity, and amplify its resonance with voices from the Chan tradition. The following questions animate this exploration: is de Beauvoir's "tragic ambivalence" and "dark weight" indeed the given human condition, which in the context of modernity must be brought to full awareness in the ethics of living without universals? Or, in Buddhist terms, is it a self-conditioning dualizing feedback loop that can be turned back on itself and broken? When we look at writings by proponents of *kanhua* practice, what do they tell us about the relationship between the "breakthrough" experience of cultivating "doubt" as part of a de-conditioning process ("gradual") and the realization of the always-already complete truth of the lack of subject-object dualism ("sudden")? Finally, within these shifts of perspective and voices, how is the grounding of ethical practice conceived? Is it possible or desirable to be completely free *from* existential ambiguity and doubt in the world of morally weighted action, or does one at best become free *to* make consequential choices within the tension of ambiguity?

To explore these questions, the paper is structured as follows. I begin by identifying the aspect of Buddhism we will be tracking most closely in this exploration of resonances with de Beauvoir's phenomenological existentialism, namely subject/object co-constitution. Coverage of the extensive literature on phenomenology and Buddhism is beyond the scope of

---

<sup>3</sup> de Beauvoir 1948: 1. These citations will be revised; the book is not available in a Kindle edition, and I do not yet have a print copy. I cite from a widely available pdf of a transcription of the 1948 Citadel Press translation, but the pages numbers do not match the original. (Page numbers in the copy represent approximately three pages in the original.)

this paper, but I summarize a pertinent example: Jin Y. Park's comparison of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) and Pojo Chinul (普照知訥, 1158-1210).

I then turn to de Beauvoir and *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. The first part of de Beauvoir's work explores existential ambiguity, and the last two parts explore the possibilities of action from this awareness. In the present paper these two aspects, namely ambiguity and its deployment in action, form "bookends" for sections on Chan/Zen/Sōn Buddhism.

In the middle "Chan" part of the paper, I discuss "doubt" in the context of comments by Dahui Zonggao (大慧宗杲, 1089-1163) and Chin'gak Hyesim (真覺慧諶, 1178-1234).

We then return to de Beauvoir and her consideration of action, incorporating reflections on Buddhist counterparts. In brief concluding remarks, I suggest that de Beauvoir's extended essay on ambiguity could be considered a kind of *kanhua*, boring into existential doubt. Yet while both practices aspire to commitment to freedom for oneself and others, the modes of discovering and maintaining that commitment remain irreconcilable. Nonetheless, great courage is demanded for both kinds of practice.

## **II. Phenomenology and Buddhist Resonances**

Although Simone de Beauvoir's lifelong partner John Paul Sartre (1905-1980) was critical of aspects of the work of both Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Merleau-Ponty, it has been argued that de Beauvoir's mode of engagement with existential ambiguity owes more to Husserl and her fellow-student Merleau-Ponty than to Sartre.<sup>4</sup> She and Sartre were also heavily influenced

---

<sup>4</sup> See Langer 2003.

by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), whose Buddhist echoes and influences have been discussed extensively elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> One of the phenomenological themes de Beauvoir takes up is comparable to a Buddhist practice: examination of the co-constitution or co-specification of subject and object and the effects of the (self-delusional) human capacity to project one's subjectivity as transcendental:

It is desire which creates the desirable, and the project which sets up the end. It is human existence which makes values spring up in the world on the basis of which it will be able to judge the enterprise in which it will be engaged. But first it locates itself beyond any pessimism, as beyond any optimism, for the fact of its original springing forth is a pure contingency.<sup>6</sup>

“Ambiguity” is the gap or lack of specification in this mutual referral of subject and object, which take on particular forms in the project of meaning-making. In his introduction to *Buddhist Phenomenology*, Dan Lusthaus elaborates on Buddhist resonances with the notions of intentional arc and perceptual field in Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception*, a seminal work that was reviewed by de Beauvoir:

Key to the phenomenological project is an understanding of how intentionality constitutes meaning (*Sinn*). Merleau-Ponty deepened Husserl's description with his own description of the ‘intentional arc’ in which the mutual intentionalities of lived- bodies and perceptual fields constitute meanings out of a region of ambiguity through which they interact and

---

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Loy 1996 and May 1996.

<sup>6</sup> de Beauvoir 1948: 5.

mutually influence each other. In short, through corrected cognition presuppositions, conditioned historical views, ‘sediments,’ and so on, are replaced by a life grounded in *Evidenz*. . . . For Buddhism, the root of all human problems lies in ignorance, i.e., the mis-cognition and misperception of ‘things as they become’ (*yāthabhūtam*). Buddhist practice provides methodic and rigorous attention to the facts of experience. Cognitive acuity is sharpened through various means, from meditation and epistemological rigor, to affective and ethical betterment.<sup>7</sup>

Taking up this “region of ambiguity,” in “The Double: Merleau-Ponty and Chinul on Thinking and Questioning,” Jin Y. Park introduces Merleau-Ponty’s concern with the “double,” which is the immediacy of phenomenal reality as entanglement of binary opposites, of subject/object and appearance/absolute.<sup>8</sup> As Park later elaborates, this notion of the “double” resonates with the notion of unobstructed interpenetration of phenomena as envisioned in Huayan thought, wherein phenomenal and absolute are theorized as arising inseparably yet co-effectively.<sup>9</sup> Park draws a parallel between Merleau-Ponty’s “double” and Zen “buddha-nature” and sets out to articulate related challenges of practice in each sphere:

The basic Zen promise that the sentient being is the Buddha is a declaration of the “double” as the fundamental reality in the path of one’s awakening. How one makes this “double” -- of the absolute and the phenomena for Merleau-Ponty and of the sentient being and awakened reality for the Zen

---

<sup>7</sup> Lusthaus 2003: viii.

<sup>8</sup> Park 2009: Kindle locations 1525-1526.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, locations 1583-1597.



Buddhist -- reveal itself, and how the subject lives through it, are issues that both Merleau-Ponty and the Zen Buddhist need to clarify.<sup>10</sup>

Park outlines Merleau-Ponty's critique of the subjectivist conceits of reflective philosophy and its mis-recognition of the interactive basis of its own reflection. He proposes "interrogation" as a practice through which one recognizes and experiences the intertwining of opposites. Park summarizes:

That is so because, when one interrogates things, between the interrogator and the interrogated there arises a relationship similar to the two lines in the Greek letter "chi" ("X"). The interrogator in this relationship has no privilege over the interrogated. Nor is the interrogated an "empty thing" waiting to be filled with the signification provided by the interrogator. Instead, their relationship is totally mutual, as there emerges a "crisscrossing" or "intertwining" of the two in the act of interrogation.<sup>11</sup>

Merleau-Ponty illustrates this through the chiasmus of visibility, in which the relations of seer and being seen are recognized as synergy achieved in mutual crossing of an unknowable gap rather than the conventional construct of subject-object hierarchy.<sup>12</sup> This is analogized with philosophical interrogation that does not seek resolution but stays with the dissonance or troubling indeterminacy at the crux of relations with/as the world, a gap

---

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, locations 1528-1530.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, locations 1554-1556.

<sup>12</sup> This works both rhetorically and biologically; see Muller 2017. Chiasm refers to the area in the brain where right and left optic nerves cross; the cornea bends reflected light to produce upside-down and back-to-front monocular images on the retina, doubled (but not quite comprehensive) information that is conveyed through the optic chiasm and re-inverted by the brain to achieve binocular vision and other synthetic re-presentations.

through which the questioner encounters the ambiguity of existence and meaning.<sup>13</sup>

Park argues that this method is comparable to interrogative focus on the *huatou*(話頭; crucial phrase) in *kanhua* practice. She illustrates this with an example of Chinul’s (1158-1210) questioning method in his *Moguja Susim kyōl* (牧牛子修心訣; Moguja’s Secrets on Cultivating the Mind).<sup>14</sup> After comparing Chinul’s critique of Huayan with Merleau-Ponty’s critique of reflective philosophy, Park analogizes Merleau-Ponty’s practice of interrogation with Chinul’s “tracing back the radiance” (*fanzhao*; 返照) as illustrated in the questioning mode through which one enters noumena (*ruli*; 入理) through/as phenomena (*shi*; 事).<sup>15</sup>

Chinul: Do you hear the sounds of that crow cawing and that magpie calling?

Student: Yes.

Chinul: Trace them back and listen to your hearing-nature. Are there many sounds there?

Student: At that place, all sounds and discriminations are unascertainable.

Chinul: Marvelous! Marvelous! This is Avalokiteśvara’s method for accessing the principle. Let me ask you again. You said, “At that place,

---

<sup>13</sup> Park 2009: Kindle locations 1559-1569. David Loy, blending existential psychotherapy and Buddhist approaches, also emphasizes bringing cognitive dissonance to the surface as a therapeutic technique and posits existential doubt as the basis of interdependence; see Loy 1996 & 2002.

<sup>14</sup> Park mistakenly identifies the source as Chinul’s *Kanhwa kyōrūiron* (看話決疑論; Resolving Doubts about Examining the Topic).

<sup>15</sup> For explication of “tracing back the radiance” in Chinul’s thought, see Buswell 1992 & 2016.

all sounds and discriminations are unascertainable.” But since they are unascertainable, at such a time isn’t the hearing-nature just empty?

Student: Originally it is not empty. It is always bright and never benighted (不昧).

Chinul: What is this essence that is not empty?

Student: As it has no form or shape, it is ineffable.

Chinul: This is the life force of all the buddhas and patriarchs—have no further doubts. Since it has no form or shape, how can it be either large or small? Since it is neither large nor small, how can it have any boundaries? . . . . As there is no ordinary person or sage, there is no purity or impurity. Since there is no impurity or purity, there is no right or wrong. Since there is no right or wrong, names and words do not apply to it. Since none of these concepts apply, all sense-bases and sense-objects, all deluded thoughts, even forms and shapes, names and words are all inapplicable. Hence how can it be anything but originally void and calm and originally no-thing?<sup>16</sup>

In her discussion of this passage, Park highlights the nondual co-arising of the noumenal-phenomenal double. The coinherence of hearing-nature and sound experienced in doubling back is “originally” not empty yet has “no form or shape.” Without the functioning of subject-object co-specification, it is “unascertainable.” Buswell emphasizes that for Chinul this is the function of fundamental numinous awareness (*lingzhi*; 靈知), both ordinary sentience and the enlightened mind if realized as such: “Hence, numinous awareness is the quality of sentience, common to all sentient beings, that demonstrates their

---

<sup>16</sup> I have substituted here Buswell, trans., 2012: 221-222. (Park 2009: Kindle locations 1632-1636; quotes Buswell, trans., 1983: 146.) Dialogues based on hearing a crow and questioning “hearing nature” is a motif we find in earlier material; see Adamek 2007: 281-282; 361.

inherent capacity for enlightenment; it serves as both the faculty that allows meditation to develop through ‘tracing back the radiance’ and the quality of mind mastered through that meditation.”<sup>17</sup>

Though it cannot be described, Chinul also cautions against the notion of “cutting off” thought and language; this simply maintains the discriminating and dominating function of the “subject.” Any linguistic representation, enactment, or attempted curtailment will fall into this trap. Park elaborates on the ways that both Chinul and Merleau-Ponty recognized the problem of continual resurrection of dualistic “violence” in any movement toward a system, prescription, or institution. This includes the problem of reification of the *huatou*.<sup>18</sup> Chinul’s criticism of “involvement with meaning” (or in Dahui’s phrase “dead words”) and Merleau-Ponty’s critique of “sedimented language” challenge the practitioner to open up the questioning alive in every intentional arc toward subject-object resolution.<sup>19</sup> Park describes this in terms of Merleau-Ponty’s chiasmus:

Meaning emerges in the chiasmic space -- the third space, like Plato's *khora* -- which is neither the space of Idea nor that of the changeable. Questioning, or interrogation, in this sense, is not just one method for Merleau-Ponty and Chinul’s *huatou* meditation. It is the way one engages with the world.<sup>20</sup>

The criss-crossings of Merleau-Ponty’s and Chinul’s questioning traverse ambiguities whose similarities are both intriguing and impossible

---

<sup>17</sup> Buswell 2016: 139.

<sup>18</sup> Park 2009: Kindle locations 1654-1683.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, location 1753.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, locations 1752-1754.

to pin down; they both warn that to try to capture them is to betray them. Park concludes that their most salient similarity is the way that their theories “efface their own possibilities of being theories.”<sup>21</sup>

Yet in order to propose the ambiguous chiasmic space, Buddhist emptiness, and the practice of interrogation as matrices of ethical action, some sort of capture must be hazarded. We note that Chinul’s concluding exposition, above, includes the long-standing Buddhist “antinomian” assertion of absence of all discrimination in original nature, including absence of the right/wrong distinction.<sup>22</sup> de Beauvoir, influenced by Merleau-Ponty, attempted to indicate how an ethics of ambiguity or unascertainability might work, by questioning it.

### **III. de Beauvoir and Existential Ambiguity**

In 1946-47 de Beauvoir published a series of essays in *Les Temps modernes*, a journal she had helped to establish along with Merleau-Ponty and others. These were collected and came out as *Pour une morale de la ambiguïté* in 1947, and translated as *The Ethics of Ambiguity* in 1948. Beginning with *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*(1944), de Beauvoir was engaged in articulating the ethics of authentic individual freedom with respect to the freedom of others. Her questioning of existentialism explores dimensions that are missing from her

---

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, locations 1768.

<sup>22</sup> The longer version of this paper included a section on Bao Tang Wuzhu’s (保唐無住, 714-774) use of the phrase “destroying mind-consciousnesses” as it relates to the practice of “formless” precepts.

partner Sartre's existentialist manifesto *Being and Nothingness*(1943).<sup>23</sup> The *The Ethics of Ambiguity* appears to trace a dialectic, from exploration of the given existential condition of ambiguity in between absolute freedom and effective limits (Part I), to exploration of ambivalence about this condition that leads to various forms of denial (Part II), to the conditions of a dynamic ethics of genuine freedom and responsible action in full awareness of the aporia of ambiguity (Part III).

The passage which opens the book and this paper concludes: "This privilege, which he alone possesses, of being a sovereign and unique subject amidst a universe of objects, is what he shares with all his fellow-men. In turn an object for others, he is nothing more than an individual in the collectivity on which he depends."<sup>24</sup> This is the basic condition of existential ambiguity - - one experiences one's existence as the sovereign freedom of subjectivity in the moment. Yet not only is this moment "nothing," ungraspable, one is at the same time constrained all around by the "facticity" of being an object in a world of others. One is always at the nowhere in between, at the crossroads of the freedom to will subjectively and the unfreedom of dependent objecthood. Yet this is the condition enabling the authentic freedom of mutual disclosure. Here the debt she and Sartre owe to Heidegger's thought is disclosed but not acknowledged:

And indeed Sartre tells us that man makes himself this lack of being *in order that* there might be being. The term *in order that* clearly indicates an intentionality. It is not in vain that man nullifies being. Thanks to him, being

---

<sup>23</sup> Mussett, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/beauvoir/> (accessed May 8, 2018).

<sup>24</sup> de Beauvoir 1948: 1-2.

is disclosed and he desires this disclosure. . . . By uprooting himself from the world, man makes himself present to the world and makes the world present to him.<sup>25</sup>

Throughout her essay, the relation of “being” and authentic existence sometimes seems comparable to a Buddhist notion of the potentiality of emptiness that is actualized in enlightened action. de Beauvoir focusses on our fruitless endeavors to establish firm ground or to mask our vertiginous consciousness of a world that is both unknowable in its facticity and unceasing in its disclosure:

As long as there have been men and they have lived, they have all felt this tragic ambiguity of their condition, but as long as there have been philosophers and they have thought, most of them have tried to mask it. They have striven to reduce mind to matter, or to reabsorb matter into mind, or to merge them within a single substance. . . . And the ethics which they have proposed to their disciples has always pursued the same goal. It has been a matter of eliminating the ambiguity by making oneself pure inwardness or pure externality, by escaping from the sensible world or by being engulfed in it, by yielding to eternity or enclosing oneself in the pure moment.<sup>26</sup>

She concludes with a plea for a different kind of endeavor, the courage to live and act with integrity without recourse to reductionisms: “Since we do not succeed in fleeing it, let us therefore try to look the truth in the face. Let us try to assume our fundamental ambiguity. It is in the knowledge of the genuine

---

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

conditions of our life that we must draw our strength to live and our reason for acting.”<sup>27</sup>

Let us pause to consider the different trajectory charted for the course of existential confrontation in *kanhua* practice. As described by Robert Buswell in “The ‘Sensation of Doubt’ in East Asian Zen Buddhism and Some Parallels with Pāli Accounts of Meditation Practice,” proponents of *kanhua* claim that resolutely staying at the crossroads of faith and doubt in buddha-nature generates a crisis that breaks through the ambiguity de Beauvoir claims “we cannot flee.” Instead, Buswell, speaking for the Linji master Yuanmiao(原妙, 1239-1295), says that facing the relentless stream of self-construction and contingency demands an equally relentless focus that generates the “great fury” required to break through doubt and clinging: “At that point the doubt ‘explodes’ (Ch. *po*, Kor. *p’a*: 破), annihilating the student’s identification with body and mind. The bifurcating tendencies of thought are brought to an end, eliminating the limiting ‘point of view’ that is the constructed sense of self and restoring the mind’s inherent state of enlightenment.”<sup>28</sup>

This, however, offers an immediacy and a “plenitude” that de Beauvoir claims is impossible if one would completely embrace the inherent ambiguity of ethical action:

But it is also true that the most optimistic ethics have all begun by emphasizing the element of failure involved in the condition of man; without failure, no ethics; for a being who, from the very start, would be an exact coincidence with himself, in a perfect plenitude, the notion of having-to-be

---

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2-3.

<sup>28</sup> Buswell 2018: 7.



would have no meaning. One does not offer an ethics to a God. It is impossible to propose any to man if one defines him as nature, as something given.<sup>29</sup>

She goes on to propose that that existentialist commitment or “conversion” as argued by Sartre entails continually questioning and renouncing the desire to resolve the existential failure or flaw of knowing one’s being as non-being, thus remaining “at a distance” from oneself. This, however, is the condition through which the world that is not “myself” presences itself:

I should like to be the landscape which I am contemplating, I should like this sky, this quiet water to think themselves within me, that it might be I whom they express in flesh and bone, and I remain at a distance. But it is also by this distance that the sky and the water exist before me. My contemplation is an excruciation only because it is also a joy. I cannot appropriate the snow field where I slide. It remains foreign, forbidden, but I take delight in this very effort toward an impossible possession. I experience it as a triumph, not as a defeat.<sup>30</sup>

She proposes this conversion as a kind of dialectic, but rather than indulging in the Hegelian negation of negation to achieve synthesis, the existentialist does not surpass his failure or lack of being, but assumes it, continually realizing rather than dispelling ambiguity. This means accepting that one never knows the world or oneself as a transparency: “Existentialist conversion should rather be compared to Husserlian reduction: let man put his

---

<sup>29</sup> de Beauvoir 1948: 3.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

will to be ‘in parentheses’ and he will thereby be brought to the consciousness of his true condition. And just as phenomenological reduction prevents the errors of dogmatism by suspending all affirmation concerning the mode of reality of the external world, whose flesh and bone presence the reduction does not, however, contest, so existentialist conversion does not suppress my instincts, desires, plans, and passions.”<sup>31</sup>

This, of course, is at variance with a Buddhist claim that completely seeing into the conditions and functions through which the sense of “self-existence” is maintained, thereby revealing both distance (duality) and desire to be as codependent arisings lacking intrinsic reality, will break the chain of their production. Here we see the incommensurability between the two modes of “questioning,” for de Beauvoir would eschew any transcendental (a priori) resolution as escapism, even if Chan’s “self-nature that is no-nature” bears a surface resemblance to existentialism. Not incidentally, her mode of questioning leaves in play the Janus-faced rationalist/romantic individualism that David McMahan has identified as a key marker of hybrid “Buddhist modernism.”<sup>32</sup>

de Beauvoir’s ethics of ambiguity demands recognition of interdependence, but it is the interdependence of mutually resistant “individuals” who do not vanish in the recognition of their separate but entangled nature: “An ethics of ambiguity will be one which will refuse to deny a priori that separate existants can, at the same time, be bound to each other, that their individual freedoms can forge laws valid for all.”<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4-5.

<sup>32</sup> McMahan 2008.

<sup>33</sup> de Beauvoir 1948: p. 6.

Individual freedom is claimed to foster laws rather than license because one is left with no other responsible agent for a world “where his defeats are inscribed, and his victories as well.”<sup>34</sup> This appears to resemble but does not actually mesh with a Buddhist notion of karma. Ironically, the latter is more “individualist” in the sense of maintaining focus on cause-and-effect pertaining to the formal-nominal continuum (“self”) in question. For de Beauvoir, writing out of personal experience of Nazism, the condition of the world is a collective responsibility born of each individual will acting either in the self-delusion of bad faith or striving for authenticity.

de Beauvoir links this with her coterie’s Marxist hope for spontaneous self-conscious proletariat revolution, which appears naïve in retrospect, but she neither did she hide her repugnance toward the pompous self-righteousness of those striving to awaken said proletariat. True to her existentialist creed, she openly wrestles with her commitment to the common cause and her ineluctable distance. And as an abyss, a self-contradiction, opens at her feet, she appears to step into it willfully with open eyes. Authentic action requires staying true to the groundlessness of ambiguity, yet freedom itself becomes transcendental:

Freedom is the source from which all significations and all values spring. It is the original condition of all justification of existence. The man who seeks to justify his life must want freedom itself absolutely and above everything else. At the same time that it requires the realization of concrete ends, of particular projects, it requires itself universally. It is not a ready-made value which offers itself from the outside to my abstract adherence, but it appears (not on the plane of facility, but on the moral plane) as a cause of itself. It is

---

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

necessarily summoned up by the values which it sets up and through which it sets itself up. It cannot establish a denial of itself, for in denying itself, it would deny the possibility of any foundation. To will oneself moral and to will oneself free are one and the same decision.<sup>35</sup>

She thereby involves herself in the same irresolvable conundrum to which Chan Buddhists pledge their fidelity, the conundrum of sudden *and* gradual: “What meaning can there be in the words *to will oneself free*, since at the beginning we *are* free? It is contradictory to set freedom up as something conquered if at first it is something given.”<sup>36</sup> She even echoes the interrogation integral to the kōan known as “Zhaozhou’s Dog”: “This objection would mean something only if freedom were a thing or a quality naturally attached to a thing. Then, in effect, one would either have it or not have it.”<sup>37</sup>

She proposes that to act authentically is to effect the transition from the “natural” given freedom of ambiguity to a conscious ethics of ambiguity “by establishing a genuine freedom on the original upsurge of our existence.”<sup>38</sup> Yet the spontaneous casting forth of oneself that rides on this “upsurge” remains random and absurd if it is without intentionality. To live authentically is to exercise will and choice at the crossroads of ambiguity, and recognize that consequences are neither knowable nor avoidable.<sup>39</sup> This willing is distinguished from what Buddhists would term “grasping” -- the subject acting

---

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

as a “vain living palpitation” whose “movement toward the object is a flight.”<sup>40</sup> To convert this nescient flight into will, one must propel the spontaneous upsurge of freedom toward projects of authentic ethical action “adhering to the concrete and particular movement by which this spontaneity defines itself by thrusting itself toward an end. It is through this end that it sets up that my spontaneity confirms itself by reflecting upon itself.” This is to live in the constant tension of ambiguity: “My project is never founded; it founds itself.”<sup>41</sup> Though she does not elaborate, this *Will* would necessitate *willingness* to be new-founded oneself in the project (this also coincides in French: *la volonté* and *volonté*).

de Beauvoir then addresses the question of gradual development and continuity. Choice is manifested through “patience, fidelity, and courage” in continual renewal-in-itself and yet deferred closure of the provisional project, carried out through committed action and not mere exercises of thought. She oscillates through the tensions from which authentic action springs: a creation is neither wholly derivative or wholly new; in the face of the world’s ineluctable resistances and limits one eschews both vain obstinance and detached resignation; the heartbreak of letting go is also the joy of finding one’s “hands free and ready to stretch out”; the true project is the disclosure of ambiguity (existence), but each particular project must be meaningful.<sup>42</sup>

In the final passages of this first part, de Beauvoir takes up the question of “bad willing” and the possibility of evil: “If man has one and only one way to

---

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10-12.

save his existence, how can he choose not to choose it in all cases?”<sup>43</sup> Instead of saying, like Kant, that in the end “he can’t,” the existentialist accepts that ambiguity entails infinite renewal of the possibility of choosing an illusory solipsistic closure:

Only, unlike Kant, we do not see man as being essentially a positive will. On the contrary, he is first defined as a negativity. He is first at a distance from himself. He can coincide with himself only by agreeing never to rejoin himself. There is within him a perpetual playing with the negative, and he thereby escapes himself, he escapes his freedom. And it is precisely because an evil will is here possible that the words “to will oneself free” have a meaning. Therefore, not only do we assert that the existentialist doctrine permits the elaboration of an ethics, but it even appears to us as the only philosophy in which an ethics has its place.<sup>44</sup>

This, she argues, is because the stakes are real. The infinite ambiguity of authentic existence and its denials are not illusory or abstract:

Existentialism alone gives -- like religions -- a real role to evil, and it is this, perhaps, which make its judgments so gloomy. Men do not like to feel themselves in danger. Yet, it is because there are real dangers, real failures and real earthly damnation that words like victory, wisdom, or joy have meaning. Nothing is decided in advance, and it is because man has something to lose and because he can lose that he can also win.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

Moving into branching Buddhist pathways toward victory, wisdom, and joy, I would like to take along some of these closing reflections, choosing her translated words in a way that may help amplify their resonances and dissonances in Buddhist milieux. “Negativity” is mis-recognition of dependence, grasping at illusory supports for a sovereign subjectivity. Instead, to take up authentic existence is to live in the ambiguous nonbeing of “being” and act at the crossroads of this free self and a world that cannot be appropriated. “Escaping oneself” is being on the run from this freedom. And real (effective) virtues and evils arise from the ever-renewing possibility of choosing to act in freedom.

## IV. Chan/Sōn Practice of Doubt

### A. Dahui Zonggao, Classic “Doubt”

Dahui (1089-1163) is viewed as the paradigmatic proponent of cultivating “doubt” and breakthrough as a practice-technique. As is well-known to this audience, he belonged to the Linji school Yangqi(楊岐) line that was prominent in his day. Though Dahui used “old cases” as meditative devices, he was critical of “literary Chan” (*wenzi* Chan; 文子禪) and mere aesthetic appreciation of *gongan* (公案; public cases).<sup>46</sup> He is said to have suppressed

---

<sup>46</sup> To briefly review the Chan/Sōn/Zen tradition of “public cases” (Chin. *gongan*, Korean *kongan*, Jap. *kōan*): *gongan* encounters were usually set in the late Tang and featured Chinese masters. From the Song onward, masters in China, Korea, and Japan compiled *gongan* collections and commentaries. Over the centuries, the evolution of the “old model cases” (*guze*; 古則) collections proceeded from compilations of sayings to elaborate curricula. Fenyang Shanzhao(汾陽善昭, 947-1024) made one of the first collections of Chan sayings with his own response or reflection in verse. Xuetou Chongxian(雪竇重顯, 980-1052) modeled his format on Fenyang and made a collection of one hundred cases. He added verses, and in some cases gave alternative responses. Yuanwu added his own commentary on these cases and verses, and this was published by his students as the *Biyān lu* (Blue Cliff Records) in 1128. It

use of the *Biyān lu* (碧巖錄; Blue Cliff Records), his teacher Yuanwu Keqin's (圓悟克勤, 1063-1135) collection of cases and commentaries. Dahui is alleged to have burned the copies and woodblocks; it was effectively out of circulation until it was partially reconstructed in 1300.<sup>47</sup> This iconoclast episode is in keeping with Dahui's critique of "dead words" and his resistance to turning experience into literary sedimentations. However, Dahui made his own collection of cases, the *Zhengfa yanzang* (正法眼藏; Treasury of the Eye of True Dharma), a title later appropriated by Dōgen for his *Shōbōgenzō* collection of essays.

Apropos to our topic, Steven Heine recently published a book defending the *Biyān lu* as an exemplar of the use of "uncertainty" and ambiguity as a deliberate discursive device. Heine characterizes the technique as "a way of exploring and making an assessment of various viewpoints that serve as a model for self-reliance and self-awareness."<sup>48</sup>

Dahui's famous polemical distinction between the practices of "silent illumination" (*mozhao*; 默照) and *kanhua* set the tone for subsequent generations of *kanhua* practitioners. However, this "polemic" was arguably a reprise of a soteriological hermeneutic process whereby complementary styles of practice were turned into competitors. For example, we see this earlier in the complementarity of *zhiguan* (止觀; *samatha-vipassāna*, calming and contemplation) promoted by Tiantai Zhiyi (天台智顓, 538-597) and

---

uses a complex structure of seven parts for each case: introduction, case, notes, comment on case, verse, notes, and comment on verse. The best-known collection in the West is Wumen Huikai's (無門慧開, 1183-1260) *Wumenguan* (無門關; Gateless Barrier) published in 1229. Its forty-eight cases deploy a simpler format of case, comment, and verse.

<sup>47</sup> Heine 2016: Kindle locations 507-516.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, location 115.



synthesized in his characterization of the “sudden and perfect”; this complementarity was then polarized in Shenhui’s (神會, 684-758) criticism of the “Northern School.” He claimed that the latter reified quietist *kanjing* (看淨, viewing purity) and concretized defilement, while the “Southern School’s” *jianxing* (見性; seeing the nature) and *wunian* (無念; no-thought) were dynamic and nondual.

In the Song Chan world as analyzed by Morten Schlütter, *mozhao* soteriology was thought to derive from Chan’s foundational *tathāgatagarba* original-enlightenment doctrine. Its proponents did appear to have promoted the notion that quieting the mind naturally allows realization of inherent resonance with/as buddhas and the universal Dharma of emptiness. We see this in verses attributed to Dahui’s main target Hongzhi (宏智, 1091-1157), in his *Mozhao ming* (默照銘; Elegy on Silent Illumination). Here are selected verses:

1. In complete silence words are forgotten,  
total clarity appears before you.  
When you reflect it, it is boundlessly vast,  
and your body becomes numinous.

2. Numinous it is illuminated without relying on anything,  
in illumination, you return to the transcendent [*miao*].  
The dewy moon on the Milky Way,  
the snow-clad pine on the cloudy peak.

5. Where does transcendent wisdom exist?  
Alertly we destroy murkiness.  
The path of silent illumination

is the basis for leaving the world of delusion.

10. All the myriad things in the universe  
emit radiance and speak the dharma.  
They all attest to each other  
and individually correspond in dialogue.

12. Attesting and corresponding in dialogue,  
perfectly they respond to each other.  
But if in silence illumination is lost,  
then you will become turbid and leave behind the dharma.

15. Our tradition's teaching of silent illumination  
penetrates to the highest peak and the deepest deep.  
Our bodies are emptiness [*śūnyatā*],  
our arms form the *mudrā* [sacred hand gesture].<sup>49</sup>

This pellucid evocation of practice is lovely, but one can see why it would revive echoes of the formative Chan polemic against “viewing purity” and “cleansing dust.” At the same time, it also prefigures Dōgen's(道元, 1200-1253) signature teaching that practice and enlightenment are one.<sup>50</sup> Schlütter comments:

In Dahui's view, the followers of silent illumination made the mistake of not believing that there is a moment of actualization of enlightenment that takes place in relative time and space; that is to

---

<sup>49</sup> Schlütter, trans., 2008: 145-147; see p. 145 on dating the text.

<sup>50</sup> *Bendōwa*; see Tanahashi, ed. 1985: 143-160.

say, they did not believe in enlightenment as an event. Rather, they held that as soon as one sits down in meditation with wordless silence, enlightenment is manifested, and they maintained no true distinction between the actualization of enlightenment and original enlightenment. Dahui felt that Chan masters who believed this could not have experienced enlightenment themselves, and therefore they did not know the difference between a truly enlightened state of mind and one that merely suppresses thought.<sup>51</sup>

Schlütter lays out the complexities of Song institutional and cultural contexts in which Chan monks were increasingly professionalized and involved in constant interaction with elite lay adherents. Under such circumstances, the question of assigning the authority to teach the formless teaching, Chan's seminal and ongoing dilemma, understandably became more acute. Dahui appears to have taken up the challenge with gusto. In a letter to a lay follower, he explains that the antidote to quietism is focus on the *huatou* (話頭; crucial phrase) of a *gongan* in order to break through doubt:

All the myriad doubts are just one doubt. If you can shatter the doubt you have on the *huatou*, then all the myriad doubts will at once be shattered [too]. If you cannot shatter the *huatou*, then you must still face it as if you were opposite a cliff. If you discard the *huatou* and then go and let doubts arise about other writings, or about the teachings in the sutras, or about *gongan* by the old masters, or about your day-to-day worldly worries, then you will be in the company of demons.<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Schlütter, trans., 2008: 120.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

Dahui vividly evokes the transformative force and potential danger of making the *huatou* a point of intense focus of doubt. The opposite of doubt is conviction: unifying and shattering doubt breaks through to conviction of enlightenment. Dahui complained that latter-day Chan practitioners did not *believe* -- they had no faith in actualization of original enlightenment.

Doubts, deep-rooted delusions that obscure original nature, can be viewed as functionally analogous to *klesās*. The most glaring doubt that presents itself when attempting to actualize *tathāgatagarbha* is awareness of one's own flawed nature. In Chan contexts, this dilemma echoes the theodicy problem in Christian contexts: "How can God have created such an imperfect world?" becomes "How can *this* be buddha-mind?" Yet disbelief in one's true self is damning disbelief in the buddhas.

Schlütter brings out the ambiguities of this "theodicy," tracing both conflict and closeness in the representations of Dahui's and Hongzhi's relationship. Poignantly, a deathbed scenario in the literature about Hongzhi plays on the classic Chan motif of "pacifying" the indeterminable mind and illuminating the lack of disease:

When Hongzhi was about to die, he asked Dahui to take charge of his affairs after death. Dahui came [to Tiantong] and asked: "Is the master [Hongzhi] at peace?" The attendant said: "The master has no disease." Dahui laughed and said: "What a dull bird." The master [Hongzhi] heard this and accordingly responded to him with a poem that had the words: "It is easy for a dull bird to leave the nest, but difficult for a sacred turtle to shed its shell."<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

This story, likely to have been a fabrication, adroitly captures key issues. The implicit claim that silent illumination is itself original lack-of-disease is characterized by Dahui as “dull,” not leaving the peaceful nest of complacent meditation. Hongzhi gets the final word, however, countering that it is Dahui who has trapped himself in a hard-shelled distinction between original and actualized enlightenment.

In the successful rhetorical maneuvers carried out by generations of *huatou* advocates in China, Japan, and Korea, sectarian politics, institutional continuity, and economic stakes were undoubtedly critical factors, as they were at every stage of Chan polemicism. However, like the eighth-century Chan polemicists, Dahui can also be viewed as creating a device, a skillful means that turns on the irresolvable ambiguity between inherent resonance and intentional actualization. Dahui’s ultimately empty polemic served to focus attention on this crucial ambiguity, the pivotal distinction/nonduality of delusion and buddha-nature, doubt and faith.

## **B. One Who Listens: Hyesim and the Fox Kōan**

Here we examine the famous *kongan* known as “Baizhang’s Wild Fox” as it appears in a recent collation of two Korean case collections, the *Seonmun yeomsong seolhwa*(禪門拈頌說話; Explanation of the Prose and Verse Commentaries of the Sōn Gate) and the *Seonmun yeomsung jip*(禪門拈頌集; Collection of Prose and Verse Commentaries of the Sōn Gate). The latter was

first printed in 1226 with a preface and commentaries by Hyesim, Chinul's successor.<sup>54</sup>

#### Case 184: Baizhang's Wild Fox

Every day Baizhang ascended the hall. Each time an old man would always listen to the sermon and leave when the assembly left. One day he did not leave. The master thereupon asked, "Who is this standing before me?" The old man said, "I used to dwell here on this mountain during the time of Kāśyapa Buddha. There was a student who asked, 'Is a person with great cultivation still subject to karma or not?' I answered, 'He is not subject to karma.'" I (consequently) fell into the body of a wild fox. Today I ask your reverence to say a turning phrase on my behalf." The master said, "Then ask." The old man asked again, "Is someone with great cultivation still subject to karma or not?" The master said, "He is not in the dark (不昧) about karma." At these words the old man had a great awakening.<sup>55</sup>

It is often noted that the "old man" sets up his would-be savior for the same fall, but Baizhang Huaihai(百丈懷海, 749–814) avoids the trap with skillful

---

<sup>54</sup> Jorgensen and Ahn, trans., 2012: 308-340. The translators explain the collated text and translation as follows:

One hundred *gongan* have been selected from the 1463 *gongan* of the *Seonmun yeomsong seolhwa*. Each of the selected *gongan* have been completely translated and annotated. Two separate texts, the *Seonmun yeomsong jip* and the *Seonmun yeomsong seolhwa* have been combined for each of these *gongan*. This is a different system of compilation than that found in the *Seonmun yeomsong seolhwa* that is printed in the fifth volume of *Hanguk Bulgyo Jeonseo* (Complete Works of Korean Buddhism), where all of the *seolhwa* (explanation of the *gongan*) is given at the end of the *gongan*. Here the appropriate *seolhwa* part has been placed immediately following the original *gongan* and each of the verses and other parts found in the *Seonmun yeomsong jip*. (2012: xxv.)

<sup>55</sup> Jorgensen and Ahn, trans., 2012: 308.

ambiguity. Baizhang's turning word *mei*(昧) is multivalent and can be translated "obscure, dark, ignore, evade, feign," so the phrase has sometimes been translated as "he does not evade (or escape) karma." We might recall that in Chinul's dialogue, the student-figure voices the same phrase to affirm that original hearing-nature is "never benighted."<sup>56</sup>

In his commentary Hyesim first establishes that the question is about "a person of the present moment," i.e. one who is actualizing buddha-nature and acting according to principle, rather than the "original person" or universal condition of buddha-nature that may or may not be realized in action. This corresponds to some extent with de Beauvoir's distinction between the given condition of ambiguity and the person who chooses to act in full awareness of what existential freedom entails. Of course, in the latter context the breakthrough of "entering principle" or an enlightenment threshold is not posited.

Hyesim counters the two exclusive possibilities posed by the questioner: that an actualized person is either subject or not subject to karmic effects. He then presents the image of the fox as one who "listens":

The old man answered that he is not subject to karma and fell into the body of a wild fox. Later, Baizhang said, "He is not in the dark about karma," and at these words he was released from the body of a wild fox. Why? The fox is a beast whose nature is to be full of doubt. When crossing a frozen river the fox listens after each step. That is, before he met Baizhang the old man raised doubt and spoke; he therefore fell into the body of a wild fox. After he met

---

<sup>56</sup> Buswell's translation captures the word's two main aspects, darkness and ignorance.

Baizhang the old man cut off his doubt and spoke; he was therefore released from the body of a wild fox.<sup>57</sup>

The image of a fox on ice comes from the *Yijing* (Book of Changes)'s final hexagram, No. 64, Wei Ji (未濟) "[Crossing] not yet completed." This is an especially significant hexagram, a turning point rather than a closure of the text; Chinese correlative systems recognized the condition of nadir as the beginning of a new cycle, and Wei Ji is linked to the vernal equinox. Wei Ji is also one of the hexagrams that conjoins opposites: the lower trigram is *kan* (坎), water, and the upper is *li* (離), fire. The changing lines of the hexagram distinguish between the behavior of young or old foxes when trying to cross a river. These images illustrate seasoned versus heedless action in a time when great transition is at hand. The "dry conditions" mentioned in the hexagram may be interpreted to mean ice that the fox may or may not succeed in crossing -- perhaps because it is spring, and the ice is melting. In any case, Hellmut Wilhelm glosses the *Yijing* commentary as follows:

At first, however, one must move warily, like an old fox walking over ice. The caution of a fox walking over ice is proverbial in China. His ears are constantly alert to the cracking of the ice, as he carefully and circumspectly searches out the safest spots. A young fox who as yet has not acquired this caution goes ahead boldly, and it may happen that he falls in and gets his tail wet when he is almost across the water.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 310.

<sup>58</sup> Wilhelm 1967: 690.



The 『*Yijing*』 could also be called “the book of ambiguity,” for the guidance of its evocative images and phrases is notoriously difficult to interpret. Even though individual lines may indicate success or failure, responding to circumstances appropriately in the chiasmus of “the Mean” (*zhong*; 中) is the central challenge the book addresses. In an *Yijing*-like manner, Baizhang’s “not in the dark/does not evade” does not tell one how to act, but demonstrates the understanding that enables one to act in freedom. This freedom is not presented as freedom from consequences, but freedom from doubt. Hyesim says, “The fox is a beast whose nature is to be full of doubt. When crossing a frozen river the fox listens after each step.” He goes on to develop the theme of raising doubt and cutting off doubt, using poetic images to illustrate the hair’s breadth in between before and after, or not understanding and understanding. He emphasizes the old man’s pitiful condition and Baizhang’s compassion rather than the old man’s fox-like craftiness and Baizhang’s skillful avoidance of the trap. Baizhang’s compassion exemplifies the ability to respond out of the empty chiasmus of self/other that arises from freedom from doubt. Hyesim points out that this is the great matter at stake, not receiving a “yes or no” answer: “Whether you say karma exists or not there is a path to free yourself.”<sup>59</sup>

Wumen Huikai’s (無門慧開, 1183-1260) terse comment on the case in his slightly later *Wumenguan* (無門關; Gateless Barrier) collection plays on the chiasmatic potential of the turning word “*mei*.” We might observe that Wumen stays safely within the indeterminacy of ambiguity, he does not commit himself. Unlike Hyesim, he does not raise the possibility of the catalytic effect

---

<sup>59</sup> Jorgensen and Ahn, trans., 2012: 312.

of the old man's doubt. He alludes to Baizhang's state as an "old fox" who has succeeded in making the transition, but the compassion of his response is not made explicit.

Not falling under the law of cause and effect -- for what reason had he fallen into the state of a fox? The law of cause and effect cannot be obscured - for what reason has he been released from a fox's body? If in regard to this you have the one eye, then you will understand that the former Baizhang enjoyed five hundred lives of grace as a fox.

Verse:

Not falling, not obscuring:

Two faces, one die (兩采一賽)

Not obscuring, not falling:

A thousand mistakes, ten thousand mistakes.<sup>60</sup>

The verse pivots on the karmic effect that appears once the die is cast, but while still up in the air the playing piece is a nexus of choice. (This nexus is both chiasmus, X, not one; and ambiguity, 0, not two.) This is the emptiness/consequence over which the old fox walks with utmost attention. But what is the fox's nature? Wumen's "lives of grace" suggest that this is a fox who is free from doubt and takes each step with "hearing nature." The nature of Hyesim's fox, on the other hand, is to take each step with doubt. With this ambiguity in mind, let us turn to what de Beauvoir says about the perils of choice and action.

---

<sup>60</sup> Yamada, trans. (1979) 2005: 64-65.

## V. Ambiguity, Others, and Violence

### A. Others

In Section II of the *Ethics of Ambiguity*, “Personal Freedom and Others,” de Beauvoir elaborates a kind of “*panjiao*” classifying the types of attitudes that people assume in order to try to maintain an inauthentic identity in the midst of freedom. This inauthenticity would be further elaborated in de Beauvoir’s and Sartre’s writings as “bad faith.” I here summarize the types that ascend like rungs of ladder toward freedom; ascension is defined according to how much one engages with others as equally free individuals.

1) The “sub-man” who is in flight from the demands of freedom makes no proactive choices, he only reacts; thus he is easily swayed by demagogues.

2) The “serious man” maintains a “tepid” sense of being through orientation to some established code of good and evil, reward and punishment, or even good and bad taste. de Beauvoir describes this as a conscious choice to return to the security of childhood strictures and refashion them as “values,” a choice that is made after the disorienting revelation that the world and its rules have no firm foundations. Life then becomes an attempt to shore up one’s values and obscure one’s view of their empty nature; since complete success is not possible, such a life is suffused with anxiety and cognitive dissonance.

3) The “nihilist” is one who has seen the “living moment” of his negation but rejects its openness and tries to turn it back into firm ground. Experiencing his fundamental lack of being, he tries to convince himself that he desires annihilation, which is really the desire for annihilation of the consciousness that could potentially free him. Such men can be self- and other-destructive; de Beauvoir ascribes this drive to the Nazis, who have “a will for power and a will for suicide at the same time.” She says of this dark turn: “But the mistake

is that it defines man not as the positive existence of a lack, but as a lack at the heart of existence, whereas the truth is that existence is not a lack as such.”<sup>61</sup>

4) The “adventurer” cultivates a “taste for existence,” which is not the same as existential joy in freedom. He throws himself into undertakings like “exploration, conquest, war, speculation, love, politics,” but only for the sake of conquest and action. However, de Beauvoir says that this is nearer to a genuinely moral character: “he deliberately makes himself a lack of being; he aims expressly at existence; though engaged in his undertaking, he is at the same time detached from the goal.”<sup>62</sup> She goes on to say that if existentialism were indeed as solipsistic as its critics claim, the adventurer would be its ideal type. However, the pathway that would take the adventurer from goal-less passion to true freedom entails equally passionate engagement with the freedom of others: “He can become conscious of the real requirements of his own freedom, which can will itself only by destining itself to an open future, by seeking to extend itself by means of the freedom of others.”<sup>63</sup> If this conversion is made, then one becomes “a genuinely free man.” However, the adventurer who is attracted by the nihilist seduction of a sense of unique destiny will see himself as above the mere facticity of others and act as a tyrant. This is a case where others as objects or mere “content” are not fulfilled in their truth at the crossroads of freedom.

5) The opposite one-sidedness is found in the “passionate man.” The passionate man fails in genuine fulfillment of the subjective. The object of passion is not experienced as something detached from oneself or objectively

---

<sup>61</sup> de Beauvoir 1948: 23.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

desirable, but as a thing uniquely disclosed by one's subjectivity. (Though de Beauvoir does not mention Proust, one cannot help but think of his immersive unfolding of Swann's love for Odette.) Because of the intensity that grows with failure to entirely possess, passion can either seek a new object or take a violent turn -- and here we might recall Yuanmiao's evocation of "great fury" that builds through relentless focus on the *huatou*. de Beauvoir also says "conversion can start from within passion itself," a conversion that she describes as a kind of homeopathy: "The cause of the passionate man's torment is his distance from the object; but he must accept it instead of trying to eliminate it. It is the condition within which the object is disclosed."<sup>64</sup>

All of the above are varieties of inauthenticity or flights from freedom. Rather than engaging with the unfolding vitality of existential ambiguity with/as self-and-others, bad faith is an attempt to hide this from oneself. The final "type" is on the threshold of full awareness of interdependence but still takes on an identity. This threshold de Beauvoir characterizes as "the creative," into which she folds the contemplative, the artist, and the intellectual:

Thus, we see that no existence can be validly fulfilled if it is limited to itself. It appeals to the existence of others. The idea of such a dependence is frightening, and the separation and multiplicity of existants raises highly disturbing problems. One can understand that men who are aware of the risks and the inevitable element of failure involved in any engagement in the world attempt to fulfill themselves outside of the world. Man is permitted to separate himself from this world by contemplation, to think about it, to create it anew. Some men, instead of building their existence upon the indefinite unfolding of time, propose to assert it in its eternal aspect and to achieve it

---

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

as an absolute. They hope, thereby, to surmount the ambiguity of their condition. Thus, many intellectuals seek their salvation either in critical thought or creative activity.<sup>65</sup>

She concludes this section with the credo: “To will oneself free is also to will others free.” She then proposes to examine concrete action in the third section, “The Positive Aspects of Ambiguity.” She begins with a hypothetical objection that may sound familiar: “If every man is free, he cannot *will* himself free.” This resonates with an ongoing Chan question, “If all beings are original Buddha nature, why does one have to cultivate and practice?” de Beauvoir goes on to say, “Likewise the objection will be raised that I can will nothing for another since that other is free in all circumstances” So what is there to *do*?<sup>66</sup>

The aesthete may contemplate the world from a distance, impersonally, but she points out that this attitude becomes most attractive in times of political chaos. One thinks of the Chinese aesthetic of principled reclusion,<sup>67</sup> but de Beauvoir clearly does not consider this a virtue. Likewise, the artist who transforms moral outrage into a beautiful work of art may provide escape rather than provoking confrontation.<sup>68</sup>

She questions the existentialist precept “to will freedom” (and thus its unspoken counterpoint that this is also to will others free) because willing existential freedom cannot be abstract, it can only be realized in specific engagements with the world. But any engagement or project is only alive in

---

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>67</sup> See Berkowitz 2000.

<sup>68</sup> de Beauvoir 1948: 33.

surpassing itself and allowing itself to remain open-ended; she makes a point that has been oft-repeated: that science must be an indefinite questioning and not a quest for control, as technological mastery is another attempt to mask the lack of being. For de Beauvoir, the ethic of freedom to realize this lack and participate in its infinite disclosure means that one must take sides in the war against oppression, in whatever form that war presents itself in one's given situation.<sup>69</sup>

She clearly speaks from her coterie's passionate engagement with the question of Marxist revolution: "Revolt is not integrated into the harmonious development of the world; it does not wish to be integrated but rather to explode at the heart of the world and to break its continuity."<sup>70</sup> She says that this "continuity" is maintained just as much by comfortable consumerism as by outright slavery. Yet she also recognizes the sophistries of the Soviet Union and the complexities of internecine wars of liberation in the wake of WWII. (Not long after this was written, Sartre would be excoriated for making excuses for Stalin's gulags.) How does one pick one's battles? She oscillates between condemning some choices and arguing that individuals must choose their own mode of engaging with freedom's disclosure: "All that an external action can propose is to put the oppressed in the presence of his freedom: then he will decide positively and freely."<sup>71</sup>

Though revolution is the theater of doubt in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, here and now, in the midst of the #MeToo moment, we must ask: "What about sexual predation?" Notoriously, de Beauvoir had affairs with her high-school

---

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

students and shared her lovers with Sartre. One of them, Bianca Lamblin, wrote a memoir about her experiences as the seventeen-year-old lover of both. The memoir was written much later, at the age of seventy; when de Beauvoir's letters were posthumously published, Lamblin discovered that her passion had been a subject of light ridicule between the older couple. Moreover, she accused de Beauvoir and Sartre of callously abandoning her on the brink of WWII -- and she was Jewish. In 1943, de Beauvoir permanently lost her teaching license when the parents of another student laid formal charges against her for debauching a minor.<sup>72</sup>

I have not read de Beauvoir's letters myself, and I do not know if she ever claimed that these young women were being "exposed to freedom" and could exercise equal freedom. Should not her commitment to the practice of doubt have enabled her to examine the power-differential between herself and her students? Beauvoir later expressed regret about some of her actions, but one cannot help but feel that it was too little, too late. For one of the most influential and explicit spokeswomen for women's social and sexual liberation, this area of her life constitutes an ambiguity of elephantine proportions. This is murky, clinging ambiguity rather than the clear, unobscured recognition of coinherent freedom with the other.

There is a related herd of elephants in this room: the ongoing string of revelations about sexual predation by Dharma teachers that have plagued the Sanghas of Buddhist modernism. This has and no doubt will continue to be a topic of interrogation. The quest is truly challenging: one must find ways to transparently maintain mutual authentic respect in a field of relations that is ineluctably hierarchical. This becomes even more fraught with hazard in

---

<sup>72</sup> See Lamblin 1996; O'Grady 2016.



modern contexts, where privacy is considered sacrosanct and personal psychological issues and traumas are brought to teachers who may not have the training to deal with them. No doubt many of the teachers who have been exposed in taking advantage of the vulnerabilities of students, who have confessed, or who remain “in the dark” of secrecy have justified their actions on the basis of putting the other “in the presence of her/his freedom.”

## **B. Violence**

In this light, let us return to *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. de Beauvoir’s interrogation heats up when she delves into the question of justified violence. In the sub-section “The Antinomies of Action,” she agonizes and oscillates through the contradictions and difficult truths confronting those (including herself and Sartre) who advocate violent revolution for the sake of freedom: “We are obliged to destroy not only the oppressor but also those who serve him, whether they do so out of ignorance or out of constraint.”<sup>73</sup> One cannot be in the dark about the consequences:

But that is not the worst thing to be said for violence. It not only forces us to sacrifice the men who are in our way, but also those who are fighting on our side, and even ourselves. Since we can conquer our enemies only by acting upon their facticity, by reducing them to things, we have to make ourselves things; in this struggle in which wills are forced to confront each other through their bodies, the bodies of our allies, like those of our opponents are exposed to the same brutal hazard: they will be wounded, killed, or starved.<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

The existentialist who engages in whatever battle against oppression that discloses itself must at the same time confront the lack of any comforting self-justification or refuge: “Thus one finds himself in the presence of the paradox that no action can be generated for man without its being immediately generated against men.”<sup>75</sup> The purest self-sacrifice can be consumed on the altar of tyranny: “We know how many edifying speeches this philosophy has inspired: it is by losing oneself that one finds himself, by dying that one fulfills his life, by accepting servitude that one realizes his freedom; all leaders of men preach in this vein.”<sup>76</sup>

But if the substance of the individual is taken away, then so is that of the State that takes it. The inevitable collapse of inauthentic relations allows the hope that truth will always shine forth through the cracks: “only the subject can justify his own existence; no external subject, no object, can bring him salvation from the outside. He can not be regarded as a nothing, since the consciousness of all things is within him.”<sup>77</sup> At the same time, she warns against resorting to this or any justification for the struggle against oppression, for rationalizations fall back into treating others as “substance” or mere objects. Action can only come from ongoing self-questioning, not self-reassurance.

After wrestling with the issue of sacrifice and totalitarianism, she returns to ambiguity, which has now lost the hazy glow of the interdependent freedom of self and others in the harsh light of infinite chiasmatic antinomy: “that

---

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

action has to be lived in its truth, that is, in the consciousness of the antinomies which it involves, does not mean that one has to renounce it.”<sup>78</sup>

She proposes art as an example of practice of “each action” that is neither simply an end in itself nor a striving toward future ultimate fulfillment:

There we have an example of how man must, in any event, assume his finiteness: not by treating his existence as transitory or relative but by reflecting the infinite within it, that is, by treating it as absolute. There is an art only because at every moment art has willed itself absolutely; likewise there is a liberation of man only if, in aiming at itself, freedom is achieved absolutely in the very fact of aiming at itself. This requires that each action be considered as a finished form whose different moments, instead of fleeing toward the future in order to find there their justification, reflect and confirm one another so well that there is no longer a sharp separation between present and future, between means and ends.<sup>79</sup>

Yet in the midst of cultivating this art, this practice, one never gives up asking: “Am I really working for the liberation of men? Isn’t this end contested by the sacrifices through which I aim at it?”<sup>80</sup> Though she acknowledges that this may seem intangible, impractical, and abstract, she eschews the formulation of precepts: “Ethics does not furnish recipes any more than do science and art. One can merely propose methods.”<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

A crucial dimension of “method” is that it has no Kantian formal strictness or universality, but is enacted within particular familial, cultural, social, and national entanglements. In Buddhist terms we might call this the antinomy of the universal in the particular, easy to idealize but difficult to actualize without “ten thousand errors”:

But man is man only through situations whose particularity is precisely a universal fact. There are men who expect help from certain men and not from others, and these expectations define privileged lines of action. It is fitting that the negro fight for the negro, the Jew for the Jew, the proletarian for the proletarian, and the Spaniard in Spain. But the assertion of these particular solidarities must not contradict the will for universal solidarity and each finite undertaking must also be open on the totality of men.<sup>82</sup>

The only valid practice is to doubt, consider the antinomies, and in the end to cast the dice: “One finds himself back at the anguish of free decision. And that is why political choice is an ethical choice: it is a wager as well as a decision; one bets on the chances and risks of the measure under consideration; but whether chances and risks must be assumed or not in the given circumstances must be decided without help, and in so doing one sets up values.”<sup>83</sup>

Earlier, she claimed that values are the refuge of the “serious man,” one who is living in a substitute childhood. In this section she struggles to resuscitate an authentic method of living values, positing homologies with the chiasmatic practices of science and art: “It is apparent that the method we are

---

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

proposing, analogous in this respect to scientific or aesthetic methods, consists, in each case, of confronting the values realized with the values aimed at, and the meaning of the act with its content.” Again turning volte-face, she recognizes that “hesitations and misgivings only impede victory,” and the endless tension of the practice of existentialism is exhausting and unappealing.<sup>84</sup> (At this point the reader will no doubt agree.)

In her short conclusion she reiterates the interdependence at the core of this practice, that one’s freedom can only be achieved through the freedom of others, the movement that “springs from his heart but which leads outside of him.”<sup>85</sup> She speaks movingly of the great feeling of calmness she experienced when reading Hegel in the library in 1940. On walking outside this calm evaporated, and opened into unblinking infinity:

But once I got into the street again, into my life, out of the system, beneath a real sky, the system was no longer of any use to me: what it had offered me, under a show of the infinite, was the consolations of death; and I again wanted to live in the midst of living men. I think that, inversely, existentialism does not offer to the reader the consolations of an abstract evasion: existentialism proposes no evasion. On the contrary, its ethics is experienced in the truth of life, and it then appears as the only proposition of salvation which one can address to men. . . . Regardless of the staggering dimensions of the world about us, the density of our ignorance, the risks of catastrophes to come, and our individual weakness within the immense collectivity, the fact remains that we are absolutely free today if we choose

---

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70

to will our existence in its finiteness, a finiteness which is open on the infinite.<sup>86</sup>

## VI. Conclusions

Articulating basic universal principles for ethical action, like the Eightfold Path, will always be an important human endeavor. However, an ethics of ambiguity and groundlessness as argued by de Beauvoir and demonstrated in the teachings of Dahui, Chinul, Hyesim and other Chan/Sōn/Zen masters have also persisted as complementary reversals or upendings of practices defined by reified principles. The difference between our existentialist and *kanhua* proponents is in their representations of what the practicing life is like. The never-ending existential quest to “live an authentic life” is an open-ended endeavor in which neither despair nor joy are permanent, and living with the tensions of uncertainty and risk is a daily challenge. In contrast, Chan writings tend to idealize boring into Great Doubt and the subsequent breakthrough of enlightenment as opening up joy as the given condition while the practice continues to deepen.

Nevertheless, each must face its own closeted antinomies. By his own account, Hakuin’s repeated breakthroughs through *kanhua* practice did not result in physical or mental stability until his bodhisattvic turn late in life.<sup>87</sup> de Beauvoir’s evocation of authentic life was articulated in the midst of affairs with adolescent girls in the name of sexual liberation, and justification of violent revolution for the sake of liberation of the working class. As Bernard

---

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>87</sup> See Waddell, trans., 2010. This is elaborated in a longer form of the paper.

Faure and others have pointed out, Buddhism has its own histories and contemporary manifestations of support for violent regimes and tacit acceptance of sexual predation and exploitation of weaker members of the Sangha.

Both Chan and existentialist forms of practice cultivate the lack of fixed ground on which to base ethics. For most people, this may not sound like an appealing condition to begin from or end up. However, both forms of practice affirm that this is a vibrantly living ambiguity from which to attempt to engage truthfully and compassionately with others. One cannot skate over it, and one must cross it: “A thousand errors, ten thousand.”

## References

- Adamek, Wendi L. (2007). *The Mystique of Transmission: On an Early Chan Text and Its Contexts*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Berkowitz, Alan J. (2000). *Patterns of Disengagement: The Practice and Portrayal of Reclusion in Early Medieval China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Buswell, Robert E. Jr. (2018). “The ‘Sensation of Doubt’ in East Asian Zen Buddhism and Some Parallels with Pāli Accounts of Meditation Practice.” *Contemporary Buddhism: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 19 (14 pages).

- \_\_\_\_\_ (2016). *Numinous Awareness Is Never Dark: The Korean Buddhist Master Chinul's Excerpts on Zen Practice*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_, trans. (2012). *Chinul: Selected Works*. In *Collected Works of Korean Buddhism, Vol. 2*. Seoul: Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, Compilation Committee of Korean Buddhist Thought.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1992). *Tracing Back the Radiance: Chinul's Korean Way of Zen*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1983). *The Korean Approach to Zen: The Collected Works of Chinul*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Card, Claudia, ed. (2003). *The Cambridge Companion of Simone de Beauvoir*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- de Beauvoir, Simone [1949] (1953). *The Second Sex*. Trans. H. M. Parshley. London: Jonathan Cape.
- \_\_\_\_\_ [1947] (1948). *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Trans. Bernard Frechtman. Secaucus, N.J.: Citadel Press.
- Jorgensen, John, ed., Juhn Y. Ahn, trans. (2012). *Gongan Collections I*. In *Collected Works of Korean Buddhism, Vol. 7-1*. Seoul: Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, Compilation Committee of Korean Buddhist Thought.
- Lamblin, Bianca (1996). *A Disgraceful Affair: Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Bianca Lamblin*. Trans. Julie Plovnick. Boston: Northeastern Press.
- Langer, Monika (2003). "Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty on Ambiguity." In Claudia Card, ed., *The Cambridge Companion of Simone de Beauvoir*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 87-106.



- Loy, David (2002). *A Buddhist History of the West: Studies in Lack*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (1996). *Lack and Transcendence: The Problem of Death and Life in Psychotherapy, Existentialism, and Buddhism*. Amherst: Humanities Books.
- May, Reinhard (1996). *Heidegger's hidden sources: East Asian influences on his work*. Trans. Graham Parks. London and New York: Routledge.
- McMahan, David L. (2008). *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Muller, Robin M. (2017). "The Logic of the Chiasm in Merleau-Ponty's Early Philosophy." *Ergo* 4.7: 181-227.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/ergo.12405314.0004.007>
- Mussett, Shannon. *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*,  
<https://www.iep.utm.edu/beauvoir/> (accessed May 8, 2018).
- O'Grady, Jane (2016). "Did Sartre and de Beauvoir groom high school girls?" *The Telegraph*, Feb. 21.
- Park, Jin Y. (2009). "The Double: Merleau-Ponty and Chinul on Thinking and Questioning." In Jin Y. Park and Gereon Kopf, eds. (2009). *Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism*. Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books. Kindle Edition, locations 1510-1764.
- \_\_\_\_\_ and Gereon Kopf, eds. (2009). *Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism*. Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books.
- Schlütter, Morten (2008). *How Zen Became Zen: The Dispute over Enlightenment and the Formation of Chan Buddhism in Song-Dynasty China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

- Steven Heine (2016). *Chan Rhetoric of Uncertainty in the Blue Cliff Record: Sharpening a Sword at the Dragon Gate*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tanahashi, ed. (1985). *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Master Dōgen*. San Francisco: North Point Press.
- Waddell, Norman, trans. [1999] 2010. *Wild Ivy: The Spiritual Autobiography of Zen Master Hakuin*. Boston: Shambhala.
- Wilhelm, Hellmut, trans. (1967). *The I Ching or Book of Changes*. English Trans. Cary F. Baynes. 3rd edition, with a foreword by C. G. Jung and preface by Hellmut Wilhelm. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Yamada, Kōun [1979] (2005). *The Gateless Gate: The Classic Book of Zen Koans*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.

# **Taming the Tiger of *Hwadu* Absolutism: *Kanhwa* Practice and Its Experiences as Ritual Practice and Ritual Experiences**

**Sung-Eun Thomas Kim**

University of British Columbia

## **Abstract**

*Kanhwa* Sŏn has often been perceived as iconoclastic and rejecting theorizing. Furthermore, its critique of “hermeneutical rigidity” and “*hwadu* absolutism” has been noted as rendering a dialogue between its practitioners and scholars impossible. It has even been argued that such characteristics of *Kanhwa* Sŏn have compromised the possibility of its practice becoming adoptable to the contemporary world.

In an effort to build a methodological bridge, this paper attempts to provide the grounds for discussing the practice of *Kanhwa* Sŏn from the perspective of social sciences. With this in mind, this paper will highlight the experiences of the practitioners in the context of ritual practice while perceiving those experiences as social manifestations.

The reason for this attempt is that there seems to be much similarity in the soteriological structure of *Kanhwa* Sŏn practice with the structure of ritual practice that revolves around constructing and eliciting a transformative experience. Beyond the transformation, further similarity is in the motif of returning, to society but yet having become transformed. And in this return, of significant importance is the change in identity that comes about through the event of crossing a threshold.

A result of such comparison would highlight the importance of the socially defined context of practice that is missed in doctrinal discussions but which determine the characteristics of the transformative experience and its outcomes. In this sense, translating the practice of *Kanhwa* Sŏn into ritual practice and experiences will provide insight and a way to bring the discussion of *Kanhwa* Sŏn into wider discourses of the academia.

**Keywords:** *hwadu* (critical phrase), *Kanhwa* Sŏn, ritual studies, ritual experiences, soteriological structure, identity and experience, experiential awakening

## **I. Introduction**

It was the start of another winter retreat of 1975-1976 at Song-gwang Temple located deep in the mountains of the Southern Chŏlla province. The Sŏn master Kusan (1908-1983) gave an inaugural dharma talk to the gathered monks for the retreat.

After ascending the dharma seat and looking to all the four directions, the master [Kusan] said, “today is the beginning of the this three-month retreat. Within the assembly present here now—do each of you brave men intend to go through with this retreat? Those of you endowed with the dharma-eye, speak! What is an extraordinary man?”

The assembly remained silent.

After a pause the master shouted and said, “The oranges of Cheju Island and the apples of Taegu: do you know where they fall?”

Kusan continued on with a full lecture on the reason for investigating the *kongan* (Jpn. *kōan*) and some lessons for the practice. At the end of the dharma talk the Sōn master shouted a *gāthā* and descended from the dharma seat.<sup>1</sup>

Though the firsthand account further describes the above scene as being carefully scripted, on imagining the scene as described, one would not be surprised that such scenes from Sōn/Zen/Chan interaction had often been described with words such as iconoclastic and spontaneous. Especially in the practice of *Kanhwa* Sōn(看話禪) or “observing the critical phrase meditation,” which is also known as investigating a *kongan*, monks do not hold back in using descriptions such as “beyond sensory perception,” or “There is no place for reasoning, wording or meaning to function.”<sup>2</sup> From such descriptions one may easily be convinced that *kanhwa* Sōn would be iconoclastic, spontaneous, and even anti-ritualistic. It may be hard to think that in such practices there will be formulaic and logical steps that the postulants can follow.<sup>3</sup>

Such ideas can be traced back to Chinul(知訥, 1158-1210), the first Korean monk who systematically incorporated *kanhwa* Sōn into his soteriological schema and agreed that ultimately, even words used in *kanhwa* Sōn must be abandoned in favor of completely “nonconceptual forms of pedagogy.” According to an eminent modern monks in Korea, Sōngch’ōl (性徹, 1912-1993), the soteriological schema of awakening and practice can only be “sudden enlightenment/sudden practice” (Kr. *tono tonsu*).<sup>4</sup> This is the idea

---

<sup>1</sup> This scene was described by Buswell in his *The Zen Monastic Experiences* (1992, 183-184).

<sup>2</sup> Wōnyung, 1993, 76; cited in Yun 2010, 213-214.

<sup>3</sup> In popular descriptions, focus has been on the climactic interaction between the master and the student. Such “Sōn exchanges,” are usual filled with spontaneous and iconoclastic actions by the Sōn master such as shouting and even striking their student.

<sup>4</sup> According to Buswell, “nonconceptual forms of pedagogy” included, “striking, beating, and

that complete awakening will be coupled with perfected form of cultivation, a technique referred to as “radical subitism,” that is typically associated with Linji school of Sŏn.<sup>5</sup> As noted above such means as discriminating consciousness or language and cognition are useless. No reasoning and no meaningful thought processes will be of any help in one’s practice. Any other way was considered “heretical!”

Sŏngch’ŏl, was a charismatic monk who had a significant effect on the thought and method of practice in Korean Sŏn. During his time of active teaching, Sŏngch’ŏl with a magnetic personality gathered a large following both among the lay followers and the monastics. Many of his thoughts still reverberate in the Korean Buddhist communities. He built a strong foundation for his teaching at his resident temple, Hein Temple, in Southern Gyŏngsan province that rivaled the long tradition that has been established by the Koryŏ period (918-1392) monk, Chinul, at present day Songgwang Temple.

Despite his popularity he was also a controversial figure as the accusation of “absolutism,” that is embodied by such figures as Sŏngch’ŏl seems to be well founded in modern Buddhist discourses amongst the monks in present-day Korea. In one case at an international conference on *Kanhwa* practice at Dongguk University in 2010. An eminent practitioner monk of the Chogye Order of Korea had finished his talk and was asked by a Western scholar “How do you adapt the teaching of KWM (Keyword meditation) to Korea's general public and to the Western world?” The monk answered the earnest and serious

---

pregnant pauses” (2014, 142-143).

<sup>5</sup> Here, Buswell terms such method of practice and awakening as “radical subitism.” See Buswell’s short but clear explication of the sudden awakening/sudden cultivation and sudden awakening/gradual cultivation stratagems of soteriology that is identified with the Linji line of Sŏn and Guifeng Zongmi’s 圭峰宗密 (780-841) schema, respectively (2014, 128-130).

question with a terse answer, “Just raise the *hwadu* (話頭; Ch. *huatou*).” This, in other words meant that one must “just observe the critical phrase,” to which there was a loud applause from the audience but left the question unanswered.<sup>6</sup> The avoidance of a sincere and open dialogue with academics and the posture of self-righteousness witnessed in such actions have led some to accuse the current Chogye Order of *hwadu* absolutism.<sup>7</sup>

From the very beginning when *kanhwa* Sōn was first adopted systematically as a form of practice in Korea by the late 12<sup>th</sup> century monk, Chinul, it was for the purpose of providing a “short-cut” method for the students of Buddhism.<sup>8</sup> It was seen as an effective method in having the mind of the practitioner cut directly to “realization-enlightenment” without going through the process of understanding enlightenment and gradual cultivation.<sup>9</sup> By incorporating this method into his soteriological stratagem of sudden awakening/gradual cultivation, Chinul felt that it was a more effective method in bringing the practitioner to the state of complete realization awakening.<sup>10</sup> After Chinul’s

---

<sup>6</sup> Senécal 2011, 94.

<sup>7</sup> Barnard Senécal describes “*Hwadu* Absolutism” as claiming the notion that *Hwadu* Sōn is the pinnacle of Sōn Buddhism while ignoring that Sōn Buddhism has continued to develop from the past. He explains that it is “a closed, exclusive, rigid, self-justifying and nationalistic interpretation of KWM [Keyword Meditation] that wants to impose itself as the last word upon the pluralistic societies of South Korea and the rest of the contemporary world” (2011, 91). Similar concerns of *hwadu* absolutism has been raised by other scholars of Korean Buddhism including Jongmyung Kim “Discourses on Buddhist Praxes in Contemporary Korea: Issues, Analysis, and Alternatives” (2010), and Sō Chōnghyōng “Sōn Pulgyo suhaeng e taehan pansōng” Sō (2000).

<sup>8</sup> Buswell 1983, 238.

<sup>9</sup> Keel 1984, 146-155.

<sup>10</sup> Chinul is a significant figure in the systemization of thought and practice in relation to the progression towards the state of awakening. He was the first in Korea to adopt and systematize the practice from reading the works of the Chinese systematizer, Ta-hui Tsung-kao (大慧宗杲, 1089-1163) of the Lin-chi lineage. His system of thought and practice has shaped monastic curriculum and methods of practice from his time up to modern times

time, especially with greater emphasis placed on *kanhwa* Sŏn by his immediate successor, Chin'gak Hyesim(眞覺慧諶, 1178-1234), *kanhwa* Sŏn became the main form of practice at the Korean Sŏn community which has continue to this day.

Even for the great 16<sup>th</sup> century Sŏn master Hyujŏng(休靜, 1520-1604) who is known as the systemizer of monastic curriculum that has been to a great extent reflected in modern monastic curriculum, *kanhwa* Sŏn was made into a critical practice where the novice started with textual studies but later engaged in *hwadu* practice to discard discursive thinking, likened to a boat used to cross to the shores of enlightenment.<sup>11</sup>

However, despite the criticism of absolutism of *kanhwa* Sŏn, upon closer examination, we are able to discern logical steps and reason within the practice of investigating the critical phrase that is common in other forms of religious practices. Though *kanhwa* practice comes across as rhetorical and expressed in recondite language, I claim in this paper that such aspects are part of a greater stratagem of practice. In this sense the recondite aspects have a role that fits within the greater logic of the practice. Furthermore, in analyzing such roles, it is helpful when the greater logic can be discerned by comparing it to the logic of ritual practice. In ritual practice, there are various steps placed in a greater structure to bring about certain experiences in the initiands.

---

especially in the practice of *kanhwa Sŏn*. Robert Buswell has been the most prominent Western scholar who has discussed Jinul, his life of practice and his thought. See Buswell, Robert E. Jr. *The Zen Monastic Experience: Buddhist Practice in Contemporary Korea* (1992).

<sup>11</sup> The thought and practice of *kanhwa Sŏn* that was formulated by Chinul later in his life in the early thirteenth century were wholly accepted and espoused by Hyujŏng and was only slightly modified. See Hyujŏng (1977).



The ritual that will be used for comparison is initiation rituals or commonly known as rites of passage. It is hoped that such comparison would provide an alternative insight into how *kanhwa* Sŏn “works,” which can provide a fresh view different from many doctrinal discussions. In this way translating the practice of *Kanhwa* Sŏn into a form of ritual practice and experience will provide a new analysis and an approach through which *Kanhwa* Sŏn can be brought into a broader discourse.<sup>12</sup>

Past studies have been heavily based on exegetical analysis of the underlying doctrine and thought without much cross-disciplinary discussions. Furthermore as explained by Wright (2008), the Western Cartesian frame has played a part where in the past studies, emphasis was put on the mind over the body.<sup>13</sup> This paper is in following the current trend towards a more embodied approach to understanding Buddhist practices and rituals.<sup>14</sup>

On an interesting note, rituals are not just empty and meaningless choreography of actions. Rather, as Wright argues, rituals shape the initiands

---

<sup>12</sup> By taking this approach I may be accused of reductionism of unique religious experiences. I hope to avoid this by not engaging in discussing the content of the experiences. I accept the cautionary note by Sharf that we need to move away from focusing on the practitioner’s internal religious experiences which may lead to the notions of transcendent and mystical experiences (2000, 267).

<sup>13</sup> Wright 2008, 12-13.

<sup>14</sup> There have been studies on Chan rituals that challenged the idea that Chan/Zen Buddhism was iconoclastic and anti-ritual. To name a few, they include Bernard Faure *Chan Buddhism in Ritual Context* (2003); Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright *Zen Ritual: Studies of Zen Buddhist Theory in Practice* (2008), and from the ritual studies perspective, Ronald L. Grimes “Modes of Zen Ritual” (1995). Similar works have been done also by Korean scholars of Buddhism such as the recent work by the prominent scholar Kim Jongmyong, “The Sŏn Monk Hyujŏng and Buddhist Ritual in Sixteenth-Century Korea” (2017). In the Korean works, Sŏn Buddhism being anti-ritualistic or iconoclastic does not figure as a significant issue. Rather, there is a general acceptance that rituals are, and have been a significant element in the practices of monastic Buddhism. See Chŏng, “Sŏn'gwa milgyoŭi sot'onge kwanhan koch'al” (2009).

into thinking and seeing the world differently but also see themselves differently through the ritual process.<sup>15</sup> If this is true there is much to be said about *kanhwa* Sŏn as a form of ritual. As we will see, scholars of ritual studies have pointed out the power of rituals and would agree with Wright in that,

In contemporary ritual studies, the view that ritual goes beyond the task of expressing or communicating cultural values to actually effecting fundamental change in a person's perception of self and world is called the 'performative' approach"<sup>16</sup>

## II. Methodological Considerations

Before going further, I would like to briefly discuss the definition of rituals at this point. There is a question of what is a ritual. Should any regularly repeated activity be understood as a ritual? Or should the repeated action done in reference to some beliefs or some greater overarching ideas be considered a ritual? Here I adopt Bell's idea of "ritual-like" activities. There is a reason why Bell avoids setting a precise definition. According to Bell, rituals need not be rigid formal activities. Rather, rituals can be informal and loosely structured.<sup>17</sup> What is important in rituals is that it is differentiated from other activities and is therefore made meaningful and powerful.<sup>18</sup> As Bells explains,

---

<sup>15</sup> Wright 2008, 11.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>17</sup> Bell 1997, 138-139.

<sup>18</sup> According to Bell, rituals are defined such that, "At a more complex level, ritualization is a way of acting that specifically establishes a privileged contrast, differentiating itself as more important or powerful. Such privileged distinctions may be drawn in a variety of

“...it becomes clear that formality, fixity, and repetition are not intrinsic qualities of ritual so much as they are frequent, but not universal strategies for producing ritualized acts.”<sup>19</sup> Here, I adopt Bell’s idea that rituals are a set of actions that are set apart as being different and therefore having special significance and meaning, and in this sense, *kanhwa* Sŏn can easily be described as a ritual but there is more, as I will explain below.

I return to the proposal to apply the ritual framework to the practice of *kanhwa* Sŏn. The idea here is that there is a ritual structure, a blueprint for performance. I envision rituals, as a socially constructed structure, that function to direct the bodies and actions of the practitioners and this process also affects certain changes in the knowledge and experience of the initiands. It may be the frame of mind, a state which accepts and processes information differently.

With this in mind, the soteriological structure of *Kanhwa* Sŏn practice can be said to be structured in a ritual format that elicits and constructs a transformative experience. Aside from the exegetical discussions of transformational processes that take place in the mind,<sup>20</sup> I focus the current discussion on the ritualized aspects as a way of directing the transformation of the practitioners. In our case, I am referring to the greater social processes and ritual dynamics that are related to the practice of observing the critical phrase.

---

culturally specific ways that render the ritualized acts dominant in status” (1992, 90).

<sup>19</sup> Bell 1992, 92.

<sup>20</sup> What has been focused on in the practice centered examination is the usual internal cognitive transformations that pertain to what the individual postulant needs to do such as studying the scriptures and practicing meditation. This is all focused on what takes place internal to the person. Buddhist exegetical discourses have all been about this.

### III. Van Gennep's Structuring of Rituals: Three-stage Sequence

I adopt Van Gennep's three-stage sequence of the rites of passage or often referred to as initiation: separation, transition (liminal phase), and integration<sup>21</sup> and apply this to the *kanhwa* practice. Van Gennep considered important the understanding of rituals in its entirety and not just sections. He was interested in initiation rituals as rites of passage which are transitional rituals that consisted of "crossing of boundaries, changes in time and in social status." This tripartite structure has been found in all rituals of transition.<sup>22</sup> Also in the *kanhwa* Sŏn practice the three stages exist—separation (gathering for the summer/winter retreat), transition (*kanhwa* meditation and breakthrough), integration (leaving the retreat).

That we can discern overlapping ritual structures with *kanhwa* practice indicates similar underlying dynamics that may be involved in the transformation process. I will firstly give a brief description of these stages, in reference to how they would contribute to directing the participant towards some form of transformational experience. I will then discuss in more detail the significant components that I feel stand out in the transformational process: identity, liminality, and recognition in the *kanhwa* practice.

In the first step of separation, the initiand is removed from their routine life and enters the place where the ritual will take place. In the case of *kanhwa* Sŏn practice, the monks and nuns join the summer and winter retreats that are hosted by temples. The meditation halls where the retreat takes place are

---

<sup>21</sup> Van Gennep considers the three rites of passage as playing an important role among the various rites. He explains that the three rites do not always play equal part in rituals. In some cases the rites of separation may play a larger role and so on (1960, 10-11).

<sup>22</sup> La Fontaine 1986, 24-25. La Fontaine notes that the most influential early work on initiation rituals was written by the Belgian anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep with his work, *Les Rites de Passage* written in 1909.

separated from the usual temple activities. The duration of the practice is usually for three months when the postulants are separated and isolated from the outside activities of the temple and the world. Outsiders are prohibited from entering the retreat area and only those who are taking part in the retreat or the support staff are allowed access to these grounds.<sup>23</sup>

Simply, such removal to the place of ritual is an important component. It would be part of creating a different and separated realm that run on different values system which would facilitate focusing on the transformational process. This is common in religious retreats where the participants leave their homes and normal lives and enter the place where the person can focus on their religious practice. Location and activity show to be important and closely associated with triggering religious experiences and so it only makes sense that such steps are first taken.<sup>24</sup>

The second stage, transition, is referring to the main purpose of the initiation ritual when the initiands are literally put through the process of transformation. It is the time when the transition rites takes place. In the case of *kanhwa* Sŏn, it would be the time of participating in the daily gruelling schedule of meditations. During the time of the retreats there are strict rules that must be followed such as times for sleeping and waking, meals, and meditation.<sup>25</sup>

It is in this setting that the postulant is able to focus on one's own *hwadu* and carry out one's meditation and go through the agonizing experience of

---

<sup>23</sup> In describing the activities that take place at Korean temples such as *kanhwa* Sŏn practices, I have referenced heavily from Buswell's *The Zen Monastic Experience* (1992).

<sup>24</sup> Studies have shown that religious experiences are triggered by activities such as listening to music, praying, or attending church. See Argyle (2002, 169).

<sup>25</sup> See Buswell (1992, 163-168). Buswell also describes that due to the rigors of the meditation schedule some monks were not able to complete the retreat and surreptitiously escaped the temple where upon other monks were sent out to search for him (180-181).

breaking through the *hwadu*. The postulants are able to meet with the Sŏn master and share his or her experiences and get a sense of how far they have progressed in their practice.<sup>26</sup> It would be during this time that the practitioner would make progress in one's practice and gain insight and possibly experience an initial "understanding-awakening" (解悟; *hae-o*) or even a full "realization-awakening" (證悟; *chŭngo*).<sup>27</sup>

The last stage of initiation is integration when the initiands on completing the initiation ritual are reincorporated back into the community they came from. This is also the case for the monks who had finished the retreats and who are free to leave the hosting temple back to the life of travelling from temple to temple, or back to where one may have been stationed more permanently. As in both cases, those who completed the initiation and the postulants who completed the ritual and who may have had a breakthrough of the critical phrase, their status and identity would have changed. Returning back but having the transformation recognized seems to be the key in the changes in one's status and identity. Being recognized will be discussed further below but suffice to say that societal or community recognition through a validation process is highly important in the transformation experience.

These stages provide the setting, the sequence to follow, and the medium for the performance of *kanhwa* Sŏn as a ritual form. Without the setting of the location and the social medium of the rules and practice schedules, including

---

<sup>26</sup> Buswell reports that during such retreats monks do not become enlightened right and left like "spiritual firecrackers popping off." Rather, monks expected to spend upwards of twenty years in meditation to make any significant progress (1992, 160).

<sup>27</sup> "Understanding-awakening is the initial awakening that fits into the sudden-gradual soteriological schema where "realization-awakening" is expected to follow. On the other hand, in the sudden-sudden schema, it is claimed that the initial understanding-awakening is not need. See Buswell (2014, 129-130).

instructions from one's masters, transformations would be more difficult to bring about and the desired effects may not be easily forthcoming. I now move to the elements in the *kanhwa* Sōn practice that are also important aspects of initiation rituals namely, identity, liminality, and recognition.

### 1. Identity

One of the most important outcomes of initiation rituals is identity. This could not be truer for Buddhism as the ultimate outcome of Buddhist practices is a matter of identity—coming to the realization of one's true nature, that of the Buddha.<sup>28</sup> Admittedly, this is the core of *kanhwa* Sōn practices. In ritual terms, how one perceives oneself after the ritual is highly dependent on the success of the ritual process.

While from early on in the Korean history of Buddhism, identifying with the Buddha has been a significant aspect.<sup>29</sup> I take the explanations of Chinul for the reason why we need to cultivate, from his *Excerpts from the Dharma Collection and Special Practice Records with Personal Notes* (法集別行錄節要并私記, Kr. Pōpchip pyōrhaengnok chōryo byōngip sagi).

---

<sup>28</sup> The final stage, “Realization-awakening,” of the sudden awakening/gradual cultivation schema of soteriology that Chinul championed is where “the person becomes a Buddha in fact as well as in potential.” Here we can confirm that according to Chinul, becoming a buddha is the ultimate goal of Buddhism. See Buswell 2014, 130.

<sup>29</sup> For example, one of the most influential texts in the development of East Asian style of Buddha-nature theory is *The Awakening of Faith*. In Hakeda's translation, he also makes this important connection between the nature of the mind of the sentient beings and that of the Buddha. Of course, the focal aspect is the connection through the nature of the “Mind.” Hakeda explains that, “Some of the synonyms for the “Mind of sentient being” are Tathāgata-garbha, “the essential nature of Mind,” “One Mind,” and “the Fountainhead of Mind” (29).

[P]eople who are cultivating the mind are not aware that their own minds are the Buddha-mind and their own natures are the dharmature; they willingly remain in their inferior state cultivating gradual practices laboriously, trying constantly to supplement those practices day after day, kalpa after kalpa. My intention has been to illustrate the idea of “see the nature and achieve Buddhahood” of the sudden school [of Sōn]...<sup>30</sup>

As noted in the above, the notion of “see the nature and achieve Buddhahood(見性成佛).” is a clear demonstration of the core intended outcome of Buddhist practice. Here the ideogram *kyōn*(見) which is translated as “to see,” also can be translated as “to discern, awaken, spiritual penetration.”<sup>31</sup> The second ideogram *song*(性) is referring to the nature of a person, the practitioner. From the point of view of the practitioner, *kyōn-sōng* would also mean to realize one’s own true nature. Thus, achieving Buddhahood can be said to be as a result of coming to the realization of one’s true identity.<sup>32</sup>

Such understanding is echoed by Sōngchōl. He argues that *kyōn-sōng* is having “insight into the True Suchness of self-nature” which refers to gaining insight of the original innate Buddha-nature that is within all of us. He defines this as coming to realize one’s original perfect Buddhahood, which in other

---

<sup>30</sup> Re-quoted from Buswell (1983, 303).

<sup>31</sup> See Muller, Charles, ed. “Digital Dictionary of Buddhism.” <http://www.buddhism-dict.net/ddb/>, accessed Feb. 2018. In the case of Soothill and Hodous, it was translated as “To behold the Buddha-nature within oneself” (Soothill and Hodous *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, 244; <http://mahajana.net/texts/soothill-hodous.html>, accessed Feb. 2018).

<sup>32</sup> Leighton (2008) explains that in the ritual of *zazen* that the great Dōgen has taught, the practitioner “enacts” the enlightenment of the Buddha in the proleptic sense that one is already the Buddha (171-174).



words means enlightenment. Söngch'öl defines coming to realize one's self nature as follows:

...to discover the [self-nature is to realize] no-mind, in which the false thoughts have been completely extinguished and the truth has been verified; or the Ultimate Enlightenment, in which the [false thoughts up to the most] infinitesimal [ones] have been left far behind; and the Great Nirvāṇa, where defilements do not arise. It is unquestionable that discovering the [self-] nature is [realization of] the “Tathagata ground” and Buddhahood... Discovering the nature is none other than [the accomplishment of] the state of Tathagata, Great Nirvāṇa, Buddhahood..., and is thus the final ultimate goal of Buddhism.<sup>33</sup>

That ritual actions are set aside as different and significant, its effect on the formation of identity within the social setting must have a magnifying effect. Thus even the simply act of participating in some form ritualized actions that stand out as being special must have an effect on the forming of identity such as how one perceives oneself and how the society perceives the person. It is generally accepted in the sociological field of “social-interactionism” that the perception by the person of how the society perceives that person make up a significant part in the formation of self-identity.

Thus this adds to the idea that there are further implications to this, which is that such identity does not take place in a vacuum but within the social community that is laden with ideals, and within the soteriological implications of Buddhist thought and teachings. That as it may, the validity and its recognition is in essence a matter that is to a significant extent socially

---

<sup>33</sup> Cited in Yun (2010, 200).

determined. In other words, it is a combination of both self-identification and how others identify the person and both are to a great extent social processes.

## 2. Liminality and Doubt

Another descriptor used by Van Gennep for the rite of transition is liminality. The famous anthropologist Victor Turner emphasizes this notion in his ideas and further described it as a period of ambiguity and without social order and structure and the initiand is without an identity. However, in the third phase, of integration, Turner states that state of being structured and ordered returns and the initiand regains his or her identity.<sup>34</sup>

One of the important functions of rituals is that it sets up the initiand into a position that will induce transformation. This may be by means of creating a situation of what may be described as liminal – a state of transition, of uncertainty. In the same way that initiation rituals are transitional rituals, it is about “changes in statue” and “crossing of boundaries.” Moreover, according to La Fontaine, Van Gennep described the transition state as “liminal” which in Latin meant a threshold, where “one is neither in nor out.” This liminal state is said to be at a marginal stage and is characterized by danger and ambiguity.<sup>35</sup> The concepts and even the state of being lost seems quite comparable to what is described in *kanhwa* practice as being in a state of mental immobility due to intense doubt.

This is described adeptly by the 16<sup>th</sup> century Korean monk Hyujŏng(休靜, 1520-1604) who compared the state of the doubt taking over a practitioner to a mouse that has entered an ox horn trap, head first. Once trapped, the mouse

---

<sup>34</sup> Turner 1969, 94-95.

<sup>35</sup> La Fontaine 1986, 25.

can neither move forward or retreat back.<sup>36</sup> The intensity of the will involved in these practices of meditating on the critical phrase while holding great doubt is also described well by Hyujōng when he compares the postulant to a mosquito who must thrust its sting into ox with all its might.<sup>37</sup>

According to the soteriological structure of *Kanhwa* Sōn, creating doubt is crucial in eliciting a breakthrough of the critical phrase. The practitioner receives a *hwadu*,<sup>38</sup> from a Sōn master, which does not make sense, or is “tasteless.”<sup>39</sup> The practitioner investigates the critical phrase and meditates on it which in hence leads the practitioners to a place of great doubt. Ideally, the practitioners through meditation and labouring over this critical phrase eventually breaks through the doubt by means of non-discursive thinking, the realization of Buddha nature of self. Kusan describes it as follows:

“Suddenly one morning he shouts ‘Ha!’ and heaven and earth are overturned. He enters into a place unfathomable by others; and after a laugh alone, he only smiles. When he has reached that stage he can taste for himself, without one iota of difference the flavor of the sincere words of the buddhas and patriarchs.”<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Hyujōng 1998, 73,

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>38</sup> “To receive a *hwadu*” is a common expression which means to be given a kongan to meditate on by one’s master. Unlike the Japanese Rinzai tradition where the student is expected to work through hundreds of (1700) *kōan*, a postulant in Korea usually focuses on just one *hwadu* during his or her entire life. Buswell describes quite thoroughly *kongan* practice in a Korean temple (1992, 153-160).

<sup>39</sup> Critical phrases are often described as words either with taste or tasteless. This is referring to the way critical phrases are investigated, either conceptually using their meaning or just on the word without discursive thoughts. See Park (2005, 85-87).

<sup>40</sup> Ku San 1976, 61; cited in Buswell 1992, 159.

Thus the breakthrough as described by Kusan is the point of transformation, of crossing the threshold after a period of liminality of doubt. The ambiguity of liminal stage is also similarly described by Turner. According to Turner, the state of liminality is a time when the initiands are in a state of being “neither dead or alive” without names. At the conclusion of the ritual the initiands are reborn with a new status in the community. Turner notes that, “This is death to the indistinct and amorphous state of childhood in order to be reborn into masculinity and personality.”<sup>41</sup> Here, it was the crossing of a threshold that divided childhood from adulthood.

Here the crossing of the boundary also provides a metaphor for the transition from a state of great doubt to a state of illumination. Such crossing of a threshold is related to another factor that is similar and comparable to the intense nature of doubt, pain. It is interesting that this idea of leaping over a threshold has also been used by Morinis (1985) when he examined the role of ordeal of pain in the initiation rituals.

A comparison can be made between pain in initiation rituals and doubt in *kanhwa* Sŏn, where in both cases pain and doubt create a situation of great discomfort which is critical for inciting transformation in respective rituals. Morinis notes that there were recurrent core characteristics of ordeals in initiation rituals, which are 1) infliction of pain, and 2) its occurrence in a social context.<sup>42</sup> I would like to discuss further the first point. Morinis lists four roles of the ordeal of pain that are inflicted in initiation as follows:

---

<sup>41</sup> Turner 1962, 173.

<sup>42</sup> Morinis is referring to the participation of people who were related to the initiand such as the grandfather or relatives who offered support or acted as the initiator (1985, 159-160).

- 1) Pain acts as a meta-message of the opposite of the virtue of social membership.
- 2) Pain and mutilation are symbolic of change and transformation.<sup>43</sup>
- 3) Pain contributes in the maturation process of the initiand.
- 4) Pain, as an intense, unforgettable experience, has an impact in the transition from childhood consciousness to adult self-awareness.<sup>44</sup>

Related to this paper, I find the fourth function as being the most relevant to *kanhwa* practice in that pain has an impact on the change of consciousness of the person. This connects with the idea of Morinis that ritual acts to affect the psycho-physiological experiences of the initiands. Morinis elaborates the last point further.

All ascetic religious traditions have based their practices of mutilation, flagellation, and self-abuse on the observation that experiences such as these result in spiritual development and wisdom, that is, keener perception of the nature of self and reality... There is an intrinsic potential in human cognition to translate extremes of experience into new patterns of insight into self and object. Pain serves to initiate the

---

<sup>43</sup> Also, in the initiation rituals there is sometimes mutilation of the body part both for males and females to indicate the change in status from child to adult such a circumcision. There are such similar mutilations of the body in the case of Buddhist postulants including burning off a finger but this does not seem to be an indication of one's attainment of enlightenment than more a show of one's dedication to one's vocation. See Buswell (1992, 195-197). Buswell writes, "But there are monks who take the step not because of any exemplary motivation, but simply to show off. Monks who have burned off their fingers are accorded a measure of respect, particularly from the laity, and this is a quick, if painful, way of winning esteem—certainly much easier than spending years in the meditation hall" (1992, 197).

<sup>44</sup> Morinis 1986, 164.

subject into a reality that remains closed to those who remain in innocence.<sup>45</sup>

In a similar way, great doubt created through *kanhwa* practice places the practitioner into a state that paralyzes their discursive activating consciousness. The great doubt becomes a psycho-physiological state and not simply an intellectual conundrum or mental exercise about a question. In fact, this method of creating doubt seems to be accepted as helping in pushing the postulants over the threshold of discursive thoughts and into non-discursive thinking. This brings them close to the state of awakening by creating a “sensation of doubt” (疑情) which intensifies to the extent that it induces the postulant to a state of not fearing “falling into emptiness.”<sup>46</sup> Kusan explains well how the sensation of great doubt is connected to crossing the threshold. He describes that monks absorbed by great doubt,

forgo sleep and forget meals. Even if we want to sleep we cannot, for it is as if we are confronted by all the enemies we have made throughout ten-thousand years. We cannot go left, we cannot go right, we cannot go forward, we cannot go backward. And finally when there is no place left to keep the body, we do not fear falling into emptiness.<sup>47</sup>

Similar to pain, great doubt plays the role of stimulating a transition to a psycho-physiological state that provides “new patterns of insight into self and

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 166. Morinis connects intense pain with “peak experiences” as in Moslow’s definition as moments of happiness and fulfillment.

<sup>46</sup> Ku San 1976, 52; cited in Buswell 1992, 157.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 52-53; cited in Buswell 1992, 157.

object.” Similar to pain, doubt “serves to initiate the subject into a reality that remains closed to those who remain in innocence.” No different from the role of pain in helping to push the initiand out of the state of liminality so too doubt leads the postulant closer to the state of breakthrough of the *hwadu*.

In summary, by analyzing the soteriological structure of *Kanhwa Sŏn*, by way of the structure of ritual practice we can appreciate how structuring the *Kanhwa Sŏn* as a ritual in this way and incorporating certain elements were intended to elicit an awakening experience. However, according to Morinis such structuring and formation of these rituals were “motivated less by rational intentions than by emotions and intuitive understandings.”<sup>48</sup> Morinis is referring to the nature of rituals that eludes intellectual understanding but functions on the level of emotions and intuitive thoughts.

Indeed, rituals bring about experiences and knowledge that is difficult to express with rational thoughts. Wright maintains in the same line of thought that rituals are effective in bringing about certain kind transformations in people. His views are that rituals, “they perform a transformative function that is not captured in either reductive interpretations or interpretations that remain at the level of belief or conception.”<sup>49</sup> This certainly gives us insight on how the socially structured schema of rituals is able to bring about an emotional and intuitive understanding and hence lead to a transformation.

### **3. Recognition**

Before the ritual is completed, change in one’s status or one’s worthiness of receiving a membership into a community needs to be verified by the initiators.

---

<sup>48</sup> Morinis 1986, 160.

<sup>49</sup> Wright 2008, 12.

Both in the initiation rituals and in *kanhwa* Sŏn, there are tests or verification processes that take place. Such methods then are able to verify that the initiand or the practitioner is worthy of membership and deserving of the new identity. As noted, such recognition processes are synchronized where self-perception and the greater community perceptions work in tandem to mutually reinforce the other. The ritual can also act as a verifying method that can be presented to the community as a proof of the transformation and can also serve to give validation to the person of his or her new status and identity.

Such validation methods in initiation rituals are elements of what may be called tests that include formal taking of oaths of allegiance, ordeals of some kind such as enduring severe pain or privation. These tests demonstrate that successfully passing them determines the candidate's fitness for his or her new status. As noted by La Fontaine, what is intriguing is that such tests all entail properly responding to the initiators, and the acceptance of their authority.<sup>50</sup>

As mentioned, *kanhwa* practice involves verification methods that are an integral process of the practice. Of course, such identification of self as having changed not only needs recognition to show to the community but is important in determining one's self-identity and self-perception. In the practice of *kanhwa* Sŏn, the disciple meets his or her master in what is referred to as the "encounter dialogue" (禪問答; Sŏnmun-dap), what can literally be described as "question-response Sŏn."

In these dialogues, the student meets face-to-face with the master and the recognition of the awakened state of the disciple is determined based on the personal judgement of the master. The master's "seal of recognition" (認可;

---

<sup>50</sup> In La Fontaine's *Initiations*, he claims that such tests are part of a series of events and that they have an important function in the ritual process, which is that it demonstrates that the ritual is working by having effect (1986, 186-187).



Kr. *in-ga*) is a verification of the awakened state of the disciple. It is through the responses of the disciple about the *gong-an* that the master makes his or her judgement.

As Buswell explains, once a practitioner is enlightened, he or she does not end their polishing of the enlightened mind but continue their practice by “searching out masters against whom he can test himself.”<sup>51</sup> Such recognition takes place between the student and the master who has the ability to recognize an awakened person. An interesting note is that the authority to judge the awakened state of the postulant is in the hands of already awakened masters.

This is similar to the fact that in the initiation rituals, the developmental stage that the initiands had reached was determined and defined socially through rituals rather than being dependent on their physiological state. For instances, in the initiation rituals that are sometimes called “life-crisis” or “life-cycle” rites, the person’s transition from one stage of life to another is related to the socially defined stages of life and not on physiological developments. As Bell explains, “Likewise, the appearance of facial hair or menses does not make someone an adult; only the community confers that recognition, and it does so in its own time.”<sup>52</sup> This goes to show firstly, the power of the greater community in determining who is and is not an adult and secondly, the social determined nature of the criteria. This then leads to the question of the verification of the awaken state of a person. To what extent such verification are socially determined or culturally determined?

In the final analysis, such comparisons of *kanhwa sŏn* with initiation ritual highlight the importance of the ritually created context and knowledge that are

---

<sup>51</sup> Kusan 1985, 61; cited in Buswell 1992, 160.

<sup>52</sup> Bell 1997, 94.

essential together with the intellectual knowledge in determining the transformative experiences and its outcomes. Translating the practice of *Kanhwa* Sŏn into ritual practice and experiences has provided insights into the processes of *kanhwa* practice and its experiences as being determined by social structures.

#### **IV. Conclusions**

Maybe the monks and scholars have gone a little overbroad in emphasizing the spontaneous, iconoclastic, and at times, spurious elements of *kanhwa* Sŏn, which has made it all the more attention-grabbing. Surely, the idiosyncratic nature of the *kanhwa* Sŏn has been a fascination and an attraction but it has also left it distant from the religious discourses and even possibly irreconcilable with other traditions such as academia.

There is much rhetoric surrounding the practice of Sŏn Buddhism, not the least of which include ideas of unbroken transmission of the Linji lineage in Korea. However, as one would imagine this can only be normal when faced with challenges such as the situation of stiff competition from Buddhism from places such as Japan or even South East Asia.

These are some practical explanations for the characteristics of current Buddhism in Korea but through this exercise we can now be sure that illogical and spontaneous actions are actually logical. They are part of the ritualized activities that are essential and are called for when intending to induce a certain kind of experience and knowledge in the participants. It's the Sŏn Buddhist way.

The importance of rituals cannot be emphasized enough in effecting religious experiences. Ritual as the mediator of beliefs and emotions is

powerful in conveying and determining the religious experiences. We can appreciate that ritual practices are, and have been, central mechanisms through which religious knowledge and experiences have come to be formed and articulated. It has the power to direct people's actions and the related set of symbols to bring about a certain outcome of intuitive and emotional experiences that are often associated with religious experiences. This certainly gives us insight on how the socially structured schema of rituals is able to bring about an emotional and intuitive understanding and hence lead to a spiritual transformation.

A significant aspect of rituals that resonated with *kanhwa* practice is the non-intellectual learning. What has been emphasized by the scholars of rituals studies is the power of performative, experiential learning in rituals practice that seems radically different from intellectual learning. *Kanhwa* Sŏn is much about leaving behind of rational thoughts as in the shedding words. Perhaps the lesson to be had from comparing rituals and *kanhwa* practice is that there is much wisdom and learning to be gained in *just practicing*.

## References

- Argyle, Michael. 2002. "The Effects of Ritual." *Psychology of Religion* 24: 167-179.
- Aśvaghōṣa. 1967. *The Awakening of Faith*. Translated by Yoshito S. Hakeda. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Bell, Catherine. 1996. "Ritual Perspective and Dimensions." Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1998. "Performance." In *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor, 205-224. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Buswell, Robert E. Jr. 2014. "Bojo Jinul 普照知訥 and the Sudden-Gradual Issue: *Kanhwa* Sŏn and Korean Buddhist Soteriology." In *The State, Religion, and Thinkers in Korean Buddhism*, ed. Dongguk University. Seoul: Dongguk University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1992. *The Zen Monastic Experience: Buddhist Practice in Contemporary Korea*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1983. *The Korean Approach to Zen: The Collected Works of Chinul*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Chŏng Sŏng Joon. 2009. "Sŏn'gwa milgyoŭi sot'onge kwanhan koch'al" [선과 밀교의 소통에 관한 고찰]. *Chonggyo gyoyuk'akyŏn-gugyo* 29: 237-250.
- Hyujŏng 休靜. 1977. *Samga gwigam* 三家龜鑑. Translated by Nakhun Seong. Seoul: Donghwa chulpansa.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1998. *Sŏn'ga kwigam* [禪家龜鑑] [*A Mirror on the Sŏn School of Buddhism*]. Translated by Yi Chongik and Sim Taeyeol. Posŏng munhwa sa.
- Keel, Hee-Sung. 1984. *Chinul: The Founder of the Korean Sŏn Tradition*. Berkeley: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies.

- Kim, Jongmyung. 2010. "Discourses on Buddhist Praxes in Contemporary Korea: Issues, Analysis, and Alternatives," paper presented at the international conference on "Cultural Histories of Meditation: Practice and Interpretation in a Global Perspective." Acem International Retreat Center, Halvorsbøle, Jevnaker.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2017. "The Sŏn Monk Hyujŏng and Buddhist Ritual in Sixteenth-Century Korea." *Korea Journal* 57, no. 1: 7–34.
- Ku San. 1976. *Nine Mountains*. Songgwang-sa: International Meditation Center.
- Kusan Sunim. 1985. *Way of Korean Zen*. Translated by Martine Fages. ed. Stephen Batchelor. New York: Weatherhill.
- La Fontaine, J. S. 1986. *Initiation*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Leighton, Taigen Dan. 2008. "Zazen as an Enactment Ritual." In *Zen Ritual: Studies of Zen Buddhist Theory in Practice*, eds. Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright, 167-184. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Morinis, Alan. 1985. "The Ritual Experience: Pain and the Transformation of Consciousness in Ordeals of Initiation." *Ethos* 13, no. 2: 150-174.
- Muller, Charles, ed. "Digital Dictionary of Buddhism." Available at <http://www.buddhism-dict.net/ddb/>.
- Park, Jin Y. 2005. "Zen Language in Our Time: The Case of Pojo Chinul's Huatou Meditation." *Philosophy East and West* 55, no. 1: 80-98.
- Senécal, Barnard. 2011. "A Critical Reflection on the Chogye Order's Campaign for the Worldwide Propagation of Kanhwa Son 看話禪." *Journal of Korean Religions* 2, no.1: 75-105.

- Sharf, Robert H. 1998. "Experience," In *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor, 94-116. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2000. "The Rhetoric of Experience and the Study of Religion." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 7, no. 11-12: 267-287.
- Sō Chōnghyōng. 2000. "Sōn pulgyo suhaeng e taehan pansōng" [Reflection on the Meditative Praxis], *Ch'ōrhak sasang* 11: 105-31.
- Soothill, William Edward and Lewis Hodous. *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, Available at <http://mahajana.net/texts/soothill-hodous.html>.
- Turner, Victor W. 1962. "Three Symbols of Passage in Ndembu Circumcision Ritual: An Interpretation." In *Essays on the Ritual of Social Relations*, edited by M. Gluckman. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1969. *Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Van Gennep, Arnold. 1960. *The Rites of Passage*. Translated by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Wright, Dale S. 2008. "Introduction." In *Zen Ritual: Studies of Zen Buddhist Theory in Practice*, edited by Heine, Steven and Dale S. Wright, 3-20. New York: Oxford University Press.

Yun Wonchöl. “Zen Master T’oe’ong Söngch’öl’s Doctrine.” In *Makers of Modern Korean Buddhism*, ed. Jin Y. Park, 199-226. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.

# Origin of Sudden Awakening

*Bhikkhuni Thogu* (德雨)

University of Peradeniya

## Abstract

Even though Sudden Awakening, *Dunwu*(頓悟), is a pivotal concept in *Chan* Buddhism, most discussions have been made not only within the perspective of *Chan* Buddhism, but also within the limited *Chan* texts. This paper attempts to identify Sudden Awakening with a special reference to the early Buddhist texts and argues that “sensation of doubt” activated by the *Huatou* of *Kanhua Chan* is the genius revival of Buddha’s early teaching method in Chinese soil and tradition.

**Keywords:** Sudden Awakening(頓悟), *Dunwu*, *Kanhua Chan*(看話禪), *yiqing*(疑情), sensation of doubt, *Satiṭṭhāna Sutta*, *Mahākandhakha* of *Pāli Vinaya*

## I. Introduction

All religions within their own belief systems pursue profound inner experiences. In *Chan* Buddhism, Sudden Awakening, *Dunwu* (頓悟), has been considered a significant experience and served as a pivotal concept during its evolution. Earlier introduced as *Satori* (悟<sup>り</sup>) by Japanese scholars, most *Chan* scholarship has viewed Sudden Awakening as an exclusive argument of *Chan* Buddhism. As a result, outside of the *Chan* Buddhism academic community, the popular view on Sudden Awakening was a mere outcome of Chinese



culture and traditions, not closely related with the early Buddhist doctrine. Considering the significance and influence of *Chan* Buddhism in the histories and cultures of many Far Eastern Asian countries, *Chan* scholarship must attempt to identify the origin of its core concept, Sudden Awakening, within the relevance of the early Buddha's teaching.

To begin the discussion, I identify a key piece of evidence in *Satiṭṭhāna Sutta*, which suggests that the Buddha opened the possibility for Sudden Awakening.

If anyone should develop these four *Satiṭṭhānas* in such a way for seven years ... six years ... five years ... four years ... three years ... two years ... one year ... seven months ... six months ... five months ... four months ... three months ... two months ... one month ... half a month ... seven days, one of two fruits could be expected for him: either final knowledge here and now, or, if there is a trace of clinging left, non-returning.<sup>1</sup>

*Satiṭṭhāna Sutta*, as one of the highly appreciated *Pāli Suttas*, contains comprehensive descriptions on a gradual approach to attain awakening, and its critical phrasing is undeniable evidence of the possibility for Sudden Awakening. Its Chinese comparable, *Nianchujing*(念處經, MĀ98), suggesting even quicker awakening, indicating awakening can be attained in the evening even if practice begins only that same morning.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The similar accounts also appear in several *Suttas* like *Udumbarikasuttaṃ* (DN PTS iii, 55-6); *Sammādiṭṭhisuttaṃ* (MN PTS i, 62-3); *Bodhirājakumārasuttaṃ* (MN PTS ii, 95); *Sakkasuttaṃ* (Ten categories) (AN PTS v, 56).

<sup>2</sup> T1 p0584b24-27 置七日七夜 六五四三二 置一日一夜 若有比丘 比丘尼少須與頃立心正住四念處者 彼朝行如是 暮必得昇進 暮行如是 朝必得昇進. Bhikkhu Analāyo, (2006, pp.264-257) related with the above passage, comments a number of episodes which shows the Sudden Awakening among the early Buddha's disciples and admits

The conventional notion of awakening in *Pāli* canonical discourses is that the awakening is achieved with Threefold Trainings(*tisikkhā*), i.e., in Higher virtue(*adhisīla-sikkhā*), Higher mind(or simply concentration; *adhicitta-sikkhā*), and Higher wisdom(*adhipaññā-sikkhā*). The first training, Higher virtue, contains 10 precepts for lay people and *Patimokkha* rules for monastic members. The second training, Higher mind, includes mastering four *rupajhanas*, four *arupajhanas*, and finally the cessation of perception and sensations (*nirodha-samapātthi*). As a result of two trainings, insight into the Four Noble Truths as well as the knowledge to destroy the taints is attained, signifying the third training, Higher wisdom.<sup>3</sup>

The *Mahākhandhaka* of *Pāli Vinaya* demonstrates a well-known episode that the Buddha was asked to preach the *Dharma* three times, but the Buddha refused *Brahmā Sahampati*'s earlier two requests. At the third request, the Buddha finally accepted and surveyed the world with his awakened eyes:

As the Lord was surveying the world with the eye of an awakened one, he saw beings with little dust in their eyes, with much dust in their eyes, with acute faculties, with dull faculties, of good dispositions, of bad dispositions, docile, indocile, few seeing fear in sins and the worlds beyond.

Even as in a pond of blue lotuses or in a pond of red lotuses or in a pond of white lotuses, a few blue or red or white lotuses are born in the water,

---

that numerous *Suttas* present the instances which not only monastics but also laymen were found to gain stream-entry while listening to the Buddha's discourse or meeting with the Buddha first time. Nevertheless, he ends the discussion saying that the time required to bear fruits varies according to the individual although a gradual progress towards realization is the rule. In his later work of a comparative study of *Majjhima-nikāya* with its Chinese comparable, *MĀ*, he leaves out gradual and sudden comments related with this phrase.

<sup>3</sup> PTS AN. i. p.229

grow in the water, do not rise above the water but thrive while altogether immersed; a few blue or red or white lotuses are born in the water, grow in the water and reach to the surface of the water; a few blue or red or white lotuses are born in the water, grow in the water, and stand up rising out of the water, undefiled by the water. <sup>4</sup>

The simile of “dust in their eyes” suggests that for the Buddha, all beings are not of equal capacity, but rather, like a blooming lotus flower, they are at different levels of practice. “If they are learners of the *Dhamma*, they will grow” suggests that all beings will become awakened if the opportunity to learn the *Dhamma* is given. The text further depicts the Buddha searching for the first student to whom he might transmit his *Dhamma*.

“Now, to whom should I first teach *dhamma*? Who will understand this *dhamma* quickly?” Then it occurred to the Lord: “Indeed, this *Āḷāra Kālāma*, is learned, experienced, wise, and for a long time has had little dust in his eyes.<sup>5</sup>

Here, the Buddha says “quickly”, which could also mean “suddenly”, while “has had little dust in his eyes” indicates the capacity of the student to be awake. Ample evidence of Sudden Awakening appears not only in *Mahākhanda* of *Pāli Vinaya* also in numerous *Suttas* depicting monastics and laymen being awakened while listening to the Buddha’s talk for the first time. Despite this clear evidence, however, “Sudden” teachings are not prominently emphasized in *Theravadin* texts.

---

<sup>4</sup> PTS Vinaya i. p.6; BD iv. p.9

<sup>5</sup> PTS Vinaya i. p.7; BD iv. p.10

A similar discussion on the definition of “quickly” appears in the Sudden and Gradual Chapter of *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*:

Why [is the called] gradual and sudden? The *Dharma* is only one kind, but there are slow and quick in opinion. [If] the opinion is slow, [it is] gradual. [If] the opinion is fast, [it is] sudden. [However] there is no gradual and sudden in *Dharma*, only ones are quick and slow. Thus it is named sudden and gradual.<sup>6</sup>

The *Platform Sutra* reminds the readers of the “lotus” and “dust” simile found in the *Mahākhandhaka*, with both texts sharing the notion of unequal capacity. However, the central issue is not sudden or gradual, but on awakening.

During the evolution of *Chan* Buddhism, in particular, *Kanhua Chan* strived to create praxis to attain Sudden Awakening by introducing “doubt/sensation of doubt” as a meditation object and systematizing it as Three Essentials. Unlike the “doubt” as defilement in the Indic dichotomy, it was newly reconsidered as a fundamental question towards oneself or ultimate nature leading to the Sudden Awakening. All in all, the Sudden Awakening is also elemental to early Buddhist praxis. It can be identifiable with early Buddhist textual evidence and reinterpreted in view of the *Kanhua Chan* praxis.

In order to understand my aim, the study begins with a brief overview of the introduction of Buddhism to China, with a focus on the cultural reinterpretation of the Indian notion of Threefold Trainings (*tisikkhā*) as

---

<sup>6</sup> T48 p0342b03-b05 何以漸頓？法即一種，見有遲疾，見遲即漸，見疾即頓，法無漸頓，人有利鈍，故名漸頓

Buddha-nature. In addition, the study examines various definitions of “doubt”. Finally, evidence found in Buddhist literatures and *Pāli Vinaya* texts suggests that *Siddhartha Gautama*’s<sup>7</sup> practice and subsequent awakening, as well as the Buddha’s transmission of *Dharma* can be reinterpreted in view of the *Kanhua Chan* praxis.

## II. The Evolution of Sudden Awakening in *Chan* Buddhism

Historical records show that the evolution of *Chan* Buddhism from an Indian doctrinal base to a distinctly Chinese doctrine is a controversial period marked by prominent figures leading the way. Rather than going over old ground with a comprehensive history of its evolution, this chapter is a brief overview discussing how these figures might have added to the controversy.

Much of the current debate begins in 65 BCE when Buddhism was introduced to China. That event sparked a nearly three-century period characterized by a prolific effort to translate Buddhist Sutras and disseminate Buddhist philosophy. The earliest text translated at that time in 67 BCE was the *Sūtra of 42 Sections*(四十二章經). Another event that happened at this time was the development of a concept-matching system(格義佛教) to associate Indian Buddhist terms with those of Chinese Daoism. As Buddhism spread throughout the temples and city-centers of the Southern and Northern Dynasties(200-589), scholars began to establish standards of interpretation and categorization of the *Sūtras*. This period is identified as scholastic Buddhism(教相判釋).<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> *Siddhārtha Gautama* is also known as *Shakyamuni Buddha* or simply the *Buddha* after the great awakening.

<sup>8</sup> Oh (2000, pp.277-297)

Roughly a century later *Tiantai Zhiyi*(天台智顛, 538-597) emerged, who mixed and reinterpreted Buddhism. As the leading authority in doctrinal taxonomy, he classified the Buddhist teachings into a system called the Five Periods and Eight Teachings(五時八教). Moreover, *Tiantai* evolved Buddhist meditation by compiling *Daozang* with both *Mahāyana* and early Buddhist teachings. It is termed the Three Kinds of Calming and Discerning(三種止觀), which illustrates principles of meditation(坐禪儀) including breathing(息門), techniques (吐納法) such as embryonic breathing (胎息法), as well as concepts of the *dantian*(丹田) and *anma*(按摩).<sup>9</sup> Great interest in meditation from this time is found in the chapter of eminent monks in meditation(習禪) of *Biographies of Eminent Buddhist Monks* (唐高僧傳, ed. 649) written by *Daoxuan* (道宣, 596–667).<sup>10</sup> The chapter includes 95 monks’ stories and these respective masters and locations where they taught are summarized into six groups:<sup>11</sup>

- Group 1 in areas in the Northeast centered around *Yexia*(鄴下, in present-day *Anyang*; 安陽) and *Luoyang*(洛陽): *Sengchou*(僧稠, 480-560).
- Group 2 in areas in the Northwest centered around *Chang’an*: *Sengshi*(僧實, 476-563).
- Group 3 in areas around the *Yangtze* and *Luo*(洛) Rivers: *Bodhidharma*(菩提達磨, 5-6th c.).

---

<sup>9</sup> Lee (2015, pp.143-144)

<sup>10</sup> The earliest *Biographies of Eminent Buddhist Monks*, *梁高僧傳*, written by *Huijiao* (慧皎, 497-554) also contains the same chapter on chapter of eminent monks in meditation (習禪).

<sup>11</sup> Chen (2002, pp.596-667)

- Group 4 in areas around *Jinling*(金陵, present-day *Nanjing*; 南京): *Zhicui* (智瓘, d. after 577).
- Group 5 in areas around *Nanyue* (南嶽, i.e. *Hengyue*; 衡嶽, present-day *Hengyang*; 衡陽), *Jingzhou*(荊州, in present-day *Hubei*) and *Tiantai*(天台): *Huisi*(慧思, 515-577).
- Group 6 in areas in present-day *Shanxi*, centered around *Jinyang*(晉陽, i.e. *Taiyuan*; 太原).

Up to this period there was no prominent figure guiding the sudden and gradual controversy since most discussions mainly concentrated on translation in order to reinterpret Buddhist doctrines into a Chinese thought.

The most prominent figure who helped in the development of Sudden Awakening of *Chan* Buddhist thought is *Bodhidharma*, who came to China in the 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries. By this time, China already had deep and rich Buddhist doctrinal and practice traditions. Realizing this, *Bodhidharma*'s "mind-to-mind transmission" from master to disciple, made his new method distinct from anything in China at the time. The following account characterizes the future *Chan* Buddhism:

*Huike* says, "My mind is so anxious. Please comfort it."

*Bodhidharma* says, "Bring it to me, then I will comfort it for you."

*Huike* says, "Although I tried to find it, I cannot find it anywhere."

*Bodhidharma* says, “I have already comforted it.”<sup>12</sup>

The period from *Bodhidharma* to *Huineng* is called Ancestral *Chan* (祖師禪).

In the 8th century CE, the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* described the evolution of *Chan* Buddhism and its doctrinal foundation of Sudden Awakening concept. To wit, this concept differed from the Gradual Awakening concept found in a strictly Indian Buddhist context and soteriology. The difference rests in the meaning of two Indian terms, *samādhi* (concentration) and *prajñā* (wisdom) and their redefinition into a Chinese context. *Samādhi* and *prajñā* are specific constituents of the gradual regimen of spiritual maturation beginning with *sīla* (morality), to *samādhi*, and finally to *prajñā*. Chinese reconceptualization of *samādhi* and *prajñā* were not stages in practice, but states of mind present in all moments of thought.<sup>13</sup> In fact, *The Platform Sūtra* claims:

*Samādhi* and *prajñā* are one, not two. *Samādhi* is the essence of *prajñā*. *Prajñā* is the function of *Samādhi*. When *samādhi* is present, *prajñā* is present. When *prajñā* is present, *samādhi* is present. If [you] understand this meaning, [you] equivalently learn *samādhi* and *prajñā*.<sup>14</sup>

Few scholars would dispute that these terms define developmental stages evident in the gradual awakening approach, while in the Chinese they

---

<sup>12</sup> M59 p0886b09-10 二祖告達磨曰我心未寧乞師安心既云無悟何必安心達磨曰將心來與汝安

<sup>13</sup> Buswell (1987, pp.328-331)

<sup>14</sup> T48 p0338b08-10 定惠體一不二。即定是惠體，即惠是定用。即惠之時定在惠，即定之時惠在定。善知識此義即是定惠等。



become combined into a single operative definition. As the *Platform Sūtra* points out:

Why [is the called] gradual and sudden? The *Dharma* is only one kind, but there are slow and quick in opinion. [If] the opinion is slow, [it is] gradual. [If] the opinion is fast, [it is] sudden. [However] there is no gradual and sudden in the *Dharma*, only ones are quick and slow. Thus it is named sudden and gradual.<sup>15</sup>

The reinterpretation set a new standard for the Sudden Awakening concept found in *Chan* Buddhism.

It must be noted that the standard did not only emphasize Sudden Awakening but also Gradual Awakening as a significant part of meditation practice. These dynamic challenges brought confrontation and led to series of public disputes which resulted in the division of Chinese Buddhism into Northern School of Gradual Awakening and Southern School of Sudden Awakening.

Putting aside the larger debates and divisions at that time in China, the new standard resulted in a further evolution of the sudden concept in Chinese Buddhist teaching and learning, namely during the *Tang* Dynasty (750-1000 CE). It begins with the reconceptualization two Indian Buddhist terms, *samādhi* and *prajñā*, as the essence and function of mind as argued by *Yung-ming Yenshou*, then reduce them to “no-mind” or “no-thought”.<sup>16</sup> Again, *The Platform Sūtra* points out:

---

<sup>15</sup> T48 p0342b03-05 何以漸頓？法即一種，見有遲疾，見遲即漸，見疾即頓，法無漸頓，人有利鈍，故名漸頓

<sup>16</sup> Buswell (1987, pp.331-334)

“No thought is not to think even when involved in thought.”<sup>17</sup>

This period also witnessed the *Hongzhou-Linji* (洪州宗-臨濟) school become distinguished from rivals because of its use of metaphor, rhetoric, and physicality for instruction. These new pedagogical techniques included irrational retorts, phrases such as ‘moon of the mind,’ ‘inextinguishable lamp,’ and ‘bottomless bowl’, as well as shouts and hits.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, these were done by the master to help the disciple overcome mental activity.

In the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE, *Mazu Daoyi* (馬祖道一, 709~788) emerged as the most prominent figure in the *Hongzhou-Linji* school. His fame partly stemmed from his teaching style. But it was his deep faith in Buddha nature which he believed pervaded all phenomena that catapulted him to the fore. Because of this, faith became the integral component of the *Hongzhou-Linji* school and *Chan* Buddhist practice.<sup>19</sup>

By the end of the *Tang* Dynasty and beginning of the *Song* Dynasty (960–1279), *Chan* Buddhism developed into a replete tradition unique to Indian Buddhism. At this time the *Gong-an* (公案) appeared as a major pedagogical element of the *Hongzhou-Linji* school, which looked to its own teaching history for inspiration. A *Gong-an* is a “public case”, or a record of the teachers’ methodology compiled into anthologies, with the *Blue Cliff Record* (碧巖錄) being the largest set.

Another prominent figure in the evolution of *Chan* Buddhism is *Dahui Zonggao* (大慧宗杲, 1089~1163). In line with the radical pedagogy of the *Hongzhou-Linji* school, he railed against *Chan* being kept in writing even

---

<sup>17</sup> T48 p338b5 無念者，於念而不念

<sup>18</sup> For further readings: McRae (2003), Jinhua Jia (2006)

<sup>19</sup> Buswell (1987, pp340-343)

advocating burning the *Gong-an* anthologies. His contribution to *Chan* Buddhism is the *Huatou*(話頭), a critical phrase evident in a *Gong-an*. In meditation practice, the *Huatou* serves as the object used by the practitioner to suddenly cut-off conceptuality in order to have a direct experience of Buddha-mind. This new development became *Kanhua Chan*, or questioning meditation.

Lastly, *Gaofeng Yuanmiao*(高峰原妙, 1238~1295) further embodied doctrine into three essentials: (1) Great faith; (2) Great sensation of doubt; (3) Great furious determination. These three essentials are essential to meditation practice and synthesized with “sensation of doubt”, the topic of chapter three, justified the unique aspects of *Kanhua Chan*.

### III. The Sensation of Doubt(疑情): Objectless Object

Chapter Two reviewed the evolution of one of the two major elements of *Kanhua Chan*, i.e. the concept of Sudden Awakening found in Chinese Buddhism. This chapter is concerned with the other major element, “doubt”, which serves as the key meditation object in *Kanhua Chan*. The *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* contains what is believed to be the earliest discussion about “doubt” as distinct from traditional Indian Buddhism.

*Huineng* will return to *Caoji* Mountain. Among this gathering, if there is anyone who holds great doubt, please come to the mountain. [ I will ] let you break the doubt and see the Buddha Nature together.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> T48 p0342a7-9 但自去非心 打破煩惱碎 若欲化愚人 是須有方便 勿令破彼疑 即是菩提見現

Simply abandon own wrong thought and break the defilements.  
If you wish to awaken a fool, you must have a tool. Do not let  
[him] lose his doubt, this [will make him] attain awakening.<sup>21</sup>

The above vignettes show that *Huineng*'s suggestion on “doubt” already formed the basis of *Chan* Buddhist doctrine.

### 1. “Doubt” in Indian Buddhism

“Doubt”, generally defined by the dictionary, means to lack confidence or to question the truth about something. A similar notion is held in Indian Buddhism. Numerous *Pāli Suttas* categorize it as one of five hindrances which hampers meditation progress because of inattentiveness to the meditation object.<sup>22</sup> Additional definitions can be found in several Buddhist commentaries. For instance, the *Visuddhimagga* defines “doubt” as uncertainty, wavering, indecisiveness, or taking various sides. Its proximate cause is unwise attention.<sup>23</sup> Another reputed *Sarvāstivādin* commentary, *Abhidharmakośa-kārikā* (阿毗達磨俱舍論), classifies all existences in five groups and 75 phenomena (*dharmas*), with “doubt” listed as one of eight unfixed phenomena(不定地法). It can be associated with wholesome, unwholesome and indeterminate states of consciousness, unlike in the interpretation of *Visuddhimagga*, where it is always associated with

---

<sup>21</sup> T48 p342a18-20 惠能歸漕溪山 眾生若有大疑 來彼山間 為汝破疑 同見佛

<sup>22</sup> Five hindrances are sensory desire (*kāmacchanda*), Ill-will (*vyāpāda*; or *byāpāda*), Sloth-and-torpor (*thīna-middha*), Restlessness-and-worry (*uddhacca-kukkucca*) and Doubt (*vicikicchā*).

<sup>23</sup> *Visuddhimagga*, written by *Buddhaghosa*, is an orthodox Buddhist text meaning “Path of Purification” and it holds what is believed to be the complete path to enlightenment as taught by the Buddha; Buswell (2011, pp.2-4)

unwholesome states of consciousness in the sensual sphere of existence.<sup>24</sup> *Abhidharmakośa* comments that “doubt” causes hesitation in the mind with regard to the Four Noble Truths. In the cognitive process, it is like [a man] being undecided when confronted with an intersection or a straw-man. In the first case, he is uncertain as to which is the right way to take; in the second case, he is uncertain – when seeing from afar or in darkness – as to whether it is a real man or simply a straw-man.<sup>25</sup> More discussions on doubt are also found in *Yogacārā*. Its early commentary, *Mahāyāna śatadharmāprakāśamukha śāstra*(百法明門論), classifies mind faculties into five groups and 100 phenomena, with “doubt” belonging to mental disturbances (*kleśa*, 煩惱). Its later commentary, *viññaptimātratāsiddhi-śāstra* (成唯識論), classifies “doubt” into two hindrances:

- 1) Afflictive(煩惱障), which prevents one from attaining *nirvāṇa*.
- 2) Cognitive(所知障), which prevents one from attaining wisdom.

The commentary argues that both hindrances can be overcome by the removal of imaginary nature (遍計所執性, *parikalpita-svabhāva*, fully conceptualized) through a contemplation on dependent nature(依他起性, *paratantra-svabhāva*, other dependent). Through this process one might finally achieve absolute nature(圓成實性, *pariniṣpanna-svabhāva*, fully accomplished). The commentary opens up a new possibility for “doubt”, not

---

<sup>24</sup> Eight unfixed *dharma*s 不定地法: *Vitarka* (尋; reasoning) · *Vicara* (伺; discerning, sustained application of mind) · *Middha* (睡眠; sleepiness, drowsiness, torpor) · *Kaukrtya* (惡作, 悔; remorse, repentance, regret) · *Raga* (貪; greed, covetousness) · *Pratigha* (嗔; hostility, hate) · *Mana* (慢; conceit, pride) · *Vicikitsa* (疑; doubt, afflicted indecision, ambivalence, indecision, skepticism)

<sup>25</sup> <https://abhidharmakosa.files.wordpress.com/2010/07/akb-ch-2-web.pdf>

necessarily as an unwholesome faculty to be removed in the dichotomy of early Buddhism, but as part of nature with a possibility to turn into the absolute nature.

## 2. From “Doubt” to “Sensation of Doubt” (疑情)

*Kanhua Chan* took a decisive turn and redirected “doubt” to question phenomena, and thus uses it as a meditation object. Consider when Prince *Gautama* had doubt about life, and thus questioned birth, aging, sickness, and death. For some people, like *Gautama*, they are predisposed to understand fundamental questions from which naturally arises “doubt”, and thus compels them to seek answers. For others, who are not or less predisposed, they are intentionally asked questions which they might consider at a later date. These approaches represent two types of “doubt”: the former is called “natural doubt”, while the latter is called “intentional doubt”. For now, let’s put the “doubt” aside and think about one’s mind who has held the “doubt” for a long period. Once the “doubt” or question is kept in one’s mind and thoughts, one’s mind sharply enveloped with great tension is called “sensation of doubt” *yijing*(疑情) in *Kanhua Chan*.

In Buddhist English, what makes us confused is “sensation”. The English “sensation” can be applied in two Buddhist doctrinal terminologies: *Vedanā* in Indian Buddhism and *Jing*(情) in *Kanhua Chan* .

The *vedanā*, translated as *shou*(受) in Chinese and sensation in English, is identified in both the *Theravāda* and *Mahāyāna* traditions in its doctrinal usage:

- A link of dependent origination.
- A *skanda*.

- A universal mental factor.
- As a meditation object within the four foundations of mindfulness practice.

Moreover, the *Pāli* canon describes “sensation” as arising from contact between a sense organ (*āyatana*: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind) and a sense object. The meeting of these two produces a respective sense consciousness (*viññāna*), which is conditioned. The sensation (*vedanā*) is further identified as pleasant (*sukhā*), unpleasant (*dukkhā*), or neither pleasant nor unpleasant (*adukkham-asukhā*).

A deeper understanding of *vedanā* can be found in the *Satip̄ṭṭhāna Sutta*. Here, *vedanā* is one of four meditation objects, comprising both bodily and mental feelings as pleasant (*sukhā*), unpleasant (*dukkhā*), or neither pleasant nor unpleasant. It excludes ‘emotion’, which is considered to be more complex mental phenomena than bare feelings. In addition, the *Satip̄ṭṭhāna Sutta* emphasizes the observation of the prominent characteristic of feelings, specifically their impermanent nature. Through a steady meditation practice, observation becomes a powerful tool for developing disenchantment with feelings. As a result, one might finally attain *arahantship*.<sup>26</sup>

*Kanhua Chan* offers an alternative use of a term that also means sensation: *jing* (情). In this context, the sensation *jing*(情) is yoked with “doubt” *yi*(疑), where it is called the “sensation of doubt” *yijing*(疑情). A nuanced understanding is found in the meaning of *jing*(情), which to the Chinese is commonly conjoined with *ai* (love, 愛) to create feelings associated with

---

<sup>26</sup> Analāyo (2003. pp.153-154)

love. The story of ‘Romeo and Juliet’ illustrates how *ai*(愛) and *jing*(情) are connected.

Imagine for a moment when Romeo met Juliet at the ball. If we apply the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, a pleasant sensation arises from the contact (meeting) between their eyes (sense organ) and their perception of each other (sense object). Because of their meeting, a consciousness arises due to the mutual attraction which produces intensive pleasant sensation called love *ai*(愛) with. If Romeo and Juliet were meditators, both would immediately recognize the impermanent characteristics associated with their love, and release the conceptual notion. Tragically, the story would end with both of them becoming *arahants*.

Romeo and Juliet’s balcony scene reveals the evolution of *jing*(情) in *aijing*(愛情). In the balcony scene, Romeo vows his love for Juliet, despite the antipathy that both families harbor for each other. This expression of love drives them to decide to marry in secret the next day. A feeling rapidly surfaced in both Romeo and Juliet, so much so that their love appears as an intense feeling which compels them to act, demonstrating *jing*(情). *Jing*(情) serves as an operative function, and thus plays a significant role in that it leads to a conclusion or an end. It is suffused with an intense immediacy, similar to smoke produced by a fire. When yoked with “doubt”, “sensation of doubt” assumes a stronger emphasis in *Kanhua Chan* and becomes a distinctive meditation object, i.e., “objectless object”.<sup>27</sup> The precise understanding of *jing* 情 is the most critical aspect in *Kanhua Chan* practice.

---

<sup>27</sup> The term “objectless object” in relevance with the sensation of doubt in *Kanhua Chan* was mentioned during the 4th International *Ganwha Seon* Conference in Seoul, by R. Buswell.



### 3. Two Types of “Sensation of doubt”

There are several terms needing clarification in this discussion since they serve as linchpins of the *Kanhua Chan* doctrine:

- *Gong-an*(公案), also known as a “public case” or “case study”, is the collected analogies of early *Chan* teachers. It creates a larger context.
- *Huatou*(話頭), a specific event taken from one of the analogies to catalyze “doubt”.
- *Yijing*(疑情), “sensation of doubt”, is a strong feeling needed to suspend conceptualization.

Two additional terms: (1) “natural sensation of doubt” (NSD, 自然的疑情), and (2) “intentional sensation of doubt” (ISD, 意圖的疑情) are not to be confused because they are used differently to effectuate meditation practice. Recall that each term relates to the adeptness of a person’s meditation ability. In this sense, people who are not necessarily truth seekers are motivated by ISD, whereas those who are truth seekers are motivated by NSD. A vast majority of people fall into the ISD category. When the teacher meets a student for the first time, it is their responsibility to intentionally activate the student’s “doubt”, and guide meditation practice to develop the “doubt” naturally into the strong “sensation of doubt”.<sup>28</sup>

#### 1) Natural Sensation of Doubt (NSD, 自然的疑情)

---

<sup>28</sup> The discussion on two different sensations of doubt was proposed in a Master research paper, “A study on the sensation of doubt with a special reference with Ganwha Seon” by Lee, Sangho (2004). This chapter contains the most critical aspects of his research.

Evidence for the use of NSD does not appear in early Chinese Buddhism. The earliest Buddhist catalogue(出三藏記集) contains a section called *Sūtras on Meditation*(禪經) and lists 25 *Sūtras* related with meditation practice. Even though no evidence shows the use of “doubt” in the early *Chan* period, this section deserves serious attention to understand the keen interest of the Chinese in meditation since the introduction of Buddhism. For instance, the earliest *Sūtra* found in this section is titled the *Anbanshouyijing*(安般守意經), a comparable of *Ānāpānasati Sutta* (Mindfulness of Breath). The *Sūtra* was translated by *Anshigao*(安世高), and is widely known that *Anshigao*(安世高) not only adopted Daoist terms to aid his translations of Buddhist texts, but also exchanged breathing practices and ideas with Daoist masters.<sup>29</sup>

Another prominent figure in early Buddhist meditation is *Lokaksema*(支讖) who introduced several *Mahāyana* meditation texts. Most *Mahāyana* meditation texts have instructions to develop concentration. Once the concentration is developed, practitioners are exhorted to make a vow to save all sentient beings, and set a goal to attain awakening by understanding *śūnyatā* (emptiness) rather than obtaining gradual *samādhi*.

Although conclusive evidence has yet to be identified in early Chinese Buddhism for NSD, an interesting discussion is found in the *Tang Biographies of Eminent Monks*(唐古僧傳). Authored by *Daoxin*(道宣, 596-667), the *Biographies* is a critical examination of the lives and achievements of 95 meditation masters. At the end of the Meditation Chapter, *Daoxin* commented on two prominent meditation masters of that time, *Sengchou*(僧稠, 480-560) and *Bodhidharma*.

---

<sup>29</sup> Monthly Bulgwang (1984) Vol.122

While *Sengchou* mainly practiced *Satipaṭṭhāna* and [he considers] the form and mode are critical in practice, *Bodhidharma*'s praxis are based on Emptiness and his achievement was very profound.<sup>30</sup>

The quote might be a summary comparison, but its significance is worth consideration. On one hand, it suggests the importance of these two masters' influence on meditation praxis in China. On the other hand, and more notably, the comment marks a distinct recognition of *Bodhidharma*'s teaching, especially given *Sengchou*'s popularity. The earlier quoted episode between *Bodhidharma* and *Huike* might help illustrate the praxis:

*Huike* says, "My mind is so anxious. Please comfort it."

*Bodhidharma* says, "Bring it to me, then I will comfort it for you."

*Huike* says, "Although I tried to find it, I cannot find it anywhere."

*Bodhidharma* says, "I have already comforted it."<sup>31</sup>

Even though the episode's authenticity is controversial, within the perspective of *Kanhua Chan*, it illustrates a typical exchange and how "doubt" is understood in early *Chan* Buddhism. *Huike*, reputed for profound sincerity to seek truth, reveals that anxiety is connected with NSD. To be clear, it is not an anxiety that we might find in a dictionary, defined as a form of weakness, instead it is a strong desire to resolve a paradox, frustrating and perplexing at the same time. That he was not asked a question, but gently prompted, reveals that he already had NSD. To that end, by the time *Huike*'s

---

<sup>30</sup> T50 p0596c14-15 稠懷念處清範可崇。摩法虛宗玄旨幽蹟。

<sup>31</sup> M59 p0886b09-10 二祖告達磨曰我心未寧乞師安心既云無悟何必安心達磨曰將心來與汝安

mind was comforted, his NSD had collapsed in a single moment, revealing a mind-to-mind transmission of *Dharma* and a connection with Sudden Awakening.

## 2) Intentional Sensation of Doubt (ISD, 意圖的疑情)

Standing in opposition to NSD, a predisposition of certain Buddhist practitioners, is ISD. This became a dominant feature of *Chan* Buddhism because it involved the role of the master to trigger/activate it through a question to his student.

Stated earlier, the *Platform Sūtra* suggested the use of “doubt” for Sudden Awakening. However, its emphasis on ISD is weak. Not until the systematization of ISD as a main praxis do we understand its significance. Speaking more accurately, *Chan* masters outlined the path for *Kanhua Chan* practice and its use during daily life which did not require any particular form or mode, like sitting or breathing.

A seminal figure in the systemization was *Mazu Daoyi*(馬祖道一, 709-788), who advocated *Ordinary Mind is the Path*(平常心是道). Because all phenomena are a manifestation of Buddha-nature, he claimed that the Path is inseparable from ordinary daily life. His remarks aligned *Chan* Buddhist praxis more closely to lay practice, as well as making the notion of Buddha-nature an integral element of *Chan* meditation.

Another critical figure is *Huangbao Xiyun*(黃檗希運, ?-850) and his *No-thought is the Path*. His contribution stressed that *Chan* practice is nothing special as long as there is no dichotomy in our thought:

Mind is the Buddha. No-thought is the Path. As long as no trembling thought arises and not thoughts arise like existence and nonexistence;

advantage and disadvantage; others and I; subject and object, the mind is the Buddha and the Buddha is the mind itself.<sup>32</sup>

His contribution to the development of ISD is evident in this example:

If you are a manly man, observe a gong-an. A monk asked to *Chaozhou*, ‘Does a Dog have the Buddha nature? Or Not? *Chaozhou* said no. Nevertheless, contemplate that “No” gong-an for 24 hours; during the day and evening; while moving, stopping, sitting and lying; while changing clothes and eating meals ..... Keep this “No”. When the time goes, the thought will become one. Then your mind will blossom in a sudden moment.... Then you will understand *Bodhidharma*’s arrival with the waves but without wind.<sup>33</sup>

This is a significant piece of evidence for *Kanhua Chan* practice. However, his contribution to the ISD is questionable, because it is difficult to clearly discern any systematized notion on how to raise ISD in the passage.

Further systematization of *Kanhua Chan* occurred because of a major disagreement within *Chan* Buddhism during the *Song* dynasty (960-1279), a period widely viewed as its pinnacle. The period, referred to as Lettered *Chan*(*wenzi-Chan*, 文字禪), is notable for the prolific publications of *Gong-an*(公案), the collected analogies of past *Chan* teachers.

---

<sup>32</sup> T48 Bp0384b01-3 即心是佛 無心是道 但無生心動念有無長短彼我能所等心 心本是佛 佛本是心

<sup>33</sup> T48 p0387b03-10 若是箇丈夫漢。看箇公案。僧問趙州。狗子還有佛性也 無。州云無。但去二六時中看箇無字。晝參夜參行住坐臥。著衣吃飯處。阿屎放尿處。心心相顧。猛著精彩。守箇無字。日久月深打成一片。忽然心花頓發。悟佛祖之機。便不被天下 老和尚舌頭瞞。便會開大口。達摩西來無風起浪。

The deepening of an already systematized *Kanhua Chan* doctrine came from *Mozhao Chan*(默照禪). Two fundamental differences appear between the schools. First, praxis of *Mozhao Chan* fell closest to that espoused by *Shenxiu*(神秀), a highly influential Northern School teacher, who advocated Gradual Awakening. This position stood in stark contrast to that of *Huineng*, a highly influential teacher of the Southern School, who advocated Sudden Awakening. A second difference, tied to the use of *Huatou*, was the absence of any “sensation of doubt” used by *Mozhao Chan* practitioners. For this reason, it was criticized as *Dead Tree Chan*(枯木禪) because the meditation progressed no further than tranquility.

Yet, we still find further systemization in the *Collection of Letters*(書狀) written by *Dahui Zonggao*(大慧宗杲, 1089–1163). The collection’s significance rests in their intimacy with *Song* Dynasty literati.<sup>34</sup> As already known, *Chan* Buddhism enjoyed thorough support from the government in order to legitimize its control over China. Cementing the tie was frequent contact between literati and *Chan* Buddhist monks. Such a relationship required a proper teaching methodology, perhaps a flexible praxis, for influential figures with powerful ego-identities. Given this circumstance, the critical role of the Buddhist teacher to raise ISD became the de facto technique undergirding the relationship dynamic. In order to raise ISD, the teacher more than likely threw the literati student a *Huatou* because of its applicability and, dare I say, its convenience. The critical matter, however, was in how to turn the intentionally fabricated “doubt” into a deeper NSD. Thus, the teacher’s role became more significant, and a kind of system to check the progress of the student had become necessary, akin to an encounter

---

<sup>34</sup> For further readings. Welter (2006)

dialogue. It was through his *Collection of Letters* that Dahui Zonggao encouraged his students to raise the “sensation of doubt” numerous times and to ultimately break through it.

#### 4) Ball of Doubt(疑團) and Silver Mountain and Iron Walls(銀山鐵壁)

The *Collection of Letters* by Dahui Zonggao elaborates various cases of conceptualization during practice, and stresses that is not the right way. One case, for instance, “Where the mind had no place to go”, instructs the practitioner to move deeper into the mind:

A thousand and ten thousand kinds of doubt are all in one doubt. If one doubt is broken, a thousand and ten thousand kinds of doubt are all broken down in a moment. If the doubt is not broken yet, you assume vigorously to cut the sky while facing *Huatou* at a cliff. Abandoning the *Huatou*, if you try to raise the doubt from the letters, from the doctrine in a *Sūtra*, from the *gong-an* or from the daily toil, all these are mistaken. Neither necessarily turn towards the moment of interesting event, nor concern about forecasting. Simply rest your thought where you cannot estimate, the mind has no place to go like an old rat enters into the horn of ox.<sup>35</sup>

[If] sensation of doubt is not broken, life and death [will] occur simultaneously. [if]sensation of doubt is broken, the mind of life and death [will] be cut off, occur simultaneously. [Once] the mind of life and death is cut off, notion of the Buddha and *Dharma* will perish. Even the notion

---

<sup>35</sup> T47 Ap0930a14-20 千疑萬疑。只是一疑。話頭上疑破。則千疑萬疑一時破。話頭不破。則且就上面與之廝崖。若棄了話頭。却去別文字上起疑。經教上起疑。古人公案上起疑。日用塵勞中起疑。皆是邪魔眷屬。第一不得向舉起處承當。又不得思量卜度。但著意就不可思量處思量。心無所之。老鼠入牛角便見倒斷也。

of the Buddha and Dharma is perished, how will the defilements of sentient being arise again?<sup>36</sup>

Close attention should be paid to the importance *Dahui Zonggao* places on breaking the “sensation of doubt”.

According to *Chan* records, the “sensation of doubt” often conjoins with what is called a “ball of doubt” *yituan*(疑團). The “ball of doubt” describes when the “sensation of doubt” coalesces and becomes like a ball of fire. In this condition, there is no room for other things to intrude. Master *Mengshan Deyi*(夢山德異, 1231-?) said:

If you break through the mass of doubt, ignorance is also broken up.  
If ignorance is absent, you can see the Path.<sup>37</sup>

Metaphorical expressions are applied to this state in which a practitioner’s mind becomes sharpened to prohibit thought or conceptualization: “[as a result of striking, it finally] merges with [the sensation of doubt]’ *dachengyipian*(打成一片), or “a ball of doubt in a single dew drop” *yituandulu*(疑團獨露). Another description might clarify the process:

Do not think it is futility or do not think it is there or it is not there. It is likely you swallowed a steaming hot iron ball, and [even you] try to throw [it] up but not [it is] not coming out. You [should] thoroughly sweep up previous wrong knowledge and awareness. [Once you] practice

---

<sup>36</sup> T47 Ap0930b25-27 疑情不破生死交加 疑情若破則生死心絕矣 生死心絕 則佛見法見亡矣 佛見法見尚亡 況復更起眾生煩惱見耶

<sup>37</sup> Gou (2014, pp.176-177)



for a long time, naturally [the sensation of doubt] will become one. It is like a mute person had a dream, [but it is] only himself who knows.<sup>38</sup>

These metaphors reflect an experience that cannot be understood using conventional notions, nor the use of words of any kind.

Finally, as the tightened “ball of doubt” is near the breaking point, *Chan* texts describes the practitioner as being trapped in an ox-horn, striving to be free. At this point there is no mental activity, only the “Silver Mountain and Iron Walls(銀山鐵壁)”.<sup>39</sup>

If you really develop the ball of doubt, you are just like a person who is trapped in the ‘silver mountain and iron walls.’ You are desperately seeking a way out. If you continue to investigate the *Huatou* in this way, the iron wall will break spontaneously.<sup>40</sup>

It is like [you are] trapped in the mid of silver mountain an iron wall, [you] merely want to get an escape. If you don’t get an escape, how could you get the comfort? Keep [your practice]. But how? Keep practice. [Once] the time comes, [it will] certainly collapse and break off.<sup>41</sup>

Once the practitioner successfully breaks the “Silver Mountain and Iron Walls”, the moment of Sudden Awakening is achieved. At this point, the practitioner gains experiential insight into phenomena and intrinsic nature,

---

<sup>38</sup> T48 p0293a04-07 莫作虛無會。如吞了箇熟鐵丸相似 吐又吐不出 蕩盡從前惡知惡覺。久久純熟 自然內外打成一片。如啞子得夢 只許自知。第1則「趙州狗子」

<sup>39</sup> Gou (2014, pp.176-177)

<sup>40</sup> Gou (2014, pp.176-177)

<sup>41</sup> X63 p0757b08-10 如坐在銀山鐵壁之中 祇要得個活路 若不得個活路 如何得安?去。但恁?做去 時節到來 自有個倒斷。

and truly understands the workings of Interdependent Origination and the Four Noble Truths.

### 5) No-thought *Samādhi* (無心三昧)

During the *Kanhua Chan* meditation, what often confuses the practitioner is the difference between breaking the “sensation of doubt” and “no-thought” *samādhi*. *Chan* records describe “no-thought” *samādhi* as the result of meditation practice. An example of a person driving a car might help to clarify. Imagine that the car is moving along the highway. The driver feels comfortable and relaxed because the car is operating smoothly, and keeps a steady pace. Moreover, the road is clear, unhindered by obstacles. But the final destination has yet to be reached. A *Chan* record describes its manifestation:

“Where does this One return to?” is somewhat different from ‘*Chouzhu*’s No’ and much easier to raise the sensation of doubt. If you raise the sensation, it is still there; even without repeatedly thinking and pondering to raise the sensation of doubt, it stays. While time goes, it will grow more and more, it become effortless. Since mind becomes effortless, it becomes mindless. As it becomes mindless, it is easily thoughtless. Mind will rest without any efforts; all six sense doors will be calm effortlessly; as the mind will not be attacked even by a tiny dust, you will enter into no-thought *samādhi*.<sup>42</sup>

### 6) Three Essentials in *Kanhua Chan*

---

<sup>42</sup> X70 p0703b16-20 一歸何處 却與無字不同 且是疑情易發 一舉便有 不待返覆思惟 計較作意 纔有疑情 稍稍成片 便無能為之心 既無能為之心 所思即忘 致使萬緣不息 而自息 六窓不靜而自靜 不犯纖塵 頓入無心三昧

The figure to finalize the *Kanhua Chan* system is *Gaofeng Yuanmiao*(高峯圓妙, 1238-1295), who added Three Essential views to praxis: (1) Great Furious Determination; (2) Great Faith; and (3) Great Doubt. His addition ended the roughly 800-year evolution of *Chan* Buddhism, a period marked by a distinct meditation which many *Chan* teachers claim is unique. A description of the Three Essentials and their importance to practice:<sup>43</sup>

Just keep the great faith and go. Just go without changes. Just go to the 80,000 feet high-cliff. Just go like drawing a cat according to the model. Come and go while drawing. While drawing a ear and reaching whorl, the road of mind will end. A man and *Dharma* all disappear. Suddenly at the end of brush, a live cat will jump out and come. Originally, the ground is perfectly the field to select the Buddha and the ground is perfectly you.<sup>44</sup>

In *Gaofeng Yuanmiao*'s analogy titled *Chanyao*(禪要), he highlights that even the “sensation of doubt” can lead to “no-thought” *samādhi*, but the praxis is for the practitioner to continue holding Great Faith(大信心) about their own Buddha-nature. *Chan* Buddhism claims that the seed for enlightenment is innate to all people:

If we're speaking about authentic *Chan* contemplation, there have to be three essentials. The first essential is to have the faculty of great faith:

---

<sup>43</sup> Buswell (2011, p.6)

<sup>44</sup> X70 p0703c03-07 直下具大信去 直下無變異去 直下壁立萬仞去 直下依樣畫貓兒去 畫來畫去 畫到結角羅紋處 心識路絕處。人法俱忘處。筆端下驀然突出箇活貓兒來。元來盡大地是箇選佛場。盡大地是箇自己。

This Matter should be so patently obvious that it is just as if you are leaning against Mt. *Sumeru*. The second essential is to have great fury, which is just as if you've come across the villain who murdered your father and right then and there you want to cut him in half with a single strike of your sword. The third essential is to have the sensation of great doubt, which is just as if you've done a heinous act in secret and are about to be exposed.<sup>45</sup>

However, to break the “sensation of doubt”, something needed to be added, so *Gaofeng Yuanmiao* included Great Furious Determination(大墳心) as the catalyst. When tightly linked with Great Faith:

It should be understood that doubt is the essence of faith and [at the same time] function of awakening. If faith is 100 percent, doubt will be 100 percent. If doubt is 100 percent, awakening will be 100 percent.<sup>46</sup>

Even “doubt” allows the inception of praxis. Yet, its success rests in the Three Essentials. Great Faith in one's true nature will surely give rise to Great Doubt. Great Furious Determination serves as an encouraging function, so that the practitioner does not retreat from the praxis. Finally, because of Great Faith and Furious Determination, the practitioner's ISD will develop into NSD, and Suddenly Awaken. The Three Essentials are not gradual phenomena, rather they are interconnected like three legs of a pot mutually supporting each other.

---

<sup>45</sup> Buswell Ibid.; X70 p0708b05-8 若謂著實參禪 決須具足三要 第一要 有大信根 明知此事 如靠一座須彌山 第二要有大憤志 如遇殺父冤讐 直欲便與一刀兩段 第三要有大疑情 如暗地做了一件極事 正在欲露未露之時

<sup>46</sup> X70 p0707a08-9 須知疑以信為體。悟以疑為用 信有十分 疑有十分 疑得十分 悟得十分

## IV. The Buddha's praxis and pedagogy in *Kanhua Chan* perspective

This chapter investigates the Buddha's praxis and pedagogy from a *Kanhua Chan* perspective, namely "sensation of doubt" and the Three Essentials. Evidence for the Buddha's praxis is found mostly in early Buddhist literatures, but also partially in *Vinaya* texts and sporadically in *Nikāyas* and *Āgamas*.

### 1) The Buddha's Great Doubt and No-thought *Samādhi*

Numerous Buddhist texts contain Buddha's early life. Among the many stories, one significant event which stands out in relevance with the inception of praxis is the farming festival. The unanimous description of that day is Prince *Siddhārtha*'s first meditation sitting beneath the *Jambū* trees. The conventional claim of early Buddhism about the Buddha's awakening was the attainment through nine graduated concentrations(九次第定), which include the four material realms(*rūpajhāna*), the four non-material realms (*arūpajhāna*), and culminating in the cessation of feelings and sensations(*nirodha-samāpatti*). In particular, the eight *jhānas*, one of the most frequently used terms in *Pāli* scriptures, are considered to play a significant role in realizing liberation.<sup>47</sup> Early Buddhist texts suggest that *Siddhārtha* attained either the first *rūpajhāna* or all four *rūpajhānas* beneath the *Jambū* trees. Four sources lend support to the assertion of the first *rūpajhāna*:

- *Weiceng youjing* (未曾有經) (MĀ32)

---

<sup>47</sup> The critical issue in Indic Buddhism is whether eight *jhānas* or nine *jhānas* were attained for the Buddha's final liberation. Wynne (2007, pp. 24-43), Gunaratana (1981).

- *Ayuwang zhuan* (阿育王傳) (SĀ)
- *Sifenlu* (四分律)
- *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* (根本說一切有部毘奈耶)

While two sources, the *Ekottara Āgama* (28.8) and the *Lalitavistara*, lend support to the Buddha’s attainment all four *rūpajhānas*.<sup>48</sup>

It might be difficult to ascertain why inconsistencies appear in the argument regarding *Siddhārtha*’s attainment and Buddhahood. A credible view claims it as an intentional interpretation by Gradual Awakening advocates who emphasized the significance of all four *rūpajhānas* prior to full awakening.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, it is widely known that *Siddhārtha* mastered the third *arūpajhāna* “sphere of nothingness” and the fourth *arūpajhāna* “neither-perception-nor-non-perception” from his teachers, *Ālāra Kālāma* and *Uddaka Rāmaputta* respectively. In order to complete the process of awakening, the gradualists needed to find a reference point to connect all the *rūpajhānas* with *Siddhārtha*’s first meditation. By framing it within the farming festival, they were provided with a perfect milieu to establish the nine graduated concentrations.

If we look at the farming festival from a *Kanhua Chan* perspective, the event suggests that *Siddhārtha* experienced an arising NSD.

.... [it would be] suitable [if] we let the Prince supervise farming, this [may make] him not think about the Path. Soon afterwards, preparing for thousands of farming ploughs, cows and young and old footmen one after another, let him supervise the work. The Prince, sitting underneath the

---

<sup>48</sup> Kim, J. (2007, p.229-233)

<sup>49</sup> 佐藤密雄 (1957, pp.173-181); Kim, J. (2007, p.229-233)

*Jambū* trees, watched ploughing. Cultivating the land, [from] the soil, worms came out. As the sky changes, letting cow's neck plough the land, worms are pouring down. Then crows follow, peck and swallow [them]. Suddenly frogs and toads jump out, chase and eat the bent earthworm. Snakes, coming out from the hollow, swallow and eat frogs and toads. Peacocks fly down and swallow the snakes. Some hawks fly down and come, fight and fetch the peacocks. Vultures come again, wrestle and pick up and eat peacocks. The Bodhisattva, watching this, [and thinking] that all categories of sentient beings pass through and swallow each other, with loving-kindness, pitied and felt compassion. Then he [moved] to underneath the *Jambū* trees and attained the first concentration.<sup>50</sup>

The *Xiuxing Benqijing*(修行本起經; Skt. *Cāryanidāna*) is one of the few Buddhist texts which renders a specific description about the farming festival. More accurately, it provides an elaborate depiction of the emotions felt by *Siddhārtha* as he observed scene after scene in which the weak succumbed to the strong. Through his observation, he witnessed pain and suffering experienced by all sentient beings. In response, he felt compassion, and then moved to the *Jambū* trees for meditation. It is quite evident that *Siddhārtha* already had a very strong “sensation of doubt”. Interestingly, all other earlier texts emphasized that he attained either the first or all four *jhānas* at the farming festival without giving a full elaboration on exactly what he had witnessed.

---

<sup>50</sup> T3 p0467b16-24 宜令太子監農種殖役其意思使不念道。便以農器犁牛千具僕從大小相率上田令監課之。太子坐閭浮樹下見耕者墾壤出蟲天復化令牛領興壤蟲下淋落烏隨啄吞。又作蝦蟇追食曲蟺蛇從穴出吞食蝦蟇孔雀飛下啄吞其蛇，有鷹飛來搏取孔雀鷗鷺復來搏撮食之。菩薩見此眾生品類展轉相吞，慈心愍傷即於樹下得 第一禪。

Another significant period prior to *Siddārtha*'s renunciation of home life involved his four excursions outside of the palace gates(四門遊觀). In each excursion, he encountered a sight which compelled him to contemplate life: first he saw an old man, then a sick man, and next a corpse being carried to the cremation grounds. From these sights, he thoroughly understood that he too was subject to become old, sick and dead even though he is a king's son. Finally, he encountered a holy-man who looked content and peaceful.

Buddhist literature is inconsistent with the order of the two pivotal events of *Siddārtha*'s life. Some literature places the farming festival earlier and the four excursions later, while some reverse the chronology. Regardless of the chronology, these two episodes, within a *Kanhua Chan* context, demonstrate that *Siddhārtha*'s innate "natural doubt" had already developed into a strong "sensation of doubt". Moreover, by witnessing how all sentient beings suffer the same fate whether they are human or animal, he is moved to question his own experience. The events, therefore, suggest that *Huatou*, "What is this?" (*Shi Shenme*, 是甚麼), had been naturally generated within *Siddhārtha*'s mind. Considering further the compassion and pity which prevailed him after witnessing these painful episodes, it appeared to have a different quality of sensation with the feeling which an ordinary person might have when encountering similar events. Thus, it is not simply an uncertain doubt, but rather a "great doubt" which will eventually lead him to renounce his royal life and family.

Recall the earlier discussion about the "sensation of doubt" and its activation. What happens often to a *Kanhua Chan* meditation practitioner is that he/she will fall into "no-thought" *samādhi* during a sitting session:



“Where does this One return to?” is somewhat different from ‘*Chouzhu*’s No’ and much easier to raise the sensation of doubt. If you raise the sensation, it is still there; even without repeatedly thinking and pondering to raise the sensation of doubt, it stays. While time goes, it will grow more and more, it become effortless. Since mind becomes effortless, it becomes mindless. As it becomes mindless, it is easily thoughtless. Mind will rest without any efforts; all six sense doors will be calm effortlessly; as the mind will not be attacked even by a tiny dust, you will enter into no-thought *samādhi*.<sup>51</sup>

According to the above description, it is quite possible that *Siddhārtha* unintentionally fell into *samādhi* during the farming festival as a result of the “sensation of doubt” activated by the Four Excursions. In each case, he still questioned the gravity of what he had witnessed. This suggests that the “What is this?” (*Shi Shenme*, 是甚麼) *Huatou* appeared in his mind when he first questioned humanity’s fate. It continued to grow until the farming festival when, moved by pity and compassion, it catalyzed his innate growing “sensation of doubt” and resulted in “no-thought” *samādhi*. Notably, *Chan* texts emphasize that “no-thought” *samādhi* is not the final achievement, as the practice should be continued further. Indeed, *Siddhārtha* recognized that he had not gained unsurpassed consummation of the spiritual life, evident in his renunciation and search for liberation.

## **2. Buddha’s great faith, furious determination and “Silver mountain and Iron walls”**

---

<sup>51</sup> X70 p0703b16-20 一歸何處 却與無字不同 且是疑情易發 一舉便有 不待返覆思惟 計較作意 纔有疑情 稍稍成片 便無能為之心 既無能為之心 所思即忘 致使萬緣不息 而自息 六窓不靜而自靜 不犯纖塵 頓入無心三昧

In order to identify the next stages of the evolution of “doubt”, we need to review *Siddhārtha*’s practices after his renunciation. As it is widely known, *Siddhārtha* went in search for teachers and mastered the third *arūpajhāna* from *Ālāra Kālāma* and the fourth *arūpajhāna* from *Uddaka Rāmaputta*.<sup>52</sup> Later, he abandoned these practices to dedicate himself to six years of severe asceticism. In hindsight, it appears that *Siddhārtha* intuitively understood that he could not achieve the highest wisdom through ascetic practice.<sup>53</sup>

When viewed through a *Kanhua Chan* lens, the ascetic practice is believed to be a dormant period for the “sensation of doubt”. It is a period, however, in which the sensation remained with him but, due to the wrong kind of effort, his progress stagnated. As a result of stagnation, the sensation did not become tight enough to develop into the “ball of doubt”. In order to progress further, dramatic change was needed, such as the one in which *Siddhārtha* relinquished his six-year ascetic practice and recalled his meditation experience in the *Jambū* trees. At the time of *Siddhārtha*’s abandonment of severe asceticism, the comment he made was suggestive:

This is not the way to passionlessness, nor to perfect knowledge, nor to liberation; that was certainly the true way which I found at the root of the *Jambu* tree. (12.101)<sup>54</sup>

Even though perfect knowledge had not yet been reached, this remark implies that he was certain that there must be a path which would lead him to full liberation. *Siddhārtha*’s great faith that a perfect knowledge was

---

<sup>52</sup> PTS M. i.160

<sup>53</sup> PTS M. i.80; i.246

<sup>54</sup> *Buddhacarita* p.184

attainable and great faith in our own Buddha-Nature of *Kanhua Chan* are the integral part to move deeper in practice.

After abandoning asceticism, *Siddhārtha* recalled his first meditation underneath the *Jambu* trees:

At that time, the Bodhisattva remembered, “when I lived with my father, King *Suddonana*, I sat down underneath the *Jambu* tree, removing desire, vicious and unwholesome minds, resides in the 1<sup>st</sup> *jhana* with applied thought and sustained thought with rapture and happiness and one-pointedness.<sup>55</sup>

I considered: ‘I recall that when my father the *Sakyan* was occupied, while I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, I entered upon and abided in the first *jhana*, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. Could that be the path to enlightenment?’ Then, following on that memory, came the realization: ‘That is the path to enlightenment’.<sup>56</sup>

Only a few pieces of Buddhist literature identify the first meditation beneath the *Jambu* trees, when he abandoned the ascetic practice. *Kanhua Chan* identifies this as the moment when the “sensation of doubt” coalesces into a “ball of doubt(疑團)”. Two *Mahāyana* meditation sutras, *Pratyutpanna-samādhi-sūtra*(般舟三昧經) and

---

<sup>55</sup> T22 p0781a04-06 爾時菩薩自念 昔在父王田上坐閻浮樹下，除去欲心惡不善法，有覺有觀喜樂一心，遊戲初禪 The five factors of 1<sup>st</sup> *jhana*; *vitakka*, *vicara*, *piti*, *sukha*, and *ekaggata*.

<sup>56</sup> PTS M. i. 247; MN 36 (trms.) p.340

*Yogācāra-bhūmi-sūtra* of *Sangharakṣa*(修行道地經), provide a procedural description for a meditator once they have achieved a certain level of concentration. One is advised, in order to reach to the next level of practice, to make a vow of saving all sentient beings, which establishes a wholesome aspiration, and allows the mind to expand. This appears to be the case for *Siddhārtha* when he released his mind's tightness built from the ascetic practice and recalled his most pleasant meditation experience under the *Jambu* trees. Here, he finally set a very stern determination:

Then he took up the supreme, immovable cross-legged posture with his limbs massed together like the coils of a sleeping serpent, saying, "I will not rise from this position on the ground till I achieve the completion of my task". (12-120)<sup>57</sup>

The Bodhisattva vows, "[even] my body gets rotten, my muscles and bones get dried up and decayed, and this body is all broken down, I will never stand up until I achieve enlightenment."<sup>58</sup>

At this moment, *Siddhārtha* moved into the final stage of his practice, described as neither too tight nor too loose.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> *Buddhacarita* p.186

<sup>58</sup> T03 p0515b02-04 菩薩自誓 使吾身壞肌骨枯腐其身碎盡 不成佛道終不起也

<sup>59</sup> PTS: A iii 374: AN 6.55 The Buddha advised student to practice neither too tight nor too loose as an example of a monk named *Sona*. He was very inspired by meditation and determined to practice walking meditation as diligently as he could, but his feet cracked and bled. The Buddha recalled *Sona* who played vina before renunciation and let him recognize that the vina worked well if the strings were strung not too tightly.

Bhikkhus, I have personally known two things: non-contentment in regard to wholesome qualities and indefatigability in striving. I strove indefatigably, [resolved]: ‘Willingly, let only my skin, sinews, and bones remain, and let the flesh and blood dry up in my body, but I will not relax my energy so long as I have not attained what can be attained by manly strength, energy, and exertion.’ It was by heedfulness that I achieved enlightenment, bhikkhus; it was by heedfulness that I achieved the unsurpassed security from bondage.<sup>60</sup>

With these determinations, the praxis is headed to break the “Silver Mountains and Iron Walls”, an occasion often identified in *Chan* texts as follows:

百尺竿頭坐底人	You who is sitting on the acme of 100 foot pole
雖然得入未為真	even [you] get on, but not yet the real Truth.
百尺竿頭須進步	Once [you] move a step forward from the acme of the pole
十方世界現全身	[the Truth] will manifest all over in ten directions. <sup>61</sup>

The poem hints that even though the practice seems impressive and is at a certain level of progress, it is not the final goal. Ironically, this stage requires both tension and relaxation. For the final step to liberation, *Siddhārtha* reminded himself of his meditation experience under the *Jambu* trees, and that relaxation must be balanced with a stern determination. Tightness and

---

<sup>60</sup> PTS. A. i.150: AN 2.5

<sup>61</sup> T47 p0675a11-13 直須向前決擇。所以長沙和尚道。百尺竿頭坐底人。雖然得入未為真。百尺竿頭須進步 十方世界是全身

looseness must be perfectly balanced, revealed in the *Sona Sutta* of tuning a stringed instrument.<sup>62</sup> Final liberation is attained at a place in the meditation where there remains neither a single attachment to phenomenon nor a fixed idea, including a thought of awakening. The only way to get there is to step-off from the top of the pole.

After the final liberation, the *Mahākkhandhaka* of the *Pāli Vinaya*, “The Great Chapter,” also called the “Going-Forth” or *Pabbajjā* in *Pāli* describes the post-awakening experience:

At one time the awakened one, the Lord, being recently fully awakened, was staying at *Uruvelā* on the bank of the river *Nerañjarā* at the foot of the Tree of Awakening. Then the Lord sat cross-legged in one (posture) for seven days at the foot of the Tree of Awakening experiencing the bliss of freedom.

Then the Lord during the first watch of the night paid attention to causal uprising in direct and reverse order: conditioned by ignorance are the habitual tendencies; conditioned by the habitual tendencies is consciousness; conditioned by consciousness is psycho-physicality; conditioned by psycho-physicality are the six (sense-) spheres; conditioned by the six (sense-) spheres is awareness; conditioned by awareness is feeling; conditioned by feeling is craving; conditioned by craving is grasping; conditioned by grasping is becoming; conditioned by

---

<sup>62</sup> AN 6.55 PTS: A iii 374. The Buddha advised student to practice neither too tight nor too loose as an example of a monk named *Sona*. He was very inspired by meditation and determined to practice walking meditation as diligently as he could, but his feet cracked and bled. The Buddha recalled *Sona* who played vīna before renunciation and let him recognize that the vīna worked well if the strings were strung not too tightly.

becoming is birth; conditioned by birth, old age and dying, grief, sorrow and lamentation, suffering, dejection and despair come into being.<sup>63</sup>

It is clear in this text that meditative insight results in understanding the nature of *Dharma* and the 12 links of Interdependent Origination. For early Buddhist scholars, it is one of the most significant texts because it contained all the Buddha's fundamental teachings, including the Four Noble Truths and Characteristics of No-self. However, these doctrine examples are the outcome of the *Buddha*'s post-awakening. Thus awakening, in Buddhism, is the most critical part as an inception to understand the True Nature.

As understood through *Siddārtha*'s experience, *Chan* emphasizes spontaneous awakening, and the significance of post-awakening practice. This period is called *baoren*(保任), “maintaining a post”. *Chan* masters advise the newly awakened meditator to enter a secluded retreat in order to further develop the practice until the opportunity comes for teaching. Awakening is like a flower budding, this period is significant in order to stabilize it.

### **3. The Buddha's Mind-to-Mind Transmission**

The *Mahākhanda* of *Pāli Vinaya*, needless to say within the perspective of *Kanhua Chan*, illustrates very dynamic teaching techniques. The Buddha asserts that his understanding is “beyond dialectic, subtle, intelligible even to the learned”, but also admits his teaching can be transmitted “quickly” to a certain category of people. Such an assertion

---

<sup>63</sup> PTS. V. i.1; BD. IV. p.1

suggests that Sudden Awakening appeared at the earliest stages of his teaching:

“This *dhamma*, won to by me, is deep, difficult to see, difficult to understand, peaceful, excellent, beyond dialectic, subtle, intelligible to the learned.<sup>64</sup>

“Now, to whom should I first teach this *dhamma*? Who will understand this *dhamma* quickly?” Then it occurred to the Lord: “Indeed, this *Ālāra Kālāma*, is learned, experienced, wise, and for a long time has had little dust in his eyes.<sup>65</sup>

A significant element is that the Buddha already thoroughly understood that neither high-level of concentration meditation nor severe ascetic practice will finally lead to liberation. Interestingly, the passage applies to his former teachers, *Ālāra Kālāma* and *Uddaka Rāmaputta*, and the group of five ascetics - all of whom practiced together with the Buddha.

Another story supporting Buddha’s early teaching period is depicted in the scene in which he meets *Upaka*:

“Your reverence, your sense-organs are quite pure, your complexion very bright, very clear. On account of whom have you, your reverence, gone forth, or who is your teacher, or whose *dhamma* do you profess?”<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> PTS. V. i.4; BD. IV. p.6 adhigato kho myāyaṃ dhammo gambhīro duddaso duranubodho santo paṇīto atakkāvacarō nipuṇo paṇḍitavedanīyo

<sup>65</sup> PTS. V. i.7; BD. IV. p.10 “kassa nu kho ahaṃ paṭhamaṃ dhammaṃ deseyyaṃ? Ko imaṃ dhammaṃ khippameva ājānissatī”ti? Atha kho bhagavato etadahosi – “ayaṃ kho ālāro kālāmo paṇḍito byatto medhāvī dīgharattaṃ apparajakkha jātiko; yaṃnūnāhaṃ ālārassa kālāmassa paṭhamaṃ dhammaṃ deseyyaṃ, so imaṃ dhammaṃ khippameva ājānissatī”ti.

<sup>66</sup> PTS. V. i.8; BD. IV. p.11



The scene suggests *Upaka*'s curiosity and a willingness to learn more about the *Buddha*'s path. However, the scene also suggests that the *Buddha* was unsuccessful in transmitting his *Dhamma*. A *Pāli* commentary claims that the *Upaka* was not ready to listen to *Dhamma* at that time, but he later joined *Buddha*'s community.<sup>67</sup> From a *Kanhua Chan* perspective, it suggests that the *Buddha* was not skillful enough to help *Upaka* immediately suspend conceptualization. One of the important techniques in teaching *Dhamma*, is an ability to lead the listener to suspend thought, otherwise, the “sensation of doubt” is not provoked. In other words, the teacher needs to put the student into an “ox horn” so the technique, a *Huatou*, will burn away useless thoughts. Even though the *Buddha* had confidence that the *Dhamma* could be taught suddenly, his technique needed a maturation period.

Yet another story about the *Buddha*'s early teaching is the scene in which he encountered the five ascetics. Here, there is evidence that “doubt” had already formed within their minds, but remains too weak to lead them to suspension of thought. The *Mahākhanda* elaborates on the behavior of the ascetics when they met the *Buddha*. In short, it shows their bewilderment and unexpected gestures of respect which came out naturally once they saw the *Buddha*. Interpreting this moment from a *Kanhua Chan* perspective, it is the initial eye contact between the ascetics and *Buddha* which suggests they had “great doubt”. Nonetheless, the story suggests that their bewilderment stemmed from a skeptical view about proper ascetic practice. Therefore, their thoughts could not be fully suspended.

The *Mahākhanda* further suggests that the five ascetics were keen to realize *Buddha*'s practice. For instance, they continuously asked how to

---

<sup>67</sup> Dictionary of *Pāli* Proper Names Vol.1 pp.387-386

attain the highest wisdom, even though he relinquished an ascetic lifestyle. Eventually, the Buddha asked them:

“Do you allow, monks that I have never spoken to you like this before?”

“You have not, Lord”<sup>68</sup>

This suggests the moment in *Kanhua Chan* practice where the suspension of thought is achieved, while at the same time, the “sensation of doubt” is fully activated. In a later scene, the Buddha preaches the *Dhamma* to *Kona*, who suddenly awakens.<sup>69</sup> A Sudden Awakening moment can happen at any time, not constrained by a particular form or mode. Some examples have described monks who are awakened while hearing a chicken cluck, hiding in a closet out of fear, hearing roof tiles break, seeing one’s reflection on water, and listening to the temple’s drum. Unfortunately, some scholars tend to ignore the examples as part of an awakening process but emphasize the doctrinal aspect only.

Another episode in the *Mahākhanda* depicts *Yasa*. This elaborates on how *Yasa*’s luxurious life resulted in disappointment, which then led to his wandering to seek an answer regarding his dilemma. Such a notion underscores the importance of having a “sensation of doubt” to effect praxis:

[*Yasa*] “What distress indeed, what affliction indeed.” Then the Lord spoke thus to *Yasa*, the young man of family: “This, *Yasa*, is not distress,

---

<sup>68</sup> PTS. V. i.10; BD. IV. p.14

<sup>69</sup> Phramaha (2012)

this, *Yasa*, is not affliction. Come, sit down, *Yasa*, I will teach you *dhamma*.”<sup>70</sup>

From *Yasa*, we might identify how the *Buddha* skillfully instructed the student. Moreover, it suggests that the *Buddha* understood *Yasa*’s mind upon first meeting him, and thus skillfully placed him in an “ox horn.” Encounter dialogue, like this, represents *Chan* methodology (for example *Zhaozhu*’s “Does a dog have a Buddha nature?”).

Encounter dialogue is clearly identifiable in *Yasa*’s awakening, but it also shows a matured teaching method. As suggested above, the *Buddha* had two teaching opportunities that failed. Just like any competent teacher, the *Buddha* must have learned from the mistakes and adapted his approach. The adaptation appears to be an invitation to sit, such that the student might experience a moment of non-conceptuality. An identical approach appears when the *Buddha* instructed *Yasa*’s father:

Having approached he spoke thus to the Lord: “Lord, have you seen *Yasa*, the young man of family?”

“Well, householder, sit down. Perhaps, sitting here, you may see *Yasa*, the young man of family, sitting here.”<sup>71</sup>

The principal aspect of the encounter dialogue which stands-out in both episodes is that the *Buddha* now knows exactly how to effect the suspension

---

<sup>70</sup> PTS. V. i.15; BD. IV. p.22, 23 Atha kho yaso kulaputto udānaṃ udānesi – “upaddutaṃ vata bho, upassaṭṭhaṃ vata bho”ti.: Atha kho bhagavā yasaṃ kulaputtaṃ etadavoca – “idaṃ kho, yasa, anupaddutaṃ, idaṃ anupassaṭṭhaṃ. Ehi yasa, nisīda, dhammaṃ te desessāmi”ti.

<sup>71</sup> PTS. V. i.16 ; BD. IV. p.24 upasaṅkamitvā bhagavantaṃ etadavoca – “api, bhante, bhagavā yasaṃ kulaputtaṃ passeyyā”ti? Tena hi, gahapati, nisīda, appeva nāma idha nisinna idha nisinnaṃ yasaṃ kulaputtaṃ passeyyāsīti.

of thought. He does this through either a negation dialogue or an affirmation dialogue, both of which appear in *Chan* methodology.

A fourth episode revolves around four friends, all of whom expressed shock by *Yasa*'s renunciation:

*Vimala, Subāhu, Puṇṇaji, Gavampati*, heard: "They say that *Yasa*, the young man of family, having cut off his hair and beard, having put on yellow robes, has gone forth from home into homelessness." Having heard this, it occurred to them: "Now this can be no ordinary *dhamma* and discipline, nor can this be an ordinary going forth, in that *Yasa*, the young man of family, having cut off his hair and beard, having put on the yellow robes, has gone forth from home into homelessness."<sup>72</sup>

The episode further suggests that their bewilderment is a "great doubt", given the possibility of such a teaching as espoused by the Buddha. A near identical elaboration of shock and bewilderment happened with the group of *Yasa*'s friends, when they heard of his renunciation. Praxis proposes that once the mind is fully occupied with "great doubt" the meditation process develops naturally, especially under the guidance of a virtuous teacher- in this instance, the *Buddha*. All four episodes suggest that the instructional target size could range from a single student to a large group of students.

The *Mahākhandakha* ends with a scene which emphasizes Sudden Awakening of a group. The scenes describe a group of men and women the Buddha encountered:

---

<sup>72</sup> PTS. V. i.19 ; BD. IV. p.27 vimalo, subāhu , puṇṇaji, gavampati – yaso kira kulaputto kesamassuṃ ohāretvā kāsāyāni vatthāni acchādetvā agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajitoti. Sutvāna nesaṃ etadahosi – "na hi nūna so orako dhammavinayo, na sā orakā pabbajjā, yattha yaso kulaputto kesamassuṃ ohāretvā kāsāyāni vatthāni acchādetvā agārasmā anagāriyaṃ pabbajito'ti.

“Then, Lord, as we were heedlessly amusing ourselves, that woman of low standing, taking our belongings, ran away. Consequently, Lord, we friends, doing our friend a service and seeking for that woman, are roaming about this woodland grove.”

“What do you think of this, young men? Which is better for you, that you should seek for a woman or that you should seek for the self?” “Truly this were better for us, Lord, that we should seek for the self.” “Well, then, young men, you sit down, I will teach you *dhamma*.”<sup>73</sup>

The critical element of this passage suggests that the Buddha reached the pinnacle of his teaching, meaning that regardless of student status or the size of gathering, Sudden Awakening is possible. A similar praxis is evident when a *Kanhua Chan* master acutely grabs the student’s attention and asks “Who are you?” or “Where are you from?”. This is the moment when the student suddenly drops a troubled mind to pause, and allow the “sensation of doubt” to naturally arise. Similar moments are seen in *Linji*’s shouting, *Daoshan*’s stick, and *Zhaozou*’s dog. Indeed, a *Chan* master’s peculiar gestures and word choices serves as techniques to demonstrate non-duality and to manifest the middle way.<sup>74</sup>

In summation, the *Mahākhanda* provides ideal examples to support the assertion that Sudden Awakening appeared at the earliest stages of the Buddha’s teaching. These examples closely resemble the dynamic praxis used by Chinese *Chan* masters to suspend their student’s conceptualization

---

<sup>73</sup> PTS. V. i.23 ; BD. IV. p.31-32 vesī amhesu pamattesu paricārentesu bhaṇḍaṃ ādāya palāyittha. Te mayaṃ, bhante, sahāyakā sahāyakassa veyyāvaccam karontā, taṃ itthiṃ gavesantā, imaṃ vanasaṇḍaṃ āhiṇḍāmā”ti. ‘

<sup>74</sup> Kim. S. (2013, p.12)

through various encounter dialogues and the use of *Huatou* to raise “sensation of doubt”.

## V. Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to investigate the concept of Sudden Awakening of *Chan* Buddhism within the context of early Buddhism, namely liminal events which shaped *Siddhartha/Buddha*’s praxis and pedagogy. Evidence suggests that the mind-to-mind transmission of *Bodhidharma* marked the reintroduction of Sudden Awakening praxis, an inception which subsequently sparked a nearly an 800-year evolution. During this period, *Chan* teachers systematized a distinct methodology, from which *Kanhua Chan* finally emerged with its striking use of the “objectless object”, or the “sensation of doubt”. Evidence also suggests that “doubt” is not linked with any conventional use of a meditation object warranted by *Buddhagosa*, nor is it linked with any definition of “doubt” in Indian Buddhism. Rather, it is an intense “sensation of doubt” activated by a *Huatou*, intentionally thrown by a *Chan* master to provoke a student’s meditation practice. A *Huatou*’s efficacy rests in its power to suspend cognitive processes, and transform a meditator’s insight of phenomena. Both “sensation of doubt” and use of a *Huatou* appear prominently in the *Mahākhanda* of the *Pāli Vinaya*, which suggests that *Kanhua Chan* praxis is grounded earlier than heretofore believed.

This attempt may not be appreciated by some Buddhist scholars. Nonetheless, if scholarship dwells on distinct boundaries while enjoy conventional conclusions, it will remain deluded and in denial of non-duality. Moreover, without question the evolution of Buddhism from its early

period until today connotes a recurring struggle between doctrine and practice.

*Chan* Buddhism endured the argument regarding Sudden Awakening - sudden practice vs. Sudden Awakening - gradual practice. Early Buddhist circles persist to argue the predominance of *Samātha* over *Vipassana* meditation. In common, doctrine first or practice first. Regardless of view or practice, this investigation expands our mutual discussion.

## References

### 1. Primary Sources

#### *Pāli*

*Anguttara Nikāya* (AN), PTS. Second edition, revised by A.K. Warder, 1961.

*Majjhima Nikāya* (MN), PTS. Ed by V.Trenkner and Chelmers, Vols. I-IV, 1925

The *Vinaya Piṭakam*: one of the Principal Buddhist Holy Scriptures in the *Pāli* Language. Vol. I: the *Mahāvagga*. Oxford: PTS. OLDENBERG, H. ([1879] 1997),

#### *English Translation*

The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Complete Translation of the *Anguttara Nikāya* (The Teachings of the Buddha) by Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2012

The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the *Majjhima Nikāya* (The Teachings of the Buddha) by Bhikkhu Nanamoli, Bhikkhu Bodhi, 1995

The Book of the Discipline (*Vinaya-Piṭaka*), Vol. IV (*Mahāvagga*). HORNER, I.B. ([1951] 2000), Oxford: PTS,

The *Buddhacarita*-Acts of the Buddha. Lahore, vol. 1 Johnston, E.H. trans. Motilal Barnasidass, 2004

**T = 大正新脩大藏經 *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō***

T01n0005 大念處經

T03n0184 修行本起經

T03n0186 普曜經

T22n1428 四分律

T47n1996 明覺禪師語錄

T48n2005 無門關

T48n2007 敦煌本 六祖檀經

T48n2008 六祖大師法寶壇經

T48n2012 黃檗斷際禪師宛陵錄

T48n2012 黃檗山斷際禪師傳心法要

T50n2043 阿育王經

X63n1257 博山禪警語

X70n1401 高峰圓妙和尚禪要

T50n2060 續高僧傳

**M= 卍正藏經 (新文豐版) *Manji Daizōkyō* (Xinwenfeng Edition)**

M059n1540 大慧普覺禪師普說三



## 2. Secondary Sources

Anālayo, Bhikkhu. 2003. *The Direct Path to Realisation*, Windhorse Publication

\_\_\_\_\_. 2011. *A comparative study of Majjhima-nikāya*, Dharma Drum Publishing Corporation. Vol.2.

Buswell, Robert. 1987. *The ‘Short-cut’ Approach of K’an-hua Meditation: The Evolution of a Practical Subitism in Chinese Chan Buddhism.* pp. 321-377

\_\_\_\_\_. 2011. *The Transformation of Doubt (Ŭijŏng 疑情) in Kanhwa Sŏn 看話禪: The Testimony of Gaofeng Yuanmiao 高峰原妙 (1238-1295).*

Chen, Jinhua. 2002. *An Alternative View of the Meditation Tradition in China: Meditation in the Life and Works of Daoxuan.* T’oung Pao XXXVIII. pp.596-667

Gou, Seon Master. 2014. *Great doubt, great enlightenment.* Hyegak, UIjeong and Seoru, Jogye order publications

Gunaratana, Henepola. 1980. *A Critical Analysis Of The Jhanas in Theravada Buddhist Meditation.* American University, 1980.

Jinhua Jia. 2006. *The Hongzhou School of Chan Buddhism in Eighth- through Tenth-Century China.* State University of New York Press, Albany

Kim, Jun-ho. 2007. *The Buddha and Meditation in the early Buddhist Texts.* The philosophy of Bozho. Vol. 28. pp.227-259

Kim, Sungchul. 2012. *A relevance of Chan and Madhyamaka*

- Lee, Ghiewoon. 2015. Research on Concept-matching Buddhist Perspectives in Tien-tai Tradition. *Philosophy and Culture of One-Buddhism* Vol. 66. pp.143-167
- McRae, John. 2003. *Seeing Through Zen. Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism*, The University Press Group Ltd,
- Oh, Kang-nam. 2000. Taoist Influence on Hua-yen Buddhism: A Case of the Sinicization of Buddhism in China. *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal*. No. 13. pp. 277-297
- Phramaha. Ven. 2012. *An Idea of Ko'an Teaching in Theravada Buddhism: A case study of the Pali Tipitaka, commentaries and contemporary Ko'an practice in Thailand.*
- Welter, Albert. 2006. *Monks, Rulers, and Literati: The Political Ascendancy of Chan Buddhism*. Oxford University Press, USA
- Wynne, Alexander. 2007. *The Origin of Buddhist Meditation*. Routledge. New York, NY.

# Bringing *Kanhwa* Sŏn in to Contemporary Society: Sot'aesan's Re-invention of *Kanhwa* Meditation in Won Buddhism

Sung Ha Yun

University of California, Los Angeles

## Abstract

*Kanhwa*(看話) meditation as a practical subitist technique by which to catalyze enlightenment to the original nature has been considered the foremost meditation technique in the Korean Sŏn tradition over the last eight-hundred years. This paper seeks to examine Sot'aesan's re-structuring of *kanhwa* meditation in the Korean new religion of Won Buddhism. In this paper, I argue that that Sot'aesan attempted to reform and restructure Korean Buddhism in early twentieth century Korea by problematizing the *kanhwa* technique. In addition, through this examination of the Won Buddhist interpretation of *kanhwa* meditation practice, this paper will show how this technique, which has been transmitted in Korean Sŏn as a living meditative tradition, has continued to be transformed into new forms relevant to contemporary people and society.

**Keywords:** Sot'aesan, Wŏnbulgyo (Won Buddhism), *Kanhwa* Sŏn, *Ŭidu*, *Sŏngni*

## I.Introduction

*Kanhwa*(看話) meditation is conceived as a practical subitist technique by which not only to catalyze enlightenment to the original nature but also to simultaneously perfect enlightened action. It has been considered the most important meditation technique in the Korean Sōn tradition over the last eight-hundred years. In the more recent history of modern Korean Buddhism in particular, since the Sōn master Kyōnghō(鏡虛, 1849-1912) revitalized *kanhwa* Sōn in the early twentieth century, this meditation technique has taken its place as the emblematic Sōn practice in Korean monasteries. This central meditation technique in Korean Buddhism, however, has not been examined yet in relation to the Buddhist reformation led by Pak Chungbin(朴重彬, 1891-1943), better known as his pen name Sot'aesan 少太山, the founder of Wōnbulgyo (Won Buddhism). This connection is especially worthy of attention because there appear to be some close historical connections between the *kanhwa* technique and the methods of Sōn training taught by Sot'aesan. This paper seeks to examine Sot'aesan's re-structuring of *kanhwa* meditation by situating it in the historical context of Korean Buddhist reform movements during the early twentieth century. To this end, first of all, a close historical scrutiny is necessary to determine the sources from which Sot'aesan learned about *kanhwa* meditation and the questions of how he understood this technique, how he appraised its efficacy, and thereby how he restructured it in his reformation of Buddhism. When we situate his reformation of Chosōn Buddhism in this broader historical context,<sup>1</sup> we will be able to perceive the influence that this revered Sōn technique of *kanhwa* meditation had on the content and structure of Sot'aesan's reformation of Korean Buddhism.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Chōng Sunil, "Sot'aesan ūi Pulgyo kaehyōk undong kwa Hangmyōng, Manhae, and Yongsōng," *Wōnbulgyo sasang yōn'guwōn haksul taehoe*: 7-36, 2014.

## II. How Sot'aesan Encountered *kanhwa* Sŏn

In the extant historical documents of Won Buddhism, there are several sources by which we can infer how Sot'aesan encountered the method of *kanhwa* meditation. The first was his reading of the *Sŏnyo*(禪要; Essentials of Chan), an important primer of *kanhwa* meditation, which he perused after his enlightenment in 1916. The second was meetings with famous Sŏn masters in the early 1900s, specifically Paek Hangmyŏng(白鶴鳴, 1867-1929), abbot of Wŏlmyŏng-am, and Han Manhŏ (韓鍊虛, 1856 -1935), abbot of Silsang temple. Therefore, in this section, I will examine how these two sources of influence led to Sot'aesan's distinctive understanding and interpretation of the traditional *kanhwa* Sŏn technique.

### 1. *Sŏnyo*(禪要; Essentials of Chan)

One of the routes through which Sot'aesan must have encountered the method of *kanhwa* mediation is through the *Sŏnyo*, which has played a cardinal role as a practical primer of *kanhwa* Sŏn in Korean monasteries since at least the fifteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

According to *Wŏnbulgyo Kyosa*(The History of Won Buddhism) Sot'aesan's spiritual journey was prompted by the manifold questions he had about the phenomena of nature and of human beings. By searching for the answers through meeting with masters for more than eleven years, his mind became completely absorbed in contemplating these questions. All of his questions eventually coalesced, we are told, into a single question: "What shall I do with this?" Then, his concentration on this single question continued

---

<sup>2</sup> Robert E. Buswell, Jr., *Numinous Awareness Is Never Dark: The Korean Buddhist Master Chinul's Excerpts on Zen Practice*, Korean Classics Library: Philosophy and Religion (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2016), 84.

single-mindedly from morning to evening and from evening to morning. Finally, Sot'aesan entered into a deeper *samādhi* in which even the question itself disappeared.

Around the age of twenty-five, Sot'aesan abandoned the question of “What should I do in the future with this question of seeking the truth?” He then entered into a state of non-consciousness [unconsciousness], in which he was not conscious of his own actions.<sup>3</sup>

After this, he came to be regarded as a living corpse, which stirred much criticism and finally ostracism from his neighbors. Not long after, Sot'aesan began to come out of his deep *samādhi* and finally he attained enlightenment in the early morning of third month, twenty-sixth day (April 28) of the lunar calendar in 1916.<sup>4</sup>

Upon his enlightenment in 1916, Sot'aesan perused a wide range of religious texts available to him at that time in his attempt to understand what he had experienced. The *Sōnyo* was one of the texts he carefully scrutinized. According to *The History of Won Buddhism*, the texts Sot'aesan closely read include “the four classics and the *Xiaojing* (孝經; Filial piety) of Confucianism;

---

<sup>3</sup> *The History of Won Buddhism* (Iksan: Won Buddhist Publishing Co. 2006), 20. This is a translation of *Wōnbulgyo Kyosa* [The History of Won Buddhism], which was written on the basis of the *Pulpōp yōn'guhoe ch'anggōnsa* [The History of Establishment of the Society for the Study of Buddha-dharma] by the committee members of the Headquarters of Won Buddhism under the supervision of the third head Dharma master, Kim Taegō 金大舉 (1914 ~ 1998) known as his penname Taesan 大山 in 1975. It was written on the basis of the *Pulpōp yōn'guhoe ch'anggōnsa*, which describes the first twelve years of the history of Won Buddhism (1916-1927) written by Song Kyu 宋奎 (1900-1962) better known as his penname Chōnsan 鼎山 under the supervision of Sot'aesan and had been published serially in the *Heobo* vol. 34 – 47 [Monthly Magazine] from December 1937 to November 1938.

<sup>4</sup> *The History of Won Buddhism*, 20-21.

the *Jingang jing*(金剛經; Diamond Sūtra), *Sōnyo* (Essentials of Chan), *Pulgyo taejōn*(佛敎大典; Compendium of Buddhism), and *P'alsangjōn* (八相傳; Eight Episodes from the Buddha's Life) of Buddhism; the *Yinfu jing* (陰符經; Secret Planning) and *Yushu jing* (玉樞經; Jade Hinge) of Daoism; the *Tonggyōng taejōn* (東經大全; Canon of Eastern Learning) and *Yongdam yusa*(龍潭遺詞; Hymns from Dragon Pool) of Tonghak; and the Old and New Testaments of Christianity.”<sup>5</sup> After closely reading these scriptures, Sot'aesan stated,

“Even though I have attained the Way without any teacher's guidance, upon reflecting on many points, I have come to realize that my former aspiration and the course of my ascetic practice for attaining the Way coincide with what Śākyamuni Buddha did and said. Hence, I choose Śākyamuni Buddha as the origin of my enlightenment.”<sup>6</sup>

Because of this specific description, scholars often compare the process of Sot'aesan's enlightenment only with that of Śākyamuni Buddha; however, in this case, Śākyamuni Buddha does not just mean the historical Buddha, but also the source of all subsequent developments in Buddhism, including such Sōn techniques as *kanhwa* Sōn. Thus, when Sot'aesan talks about the parallels between his experience of enlightenment and the Buddha's, he probably means that he saw the affinities between the accounts of enlightenment across the Buddhist tradition as a whole.

---

<sup>5</sup> Bongkil Chung, *The Scriptures of Won Buddhism: A Translation of the Wonbulgyo Kyojon with Introduction* Classics in East Asian Buddhism (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 2003), 39.

<sup>6</sup> *The History of Won Buddhism*, 24.

Written by the Linji Chan master Gaofeng Yuanmiao(高峰原妙, 1238-1295, K. Kobong Wŏnmyo), *Sōnyo* describes not only the fundamental premise and process of *kanhwa* meditation, but also offers a detailed account of Gaofeng’s own enlightenment experiences. Its teaching is based on the fundamental Chan ground that all sentient beings are already endowed with the Buddha-nature, and therefore “sudden awakening followed by sudden cultivation,” if properly catalyzed by *kanhwa* meditation, is possible for all practitioners. It also explains two main obstacles for practitioners that obstruct them from reaching the stage of catalyzing enlightenment in the course of practicing *kanhwa* meditation: torpor/lethargy and mental distraction. Gaofeng Yuanmiao suffered from both of them. According to Gaofeng Yuanmiao, the main antidote to these two obstacles is to generate “the great sensation of doubt,” and therefore generating “the sensation of doubt” becomes the key to enlightenment. In order to generate the sensation of doubt, two other critical factors are required: great faith and fury.

Then, let us look at some specific passage describing these accounts. Gaofeng Yuanmiao portrays how he had reached his first enlightenment through *kanhwa* meditation with the help of generating the intensive sensation of doubt as follows:

“Unexpectedly in my sleep I began to doubt [the huatou/hwadu] “the thousand dharmas return to one; to what does the one return?” At that point, the sensation of doubt suddenly erupted. I stopped sleeping and forgot about eating. I couldn’t distinguish east from west and couldn’t tell day from night. Whether spreading out my sitting mat or laying out my bowls, whether defecating or urinating—finally whether active or still, whether speaking or silent, everything was just this “to what does the one return?” There wasn’t the slightest extraneous thought. And even if I had wanted



to think of something else, I was utterly incapable of doing it. [My mind] was exactly like something nailed or glued: no matter how hard you shook it, it would not move. Even if I was in a dense crowd of people, it was like no one was there. From dawn till dusk, from dusk till dawn, [my mind was] lucid and profound, lofty and imposing, pristine and flawless. One thought seemed to last for ten-thousand years. The sense realms were tranquil and all sense of person was forgotten. It was as if I were stupid or senseless.’<sup>7</sup>

忽於睡中。疑著萬法歸一。一歸何處。自此疑情頓發。廢寢忘餐。東西不辨。晝夜不分。開單展鉢。屙屎放尿。至於一動一靜。一語一默。總只是箇一歸何處。更無絲毫異念。亦要起絲毫異念。了不可得。正如釘釘膠粘。撼搖不動。雖在稠人廣眾中。如無一人相似。從朝至暮。從暮至朝。澄澄湛湛。卓卓巍巍。純清絕點。一念萬年。境寂人忘。如癡如兀。<sup>8</sup>

After this event, Gaofeng Yuanmiao continued to share his subsequent experiences. He stated that the six days just passed unknowingly. Under this deep meditative trance, he went to Samt’ap temple following a crowd of people. At the Samt’ap temple, while reciting scriptures, all of a sudden, he raised his head and saw the portrait of Fayan(法演) *hwasang*, the fifth

---

<sup>7</sup> Robert E. Buswell, Jr., “The Transformation of Doubt (Yijing/Üijōng;疑情) in Chinese Buddhist Meditation: The Testimony of Gaofeng Yuanmiao(高峰原妙, 1238-1295),” in Halvor Eifring, ed., *Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004), 225-236.

<sup>8</sup> *Gaofeng Chanyao*, sect. 1, *Xuzangjing (Supplement to the Canon)*, vol. 122: 257a ff. There is no standard edition of this text. Therefore, following Buswell’s suggestion, I also cite it only by section number. See Robert E. Buswell, Jr., “The Transformation of Doubt (Yijing/Üijōng;疑情) in Chinese Buddhist Meditation: The Testimony of Gaofeng Yuanmiao(高峰原妙, 1238-1295),” in Halvor Eifring, ed., *Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004). 225-236.

patriarch. As soon as he saw the portrait, in that brief moment he came to complete explosive consciousness regarding the *hwadu* “what is *this* that carries this body,” which Yangshan(仰山) *hwasang* had given him previously. He said that it was as if a mirror were reflecting a mirror, totally forgetting the objective world and self.<sup>9</sup> At that time, when he closely scrutinized all of the *hwadus* that he previously had examined, such as Baizhang’s wild fox, Zhaozhou’s “no,” Jingzhou’s hemp-cloth, etc., there were none that were not clear to him.<sup>10</sup>

This account of what Gaofeng Yuanmiao described in *Sōnyo* is very similar to Sot’aesan’s enlightenment. Both of them had reached an intensive concentrated state of mind by being profoundly engaged with a similar type of spiritual questioning. Deeply absorbed in such an intensive sensation of doubt, the question itself vividly occupied their body and mind, and later on they reached a deep *samādhi* in which all of the conventionally constructed objective world was exploded and disappeared. Gaofeng realized his enlightenment by having a perfectly clear understanding of all of the *hwadus* that he previously had examined. In a similar way, Sot’aesan recalled all the *ūidus* (疑頭; questions or doubts) he previously had struggled with, and “realized their meanings with perfect clarity in a single thought”<sup>11</sup> thus completing a long spiritual journey. In this regard, Sot’aesan’s recognition of the similarity between the process of his enlightenment with the Buddha

---

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, sect. 1. 不覺至第六日 隨眾在三塔諷經次。抬頭忽睹五祖演和尚真  
 驀地觸發日前 仰山老和尚問拖死屍句子 直得虛空粉碎 大地平沉 物我俱忘  
 如鏡照鏡

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, sect. 1. 百丈野狐 狗子佛性 青州布衫 女子出定話 從頭密舉  
 驗之無不了了。般若妙用 信不誣矣

<sup>11</sup> *The History of Won Buddhism*, 21-23.

should be more broadly interpreted, and through reading of the text *Sōnyo*, Sot'aesan may well have realized the similarity between *kanhwa* Sōn technique and his own process in attaining enlightenment.

## 2. Dialogues with Paek Hangmyōng and Han Manhō

The other possible way that Sot'aesan may have encountered the method of *kanhwa* mediation is through visiting Wōlmyōng-am and Silsang-sa. Sot'aesan visited the Buddhist hermitage of Wōlmyōng-am in 1919 when he was searching for a place to rest after completing one of his first joint projects with his earliest disciples: the embankment project, through which he reclaimed twenty-five acres of riverside tidal land and turned it into rice paddies. Sot'aesan once shared with his disciples his first experience of visiting Wōlmyōng-am during a dharma talk in December 8, 1941:

“When I visited Wōlmyōng-am in Pyōnsan, there was a Buddhist phrase attached to the wall, which said, “What is that thing which is not associated with the myriad dharmas?” (*pulyō manpōp uiryōja sisimma*, 不與萬法爲侶者 是什麼). No matter how I parsed it, I couldn't understand its meaning. I was ashamed, so I went into the guest room and sat for a while. But that phrase was not leaving my head. I was served a cup of tea and, as I drank the tea, all of a sudden, I came to understand what it meant. After that, upon seeing the phrase, “The myriad dharmas return to one; where does the one return?” (*manpōp kuiil ilguihach'ō*, 萬法歸一 一歸何處), I immediately understood it.”<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Yi Kongju, “Sup'il Pōpsōl,” in *Wōnbulgyo ch'ogi kyodansa: Tol i sōsō mulsori rūl tūnnūnda*, Pak Yongdōk, (Iksan: Wōnkwang University Ch'ulp'anbu, 1997), 13.

Sot'aesan candidly shared his amazement of encountering with the *hwadu*, “What is that thing which is not associated with the myriad dharmas?”<sup>13</sup> When he first read it, he could not understand what this *hwadu* meant, but after continuing to puzzle over it until he finally understood it clearly. According to the “Biography of Hangmyōng” in *Hangmyōng chip*,<sup>14</sup> when residing at Wōlmyōng-am at the age of forty-six, Hangmyōng also encountered this same *hwadu*. At that time, he felt like he was in dark as if he put his face up against to a wall. Then, he devoted himself to this *hwadu* without eating and sleeping for several days. All of a sudden, he reached the same illuminating state that the buddhas and masters reached.<sup>15</sup> Hangmyōng’s own encounter with this *hwadu* must have been why this phrase was put up on the wall at Wōlmyōng-am when Sot'aesan visited.

Sot'aesan’s teachings dealt more extensively with this *hwadu* later on. First, Sot'aesan added this *hwadu* as one of topics on the “the List for Inquiry” for instructing his disciples in *Suyang yōn'gu yoron*(修養研究要論; The Essentials of Cultivation and Inquiry). It is also noticeable that the book opens

---

<sup>13</sup> This *hwadu* can be traced back to the Chan dialogue between Mazu Daoyi(馬祖道一, 709-788) and Pang Yun Jushi(龐蘊居士, 740-808), which is described in the *Recorded sayings of Layman Pang* 龐居士語錄. This particular *hwadu* seemed to be popularly used among Korean monks at that time, and it is my assumption that the most popular *hwadu* “what is it?” (K. *imwōt ko*, a contraction of *igōsi muōt ingo*, Ch. *shishenma*; 是什麼) that has been used in Korean monasteries originated from this *hwadu*, *pulyō manpōp uiryōja sisima*(不與萬法爲侶者 是什麼) with an excerpt of the last part of the *hwadu*. As this contracting phrase had been popularized, it seems that other variations of this form began to be used, such as “what is *this thing* that carries this body?” “what is *this thing* that consists of the essence of reality?” “what is *this thing* that allows one to see, hear, listen, smell, talk, and think?” and so on. See also Robert E. Buswell, Jr., *The Zen Monastic Experience* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 154-155.

<sup>14</sup> Paek Hangmyōng, *Hangmyōng chip*, compiled and translated by Yōngwōn (Seoul: Sōngbo Munhwajae Yōn'guwōn, 2006), 108.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

with the *hwadu* “Illuminate the one mind through the myriad dharmas” (*t’ongmanpö̃p myö̃ngilsim*; 通萬法明一心). Sot’aesan also puts the phrase “that which is not associated with the myriad dharmas” (*pulyö̃manpö̃p*; 不與萬法) instead of *inji*(印紙; publication stamp)<sup>16</sup> on the *Suyang yö̃n’gu yoron*.<sup>17</sup> It is also said that this particular *hwadu* was placed on the front portico pillar at many temples during the early years of Won Buddhism.<sup>18</sup>

At Wö̃lmyö̃ng-am, Sot’aesan realized the need for some retreat time in order to enhance his spiritual power; he also noticed that his wisdom had been dulled due to the exhaustive labor for the embankment project as well as not to have any time for retreat following his enlightenment. After the embankment project,<sup>19</sup> he decided to take some time in a quiet place to enhance his spiritual ability and prepare to start his new religious society. After ten days staying at the hermitage, Sot’aesan returned to Yö̃ngsan where his

---

<sup>16</sup> In modern times in Korea, it was attached to the last page of a book to represent the copyright.

<sup>17</sup> See Pak Chungbin, *Suyang yö̃ngu yoron* (Kyö̃ngsö̃ng [Seoul]: Kidokkyo Yö̃ngmunsa insoaebu, 1927).

<sup>18</sup> Ryu Sö̃ngt’ae, “Munmok tullö̃ pogi: ilman pö̃p üiro tö̃bulö̃ chjakhaji anihan chaga ö̃ttön mulgö̃n inji yö̃n’guhalsa 97,” *Wö̃nbulgyo sinmun*, February 23, 2012, [http://www.wonnews.co.kr/news/articleView.html?](http://www.wonnews.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=103179)

[idxno=103179](http://www.wonnews.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=103179) (accessed April 20, 2018).

<sup>19</sup> According to *The History of Won Buddhism*, there are several other reasons that Sot’aesan moved to Wö̃lmyö̃ng-am in Pyö̃nsan: “The motives behind Sot’aesan’s entering the mountain was to take a rest after several years of hard work, draft the doctrine for the upcoming religious order, and avoid attention from the public during turbulent times.” See *The History of Won Buddhism*, 42. Around the time of completing the reclaiming project in March, 1919 when the March First Independent Movement was spread out all over the country, Sot’aesan was taken to the Yö̃nggwang police station on account of involvement in the Independent movement twice. According to Pak Yongdök, the initial motivation for him to move into the mountain was partly avoiding the surveillance of Japanese policemen. See Pak Yongdök, *Wö̃nbulgyo ch’ogi kyodansa 2: Tol i sö̃sö̃ mul sori rül tününda*, Wö̃nkwang University Wö̃nbulgyo charyosil, 1997, 9-13.

disciples were guided to do a special 100-day-prayer.<sup>20</sup> In August of the same year, Sot'aesan sent Song Kyu, who later became one of the successors of Sot'aesan, to Wölmyöng-am to extensively learn about Buddhism, and Paek Hangmyöng warmly received him as one of his disciples by giving him the Buddhist name, Myöng'an(明眼; Bright Eyes).

After completing the second round of the special 100-day-prayer in December, 1919, Sot'aesan moved to Wölmyöng-am, but there was not a proper place for him to stay. When Sot'aesan announced his intention to leave Wölmyöng-am, with the suggestion and financial support of his disciples Kim Namch'ön and Yi Mangap, Hangmyöng arranged for him to stay at a house in a village not far from the temple. In February, 1920, Sot'aesan moved into this new house, called "Silsang Ch'odang." One and half years later, this small thatched cottage was no longer large enough to receive the many disciples who visited and stayed with him. In July (the seventh lunar month), 1921, at the suggestion of Kim Namch'ön and Song Chökpyök, a new hermitage began to be built. At that time, Hangmyöng helped them to select a site and provided lumber to build it. When they completed the building, Hangmyöng also wrote the calligraphy for the name of the hermitage, Söktuam, on a black board in white ink.<sup>21</sup> Sot'aesan called himself Söktu *kōsa* by following after the name of Söktuam (also known as Pongnae Chöngsa). While staying in Pyönsan for about four years, Sot'aesan engaged in dialogue with Buddhist monks and

---

<sup>20</sup> "They offered prayers three days of the month (the 6th, 16th, 26th) with ten days of ablutions in between the prayer days as directed by their master." See *The History of Won Buddhism*, 36.

<sup>21</sup> Pak Yongdök, *Wönbulgyo ch'ogi kyodansa 2: Tol i sōsō mul sori rül tūnūnda*, 48-49. It is not clear, however, whether Hangmyöng named the hermitage Söktu by following Sot'aesan's penname at that time, or whether Sot'aesan adopted that cognomen after the hermitage's name. While Pak Yongdök takes the position of the former, *Hangmyöng chip* takes the latter. See *Hangmyöng chip*, 109.

studied all the rules and regulations of conventional Buddhist temples; based on these conversations and research, he drafted *Chosŏn Pulgyo hyŏksin-ron* [Treatise on the Reformation of Chosŏn Buddhism] as well as *Suyang yŏn'gu yoron*, which became the doctrinal basis for establishing the Pulpŏp Yŏn'guhoe (Society for the Study of the Buddhadharma), the earliest name of the Won Buddhist order being.

In particular, Sot'aesan and Paek Hangmyŏng became appreciative Dharma friends and shared the common spirit of reforming Chosŏn Buddhism.<sup>22</sup> There are preserved several correspondences and poems exchanged between Paek Hangmyŏng and Sot'aesan, which show their close and supportive relationship.

Dear Pak Chungbin Sŏktu *kŏsa*,

At the old temple deep in the mountain, I was lying down on a sickbed, giving a sigh. By favoring me [with this letter], which was beyond my expectation you have raised up the sick Crane [Hangmyŏng]. How pleased I am!

Your visit to Seoul must have produced some substantial accomplishments. How envious I am! This old monk only remains in self-righteousness without any considerable accomplishments in this life. Regarding the expression that [you would] visit this mountain-gate (temple) someday [in your letter], you expressed it as usual words [for the sake of courtesy]. As a responder, I also take it as usual words [as a token of courtesy]. So, how could I understand a physical meeting only as a special thing? I only hope

---

<sup>22</sup> Scholars recently have suggested that the Dharma friendship between Paek Hangmyŏng and Sot'aesan can be further traced back to the time of Sot'aesan's youth. When Sot'aesan had searched for a master to guide him during the six years from 1906 to 1912, he often visited one of the hermitages belonging to Pulgapsa, including Yongmun-am where Hangmyŏng was dedicating himself into *chamsŏn*. See Chŏngjae Yi, "Sot'aesan ũi kusa ilhwa punsŏk kwa Paek Hangmyŏng kwaŭi kwangye yŏn'gu: Pŏbilhwa 'puch'ŏ rŭl sihŏmhan il' chungsim ũiro," in *Wŏnbulgyo sasang kwa chonggyo munhwa* 62: 91-116, 2014; See Chŏng Sunil, "Sot'aesan ũi Pulgyo kaehyŏk undong kwa Hangmyŏng, Manhae, and Yongsŏng," *Wŏnbulgyo sasang yŏn'guwŏn haksul taehoe*: 7-36, 2014.

that the round moon is fully reflected its own image [on the surface of the water] without any distortion.

Farmer, Paek Hangmyōng<sup>23</sup>

示朴重彬石頭居士

深山古寺 臥病而呻吟 料外呈惠 喚起病鶴 何喜如之。京橋之一往  
想必所得不小矣 何羨如之。老衲平生 一無所得而只是獨善而已。  
一仰山門之示 示說以例言示之 聞者亦以例言知之 然何以形骸相從  
勝事哉。只希月輪相照無虧也。

白農鶴鳴

Dear Pak Chungbin Sōktu *kōsa*,

The sick Crane [Hangmyōng] of Naejang temple unexpectedly heard about many sagacious friends of the Pongnae and visited [them]. Sagacious beings (they) did not know the Crane, nor the Crane them. Alas! I merely breathed a deep sigh. When I came back, I found your letter. Reconnecting our heavenly affinities, I will visit you again by pushing the clouds aside. Thinking of when we will again hold each other's hands.<sup>24</sup>

示朴重彬石頭居士

內藏之病鶴 忽聞蓬萊之多仙伴以入 仙不知鶴 鶴不知仙。嗽然徐嘯  
以歸承惠。仙緣復續 披雲更入。相握計耳。

These two letters are in the “Collected Letters” section in *Hangmyōng chip* (The Collection of Hangmyōng). Paek Hangmyōng sent these letters to Sot'aesan while he was staying at Sōktuam. Hangmyōng, who was twenty-five years Sot'aesan's senior, presents his kind respects toward Sot'aesan. Hangmyōng candidly shows both his admiration and support for the much

---

<sup>23</sup> Paek Hangmyōng, *Hangmyōng chip*, compiled and translated by Yōngwōn (Seoul: Sōngbo Munhwajae Yōn'gūwōn, 2006), 91. I translated it with reference to both the Chinese and Korean translation in the book.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.



younger Sot'aesan, who was working hard with his disciples to accomplish their vision of reforming Chosŏn Buddhism. Though absent in body, Hangmyŏng dearly expresses his hope for being together with Sot'aesan in spirit.

Sot'aesan's own letters to Hangmyŏng also show his deep respect for the old Buddhist master:

Dear Ven. Master Crane (Hak),

When flying low in the air, you will not see this place. When flying high in the air, you will only hear the sound. At the thatched cottage [Sŏktuam], I fell into a deep spring slumber. In my dream, a "Jade-Steel Child"<sup>25</sup> came down from heaven and asked me, "Why are you sleeping deeply and not waking up?" Before long, Master White Crane flew low in the human world and looked all around at the good and evil actions. Suddenly, he flew high up into the heavens. Waking up, I soon realized it was a mere dream. I opened the door and looked out the door, but I could not see anything there. Looking up into sky, I only heaved a sigh of despair. From the high sky, there came only the sound. Grasping the Jade-Steel Child again, I slowly talked to him, "Where is the place to fly low? Where is the place to fly high? While you are flying high and low, please, go back to the place where you flew high again, and bring one word/one phrase from where you flew high." Realizing something big in the dream, I said, "I humbly met a master sitting silently and peacefully on a late spring day while looking out over the southern sky."

Sincerely,

---

<sup>25</sup> The term here *okch'ŏl tongja*(玉鐵童子) literally means a jade-steel child. I assume that this term was used as an expression of an auspicious boy who came down from heaven.

Pak Chungbin, living in the Pongnae Mountain<sup>26</sup>

敬獻鶴禪師

低飛不見其處 高飛淮聞其聲 草堂春睡足 夢一玉鐵童子  
自天上降臨 在傍謂予言曰 子何深睡不悟耶 俄白鶴道士 低飛人間  
察其善惡 忽然高飛天上云云 覺之乃夢 開戶視之 不見其處  
仰天嗟嘆 惟聞九之聲 更挽玉童子 徐謂曰 低飛何處 高飛何處  
低飛高飛之間 汝往其高飛處 更將高飛上一句來 吾夢大覺云  
遙望南天 悠然見坐暮春

蓬萊山人朴重彬再拜

With the story of his own dream, Sot'aesan expresses his respectful yearning to see Hangmyōng, just as Hangmyōng's letter conveys his admiration for him. Sot'aesan also poetically expresses the same spirit as Hangmyōng: though absent in body, his mind is with him in spirit.

Even though only three letters exchanged between the two men are preserved in the “Collected Letters” section of the *Hangmyōng chip*, they are quite significant. First, through these letters, we can notice that, as Sot'aesan was drafting his plans for the reformation of Chosŏn Buddhism, he was in active dialogue with Paek Hangmyōng, one of the representative and best-known Sŏn masters in Korean Buddhism in the early 1900s. Paek Hangmyōng's catchphrase for his Buddhist reform movement was “half agriculture, half Sŏn” (*pan' nong pan' sŏn*; 半農半禪), by which he argued that Buddhist monks should pursue both meditation practice and agricultural labor in monasteries. It was quite a revolutionary idea at that time because most of his contemporaries presumed that Buddhist monks should not be

---

<sup>26</sup> Paek Hangmyōng, *Hangmyōng chip*, compiled and translated by Yōngwŏn (Seoul: Sōngbo Munhwajae Yŏn'guwŏn, 2006), 93.

engaged in productive labor.<sup>27</sup> More revolutionarily, Sot'aesan argues that Korean Buddhism at that time should be reformed in all aspects: “1) from the Buddhism from abroad to Buddhism for Koreans; 2) from the Buddhism of the past to the Buddhism of the present and future; 3) from the Buddhism of a few monks residing in the mountains to the Buddhism of the general public; 4) from the sectarian-oriented Buddhism into a non-sectarian Buddhism integrating separate teachings; 5) from the devotional form of Buddhism to the Buddhism of practice.”<sup>28</sup> Hangmyōng’s main interest was focused on the reformation of the Korean monastic administration as a Sōn abbot in charge of a monastery. Sot'aesan, however, was not bound by any associations with Buddhist monasteries, therefore his reform vision of Korean Buddhism took a broader view and considered various aspects of Korean Buddhism at that time. Despite their age gap, Paek Hangmyōng and Sot'aesan seemed to have had an appreciative Dharma friendship, sharing their revolutionary Buddhist reform ideas with each other.

Given that there are no other extant letters between Paek Hangmyōng and other Korean Buddhist monks preserved in the *Hangmyōng chip*, the depth of the Dharma-intimacy expressed in the letters is even more compelling. Among the five total letters in the section of “Collected Letters,” two are short and formal New Year’s greeting cards exchanging between Japanese Zen master, Sōen Shaku (釋宗演. 1860–1919) and Paek Hangmyōng. The rest of the letters, which are introduced above, are exchanged between Pak Chungbin and Paek Hangmyōng. The depth and shared concerns for each other seem to be

---

<sup>27</sup> See Paek Hangmyōng’s *Sōnwōn kok* (禪園曲; Song of Sōn Monastery), in *Hangmyōng chip*, 59; “Naejang Sōnwōn kyuak,” in *Hangmyōng chip*, 102.

<sup>28</sup> See Sot'aesan’s *Chosōn Pulgyo hyōksin-ron* [Treatise on the Reformation of Chosōn Buddhism].

quite unusual. In fact, Paek Hangmyōng actively supported Sot'aesan's reform project in various ways. After having completed some preliminary preparations for the establishment of the Pulpōp yōn'guhoe [Society for the Study of the Buddhadharma], the original name of what becomes known as Won Buddhism, Sot'aesan shared the vision and progress he had made by that time with Hangmyōng. Upon hearing it, Hangmyōng proposed to offer Naejang Temple, where he was serving as abbot, as a new base for Sot'aesan's project. His proposal, however, was never pursued, due to objections raised by the majority of the monks residing at the monastery, and eventually Sot'aesan opened the Pulpōp yōn'guhoe in Iri, in the southwestern province of Chōlla-do, in 1924. These close connections between Hangmyōng and Sot'aesan clearly suggest that Won Buddhism was established through active dialogue and relationship with mainstream traditional Korean Buddhism at that time.

Despite such close associations with the mainstream Korean Buddhism at that time, the specific orientations and detailed methods regarding the reformation of Korean Buddhism were quite different. In particular, Sot'aesan had different ideas regarding the pedagogical method of *kanhwa* Sōn and the way of giving certification of enlightenment from that which had been maintained in mainstream traditional Korean monasteries. The following story tells us such a different vision and idea of Sot'aesan.

Once Sot'aesan visited Silsang Monastery and witnessed two elderly monks (Paek Hangmyōng and Han Manhō) harshly scolding a young novice who, they said, would not obey their instruction to practice "*ch'amsōn*." They said to Sot'aesan, "A person like him could not be delivered even if a thousand buddhas appeared right now. He's trash." Sot'aesan smiled and said, "Though you reverend monks have shown concern for him, you are

also preventing him from ever practicing *ch'amsŏn*.” One of the senior monks asked, “Why do you say that?” Sot’aesan said, “By demanding that a person do something he doesn’t want to do, you are making him dislike it forever. If I told you that inside the Inchang rocks of this mountain there is gold and I demanded that you crack open those rocks and extract the gold, would you trust my words and immediately start mining?” Hangmyŏng *sŏn*sa thought for a while, and said, “It would be hard to believe you and immediately start mining.” Sot’aesan said, “In the same way, if I demand that you go mining without first gaining your trust, what would you do? You would most likely think my words spurious. When a young disciple has no interest in *ch'amsŏn* or any such aspiration, if you demand that he practice *ch'amsŏn*, it would make him presume *ch'amsŏn* was spurious, and once he thinks so, wouldn’t that keep him from ever practicing it? Thus, your approach is not a skillful means of guiding a person.”

Manhŏ *hwasang* said, “If this is the case, then what would be a skillful means of guiding him?” Sot’aesan said, “Knowing that there is gold inside the rock, if you first go and mine it yourself and then make splendid use of it, people will want to know how you became wealthy. If you tell them the details to suit the degrees of their desire to know, how gratefully they would then go and mine the gold! Wouldn’t this be a skillful means of guiding others?” The senior monks sat up straight and said, “Your method of guidance is truly magnificent!”<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> This anecdote is recorded by Song Tosŏng(宋道性, 1907-1946), better known as his pen name, Chusan(主山), a younger brother of Chŏngsan. Song Tosŏng also learned to make ink drawings of Bodhidharma, the first patriarch of the Chan school, from Paek Hangmyŏng. With some modification, it is included in *The Doctrinal Books of Won Buddhism*, 387-389; See also Pak Yongdŏk, *Wŏnbulgyo ch’ogi kyodansa: Tol i sŏsŏ mulsori rŭl tŭnnŭnda*, (Iksan: Wŏnkwang University Ch’ulp’anbu, 1997), 68-71. *The Doctrinal Books of Won Buddhism*, 309-310.

The main subject of this story is about *ch'amsŏn* (參禪; “investigating Sŏn”), a term that is used interchangeably with *kanhwa* Sŏn. At that time, both the great Sŏn masters Paek Hangmyŏng and Han Manhŏ emphasized the central importance of *kanhwa* Sŏn in Korean monasteries. In this anecdote, however, Sot'aesan points out the limitation of *kanhwa* meditation in relation to the issue of pedagogy: without proper motivation, ordinary people will not be able to pursue *kanhwa* Sŏn effectively.

In fact, this admonition is not unique to Sot'aesan. As is well known, the Koryŏ-dynasty Sŏn teacher Pojo Chinul (1158-1210) also notes in his *Excerpts (Chŏryo)*, that this radical method of *kanhwa* Sŏn cannot be readily taught to ordinary people. Therefore, he said that “for the average person to succeed in practice, he must instill in himself correct understanding of nature and characteristics and of truth and falsity—in other words, generate the understanding-awakening. Only after such a sudden awakening should the *hwadu* then be used.”<sup>30</sup> Those who cannot fundamentally generate the sense of questioning with regard to the *hwadu* will lose interest in meditation. This is one of the most common problems that *kanhwa* Sŏn practitioners encounter. Particularly lay practitioners may not easily be able to practice *kanhwa* Sŏn because the technique requires such intense and complete devotion.

Secondly, Sot'aesan was critical of the efficacy and process of giving certification of enlightenment (*in'ga*) achieved through *kanhwa* Sŏn in the mainstream traditional Korean Buddhism. The following anecdote happened at Sŏktu-am.

---

<sup>30</sup> Robert E. Buswell, Jr., “Pojo Chinul and Kanhwa Sŏn: Reconciling the Language of Moderate and Radical Subitism,” in *Zen Buddhist Rhetoric in China, Korea, and Japan*, ed. Christoph Anderl (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 353.

When Sot'aesan was staying at Pongnae Hermitage, the Sŏn master Paek Hangmyŏng would come to visit, and sometimes enjoyed conversing in an extraordinary religious argot on the subject of the principle of the nature. One day, Sot'aesan told a few things to the young female novice Yi Ch'ŏngp'ung. The following day the Sŏn master arrived from Wolmyŏng Hermitage. Sot'aesan greeted him and said, "It seems that the Way is ripening for Ch'ŏngp'ung, who is over there hulling rice in a mortar." The Sŏn master went right up to Ch'ŏngp'ung and said in a loud voice, "Without moving your feet, show me the Way!" Ch'ŏngp'ung stood perfectly still, raising the pestle up into the air. The Sŏn master went inside without saying a word, and Ch'ŏngp'ung followed him in. The Sŏn Master asked, "Can you make that Bodhidharma drawing hanging on the wall walk?" Ch'ŏngp'ung answered, "Yes, I can." The Sŏn master responded, "Then make him walk." Ch'ŏngp'ung stood up and walked several steps. The Sŏn master slapped his knee in amazement and sanctioned her enlightenment, saying that she had awakened at the age of thirteen! Seeing this sight, Sot'aesan smiled and said, "Seeing the nature (viz., awakening or enlightenment) neither does nor does not involve words. However, from now on, one will not be able to give the seal of approval to 'seeing the nature' by such a method."<sup>31</sup>

As seen in the above story, Sot'aesan clearly shows his critical view about the way in which traditional monks have given certification of enlightenment particularly through the enigmatic Sŏn discourse. In the Chan tradition in East Asia, such an inscrutable acts and dialogues had been used as a way to assess and sanction a student's enlightenment. However, Sot'aesan problematizes its

---

<sup>31</sup> *The Doctrinal Books of Won Buddhism*, 309-310. Originally, the Scriptures use the term, "the founding Master" referring to Sot'aesan. I have changed "the Founding Master" into "Sot'aesan" in order to maintain a consistent tone.

efficacy and its method: such a method cannot guarantee one's actual realization, and even if one can show one's level of enlightenment through this method, this should not be the central issue in Buddhist practice. In another talk, he emphasizes much more the importance of cultivating the initial sense of enlightenment through continuous practice and of carrying out enlightened-action in daily life. How, then, did Sot'aean reform the method of *kwanhwa* Sŏn?

### **III. Sot'aesan's Re-invention of *Kanhwa* Meditation**

#### **1. From Buddhism for the Elite to Buddhism for the Common People**

Sot'aesan was mainly concerned with the issue of how to revitalize Chosŏn Buddhism, which he felt had lost its vitality in Korean society, by re-creating and re-structuring Buddhist doctrinal systems and practices so they would be more relevant and accessible to the common people. According to Sot'aesan, the potential of Buddhist teachings is limitless; if the teachings of Buddhism are well taught to the general public, they will lead them to live a better life with tranquil mind, shrewd insights, and compassionate virtues and at the same time will enable them to pursue ultimate truth in their daily lives. The wisdom of Buddhist teachings had been enjoyed only by elite minority such as monks or literati. For most of the common people, Buddhism remained merely a devotional form of practice. As mentioned above briefly, Sot'aesan suggests new reform directions of Korean Buddhism with five agendas: “1) from the Buddhism from abroad to Buddhism for Koreans; 2) from the Buddhism of the past to the Buddhism of the present and future; 3) from the Buddhism of a few monks residing in the mountains to the Buddhism of the general public; 4) from the sect-oriented Buddhism into a non-sectarian



Buddhism integrating separated teachings; 5) from the devotional form of Buddhism to the Buddhism of practice.”<sup>32</sup> Sot’aesan’s reformation of *kanhwa* Sōn is also concerned with the question of how to make what he considered an elite-oriented meditation practice into a practice more easily accessible, applicable, and relevant to the common people. To this end, Sot’aesan modified the “radical subitism” of *kanhwa* Sōn into the soteriology of “moderate subitism,” which I will explain in more detail below.<sup>33</sup> properly

## **2. Redefinition of *Kanhwa* Sōn and the Development of the Threefold Practice**

In order to examine Sot’aesan’s re-interpretation of *kanhwa* Sōn, it is necessary to look closely at *Suyang yōn’gu yoron*(修養研究要論; The Essentials of Cultivation and Inquiry),<sup>34</sup> one of the earliest doctrinal texts of Won Buddhism, in which Sot’aesan drafts his teachings for his disciples about the essentials of cultivation and inquiry, as the title suggests. In the preface of *Suyang yōn’gu yoron*, Sot’aesan explains the purpose of writing the text as follows:

The essential way of life lies in the cultivation of [the mind], the purpose of which lies in inquiry and study, and the purpose of which lies in searching for wisdom and merits. People are searching for them

---

<sup>32</sup> See Sot’aesan’s *Chosōn Pulgyo hyōksin-ron*(朝鮮佛教革新論; Treatise on the Reformation of Chosōn Buddhism).

<sup>33</sup> I borrow these terms from Buswell’s article, “Pojo Chinul and Kanhwa Sōn: Reconciling the Language of Moderate and Radical Subitism.” Buswell analyzes that Chinul also concerned about the true efficacy of *kanhwa* meditation, and therefore later Chinul changed his position of radical subitism to moderate subitism. See Buswell, “Pojo Chinul and Kanhwa Sōn,” 2012, 353.

<sup>34</sup> All translations in this paper regarding this text are mine.

in the world where various teachings are prevalent. However, not knowing the fundamental source of them, people's suffering gradually becomes serious, and various schools of thought add more confusion. In order to elucidate the fundamental source of the cultivation of the mind in the most simple and clear way, this book expounds "The Essential Treatise of Calmness and Stillness." In order to illuminate the methods of inquiry and study, it also explains "The Three Essential Practices," "The Eightfold Articles," "The List for Questions" and "The Procedure of Practice." I desperately hope that all members of this society will quickly gain the power of cultivation and resolve the lists of inquiry and study in this text, so that they will become the leaders of unawakened human beings. (*Suyang yŏn'gu yoron*)

Its preface states that the purpose of the text is to provide a brief yet essential guide to "the essential way of life." Sot'aesan elucidates that the purpose of religious practice lies in searching for wisdom and merit. This implies the pragmatic orientation of the text, rather than highlighting a supramundane, abstract goal, such as achieving enlightenment or attaining nirvana. It instructs that "the essential way of life lies in the cultivation of [the mind], the purpose of which lies in inquiry and study, and the purpose of which lies in searching for wisdom and blessings." This sequential understanding of practices suggests that Sot'aesan makes the enlightenment-oriented practices of Buddhism into a living Buddhism for the common people by which people can live out Buddhist practice in everyday life. In this regard, it can be said that its teaching is more lay-practitioner-oriented even though it is not restricted to lay persons. It basically teaches the methods of how to cultivate the calm and tranquil nature of human and how to inquire into human affairs and universal principles through questioning, not leaving daily mundane life.

In order to help practitioners to progress in inquiry, Sot'aesan teaches “the three essential practices: cultivating the mind, inquiry into principles, and choice in action” and “the eightfold articles: belief, fury, doubt, and sincere dedication; unbelief, greed, laziness, and foolishness.” Indeed, it is based on the *Suyang yŏn'gu yoron* that Sot'aesan later on developed one of the main practice pillar of Won Buddhist doctrinal system along with the “Fourfold Grace and Four Essentials.”<sup>35</sup>

Sot'aesan teaches “the threefold essentials of inquiry” consisting of “the cultivation of mind *chŏngsin suyang*(精神修養), inquiry into human affairs and universal principles *sari yŏn'gu* (事理研究), choice in action *chakŏp ch'uisa*(作業取捨).” However, Sot'aesan’s “three essentials of inquiry” is distinguished from that of traditional Buddhism: first, the Buddhist concept of “concentration” is integrated with the Daoist practice of remaining calm and tranquil. It is also clear that the text presents the spirit of integrating the three main religious traditions in East Asia: Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. For example, it explains the Buddhist concept of concentration along with the concepts of Laozi’s term “quiescence” *chŏng* (靜), and of Mengzi’s term “imperturbable mind” *pudongsim*(不動心).<sup>36</sup> Such an attitude to integrate the

---

<sup>35</sup> In Won Buddhism, the core teaching for practice is “Threefold Practice and Eight Essentials” and the core teaching for belief is “Fourfold Benevolence and Four Essentials,” consisting the two main pillars of Won Buddhist doctrine. “Threefold Practice” consists of “the cultivation of the mind, inquiry into human affairs and universal principles, and mindful choice in action.” “Eight Essentials” consisting of “the four essentials to develop: belief, passionate anger, doubt, sincere unremitting dedication, and the four essentials to forsake: unbelief, greed, laziness, and foolishness.” “Fourfold Benevolence” consists of “the benevolence of Mother Nature, of parents, of fellow beings, and of law.” “The Four Essentials” include “developing self-power, the primacy of the wise, educating others’ children, and venerating the public-spirited.” See *The Doctrinal Books of Won Buddhism*, 25-52.

<sup>36</sup> According to the *Suyang yŏngu yoron*, it says, “When one’s intention is settled in “concentration” (*chŏng*; 定), the five minds (sense bases) are not moved. Mengzi’s mind

three religious traditions, in fact, was widely and commonly shared and practiced by intellectuals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Chosŏn.

The Essential Practices of Inquiry: The Cultivation of the Mind; Inquiry into Human Affairs and Universal Principles; Making a Choice in Action [According to scripture it says that] when you cultivate your mind, your numinosity of mind *simryŏng*(心靈) will become calm and still. Delve into this why it is so.

When you delve into [human] affairs and [universal] principles, you will have a clear understanding of them. Delve into this why it is so.

When you make a choice in action [with a sense of mindfulness in using your six sense organs], you will be able to balance between easiness and hastiness, to have a clear understanding of right/wrong and benefit/harm, and to have endless wealth and fame in many years of your future life. Delve into this why it is so. (*Suyang yŏn'gu yoron*, 43)

This is the earliest form of the threefold practice in Won Buddhism. In the finalized version of *Pulgyo chŏngjŏn*(佛敎正典; The Correct Canon of Buddhism) published in 1943, all of these definitions are more clearly articulated and with greater sophistication.<sup>37</sup> One thing that we need to note is that the original form of the threefold practice of Won Buddhism, in fact, was developed in response to the subject of “inquiry (*yŏn'gu*),” which Sot'aesan reinterpreted as the core essence of *kanhwa* Sŏn, as seen above in

---

which was not perturbed and Laozi's quiescence after returning to the fundamental refer to this *chŏngjŏng*(定靜; concentration and quiescence).” See *Suyang yŏngu yoron*, 2.

<sup>37</sup> See the most current translated version of *Wŏnbulgyo kyŏjŏn*, *The Doctrinal Books of Won Buddhism*, 46-52.

the title of the section; the three essentials of *chǒngsin suyang*, *sari yǒn'gu*, and *chakōp ch'uisa* are explained as the subdivision of the subject of “the essential practices of inquiry.” From this fact, it seems to be clear that *kanhwa* Sōn was at the core of his agenda when Sot'aesan began to undertake the project of reforming Korean Buddhism in the early 1920s. In other words, Sot'aesan divides *kanhwa* Sōn technique into the three main features: calming the mind, questioning or inquiry, and realizing the calm and wise mind in daily life. This initial form of “the three essentials of inquiry” developed into “the threefold training” *samhak*(三學) later based on the traditional Buddhist system of threefold practice: *silā*, *samādhi* and *prajñā*.

### **3. Transforming the Intellectual Obstacles of *Kanhwa* Sōn (*Chihae*; 知解) into Sources of Wisdom and Gradual Awakening**

Sot'aesan took the core essence of *kanhwa* Sōn to be the faculty of inquiry (*yǒn'gu*) not the generation of the great sensation of doubt (*ūijōng*), bringing special attention to the importance of “questioning” in the practice of Buddhism. Rather than merely relying on canonical authority and following the instructions of the scriptures, he wants his students to question every single scriptural teaching based on their own rational reasoning and understanding, through which they can internalize, or privatize them, and furthermore they can create a right Dharma for themselves and others in accord with time and place.

This understanding of *kanhwa* Sōn is quite different from its conventional understanding. In the mainstream Korean Buddhist tradition, *kanhwa* Sōn is intended to help practitioners shut down all kinds of intellectual understanding or conceptual understanding in order to lead them to the state of non-ratiocinative enlightenment. By considering the core efficacy of *kanhwa*

meditation to be the faculty of questioning itself, however, Sot'aesan adopts the technique of *kanhwa* as a way to cultivate the power of inquiry, by which one can achieve rapid clarification of understanding.<sup>38</sup> This is quite opposite the usual understanding of *kanhwa* Sōn, since *kanhwa* Sōn is guided to abandon all kinds of intellectual understanding (*chihae*; 知解).<sup>39</sup> However, Sot'aesan takes intellectual understanding as necessary in order to achieve wisdom and to internalize teachings, or to have one's own rational reasoning.

In fact, cultivating clarification of understanding and reasoning is one of the most important Buddhist values. Many schools of Buddhism in particular in Indian Yogācāra tradition stress the importance of “valid knowledge” *pramāṇa*(量), which is defined technically as a consciousness that is not deceived with regard to its object.<sup>40</sup> They posit two forms of valid knowledge: direct perception (*pratyakṣa*) and inference (*anumāna*), with the former deriving from correct sense perception and the latter deriving from correct reasoning.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, Sot'aesan considers all of these capacities as the basis for the practice of “making a mindful and righteous choice in action,” which help one to perfect one's action based on both the calm and tranquil nature and clarifying understanding. For example, instead of inculcating certain religious regulations or teachings, Sot'aesan asks his disciples to inquire into the authoritative teachings of the scriptures by applying their own analysis or

---

<sup>38</sup> See *The Doctrinal Books of Won Buddhism*, 49-50.

<sup>39</sup> Taehan Pulgyo Chogyejong p'ogyowōn p'ogyo yōn'gusil, *Kanhwa Sōn Ipmun* (Seoul: Chogyejong Ch'ulp'ansa, 2006), 166-167.

<sup>40</sup> See Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Donald S. Lopez Jr. ed., *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 660-661.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 661.

critical examination; this process of inquiry will ensure that they will have their own reasoning and understanding in making a choice in action based on the understanding of the teachings.

[According to scripture it says that] when you cultivate your mind, your numinosity of mind *simryōng*(心靈) will become calm and still. Delve into this why it is so.

When you delve into [human] affairs and [universal] principles, you will have a clear understanding of them. Delve into this why it is so.

When you make a choice in action [with a sense of mindfulness in using your six sense organs], you will be able to balance between easiness and hastiness, to have a clear understanding of right/wrong and benefit/harm, and to have endless wealth and fame many years into your future life. Delve into this why it is so. (*Suyang yōn'gu yoron*, 43)

Sot'aesan adds a phrase in each of exposition of Dharma that encourages practitioners to arouse a questioning mind: “Delve into why it is so.” This is a way to encourage practitioners to enhance the faculty of questioning or doubting by allowing them to think about each teaching with their own analysis and examination, not merely accepting them by relying on the authority. Through the process of arousing doubt or question regarding each teaching, practitioners indeed begin to internalize it by either actually attempting to practice it or coming into their own reasoning.

The above cases show a general tendency to highlight a sense of questioning with “why?” in the process of learning scripture, and there are some other variations of this kind of examples that ask more specifically “to delve into the result of observing Buddhist teachings, or what is fundamental and what

is secondary, or the cause and effect, or the principle or the nature of each question.”

Belief means to determine (settle) your mind between favorable and unfavorable minds. Delve into the result of this belief.

Enthusiasm is to arouse your mind regarding favorable and unfavorable minds so that it is to encourage you to accomplish anything. Delve into the result of this passion.

Doubt arises for those who do not know, so therefore whenever doubt arouses in your mind, delve into that issue immediately. Delve into the result of this doubt.

Sincerity means a remitting state of mind, so therefore delve into the result of this sincerity.

*(Suyang yŏn'gu yoron, 44)*

The above-mentioned examples show us that questioning the results of each mental state motivates practitioners to actually practice these values in their lives in order to properly evaluate their results. Sot'aesan states the objective of inquiry into human affairs and universal principles as follows: “Therefore, our aim is, by inquiring in advance into the unfathomable principles of heavenly creation and the multifarious affairs of humanity, to know them through clear analysis and quick adjudication when confronted by them in real life.”<sup>42</sup> In this regard, it can be said that Sot'aesan transforms the intellectual obstacles of *kanhwa* Sŏn into sources of wisdom and gradual awakening in his teaching.

---

<sup>42</sup> *The Doctrinal Books of Won Buddhism*, 49-50.



#### **4. Redefinition of the Three Essentials of *Kanhwa* Sŏn into the Four Essentials**

Another special characteristic of Sot'aesan's reinterpretation of *kanhwa* Sŏn is that Sot'aesan transforms "the three essentials of belief, fury, doubt" that Gaofeng Yuanmiao stresses in *Sŏnyo* into "Four Essentials: belief, fury, doubt, and sincere dedication."

Belief means to determine (settle) your mind between favorable and unfavorable states of mind. Delve into the result of this belief.

Fury is to arouse your mind regarding favorable and unfavorable states of mind so that you are encouraged to accomplish anything. Delve into the result of this passion.

Doubt arises for those who do not know, so therefore whenever doubt arouses in your mind, delve into that issue immediately. Delve into the result of this doubt.

Sincere dedication means an unremitting state of mind, so therefore delve into the result of this sincerity. (*Suyang yŏn'gu yoron*, 44)

Sot'aesan adds "sincere dedication" as one of the important driving forces to progress the practice into "the three essentials," with which practitioners keep motivating themselves to practice until they achieve their initial vow of enlightenment. This unremitting dedicated mind is particularly important in achieving one's goal, for it becomes the driving force to push oneself forward despite the inevitable hardship or failure that people will encounter in the process of achieving enlightenment. In order to ensure that these four essentials develop, he also adds the four essentials to forsake as follows:

Unbelief arises when your mind is not settled regarding any issue. Delve into the cause and effect of unbelief.

Greed means the excessiveness regarding any issue. Delve into the cause and effect of greed.

Laziness means the aversion to act when you try to accomplish anything. Delve into the cause and effect of laziness.

Ignorance is the basis of being ruined for human. Delve into the cause and effect of ignorance. (*Suyang yŏn'gu yoron*, 45)

By adding these essentials to forsake in practice, which prevent practitioners from progressing in their practice, Sot'aesan allows his disciples to ponder upon the cause and effect of each factor, so that they naturally come to their own reasoning about how to propel themselves forward. They are to cultivate the attitude to use the negative forces innate human beings into positive driving force to progress in the practice through questioning. Furthermore, Sot'aesan expands its usage of the eight essentials not only in practicing the threefold practice in general, but also in solving all kinds of questions and problems people may routinely encounter in their daily lives.

### **5) New Role of Doubt in Practice: From Hwadu(話頭) to Ŭidu(疑頭)**

Before his students were to begin engaging in kahnwa contemplation, Sot'aesan poses a preliminary practice: studying some of basic teachings of Buddhism. Sot'aesan, in this regard, particularly explains that the main purpose of studying “scripture” is to know the right spiritual path that guides practitioners to the right direction in practice.<sup>43</sup> Once practitioners have to some degree familiarized themselves with the basic teachings of Buddhism, Sot'aesan then allows them to practice “examining the meditative topic.

---

<sup>43</sup> “Scripture” refers to our designated texts and other scriptures used for reference, so that practitioners may know the road that goes in the right direction of practice.” (*The Doctrinal Books of Won Buddhism*, 58)

“Cases for questioning (*ũidu*)” means to inquire into, and be evaluated on, topics that create doubt regarding the universal principles of great and small, being and nonbeing, and the human affairs of right and wrong, benefit and harm, as well as regarding the *hwadus* (meditative topics) enunciated by past buddhas and enlightened masters. This is intended for practitioners who are engaged in a profound stage of inquiry to attain a clear analysis of human affairs or universal principles.<sup>44</sup>

*Kanhwa* Sŏn is also often called *hwadu* practice because it is a meditation technique to concentrate on the meditative topic (*hwadu*) that derive from *kong’ans*. In his doctrinal teachings, however, Sot’aesan changes the name of *hwadu* into *ũidu* [lit., the head of doubt], which emphasizes the importance of the faculty of questioning itself rather than the doubt regarding the rhetorical phrases typically employed as Sŏn Buddhist meditative topics (*hwadu*). By changing the name of this crucial term, Sot’aesan seems to more focus on the action of “questioning” itself rather than to concentrate on a specific contemplative phrase. Keeping a sense of doubt in whatever one perceives will challenge the way in which one conventionally views and perceives the world and thereby open up the possibility of seeing the world in a whole new way.<sup>45</sup>

The concept of “doubt” (Skt. *vicikitsā*, Ch. *yi* 疑, Kor. *ũi*), which did not have constructive or positive connotations in the Indian Buddhist tradition as one of the negative mental hindrances counteracting meditative absorption, turned into a positive concept that is necessitated for practitioners to propel

---

<sup>44</sup> *The Doctrinal Books of Won Buddhism*, 58-59.

<sup>45</sup> I have come up with this phrasing while discussing with Professor Buswell. In the process of competing this paper, I have owed so much to Prof. Buswell’s insights and clarification.

their meditation practice forward in East Asian Chan Buddhism.<sup>46</sup> The sensation of doubt has become the motive force of enlightenment, “a palpable, conative sensation that ultimately serves to pervade all of one’s thoughts, feelings, emotions, and eventually even one’s physical body with the doubt generated through *kanhwa* practice.”<sup>47</sup> In the context of *kanhwa* Sōn, therefore, the sensation of doubt is more correlated with the notion of belief as an affective notion, rather than with that of wisdom or intellect.<sup>48</sup>

This concept of “doubt” in Sot’aesan’s doctrine and practice, however, once again was given new connotations. As Buswell explains in his article, even though the notion of doubt mainly refers to a negative hindrance in Indian Buddhist context, in some other Indian religious texts such as the *Brāhmāṇas*, it also suggests a positive function to promote religious questioning or philosophical inquiry.<sup>49</sup> Sot’aesan’s usage of the term of doubt extends from this positive function of philosophical inquiry; it encourages all kinds of questioning regarding human affairs and universal principles, and thereby helps practitioners to sharpen not only religious wisdom or philosophical insight, but also knowledge or intellect that is necessary in their daily lives. Accordingly, Sot’aesan defines the concept of doubt or questioning in his scripture: “Questioning means wanting to discover and know what we do not

---

<sup>46</sup> Robert E. Buswell, Jr., “The Transformation of Doubt (Yijing/Ŭijōng; 疑情) in Chinese Buddhist Meditation: The Testimony of Gaofeng Yuanmiao(高峰原妙, 1238-1295),” in Halvor Eifring, ed., *Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004), 226.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 230-231.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 230.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 229.

know about human affairs and universal principles, which is the motive force that reveals what we are ignorant of when we try to accomplish anything.”<sup>50</sup>

His extended usage of the concept of doubt can be examined in more detail by closely looking at the “list for inquiry” in *Suyang yŏn’gu yoron*, which contains 137 cases of topics for questioning (*ūidu*). In general, of the questions in the list can be divided into two groups: one is to promote mental, verbal, and behavioral transformation in accord with Buddhist teachings; the other is to foster or enhance practitioners’ understanding regarding human affairs and universal principles. The former includes a total of thirty questions among these 137 cases, most of which encourage practitioners to practice the Buddhist precepts or to regulate their conduct. In so doing, they tend to prevent themselves from engaging in unfavorable intentional, verbal, and behavioral actions while cultivating pure and compassionate actions by examining why such a precept or a certain regulation is necessary in practice:

1. It is said that killing sentient beings is a serious transgression. Delve into why it is so.
2. It is said that stealing is a serious transgression. Delve into why it is so.
3. It is said that committing sexual misconduct is a serious transgression. Delve into why it is so.
4. It is said that making impertinent remarks is a serious transgression. Delve into why it is so.
5. It is said that speaking flowery and ingratiating words while having opposite mind is a serious transgression. Delve into why it is so.
6. It is said that being double-tongued is a serious transgression. Delve into why it is so.

---

<sup>50</sup> *The Doctrinal Books of Won Buddhism*, 52.

7. It is said that using harsh speech is a serious transgression. Delve into why it is so.
8. It is said that harboring anger beyond courtesy becomes the basis of transgression. Delve into why it is so.
9. It is said that consuming intoxicants excessively becomes the basis of transgression. Delve into why it is so.
10. It is said that being ostentatious in wearing clothes beyond courtesy becomes the basis of transgression. Delve into why it is so.
11. Wishing to receive special treatment without doing something good that deserves such a treatment will produce the basis of transgression. Delve into why it is so.
12. It is said that improper singing or dancing and spending time idly become the basis of transgression. Delve into why it is so.
13. It is said that being obsessed by the pursuit of gold, silver, and precious gems without knowing the nature of them become the basis of transgression. Delve into why it is so.
14. It is said that the habits of eat at an improper and of sleeping at an improper time become the basis of transgression. Delve into this why it is so.
15. It is said, “Teach yourself day by day, hour by hour.” Delve into why it is so.
16. It is said, “Do not exhort others to do anything they do not wish to do lest they be offended but be concerned only with your own affairs.” Delve into why it is so.
17. It is said, “If anything goes wrong, do not blame others, but examine yourself.” Delve into why it is so.
18. It is said, “If you cannot take it, so do others.” Delve into why it is so.
19. It is said, “Regarding any issue, respect each other and consider each other.” Delve into why it is so.
20. It is said, “As a practitioner (*yŏn’guja*), even at the risk of your life, do not do what is wrong, no matter how much you may want to do it.” Delve into why it is so.

21. It is said, “As a practitioner (*yŏn’guja*), even at the risk of your life, do what is right, no matter how much you may dislike doing it.” Delve into why it is so.
22. While concealing one’s faults, people try to reveal other’s faults. Delve into why it is so.
23. While considering mine important, people do not consider other’s less important. Delve into why it is so.
24. Why is it that people’s conducts disagree with their words. Delve in to why it is so.
25. Why is it that honest advice is harsh to the ear. Delve into why it is so.
26. It is said, “Serve all sentient beings as if serving a living Buddha.” Delve into the principle of this saying.
27. It is said that the Way is accomplished when you cultivate your innate nature by knowing it. Delve into how you accomplish it.
28. It is said that the way you teach others is to cultivate the Way on your own. Delve into why it is so.
29. It is said that mere external knowledge instead prevents you from actualizing the Way. Delve into why it is so.
30. It is said that mere external good conduct instead prevents you from knowing the Way. Delve into why it is so. (*Suyang yŏn’gu yoron*, 46-70)

The latter group, which consists of total 107 cases, can be divided into five sub-categories according to its related theme: 1) Buddhism, 2) Daoism, 3) Confucianism, 4) common ideas both superstitious and cultural, natural phenomena, and 5) the principle of human nature. There are a total of twenty-three questions that are related to Buddhism, including Sŏn *kong’ans* and general Buddhist teachings:

37. As for practitioners (*kongbuja*; 工夫者), “What is not separated from the self-nature is called practice” (*pulli chsǒng wal kong*; 不離自性曰工). Delve into what this (what is not separated from one’s self-nature) means.<sup>51</sup>

38. According to the Buddha’s words, practitioners should repay the four great benevolences<sup>52</sup> above. In order to repay the benevolences, delve into what the benevolences are.

39. According to the Buddha’s words, practitioners should save the sentient beings who have fallen into the three evil paths (*akto*; 惡塗). Delve into how to save them.

---

<sup>51</sup> According to Pojo Chinul’s *Susimgyŏl* (修心訣; *Secrets on Cultivating the Mind*), it says, “this was the sudden school adept’s equal maintenance of *samādhi* and *prajñā* that never leaves the self-nature.(此是頓門箇者 不離自性 定慧等持也)”. See *Collected Works of Korean Buddhism* vol. 2: *Chinul Selected Works*, trans. by Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (Paju: Chunil Munhwasa, 2012), 239. The phrase of “that which is not separated from the self-nature is called “practice,” and that which is holding no-thought in the application [of the six sense organs] is called “virtue” *pulli chasŏng wal kong ũngyong munyŏm wal tŏk* (不離自性曰工 應用無念曰德) appeared on the first page of *Pulpŏp yŏn’guhoe kyuyak* [Regulations of the Society for the Study of the Buddha-dharma] published in 1927 as well as on the last page of Sot’aesan’s *Hoesŏng kok* (回性曲; (The Song of Returning to the Nature) in which Sot’aesan expresses the happiness of returning to the nature while staying in Pongnae hermitage in 1920. One day during the Winter Retreat in 1929, Sot’aesan asked his disciples, “It is said, ‘Never leave the self-nature.’ Is there someone whose mind never leaves the self-nature even a moment?” At that time, Cho Songgwang replied, “It is breath that we cannot leave even a moment. If we understand this principle and be mindful with it, then we can never leave the self-nature.” See Ryu Sŏng’ae, “Munmok tullŏ pogi: Kongbuja nŭn pulli chasŏng wal kong ira hayŏt ũni ōttŏhan kŏsi pulli chasŏng inji yŏn’gu halsa 38,” *Wŏnbulgyo sinmun*, November 19, 2010, <http://www.wonnews.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=99387> (accessed April 20, 2018).

<sup>52</sup>According to *Taesŭng ponsaeng simji kwangyŏng* (大乘本生心地觀經; T.3.159.2: 297a7), it says that there are four benevolences: the benevolence of parents, of sentient beings, of king, and of three treasures (世出世恩有其四種 一父母恩 二眾生恩 三國王恩 四三寶恩 如是四恩). According to *Chŏngpŏpnyŏmch’ŏgyŏng*(正法念處經, *Smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*; T.17. 0721. 061: 0359b07), it says that there are four benevolences: the benevolence of mother, of father, of *tathāgata*, Dharma master (何等為四 一者母 二者父 三者如來 四者說法法師). According to *Sŏkssi yoram* 釋氏要覽 (T.54.2127. 02: 0289c01), it says that there are four benevolences: the benevolence of parents, of masters, of king, and charity (恩有四焉 一父母恩 二師長恩 三國王恩 四施主恩).



46. Delve into why and with what vow the Buddha as a crown prince of a kingdom renounced the throne entered into the mountains to search for the Way (*ipsan sudo*; 入山修道) by.

47. It is said, “Illuminate the one mind through the myriad dharmas.” Delve into what it is.

81. Even though it is said that being evil will be punished, sometimes we encounter an occasion that evil people live in honor and wealth. Delve into why it is so.

82. According to the Buddha’s words, it is said that there exist the world systems of the trichiliocosm. Delve into whether they really exist.

83. It is said that the Buddha will manifest himself into a hundred million transformations. Delve into whether he really does.

84. It is said that the Buddha is the great teacher of the Way throughout the triple world and the compassionate father of the four modes of birth. Delve into how he can be such a teacher.

85. It is said that the Buddha is the master of lifespan, happiness and wealth. Delve into how he can be such a master.

92. It is said that the Buddha was enlightened on the eighth of the twelfth month of the lunar calendar by watching a bright star. Delve into why it is so.

95. It is said that the myriad dharmas return to one. Delve into where the one return.

96. Delve into what that thing which is not associated with the myriad dharmas is.

97. It is said that the Buddha descended into his royal family without leaving Tusita Heaven. Delve into why it is so.

98. It is said that the Buddha delivered all sentient beings while still in his mother’s womb. Delve into why it is so.

99. In an assembly on Vulture Peak, the Buddha held up a flower and showed it to the congregation together with 1,200 people. It is said that Venerable Mahākāśyapa’s face broke into a subtle smile. Delve into what this means.

100. *The Song of Human Nature*(性理頌) says, “I have a volume of scripture that is written without paper or ink. It does not contain a single word yet always radiates light.” Delve into what this means.

101. A monk asked the Chan Master Zhaozhou(趙州禪師), “Does a dog have the Buddha-nature?” Zhaozhou answered, “No.” Delve into why Zhaozhou answered, “No” despite the fact that the Buddha said, “All sentient beings including even worms and insects have the Buddha-nature.”

102. *The Sutra of the Six Patriarch*(六祖經) says, “There is *one thing*: Its width is wide enough to cover the sky and the earth; its darkness is as dark as a lacquer case; its brightness is as bright as the sun. But *this thing* is always in the function and using [of the six sense organs].” Delve into what *this thing* is.

103. A monk asked the Chan Master Zhaozhou, “What was the Bodhidharma’s intention in coming from the West to the East?” Zhaozhou said, “The cypress tree in the front garden.” Delve into the meaning of this.

104. The Chan master Linqi(臨濟禪師) asked the great, precise, and precisely accurate meaning of the Buddha-dharma to the Chan master Huangbo. Then, the Chan master without answering immediately stood up and hit him thirty times. Delve into the meaning of this beating

105. Delve into this: When a person is in deep, dreamless sleep, where is the numinous awareness that makes one sentient?

106. One disciple asked the Buddha whether the Way exists or not. It is said that the Buddha answered, “Were I to teach you it exists, it would be against the Way; were I to teach you it does not, it would be against the Way.” Delve into why it is so.

107. The Chan Master Guishan(澹山, 771-853) said to his disciple, “After my death, I will be born as an ox in a certain house in a village down there, having its right horn carved with the name “Guishan.” Should you call it Guishan or an Ox? Delve into what is the right way to call it. (*Suyang yǒn’gu yoron*, 46-70)

These questions include some of the most fundamental Buddhist teachings such as the life of the Buddha, the principle of cause and effect, six destinies, the original self-nature (自性), the cycle of rebirth, the source of blessing and

poverty, the trichiliocosm (Skt. *trisāhasra-mahāsāhasra-loka-dhātu*; 三千大千世界), Buddha's compassion and enlightenment, and Chan *kong'ans* such as Mahākāśyapa's flower sermon, Zhaozhou's *wu*(無) *hwadu*, the purpose of the Bodhidharma's coming from the west, Huangbo's thirty strokes, etc.

Eight questions are originated from the *Yinfu jing* (Secret Planning). One each question respectively takes from the *Tonggyōng taejōn* (Canon of Eastern Learning), the *Daode jing*(道德經), the *Lunyu*(論語), the *Yijing*(易經), and the *Mengzi*(孟子).

108. "I [K. Chōnje: Heavenly Lord] have a hallowed amulet charm. Its name is a Miraculous Medicine. Its form is the Great Ultimate (Kor. T'aeguk, Ch. Taiqi). Again, its form is a Kung-gung (a bow and a bow); 吾有靈符其名仙藥其形太極又形弓弓." Delve into the principle of this.

40. A great person accommodates, having the virtue of Heaven and Earth, the brightness of the sun and the moon, the sequence of the four seasons, and having the good and evil of the spirit(大人與天地合其德與日月合其明 與四時合其序 與鬼神合其吉凶)." Delve into how this can work.

114. Kongzi said, "I string my Dao with one single thread." Delve into how you can do this."

109. Laozi said, "The Dao that can be spoken of is not the eternal Dao." Delve into this issue.

115. Mengzi said, "I cultivate my flood-like vital energy (氣運) well. Delve into what this energy is. (*Suyang yōn 'gu yoron*, 46-70)

Some of the most intriguing questions are related to natural phenomena. There are a total of twenty questions asking about the principles of natural phenomena:

93. Examine the stars: what kinds of these things are.
118. Examine when all things in the universe firstly appeared.
119. Examine how many trees and plants exist in mountains and streams on earth.
121. Examine how day and night change.
122. Examine the principle of how the ebb and flow of the tide occurs.
123. Examine the origin of the sun and the moon.
124. Examine the principle of how the four seasons of spring, summer, fall, and winter change.
125. Examine how clouds are formed.
126. Examine how fog is formed.
127. Examine the principle of what causes rain.
128. Examine the principle of what causes snows.
129. Examine how thunder and lightning are caused.
130. Examine how an earthquake occurs.
131. Examine the principle of what causes thunderbolt.
132. Examine the principle of what causes hail.
133. Examine the principle of what causes dew.
134. Examine the principle of what causes frost.
135. Examine the principle of what causes a rainbow.

136. Examine where the winds blow.

137. Examine the principle of what cause an eclipse of the sun and the moon.

(*Suyang yŏn'gu yoron*, 46-70)

The origin of these questions indeed can be traced back to Sot'aesan's own questions, which motivated his long spiritual journey during his childhood. Accordingly, it is quite understandable to see these questions included in the list of questioning. However, these questions may have some other purposes: to develop a scientific understanding and approach toward natural phenomena, by which people can break down their superstitious understandings regarding natural changes. Most ordinary Korean people during the 1920s under Japanese colonial rule rarely had a public education. Therefore, their curiosity about these natural phenomena mostly relied on their superstitious understandings, which used to be a source of people's groundless fear or ignorance. By cultivating this kind of scientific approach, people could not only expand their scientific knowledge but also get away from their own unsubstantiated apprehension and superstition. In addition, they can cultivate their experimental and scientific spirits in general in everyday life, rather than being ignorant about those phenomena.

There are some other unique cases for questioning, which ask practitioners to delve into two aspects of not only natural phenomena but also philosophical metaphysical concepts such as good and evil, or the way (Kor. *to*, Ch. *dao*; 道) and its virtue/power (Kor. *tŏk*, Ch. *de*; 德). The two aspects expressed with two Chinese characters of "great and small" (Kor. *taeso*, Ch. *daxiao*; 大小) can be interpreted in various ways: fundamental and secondary, ultimate hidden universal principle and conventionally manifested phenomena, etc.

31. Even goodness (Kor. *sŏn*, Ch. *shan*; 善) has two aspects of “great and small”. Delve into why it is so.
32. Even evilness (Kor. *ak*, Ch. *e*; 惡) has two aspects of “great and small”. Delve into why it is so.
33. Even the way (Kor. *to*, Ch. *dao*; 道) has two aspects of “great and small”. Delve into why it is so.
34. Even the virtue (Kor. *tŏk*, Ch. *de*; 德) has two aspects of “great and small”. Delve into why it is so.

(*Suyang yŏn'gu yoron*, 51)

This initial doctrinal concept of “great and small” is deployed later by Sot’aesan in *The Correct Canon* in a more sophisticated manner. “Great” means the original essence of all things in the universe. “Small” means that the myriad phenomena are distinguished by their shapes and forms.<sup>53</sup> By these metaphysical and analytical, and ultimate and conventional approaches to the truth, Sot’aesan seems to want his students to cultivate both macro and micro perspectives on the universal principle of human life, the world, and the universe.

By having a sense of doubt in all circumstances, practitioners will not only have a chance to be free from their own personal, habitual preconceptions or deceived perception, but also to be free from their misbeliefs, superstitions, or conventional ways of thinking. This method is further developed later on in his more systematized doctrine. There, Sot’aesan provides a new framework for inquiry: *tae/so yu/mu* (大小有無; great and small, being and non-being). Through this framework, practitioners will examine their conventional ways of thinking and thereby they will have a chance to step out of their habitual ways of thinking by bringing a holistic view to their vision of the world: the

---

<sup>53</sup> *The Doctrinal Books of Won Buddhism*, 48.

ultimate aspect of truth (great), the phenomenal aspect of truth (small), and the changing aspect of truth (being and non-being). Regarding the issue of daily human affairs, Sot'aesan gives another framework of *si/bi yi/hae* (是非利害; right and wrong, benefit and harm) to be used for analyzing them, so that they will be able to understand where their suffering and happiness come from.<sup>54</sup>

### 6) Transforming *Kanhwa Sōn* into *Sōngni*(性理) Sōn

Regarding the ultimate awakening beyond conceptualization and rationalization that is supposed to be attained through *kanhwa* mediation, Sot'aesan adds another method in addition to the practice subject of “cases for questioning”: the “the principle of the nature” (*sōngni*). “The principle of the nature’ means to enable practitioners to resolve and understand the original principle of all things in the universe and the fundamental principle of our self-nature.”<sup>55</sup> While the practice of “cases for questioning” aims at attaining an analytical understanding of human affairs such as right/wrong and benefit/harm, based on which practitioners can more easily choose a right action in a timely manner when using their six sense organs, the practice of “the principle of the nature” aims for attaining awakening intuitively, which allows them to understand the nature of the mind from a perspective entirely beyond analytical intellect and conceptualization. Both these methods seem to be in a symbiotic relationship to balance between analytical understanding, and non-conceptual, non-intellectual understandings of reality.

---

<sup>54</sup> See “The Objective of Inquiry into Human Affairs and Universal Principles,” in *The Doctrinal Books of Won Buddhism*, 48-51.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

Even if Sot'aesan re-interpreted *kanhwa* Sōn as a practice to cultivate the sense of inquiry and questioning, he emphasizes the importance of the ultimate state of enlightenment. He says, “If the gateway of a religion does not elucidate ‘the principle of the nature,’ then that religion is not a consummate Way. That is because ‘the principle of the nature’ becomes the master of all dharmas and the foundation of all principles.” Here, what “the principle of the nature” means “the nature” in the concept of “seeing the nature,” which is one way of expressing “enlightenment” in the Sōn Buddhist tradition. He also composed a verse for his disciples while staying at Pongnae hermitage:

On the winding road up Pyōnsan,

A rock sits listening to the sound of a stream.

Nothing, nothing, but no nothing either.

Not, not, but not not either.<sup>56</sup>

邊山九曲路 石立聽水聲 無無亦無無 非非亦非非<sup>57</sup>

Then, he said, “If you understand what this means, you are a person who has awakened to the Way.” This is a way in which Sōn masters used to express their level of understanding of the reality, which is ineluctable and beyond conventional ways of thinking, and therefore it is considered the most fundamental source of all dharmas and religious teachings. Sot'aesan expressed the importance of being awakened to *the nature* by giving his transmission verse to the public one year before he passed away.

---

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.

<sup>57</sup> *Wōnbulgyo kyojōn*, 260.



Being into nonbeing and nonbeing into being,  
Turning and turning – in the ultimate,  
Being and nonbeing are both void,  
Yet this void is complete.<sup>58</sup>

And he supplemented this verse by saying,

“Being is a realm of change; nonbeing is a realm that is unchanging. But this realm is the locus that can be called neither being nor nonbeing. It is referred to as ‘turning and turning’ and ‘ultimate,’ but these two are nothing more than mere expressions offered as a teaching device. So what is the point of saying that these are ‘both void’ or ‘complete’? Since this realm is the true essence of the nature, do not try to understand it by ratiocination; rather, you should awaken to this realm through contemplation.”<sup>59</sup>

Therefore, we can say that the ultimate state to which *kanhwa* Sŏn is designed to lead remains as the practice of *the nature* in Sot’aesan’s doctrinal system.<sup>60</sup>

### **7) Ways of Complementing *Kanhwa* Sŏn: Lecturing and Reflection**

There are two main problems Sot’aesan sees in *kanhwa* Sŏn: first, beginners without any basic understanding of Buddhist doctrinal teachings may have difficulties in generating a sense of doubt through *kanhwa* meditation; and

---

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>60</sup> Chŏng Sunil, “Wŏnbulgyo ‘sŏngni’ ūi sŏngripsa yŏn’gu,” *Wŏnbulgyo sasang kwa chonggyo munhwa* 33: 54-76. (2006).

second, even after initial awakening through *kanhwa* meditation, practitioners will encounter various kinds of sensory stimuli that may cause their sensory perceptions to be tainted by greed, anger, and ignorance.

First, Sot'aesan creates an environment for practitioners to be able to initiate *kanhwa* Sŏn by helping them to arouse their intensive concentration on certain Buddhist phrases or problems. As I mentioned earlier, the critical issue in *kanhwa* practice is whether or not practitioners can arouse an intense sensation of doubt, and the problem Sot'aesan sees with this technique is that ordinary people cannot usually generate the kind of intensive and extensive concentration that *kanhwa* Sŏn demands.

Instead of just giving them a question to produce a sense of doubt, Sot'aesan set up an environment that can help them to arouse their intensive doubt and to maintain such a questioning mind by making them deliver a formal lecture in a public space.

When they are asked to give a formal lecture on a specific topic in a public space, such as in a Dharma service, practitioners are naturally motivated to formulate a very intensive state of concentration, and in that concentrated mind for certain period of time, they delve into the question.

“Lecturing” refers to settling on a certain issue regarding human affairs or universal principles and expounding on its significance, so that practitioners may hone their wisdom while exchanging opinions in front of the congregation with due formality.<sup>61</sup>

In addition, preparing a lecture on a certain Buddhist topic provides an opportunity for practitioners to systematically understand the basic nature and characteristics of reality through the process of studying Buddhist teachings.

---

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

Finally, giving a formal lecture in front of many other practitioners and masters provides a way for students to undergo a public evaluation of their own levels of understanding. In this regard, “lecturing” in Sot’aesan’s teachings can be a way to supplement, or serve as preliminary practice to, *kanhwa* Sōn.

Sot’aesan was also concerned with “the true efficacy of *kanhwa* meditation.” Even if practitioners attain awakening through *kanhwa* meditation, if the enlightened state that they achieved during meditation cannot be maintained in everyday life, Sot’aesan considers it as useless.<sup>62</sup> Particularly, the key point here is whether or not practitioners’ sensory contacts and perceptions produce any greed, anger, and ignorance when their six sense organs are in contact with sensory objects. In this regard, both Chinul and Sot’aesan support the soteriology of “moderate subitism,” which assumes the necessity of gradual cultivation even after initial awakening (*tonŏ chŏmsu*).

Sot’aesan designed specific methods that can frequently remind practitioners to be free from their value judgments and sensory contacts colored by their ignorance, negative emotions and thoughts based on the belief that the universal existence of the Buddha nature within all living beings will be only disturbed and agitated when it comes in contact with situational sensory conditions. Therefore, what is necessary for practitioners is to remind themselves to return back to their original nature whenever the moments of disturbance, ignorance, and wrongdoing arise in their minds. According to “The Essential Dharmas of Daily Practice,” it says:

---

<sup>62</sup> In *The Correct Canon*, Sot’aesan says that if we cannot put the results of practice in daily life, “this would like a tree that has good trunk, branches, flowers, and leaves, but that bears no fruit.” (*The Doctrinal Books of Won Buddhism*, 50-51)

1. The mind ground is originally free from disturbance, but disturbance arise in response to sensory conditions; let us give rise to the absorption of the self-nature by letting go of those disturbances.
2. The mind ground is originally free from delusion, but delusion arise in response to sensory conditions; let us give rise to the wisdom of the self-nature by letting go of those delusions.
3. The mind ground is originally free from wrong-doing, but wrong-doings arise in response to the sensory conditions; let us give rise to the precepts of the self-nature by letting go of those wrong-doings.<sup>63</sup>

Based on the general Mahayana belief of the Buddha-nature within all living beings, he sees that people usually remain in the originally enlightened state of mind once they instigate their initial awakenings. The problem is that, when they come in contact with sensory conditions without having fully perfected their awakening yet, their perceptions and cognitions can be tainted by delusions, disturbances, and wrongdoings. This idea is also based on the premise of the permeation theory (propensities of habit, *sūpki* 習氣; Skr. *vāsanā*): even if people can achieve an initial awakening immediately, the habitual force or energy that they have accumulated throughout their many previous lives cannot be immediately purified with the mere force of initial awakening. Therefore, it is necessary for them to put their efforts into recalling the initial awakening at the very moment that their ignorant sensations, perceptions, and wrongdoings arise by remembering above statements, and then returning back to their original nature that is primarily pure, perfect, utterly impartial and selfless.

---

<sup>63</sup> *The Doctrinal Books of Won Buddhism*, 56.

This method can also be considered as the way of “tracing back the radiance”<sup>64</sup> (返照; Kor. *panjo*, Ch. *fanzhao*) in the Sŏn tradition, which is one of the key purposes of *kanhwa* meditation. Practitioners turn the cognitive radiance that had been oriented toward external objects to the source of their own minds by focusing on the critical phrase of *hwadu*. While “counter-illumination,” as McRae termed it, in *kankwa* meditation is implicitly taught so that it is something that students intuitively find by themselves in the continuing process of practice, the three statements above more explicitly and directly guide practitioners to formulate their introspective focus, by which they can frequently return back to their original source of mind which is not stained by situational ignorance, negative feelings, judgments, and wrongdoings in everyday life. Based on this fact, therefore, it can be said that while Sot’aesan recognized the importance of the both epistemological awakening and perfecting one’s actions in accord with the awakening, he designed his teachings with more focus on the latter, and therefore people can approach Buddhist practice of enlightenment, he would claim, in a more forthright way and apply it directly in their everyday lives.

### **8. The Combination of Silent Meditation and *Ŭidu* Meditation**

Sot’aesan also points out the physiological problems that may result from *kanhwa* meditation. He sees the importance of meditation practice from both mental and physical points of view.

---

<sup>64</sup> “Single-minded attention to the *hwadu* was claimed to create an introspective focus that would eventually lead the student back to the enlightened source of his own mind—a process referred to as “tracing back the radiance” (Ch. *huiguang fanzhao*, Kor. *hoegwang panjo*; 迴光返照) emanating from the mind, or, in the translation John McRae has suggested, ‘counter-illumination’.” (Buswell 2004, 226)

As a rule, seated meditation is a practice that, in the mind, calms deluded thoughts and manifests the true nature. It is also a method that, in the body, causes the fiery energy to descend and the watery energy to ascend. As deluded thoughts are calmed, the watery energy will ascend; as the watery energy ascends, the deluded thoughts will be calmed. Consequently, one's body and mind will remain serene in perfect harmony, and both the spirit and energy will be refreshed.<sup>65</sup>

From this point of view, *kanhwa* Sōn technique, which necessitates the very intense concentration, can cause the fiery energy to ascend and thereby cause illness in a practitioner.

The Sōn of observing the *hwadu* may be a temporary expedient for certain persons, but it can hardly be prescribed to people in general. If one continues to practice just the *hwadu* for a long time, the fiery energy will ascend and one may well become ill. Moreover, people who cannot fundamentally generate the sense of questioning with regard to the *hwadu* will lose interest in meditation.<sup>66</sup>

Accordingly, as a way to compensate the physiological disadvantage of *kanhwa* Sōn, Sot'aesan schedules separately a time for seated meditation and a time for investigating *hwadu* so that practitioners will gain the efficacy of both *kanhwa* and silent meditation practices without either falling into voidness during silent meditation or causing physical illness.

---

<sup>65</sup> *The Doctrinal Books of Won Buddhism*, 66-67.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

## 9) Sot'aesan's Soteriology: Sudden and Gradual Awakening followed by Gradual Cultivation

Finally, Sot'aesan establishes the soteriological system of *tono chōmsu*, sudden awakening followed by gradual cultivation, instead of *tono tonsu*, sudden awakening followed sudden cultivation, which is ideally achievable by the practice of *kanhwa* Sōn. He founds the eight progressive stages of gradual cultivation starting with “beginner’s stage” sequentially followed by “arousing aspiration,” “establishing one’s intent or will,” “cultivation,” “inquiry,” “making a choice in action,” “minuteness,” and “entering into quiescence.” These eight stages of gradual cultivation went several revisions and changes, until they finally developed into the more sophisticated and detailed six “Stages of Dharma Status” in the *Pulgyo Chōngjōn* later on.

### Annotated Footnotes of the Prodedure of Practice

1. “Beginner’s stage” (*ch’oim*; 初心) means that you just begin learning the regulations of practice by relying on other’s help. You do not know yet how this society will develop and how you shall practice.
2. “Arousing aspiration” (*palsim*; 發心) means you gradually resolve your doubt about the development of this society as well as the procedure of practice. You gradually have clear understanding regarding what is right and wrong, and what is beneficial and harmful. You begin to absolve what is not satisfactory, having basically positive thoughts. Regarding the issue of the establishment of this society, you begin to consider it as your own business and begin to understand its purpose. You also pursue all issues with a lively and open mind.
3. “Establishing one’s intent or will” (*ipchi*; 入志) means that after the first two stages of beginner’s stage and arousing aspiration, you will finally get to understand that the source of what you want lies in this Dharma and in

this place without any doubt. Even if this society and teachers of this society disappear, you will not leave the teachings of this society. Even in undergoing a thousand hardships and a myriad suffering or facing death on behalf of all living creatures, you will not leave this Dharma. You regulate all of your actions according to this Dharma and your emotions are in accord with this Dharma.

4. “Cultivation” (*suyang*; 修養) means that you clearly understand that sound mind is the source of clarifying your mind while the deluded, vexed mind is the source of darkening your mind by discerning between the two minds. Therefore, you begin to avoid the source of making your mind dark and vexed while cultivating the sound mind.

5. “Inquiry” (*yŏn’gu*; 研究) means that you get gradually clarifying understanding about your doubts regarding all kinds of issue, so that you begin to have the brightness of wisdom.

6. “Making a Choice in Action” (*ch’uisa*; 取捨) means that after having obtained the brightness of wisdom, you are able to analyze what is the rise and fall, what is pure and dirty, what is thick and thin, and what is right and wrong, and what is beneficial and harmful, so that you are able to avoid what is not proper and not reasonable, but you are able to progress what is proper and reasonable, and thereby you are heading toward the ultimate happiness by leaving the path of hell.

7. “Minuteness” (*semil*; 細密) means that the brightness of your wisdom is vast and immeasurable so that there is non-obstruction in understanding both principles and phenomena.

8. “Entering into quiescence” (*ipchŏng*; 入靜) means that your mind is not separated from the original self-nature so that all of your actions are free from any self-centered thought. (*Suyang yŏn’gu yoron*, 71-73)



In these gradual cultivation stages, we can recognize Sot'aesan's quite distinctive soteriological orientation; he emphasizes "sudden awakening followed by gradual cultivation," but at the same his soteriological system is not something that one can accomplish all at once. Initial aspiration and initial awakening should be reinforced and cultivated until one reaches the stages of "minuteness," the non-obstruction in understanding both principle and phenomena" (理事無碍 事事無碍), which is the ultimate goal of the Huayan school's teachings, and "entering into quiescence," keeping the mind not separated from the original nature in daily life (不離自性), which is the ultimate goal of Chan Buddhism. In reaching these two ultimate spiritual goals, the threefold practice of cultivating, inquiry, and choice in action should be practiced simultaneously and continuously. While balancing and perfecting these practices in daily life, in particular, Sot'aesan stresses the importance of "the practice of inquiry" by which practitioners maintain the attitude of doubt and inquiry through which they gradually attain the brightness of wisdom.

One of the presumptions of *kanhwa* Sŏn practice as "radical subitism" is that the awakening experience generated through the *kanhwa* technique will simultaneously consummate both practitioners' understanding and action. Due to the immediacy of its awakening, *kanhwa* Sŏn is termed a 'short-cut' to enlightenment.<sup>67</sup> Sot'aesan, however, recognizes the difficulty to universally apply the *kanhwa* technique to ordinary practitioners. He adopts it not in the "sudden awakening and sudden cultivation" soteriological system, but in the soteriological system of "sudden awakening followed by gradual cultivation,"

---

<sup>67</sup> Robert E. Buswell, Jr., "Pojo Chinul and Kanhwa Sŏn: Reconciling the Language of Moderate and Radical Subitism," in *Zen Buddhist Rhetoric in China, Korea, and Japan*, ed. Christoph Anderl (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 351.

and thereby constructing a quite detailed guide to perfecting the initial awakening.

The regimen of “sudden awakening followed by gradual cultivation,” however, cannot perfectly capture his distinctive soteriology, because Sot’aesan poses multiple levels of awakening that are necessary to be attained in the process of perfecting Buddhahood. For instance, in the final chapter of *The Correct Canon*, six different levels of awakening are described in “the six dharma stages”: “the ordinary grade,” “the grade of special faith,” “the battle between dharma and Māra (personified evil),” “the ranks of dharma strong and Māra defeated,” “beyond the household,” and “greatly enlightened tathāgata.”<sup>68</sup>

First of all, practitioners begin their practice by receiving the ten precepts of the ordinary grade. This implies that purifying their general actions including mental, verbal, and behavioral ones before pursuing awakening<sup>69</sup> is required. Once they received the ten precepts, from the second stage up to the final one, they need to achieve certain level of understanding and certain degree of fulfilling the requirements described in each stage, and the very first criterion for practitioners to advance to the next stage is whether or not they fully observe the precepts given to each stage. In this regard, we can say that Sot’aesan highlights the importance of perfecting one’s action in reaching the stage of the *tathāgata*,<sup>70</sup> and further suggests that epistemological or cognitive

---

<sup>68</sup> *The Scriptures of Won Buddhism*, 82.

<sup>69</sup> “The ordinary grade is the rank of people who have first taken refuge in the gateway of the buddha and received the ten precepts of the ordinary grade, regardless of whether they are learned or ignorant, male or female, old or young, good or bad, or of high or low status.” (*The Scriptures of Won Buddhism*, 82)

<sup>70</sup> “The status of the greatly enlightened tathāgata is the status of people who, having practiced each and every item for advancement to the status of beyond the household and advancing to the preparatory status of the greatly enlightened tathāgata, embody myriad of abilities in

enlightenment does not necessarily induce enlightened actions in these dharma ranks. The transition from the third stage to the fourth stage is considered very meaningful and critical because those who advance to the latter begin to be understood as a sage, and the critical difference between the two is that while in the former case, “even in minute matters, dharma wins more than half the time over māra, those who are in the latter stage “in every application of their six sense organs (and) win victory for dharma a hundred times in a hundred battles.” From this explanation, we can clearly see that in the soteriology of Sot’aesan, gradual cultivation of one’s action is necessary.

However, it is noticeable that Sot’aesan’s understanding of awakening is both sudden and gradual. He understands that most ordinary practitioners cannot perfectly attain the ultimate awakening all at once by saying that “Nor is awakening and awareness completed all at once but involve thousands upon thousands of insights”<sup>71</sup> even though he opens the possibility that few high levels of practitioners can directly reach the final stage. Therefore, in each dharma stage among six, he situates different levels of understanding and awakening that are necessitated for practitioners. For example, when practitioners have a substantial understanding of doctrines and regulations, they can advance to the second stage of “special faith” from the first stage of “ordinary stage.” When practitioners can “elucidate each and every idea in scriptures and master completely the principles of great and small, being and

---

delivering all living creatures with great loving-kindness and great compassion; edify by flexibly responding with myriad expedients, but without ever straying from the main principle and without revealing those expedients to the people who are being edified; and are free of attachment to discrimination even when active, and for whom discrimination is properly regulated even at rest (*The Scriptures of Won Buddhism*, 84).”

<sup>71</sup> *The Doctrinal Books of Won Buddhism*, 193.

nonbeing; and gain liberation from birth, old age, sickness, and death,”<sup>72</sup> they deserve to be situated in the fourth stage among the six dharma ranks. However, these cannot be just regarded as gradual awakenings because practitioners in each stage cannot cultivate the path of awakening without the awakening and understanding that they are supposed to have in that rank. In this regard, Sot’aesan’s soteriology is in general “sudden awakening followed by gradual cultivation,” but at the same time it can be called “sudden and continuing awakenings followed by gradual cultivation.”

#### **IV. Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to explore how the traditional *kanhwa* Sŏn technique was understood, adopted, and re-invented by Sot’aesan in the context of his reformation of Buddhism. In this paper, I have suggested that Sot’aesan attempted to reform and restructure Korean Buddhism in the early twentieth century Korea by problematizing *kanhwa* meditation. I examined the historical sources that Sot’aesan consulted in understanding and interpreting the traditional *kanhwa* Sŏn technique. I first examined the *Sŏnyo* which outlines a similar course in attaining enlightenment to that of Sot’aesan; through reading this text Sot’aesan may have first considered how *kanhwa* Sŏn practice might be adapted to his new doctrinal system. I also focused on the times in which Sot’aesan lived in Pyŏnsan where he had established a close and supportive Dharma friendship with the renowned Sŏn master Hangmyŏng. Indeed, he may well have first learned how to engage in *kanhwa* contemplation through his interactions with Hangmyŏng. Through his readings and

---

<sup>72</sup> *The Doctrinal Books of Won Buddhism*, 100.

discussions concerning the sense of inquiry engendered through *kanhwa* Sŏn, we can clearly see that Sot'aesan's reform Buddhism, in fact, was established in an active dialogue with mainstream traditional Korean Buddhism at that time.

However, while recognizing the potential value of *kanhwa* Sŏn in catalyzing an enlightenment experience, Sot'aesan also observed the potential limitations and difficulties in teaching *kanhwa* Sŏn to the general public and at the same time noted its potential to cause physiological illness. For these reasons, Sot'aesan re-structured *kanhwa* Sŏn technique in various ways. In this re-structuring, the central issue lies in the main goal of Mahāyāna Buddhism: how Buddhist teachings can catalyze enlightenment and enhance the happiness and wisdom of the general public. Sot'aesan did not deny the efficacy or the necessity of the subitist technique of *kanhwa* Sŏn, but he fully recognized that this subitist transformation generated by a powerful sensation of doubt is really only accessible to those who have the very highest spiritual capacity. Accordingly, he adopted a more gradualist type of soteriology, by allowing practitioners to generate a sense of questioning during their everyday lives, which will enable them to overcome conventional ways of seeing the world and instead perceive the world in a new way. This is a way to challenge the way in which they habitually see the world in their daily lives, leading them to perceive and react the world in a new way. Through this way, people can gradually change their perception and action. It may begin with a conceptual or intellectual awakening, but eventually it will lead to a transformative perception and to authentic bodhisattva action.

Some of significant implications of Sot'aesan's re-invention of *kanhwa* Sŏn can be summarized as follows. First, he changed the emphasis on an epistemological awakening, which was presumed to have occurred to only a

few Buddhist masters throughout Sŏn history, into that of practically applicable awakening in people's everyday life. Second, he expanded and developed the scope of meanings of "doubt" or "questioning" in Buddhist practice from an instrumental factor in aiding enlightenment, into an essential attitude to adopt throughout all of life. Finally, he transformed the analytical, philosophical, metaphysical, and even conceptual understandings, insights, and knowledge attained through the practice of questioning into an authentic Buddhist wisdom, which will eventually become the source of practitioners' enlightenment and liberation, and at the same time become the motive force for accomplishing anything in their daily lives. By examining Sot'aesan's response to this mainstream Sŏn technique, we see that *kanhwa* Sŏn—which began in the Tang and culminated in the Song, and which has been transmitted in Korean Sŏn as a living meditative tradition—is not an inert topic but a dynamic practice, which can still take on new forms that may be even more relevant to contemporary people and society.

## References

### 1. Primary Sources

#### Wŏn Buddhist Canonical Works

*The Scriptures of Won Buddhism*. 2006. Iksan: Wŏnbulgyo Ch'ulp'ansa.

*The History of Won Buddhism*. 2006. Iksa: Wŏnbulgyo Chŏnghwasa.

*Wönbulgyo chönsö* (*The Collected Works of Won Buddhism*). 1977. Iri: Wönbulgyo Ch’ulp’ansa.

*Wönbulgyo kyosa* (*The History of Won Buddhism*). 1975. Iri: Wönbulgyo Chönghwasa,

Pak, Chungbin. *Suyang yöngu yoron* [The Essentials of Cultivation and Inquiry]. 1927. Kyöngsöng [Seoul]: Kidokkyo Yöngmunsa Insoaebu.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Chosön Pulgyo hyöksin-ron* [Treatise on the Reformation of Chosön Buddhism]. 1935. Iksan: Chingok Insoaiso.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Pulgyo chöngjön* [*The Correct Canon of Buddhism*]. 1943. Seoul: Pulgyo Sibosa.

Song, Kyu. 1938. “Pulpöp yön’guhoe ch’anggönsa” [The History of Establishment of the Society for the Study of Buddha-dharma]. In *Hanulan hanich’ie: Chöngsan chongsa pöpmun kwa irhwa*. Compiled by Pak Chönghun. Iksan: Wönbulgyo Ch’ulp’ansa. 1982.

## 2. Secondary Sources

Buswell, Robert E., Jr.. 2016. *Numinous Awareness Is Never Dark: The Korean Buddhist Master Chinul’s “Excerpts” on Zen Practice*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2012. “Pojo Chinul and Kanhwa Sön: Reconciling the Language of Moderate and Radical Subitism.” In *Zen Buddhist Rhetoric in China, Korea, and Japan*, ed. Christoph Anderl, pp.345-362. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2004. “The Transformation of Doubt (*Yiqing*; 疑情) into a Positive Emotion in Chinese Buddhist Meditation.” In *Love and Emotions in Traditional Chinese Literature*, ed. Halvor Eifring, pp.225-236. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

- \_\_\_\_\_. 1992. *The Zen Monastic Experience: Buddhist Practice in Contemporary Korea*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1988. "Chan Hermeneutics: A Korean View." In *Buddhist Hermeneutics, Studies in East Asian Buddhism*, no. 6, ed. Donald S. Lopez, pp. 231-256. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1987. "The Short-Cut Approach of Kanhwa Meditation: The Evolution of a Practical Subitism in Chinese Chan Buddhism." In *Sudden and Gradual Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought*, ed. Peter N. Gregory, pp. 321-377. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1986. "Chinul's Systematization of Chinese Meditative Techniques in Korean Sŏn Buddhism." In *Traditions of Meditation in Chinese Buddhism*, edited by Peter N.
- Buswell, Robert E. Jr. and Donald S. Lopez, Jr. 2014. *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Chŏng, Sunil. 2014. "Sot'aesan ūi Pulgyo kaehyŏk undong kwa Hangmyŏng, Manhae, and Yongsŏng." *Wŏnbulgyo sasang yŏn'guwŏn haksul taehoe*: 7-36.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2006. "Wŏnbulgyo 'sŏngni' ūi sŏngripsa yŏn'gu." *Wŏnbulgyo sasang kwa chonggyo munhwa* 33: 54-76.
- Chung, Bongkil, ed. *The Scriptures of Won Buddhism: A Translation of the Wonbulgyo Kyojon with Introduction*. Classics in East Asian Buddhism. Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 2003.
- Pak, Yongdŏk. *Wŏnbulgyo ch'ogi kyodansa 2: Tol i sŏsŏ mul sori rŭl dŭnŭnda*. Wŏnkwang University Wŏnbulgyo charyosil. 1997.
- Paek, Hangmyŏng. *Hangmyŏng chip*. Compiled and translated by Yŏngwŏn. Seoul: Sŏngbo Munhwajae Yŏn'guwŏn. 2006.



Ryu, Söngt'ae. "Munmok tullö pogi: ilman pöp üiro töbulö chjakhaji anihan chaga öttön mulgön inji yön'guhalsa 97." *Wönbulgyo sinmun*.

February 23, 2012,

<http://www.wonnews.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=103179>

(accessed April 20, 2018).

\_\_\_\_\_. "Munmok tullö pogi: Kongbuja nün pulli chasöng wal kong ira hayöt üni öttöhan kösi pulli chasöng inji yön'gu halsa 38," *Wönbulgyo sinmun*, November 19, 2010,

<http://www.wonnews.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=99387>

(accessed April 20, 2018).

Taehan Pulgyo Chogyejong p'ogyowön p'ogyo yön'gusil. *Kanhwa Sön Ipmun* (Seoul: Chogyejong Ch'ulp'ansa. 2006.

# **Kanhwa Sŏn Practice among Buddhist Nuns in Contemporary Korea: Sŏn Master Inhong (1908–1997) and the Sŏngnam-sa Monastery**

**Pori Park**

Arizona State University

## **I. Introduction**

Since the Purification Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the Jogye Order of Korea made a great leap in the number of its nuns. During the colonial period, the number of nuns reached 1,000, about one-seventh of the number of monks (Cho Sŏngmi, 47). The number of Korean nuns rose to 4,000 in the mid-1980s and to 7,000 in the early 2000s, about equal to the number of monks. The major Buddhist nunneries in contemporary Korea began to appear after the Purification Movement. They included Naewŏn-sa, Unmun-sa, and Taewŏn-sa, which were designated nunneries in 1955, and Sŏngnam-sa in 1957. These nunneries represent the emergence of the independence of nuns in Korea, who established their own system of monastic training, including lecture halls(*kangwŏn*) and meditation halls(*sŏnwŏn*). Nuns founded *kangwŏns* or *sŏnwŏns* and began communal living as a way to protect the institutional integrity of nunneries from monks.

To establish an independent system, many nuns struggled without aid to build monasteries, which were in ruin after the Korean civil war. In their attempts to elevate the status of nuns and their monastic environment as close as possible to that of monks, influential nun leaders began to emerge. Among

such leaders was Sŏn Master Inhong(仁弘; 1908–1997).<sup>1</sup> Inhong was a respected Sŏn master who built Sŏngnam-sa as a major Sŏn monastery for nuns. In 1999, the Jogye Order designated Sŏngnam-sa as the only special monastery for Sŏn meditation for nuns. Inhong practiced meditation under the guidance of great Sŏn masters, such as the monks Hanam(1876-1951), Man’gong(1871-1946), and Sŏngch’ŏl(1912-1993) in particular. Inhong regarded Sŏngch’ŏl as the most indispensable teacher in her career. Sŏngch’ŏl made a life-changing impact on Inhong in terms of her Sŏn practice.

During the Purification Movement, most celibate monks and nuns engaged in fighting against the majority married faction to maintain celibacy in the Jogye Order. Sŏngch’ŏl isolated himself at a remote hermitage away from the violent confrontations and focused on rebuilding the Order by rewriting the monastic regimen of training. Inhong faithfully adopted Sŏngch’ŏl’s ideas about a comprehensive monastic regimen of training with an emphasis on Sŏn practices, the physical labor of monastics, and the simplification of rituals. Inhong built Sŏngnam-sa, an outstanding place for nuns to focus on Sŏn practice. With her work, she became a significant contributor to Sŏngch’ŏl’s remaking of the Jogye Order. While maintaining her commitment to the Saṅgha as the member of the Central Council of the Saṅgha and the abbess of Sŏngnam-sa, she maintained rigorous Sŏn practice by participating in both seasonal retreats and special three-year retreats. She was the most loyal follower of Sŏngch’ŏl, particularly bolstering his legacy of monastic restoration and his rigorous Sŏn practices. Through an analysis of Inhong’s life and her involvement with Sŏngnam-sa, this paper explores the kanhwa Sŏn

---

<sup>1</sup> For the biography of Inhong, see Pak Wŏnja, *Inhong sŭnim Ildaegi: Kil ch’aja kil ttŏnada*; and Ha Ch’unsang, *Kkaedarŭm ūi kkot* 2:41–57.

practice of Korean nuns' and their contributions to the completion of the Jogye Order's monastic tradition.

## II. Early Buddhist training

Because many Buddhist monks and nuns were silent about their lives prior to entering monasteries, not much information is available about Inhong's monastic life. She was born in 1908 at Yǒng'il in North Kyōngsang province, the second daughter of a family of three sons and three daughters. Her family engaged in a successful fishery (Park Wōnja, 26). She must have received a good education before entering the monastery at the mature age of 33. Her assumption of leadership soon after her tonsure further suggests a high level of education. She became a *togam*(provost) at Chijang-am hermitage just five years after she received her tonsure.

She went to Master Hanam at Mountain Odae in Kangwōn province, in 1941, to begin her monastic life. Under the tutelage of Hanam, she received her tonsure with Bhikṣuṇī Chōngja at Chijang-am hermitage. Around this time, Sōn masters Man'gong and Hanam were the two most renowned monk masters who were also involved in guiding nuns to Sōn practice. They attracted serious nun practitioners like Pōphūi(1887-1975), Iryōp(1896-1971), Man'sōng(1897-1975), Sōn'gyōng(1904-1996), and Pon'gong(1907-1965). Pon'gong, who studied with both Man'gong and Hanam, established Chijang-am on Mount Odae in 1937. In 1945 and 1946, Inhong spent two summers at Kyōnsōng-am in retreat under the guidance of Man'gong (Park Wōnja, 32). Kyōnsōng-am, Chijang-am, and Yunp'il-am hermitages were the major colonial-era sites known for holding Sōn retreats for nuns. Kyōnsōng-am is under the umbrella of the Sudōk-sa monastery in South Ch'ungch'ōng

Province. It must have been built just prior to 1913, when the renowned Bhikṣuṇī Pōphūi, who received certification of her enlightenment from the Sōn master Man'gong in 1916, took residency there (Pulhak Yōn'guso, *Sōnwōn ch'onngnam*, 679-680). Yunp'il-am is located in Mun'gyōng in North Kyōngsang Province and is under the jurisdiction of the Taesūng-sa monastery. Bhikṣuṇī Pon'gong began her Sōn retreat at Yunp'il-am in 1935 (Ha Ch'unsang, 1:96).

There were about twenty nun residents, including two young postulants, at Chijang-am when Inhong began her monastic life there. Inhong and Pon'gong became close dharma companions and ran the hermitage together. All the Mount Odae nuns, following Hanam's emphasis on Sōn practice for both monks and nuns, were practicing Sōn as monks did. While the majority of Korean nuns around this time were largely excluded from Sōn practice, Inhong was one of the recipients of Hanam's spiritual leadership.

Inhong received *hwadu* (critical phrase), *mu* (no) from Hanam and began her first Sōn retreat in 1942 (Park Wōnja, 45). Like monks at Sangwōn-sa, Hanam's residence, nuns at Chijang-am also practiced Sōn. They slept for only four hours, attended the fortnightly dharma talks by Hanam, and underwent an intensive one-week period of non-sleeping meditation called *yongmaeng chōngjin*. Hanam emphasized the primacy to the Sōn practice, but adherents also had to tend to other monastic duties like chanting *yōmbul* (recalling the Buddha), reading *kan'gyōng* (reading scriptures), rituals, and safeguarding the monastery (Uhlmann, 177). His gentle and humble nature was reflected in his inclusive and balanced approach to Buddhist practices. He emphasized humility, generosity, and frugality to his followers (Park Wōnja, 57). Under such an amiable environment, Inhong was not only a committed Sōn practitioner but also a competent leader who had already shown her ability

to make Chijang-am be independent from the financial support of the main monastery, Wŏljŏng-sa, by cultivating the land and doing alms-rounds.

## II. The influence of Sŏngch'ŏl; Life as a Sŏn practitioner

Inhong left Chijang-am in 1949 as the prospect of the civil war loomed large and met Sŏngch'ŏl, who, in his early 30s, had already attained fame as a vigorous Sŏn master at Myokwanŭm-sa at Tongrae in South Kyŏngsang Province. Sŏngch'ŏl moved there from Pong'am-sa because of the pre-war situation. At Pong'am-sa, he formed the Pong'am-sa Society, which functioned from October 1947 to March 1950. The Society was a fundamentalist reform movement to reinstitute a sense of monasticism to the practice of Korean Buddhism. The main goal of the Pong'am-sa Society was to return to the original Buddhism of the Śākyamuni Buddha and the Chan patriarchs. The Society was based on the principle of the Pure Rules of Baizhang (*Baizhang qinggui*, 百丈清規),<sup>2</sup> which emphasized physical labor and self-sufficiency. Sŏngch'ŏl composed its Rules for Communal Life (*kongju kuyak*, 共住規約) (Seo Jae-yeong, 24-25). The strictures called for strict observation of monastic rules and financial independence by requiring monks cultivate the land and eschew daily support from the laity. Members revived the traditional *Posadha* observance<sup>3</sup> and the fortnightly lecture, and they attempted to revive the *vinaya* (monastic) rules, including vows of

---

<sup>2</sup> Baizhang Huaihai (720-814), a Chan master during Tang China, established Ch'ongnim in Chan Buddhism for the first time and formed the first set of monastic rules for Chan monks. Its most famous dictum was: "a day without work is a day without food."

<sup>3</sup> The fortnightly meetings of the Buddhist monastic assembly fell on full moon and new moon days. The assembly was held to recite the monastic rules of discipline.

celibacy. Chaun (慈雲, 1911-1992), a Sōngch'ōl confidant, studied the *vinaya* rules extensively and delineated precepts (*posal pophoe*, 布薩法會) to hundreds of lay people (Kim Kwangsik 2006, 181).

Inhong regarded her meeting with Sōngch'ōl as the groundbreaking moment of her life as a Sōn practitioner. It was a new world for her to encounter such a vital and intense Sōn master. Sōngch'ōl taught that practitioners should make immense efforts to reach the point where their state of mind could remain unaffected, whether moving around, dreaming, falling into a deep sleep, getting hurt, or suffering from serious illness (Sōngch'ōl, 274-275). Only when minds maintain the sameness of being awake even when falling into a deep sleep, he asserted, can they investigate *hwadu* and achieve the awakening of the mind (Sōngch'ōl, 283). This awakening refers to the ultimate attainment of the Buddhahood for him, namely, sudden awakening/sudden cultivation (Sōngch'ōl, 317).

Inhong followed his Sōn method faithfully throughout her life and, in constructing the nuns' system of training, adopted the monastic regimen initiated at the Pong'am-sa Society. In the summer of 1951, after meeting with Sōngch'ōl, she made a sincere spiritual resolution and embarked on serious Sōn practice at Sōngju-sa in Ch'angwōn, South Kyōngsang Province. Alongside her in her Sōn practice were 40 nuns from Yunp'il-am and Chijang-am, who had fled the war. The retreat was a nun's version of the Pong'am-sa Society, closely following all the rules implemented there (Park Wōnja, 106-109). Like the Pong'am-sa, they followed the Pure Rules of Baizhang and Sōngch'ōl's Rules for Communal Life. They did two hours of physical labor each day and practiced the traditional *Posadha* observance. They made 108 full prostrations for penance and chanted the Sūramṅgama mantra (*nūng'ōmju*) during morning and evening ceremonies. They ate rice gruel in

the morning and skipped dinner. Inhong was a leader who insured the whole retreat operated as planned, and she herself fully participated in Sŏn practice. She sought out Sŏngch'ŏl's instruction after each retreat by visiting his place at Ch'ŏnje-am with her nuns. The retreats occurred during the war, however, and after completing three retreats, they were disbanded.

Her desperate yearning for awakening continued while seeking places to practice Sŏn alone. She went to Chogye-am at Mount Ch'ŏnsŏng in Yangsan, South Kyŏngsang, where a young monk in his 20s, Sŏngsu, who later became a prominent Sŏn master, practiced alone for a year. With him, she, in her 40s, practiced Sŏn. Together, for 100 days, they did not sleep and ate only once every three days. Such an unprecedented way of practicing with a monk did not bother Inhong because her only concern was to attain awakening, which was a matter of life and death to her. Her effort to find a suitable place to practice continued. She went to Hongje-sa on Mount T'aebaek in early 1954 and decided to focus on practice for 10 years, but she had to go to Seoul to participate in the Purification Movement in the winter of 1954.

Throughout her career as a Sŏn practitioner, Inhong sent novice nuns to receive *hwadu* from Sŏngch'ŏl after they received their novice ordination. Before seeing Sŏngch'ŏl, her nuns had to do 30,000 or 50,000 full prostrations as a way to show their seriousness for their spiritual pursuit (Pak Wŏnja, 140-143). Even during the Purification movement, from 1955 to 1963, when Sŏngch'ŏl exiled himself in the hermitage Sŏngjŏn-am at P'agye-sa, in North Kyŏngsang, she sought him out to teach her and her disciples. Not surprisingly, he chased them away most times.

The united Saṅgha was formed in 1962, and Sŏngch'ŏl moved to Kimyong-sa in Mun'gyŏng in 1965 and gave his first official dharma talk as a monk to a group of Buddhist college students. In 1966, he moved to the Paengnyŏn-am



hermitage at Haein-sa and, in 1967, accepted appointment as the Sŏn master (*pangjang*, 方丈) of Haein-sa. During the summer retreat there in 1967, Sŏngch'ŏl gave a dharma talk for two to three hours a day for 100 days, famously known as the "Dharma Talks of 100 Days (*Paegil pŏmmun*).” Both at Kimryong-sa and Haein-sa, Inhong attended his talks with her nuns from Sŏngnam-sa.

At the end of this summer retreat, Sŏngch'ŏl suggested Inhong and the Sŏngnam-sa nuns participate in a three-year retreat, a period in which no one could leave the mountain site, at Sŏngnam-sa (Pak Wŏnja, 289). Heretofore, no one had gone through the intensive three-year retreat yet, and Sŏngch'ŏl trusted Inhong and Sŏngnam-sa enough to implement such a challenging retreat. The retreat began in Winter 1968 and ended successfully in 1971 with the 100-day intensive period of non-sleeping meditation (*yongmaeng chŏngjin*). During this time, they observed rules mandated by Sŏngch'ŏl. The rules included: do not sleep more than four hours; pretend to be mute without engaging in any gossip; do not read, act like you are illiterate; neither overeat nor snack; and do suitable physical labor. He also told them to perform 300 full prostrations for penance each day and chant the Sūramṅgama mantra once a day to eliminate any obstacles to their mental practice. While observing the rules, the nuns focused on Sŏn meditation only. These three-year retreats, for which nuns with over 10 years of monastic life could join, took place in 1982-1985, 1986-1989, 1990-1993, and 1994-1997. In 1999, Sŏngnam-sa nuns changed the retreats to one-year retreats (Pak Wŏnja, 302), which continue to this day.

Inhong had practiced with her close dharma companions, Sŏng'u, Chang'il, and Hyech'un, who also joined her when she began the three-year retreat at Sŏngnam-sa in 1968. Right after completing the first three-year retreat, Inhong,

now in her 60s, and her dharma companion Sŏng'u went to Ch'ilbul-am at Ssanggye-sa on Mount Chiri to participate in a summer retreat with monks including Hyeam, who served the Supreme Patriarch in 1993 (Pak Wŏnja, 303). The willingness of the reputed Sŏn monks to let her join the retreat showed her exalted reputation as a Sŏn practitioner. In 1979, with Sŏng'u, again Inhong, who was in her 70s, went to Sangmuju-am in Mount Chiri to focus on practice for a year. This was the first and last time that nuns spent time practicing at this famed place for monks. Soon after, she stayed for the summer retreat at Taewŏn-sa in 1980. In her 80s, she went through the three-year retreat at Sŏngnam-sa starting in 1990. We see how urgently she had pursued Sŏn practice all the while dealing with urgent temple affairs and guiding young nuns so strictly.

### **III. The Re-building of Sŏngnam-sa; Life as a leader**

Her practice at Hongje-sa abruptly ended because the leaders of the celibate faction, Ch'ŏngdam and Hyobong, needed the support of nuns because monks in the married faction outnumbered celibate monks. At the beginning of the Purification Movement, celibate monks numbered from 200 to 300 and nuns around 400, while there were about 7,000 married monks (Kim Kwangsik 2000, 419). They asked major nun leaders like Inhong, Suok, and Pŏmil to come to Seoul to join the fight. About 200 nuns stayed at Sŏnhagwŏn. Inhong assumed a leadership role as a prioress (*ch'ongmu*). She had nuns make 108 prostrations every morning while participating in rallies protesting the dominance of the married faction.

After the first victory, in 1955, against the married faction, several colonial-period heads-of-monasteries were assigned to nuns for the first time. The first

was Tonghwa-sa in Taegu. Sŏngmun (1895–1974) was appointed its abbess, and Inhong its prioress. It was designated the ecumenical center (*ch'ongnim*) for nuns, but Tonghwa-sa was taken over by monks. Unmun-sa was designated a *ch'ongnim* for nuns in 1958, instead. Two more heads-of-monasteries were given to nuns: Chino (1904–1994) was appointed to Kimryong-sa in Munkyŏng in North Kyŏngsang in 1955, and An Kwangho (1915–1989) was appointed to Sŏnam-sa on Chogye Mountain in South Chŏlla in 1956. In addition, Hyeun was appointed to Ch'ŏnŭn-sa in South Chŏlla around this time. Nuns were put in charge of only a handful of monasteries, yet the monks complained that nuns were put in charge of important sites.<sup>4</sup> Eventually, these three head-of-monastery positions and Ch'ŏnŭn-sa were taken over by monks.

Three principal Sŏn nunneries (Sŏnwŏn) also appeared during this time. Suok (1902–1966) was appointed to Naewŏn-sa in South Kyŏngsang Province in 1955, Pŏmil (1904–1991) was appointed the abbess of Taewŏn-sa on Mount Chiri in South Chŏlla Province in September 1955, and Inhong was appointed to Sŏngnam-sa in South Kyŏngsang in 1957. Sŏngnam-sa became a nunnery when Inhong was appointed abbess by the Saṅgha, and repair and construction began. She was elected as a member of the Central Council of the Saṅgha (Chonghoe) in 1956 and served until 1966

Sŏngnam-sa is located on Mount Kaji in South Kyŏngsang Province. It was built about 1,200 years ago by national master Toŭi but was essentially destroyed during the Korean War (Pulhak Yŏn'guso, *Sŏnwŏn ch'ongnam*, 772–777). When Inhong arrived, the roof of the main hall needed major repair and the other buildings had rotten floors and leaking roofs. The temple was in

---

<sup>4</sup> Han'guk Pukgyo Kunhyŏndaesa Yŏn'guhoe, *22in ūi chŭng'ŏn*, 272.

great debt without owning any land to support the temple. Under these conditions, every nun in the compound engaged in the physical labor of repairing and rebuilding. To be self-sufficient, nuns must have grown vegetables for sale and cut bamboos from the forest behind the temple to make bamboo baskets for generating income (Pak Wŏnja, 199). In 1962, Inhong formed Sŏllimhoe, a lay organization that raised funds to buy land, which nuns used to cultivate rice and other grains for themselves.

She served an abbess for 20 years until 1976 during which she built and repaired numerous buildings, including the main Buddha's hall, the three-story pagoda, the Amitabha Buddha's Hall, meditation halls, nuns' living quarters, and much more (Pak Wŏnja, 195). In 1957, Inhong built a meditation hall, called Chŏngsu Sŏnwŏn, and established the temple as a major Sŏn center for nuns. The Simgŏmdang Sŏnwŏn was built for advanced practitioners in 1963, and the Kŭmdan Sŏnwŏn was built, in 1995, to accommodate the increased numbers of Sŏn practitioners. In 1999, Sŏngnam-sa was designated a special temple for Sŏn meditation by the Jogye Order.

In any season, about a hundred nuns practice there. Sŏngnam-sa is especially known for the strict observation of precepts, and its nuns begin their daily schedule by prostrating 108 times and chanting the Sŭramṃgama mantra each morning. They observed the fortnightly Posadha observance even during free seasons. Combining Sŏn and physical labor, it emerged as most exemplary and arduous nunnery. All the monastic reform ideas of Sŏngch'ŏl were said to be realized by Inhong at Sŏngnam-sa rather than his own Haeinsa (Pak Wŏnja, 283). She produced 30 disciples and over 250 grand-disciples. Among her disciples are Pŏphi, Paekjol, Pulp'il, Tomun, Wŏn'gwan, Hyeju, and others who had established themselves as outstanding Sŏn practitioners (Ha Ch'unsang, 2:57). Pulp'il was the daughter of Sŏngch'ŏl before he took

his tonsure, Inhong's own spiritual chaperon. At Söngnam-sa, she and other disciples of Inhong have carried on the fame and the steadfast Sön training that their teacher had firmly established.

In summary, Inhong began her monastic life as Sön practitioner under the leadership of Sön master Hanam. Sön practice had been the heart of her exceptional monastic career. Her encounter with Sön master Söngch'öl gave her the impetus and passion for her life-long commitment to Kanhwa-Sön practice. Despite her demanding duties as a committed leader, she took time to participate in both seasonal and special three-year retreats, and even to join retreats with monks, which was unheard of before her. She was respected as a determined Sön practitioner equal to monk practitioners, and moreover, she went further beyond individual pursuits by establishing a monastic environment for her fellow nuns that was equal to that which monks enjoyed.

Inhong tried to fulfil the Pong'am-sa Society ideal by implementing a comprehensive monastic regimen of training with an emphasis on Kanhwa Sön practice, economic independence of nuns by physical labor, and simplification of rituals. She was successful in building Söngnam-sa, a superlative place for nuns' Sön practice. As a result of her work, Inhong became a significant contributor to Söngch'öl's remaking of the Jogye Order.

## References

Buswell, Robert. 1992. *The Zen Monastic Experience*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Cho Sŭngmi. 2014. "Hyŏndae Han'guk piguni sŭngga ũi sŏngjang kwa wigi kŭrigo kwaje," in *Han'guk yŏsŏng chonggyoin ũi hyŏnsil kwa chendŏ munje*, edited by Sŏgangdae Chonggyo Yŏn'guso, 26-62. Seoul: Tong'yŏn Press.
- Chŏn Haeju. 1999. "Han'guk Bhiksuni Sangha ũi hyŏnhwang kwa panghyang," *Chong gyo kyoyuk hak yŏn'gu* 8.
- Chŏn'guk Pigunihoe, ed. 2007. *The Life and Practice of Korean Buddhist Nuns* (Han'guk Piguni ũi suhaeng kwa sam). Seoul: Yemun Sŏwŏn.
- Ha Ch'un-saeng. 2001. *Kkaedarŭm ũi kkot* Vols. 1 & 2. Seoul: Tosŏ Ch'ulp'an Yŏrae.
- Han'guk Pukgyo Kunhyŏndaesa Yŏn'guhoe, ed. 1995. *Sinmun ũro pon Han'guk Pulgyo kŭnhyŏndaesa*. Seoul: Sŏnudoryang Press.
- Han'guk Pukgyo Kunhyŏndaesa Yŏn'guhoe, ed. 2002. *22in ũi chŭng'ŏn ũlt'onghae pon kŭnhyŏndae Pulgyosa*. Seoul: Sŏnu toryang Press.
- Kim Kwangsik. 2006. *Research on Modern Korean Buddhist History* (*Han'guk hyŏndae Pulgyosa yŏn'gu*). Seoul: Pulgyo Sidaesa.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2000. *Kŭnhyŏndae Pulgyo ũi chaejom-yŏng*. Seoul: Minjoksa.
- Park, Pori. 2007. "The Buddhist Purification Movement in Post-Colonial South Korea: Restoring Clerical Celibacy and State Intervention," in *Identity Conflict: Can Violence be Regulated?*, edited by J. Craig Jenkins and Esther E. Gottlieb, 131-145. Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2011. "The Establishment of Buddhist Nunneries in Contemporary Korea," in *More Than Women: Korean Nuns within the Context of East Asian Buddhist Traditions*, edited by Eunsu Cho, 165-181. Albany: SUNY Press.

- Pak Wŏnja. 2007. *Inhong sŭnim Ildaegi: Kil ch'aja kil ttŏnada*. P'aju, Kyŏnggi: Kimyŏngsa.
- Pulhak Yŏn'guso, ed. 2000. *Kangwŏn ch'ongnam*. Seoul: Taehan Pulgyo Chogye-jong.
- Pulhak Yŏn'guso, ed. 2000. *Sŏnwŏn ch'ongnam*. Seoul: Pulgyo sidaesa.
- Silch'ŏn Pulgyo chŏnguk sŭnggahoe, ed. 1997. *Chogyejong chungang chonghoe hwaltong yon'gu*. Seoul: Haengwŏn.
- Seo Jae-yeong, 2007. "the Principle of the Pong'am-sa Society and Sŏngch'ŏl's Role (Pong'am-sa kyŏlsa ūi chŏngsin kwa T'oeong Sŏngch'ŏl ūi yŏkhwŏl)," *Han'guk Sŏnhak* 18.
- Sŏgangdae Chonggyo Yŏn'guso, ed. 2014. *Han'guk yŏsŏng chonggyoin ūi hyŏnsil kwa chendŏ munje*. Seoul: Tong'yŏn Press.
- Sŏngchŏl. *Dharma Talks of 100 Days* (百日法門; *Paegil pŏmmun*), Volume 2 (Hapch'ŏn, South Kyŏngsang: Changgyŏnggak, 1992, 2005, 12<sup>th</sup> edition).
- Taehan Pulgyo Chogyejong Kyoyukwŏn, ed. 2001. *Chogyojong sa: kŭn/hyŏndaek py'ŏn*. Seoul: Chogyejong Press.
- Tonguk taehak Sŏngnim tongmun hoe, ed. 1997. *Han'guk Pulgyo hyŏndaesa*. Seoul: Sigongsa.
- Uhlmann, Patrick. 2010. "Sŏn Master Man'gong: A Preliminary Consideration of His Thoughts According to the Five Regulations for the Sangha," in *Makers of Modern Buddhism*, edited by Jin Y. Park, 171-198. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Yŏ Ikgu. 1985. "Han'guk Pulgyo ui inmaek/chimaek," *Sintong'a* (May 1985).
- Yun Ch'ŏngkwang. 2002. *Hoesaek komusin*. Seoul: Sigongsa.

# **Renarrativizing Chan/ Sŏn/ Zen Buddhist Studies for the Twenty First Century**

**Albert Welter**

University of Arizona

## **Abstract**

Buddhist Studies has been conducted in such a way, from its inception, so as to privilege Buddhist developments in India and South Asia, and to look at regional developments elsewhere as outgrowths of Indian based models. The story told in virtually all major textbooks is one that provides ample coverage of Indian developments, treating other regions, like East Asia as an afterthought. This was not an accident but was the outgrowth of specific cultural frameworks that inspired the Western study of Buddhism.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, Zen Buddhism inserted itself into this narrative, largely through the efforts of D.T. Suzuki. As scholars successfully challenged the Suzuki model, Zen Studies became academically robust but out of sync with the Zen narrative that Suzuki created. My presentation will review this situation and propose new ways to renarrativize our studies with regional approaches rooted in the East Asian region, suggesting new models for appreciating the intertwined legacies of Chan, Sŏn, and Zen.

## **I. Renarrativizing Chan/ Sŏn/ Zen Buddhist Studies for the Twenty First Century**



The story of East Asian Buddhism has not been told. Or, rather, it has been told in an ineffective and misleading way. My presentation here is not so much about new research as about the way our previous efforts have been conceptualized by frames of reference that have not served to highlight accurately the characteristics and features of East Asian Buddhism in terms of their full meaning and impact. Take, for example, the way the story of Buddhism is told in university courses and academic textbooks. The story begins in India, and in many cases, hardly leaves India. Buddhism begins with the life of the Buddha and his environs—geographic, intellectual, and social. It continues through the story of its early developments—the first Buddhist councils, the spawning of different sects and schools. Along the way, we are treated to the story of its diffusion beyond the Buddha’s initial homeland to include large swaths of the Indian subcontinent. Finally, we are introduced to the Mahāyāna reformation movements and the dispersion of Buddhism throughout greater Asia—into Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and finally, to East Asia.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Typical of this tendency to focus on the story of Buddhism as an India dominated trajectory is Ruthert Gethin’s *The Foundations of Buddhism*, which, as the title indicates, makes no pretense at broader coverage. The table of contents is as follows:

Introduction

1. The Buddha: The Story of the Awakened One
2. The Word of the Buddha: Buddhist Scriptures and Schools
3. Four Truths: The Disease, the Cause, the Cure, the Medicine
4. The Buddhist Community: Monks, Nuns, and Lay Followers
5. The Buddhist Cosmos: The Thrice Thousandfold World
6. No self: Personal Continuity and Dependent Arising
7. The Buddhist Path: The Way of Calm and Insight
8. The Abhidharma: The Higher Teaching
9. The Mahayana: The Great Vehicle
10. Evolving Traditions of Buddhism

Yet, even those works devoted to broader coverage, such as Andrew Skilton’s *A Concise History of Buddhism*, do not fare much better, with roughly three quarters of its pages devoted

Yet, it would be wrong to fault the authors of these works for a conceptual framework nearly all have succumbed to in one form or another. In addition, Buddhism is such a vast and complex subject, covering its geographic expanse and regional iterations, not to mention its historical contours and social, political, and intellectual dimensions, makes comprehensive treatment all but impossible. Compromise is the order of the day, and a focus on India and Indian-based developments provides a necessary short cut that few can escape. As I shall explain shortly, we have all been implicated to one degree or another in the assumptions that have guided the modern study of Buddhism, projected back on to the story of its origins and dissemination.

Although notions regarding Buddhism had reached the West from antiquity,<sup>2</sup> these had relatively little impact. Previous reports regarding Buddhism from travelers like those from the Flemish Franciscan missionary Willem von Ruysbroeck (c. 1220- c. 1293)<sup>3</sup> and the Venetian explorer Marco

---

to “Buddhism in India,” and one quarter to “Buddhism Beyond India.”<sup>1</sup> The tendency to focus on developments in India, especially the life of Śākyamuni, his teachings, the development of the early Buddhist community, etc., are typical of this genre, as is the coverage of Buddhism beyond India, which treats its subject according to national boundaries. For East Asia, a chapter is dedicated to each of China (10 pages), Korea (2 pages), and Japan (6 pages), less than the coverage that is given to individual schools of Buddhism in India (like Abhidharma, Madhyamaka, and Yogācāra).

<sup>2</sup> Instances of Western interactions with Buddhism include the Greco-Buddhism of the Seleucid empire (312-63 BCE) which formed in the wake of Alexander the Great’s expansion into Central Asia, and the spread of the Mauryan empire (273-232 BCE) into the Greco-Bactrian kingdom covering Bactria and Sogdiana in Central Asia under Emperor Aśoka. Buddhist ideas filtered into Europe through stories of the Christian saints Barlaam and Josaphat, renditions of the life of Siddhartha Gautama, via translations from Indian sources to Persian, Arabic, and Greek versions.

<sup>3</sup> Morris Rossabi. *From Yuan to Modern China and Mongolia: The Writings of Morris Rossabi*. (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 670f. An account of von Ruesbroeck’s travels is provided in William Woodville Rockhill’s translation, *The journey of William of Rubruck to the eastern parts of the world, 1253-55* (London: Hayklut Society, 1900), available at <http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/rubruck.html>. There is also a translation by Peter Jackson in Peter Jackson and David Morgan, eds., *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck:*

Polo (1254-1324),<sup>4</sup> reports from other Catholic missionaries, etc., likewise had relatively little impact. As is well-known, European contact with Asia during the so-called “Age of Discovery” (end of 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries) precipitated an era of globalization and colonialism which our current versions of modernism and world-order (political, economic, social, cultural, educational, and so on) are rooted in. Less well-known are the religious and intellectual encounters that occurred at this time. The recent work of Urs App has uncovered how knowledge of Buddhism, initiated in Europe during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, led to an interpretation of Buddhist doctrines that produced the notion of a single “Oriental philosophy” seen as a kind of primordial philosophy preeminent throughout the entire “Orient,” from Egypt to Japan, an atheism rooted in notions of “nothingness” and “emptiness.”<sup>5</sup> This became the first period of serious intellectual engagement between Buddhism and the West. Noteworthy landmarks of this interaction include the work of the German Philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860).<sup>6</sup> Yet, however the evolution of the study of Buddhism in the West comes to be viewed, the impact

---

*His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke, 1253-1255* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> *The Travels of Marco Polo* by Marco Polo and Rustichello of Pisa, the complete Yule-Cordier Edition, including the unabridged third edition (1903) of Henry Yule's annotated translation, as revised by Henri Cordier; together with Cordier's later volume of notes and addenda (1920); <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/10636/pg10636-images.html>

<sup>5</sup> *The Cult of Emptiness: The Western Discovery of Buddhist thought and the Invention of Oriental Philosophy* (Rorshach and Kyoto: University Media, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Principally *The World as Will and Idea*, translated by K.B. Haldane and J. Kemp (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co.); [https://archive.org/stream/theworldaswillan01schouoft/theworldaswillan01schouoft\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/theworldaswillan01schouoft/theworldaswillan01schouoft_djvu.txt); also Urs App, “Arthur Schopenhauer and China” (*Sino-Platonic Papers* Nr. 200, April 2010),” contains appendixes with transcriptions and English translations of Schopenhauer's early notes about Buddhism and Indian philosophy.

of the “discovery” of Buddhism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was momentous. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century height of European colonialism, Buddhism, along with other non-European religions and intellectual traditions, came to the attention of Western intellectuals through the writings of Christian missionaries, scholars, and imperial civil servants who worked and administered in lands where Buddhism was a dominant force.

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the impact of Buddhism on the European West was particularly felt on two fronts. On the popular front, one can point to Sir Edwin Arnold’s *The Light of Asia* (1879), which depicts the life, character, and philosophy of Prince Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, and was subsequently translated in numerous languages, including Hindi.<sup>7</sup> On the scholarly front, there was the legendary Max Müller, whose 50-volume series on the *Sacred Books of the East* (ca. 1879-1904) included many Buddhist classics translated into English for the first time.<sup>8</sup> As with all transitional moments in the history of ideas, the so-called discovery of Buddhism came with a particular world view that emanated from its European provenance.

---

<sup>7</sup> Full title, *The Light of Asia: Being the Life and Teaching of Gautama, Prince of India and Founder of Buddhism*. On the impact in England, see J. Jeffrey Franklin, “The Life of the Buddha in Victorian England,” *ELH (English Literary History)* 72 (winter 2005), pp. 941-974. On its impact in India, where it was retranslated into several vernacular languages, and if anything, proved even more popular than in England, see Phyllis Granoll, “A Modern Border Crossing: Fakir Mohan Senapati’s Life of the Buddha,” in Victor H. Mair, ed., *Buddhist Transformations and Interactions: Essays in Honor of Antonino Forte* (Amherst, N.Y.: Cambria Press, 2017), pp. 121-140.

<sup>8</sup> The Sacred Books of the East (SBE) series, comprising fifty volumes, was issued by Oxford University Press between 1879 and 1910, with translations of key sacred texts of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, and Islam. Buddhist texts included: *Buddhist Suttas* translated by T.W. Rhys Davids, *Vinaya Texts* translated by Rhys Davids and Hermann Oldenberg, *The Fo-sho-hing-tsan-king* (Chinese version of the Life of the Buddha translated from the Sanskrit of Asvaghosa) translated by Samuel Beal, *The Saddharma Pundarika or Lotus of the True Law* translated by H. Kern, *The Questions of King Milinda* by Rhys Davids, and *Buddhist Mahayana Texts* translated by E.B. Cowell, F. Max Müller, and J. Takakusu.

The term “Protestant Buddhism” was introduced by Gananath Obeyesekere, who observed that late in the 19th century, a Śri Lankan, Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933), became the leader of a Buddhist protest/revival movement. In Obeyesekere’s analysis, the term conveyed two meanings: as a new form of Buddhism to protest against Christian missions, and as a movement that mirrored Protestant Christianity in structure and content.<sup>9</sup> Dharmapala was a modernist who promoted a vision of Buddhism as a religion compatible with science and western values, such as democracy. Along with Henry Steel Olcott and Helen Blavatsky, the creators of the Theosophical Society, he was a major reformer and revivalist of Ceylonese Buddhism and an important figure in its western transmission. In reference specifically to Olcott, Stephen Prothero refines the term “Protestant Buddhism” to “Protestant Modernism” in light of the fact that reformers like Olcott came out of a late 19<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-American Protestantism rather than the Weberian Protestantism that Obeyesekere assumed.<sup>10</sup>

The concept was also applied in academic Buddhist Studies circles by Gregory Schopen (“Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism”), to include the Protestant presuppositions of European

---

<sup>9</sup> “Religious Symbolism and Political Change in Ceylon,” *Modern Ceylon Studies* 1:43 (1970), pp. 43-63, following Stephen Prothero, “Henry Steel Olcott and “Protestant Buddhism,”” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (1995), pp. 281-302.

<sup>10</sup> Prothero comments: “By conflating Protestantism with Weber's representation of it, Obeyesekere and his followers tend to obscure the historical sources of the tradition they describe” (p. 282), and “ To view Protestant Buddhism solely as a product of the collision of traditional Theravada Buddhism with Weber's generic Protestantism is, in short, to miss out on ways in which a particular historical form of Protestants namely, nineteenth-century Anglo-American Protestant modernism, contributed mightily to that syncretic tradition.” (p. 283).

“discoverers” of Buddhism.<sup>11</sup> Schopen concluded: “It is possible, then, that this conception has determined the history of the study of Indian Buddhism and that—as a consequence—our picture of Indian Buddhism characterization may reflect more of our own history and values than the history and values of Indian Buddhism.”<sup>12</sup> The conception Schopen is referring to includes such things as an overriding textual orientation privileging sacred “canonical” writings as ideal and actual representations (i.e., that carefully contrived ideal paradigms are adequate reflections of historical reality [pp. 4-5]); excluding what practicing Buddhists did and believed in the history of their own indigenous traditions (p. 14); the devaluation of material aspects of religion—reliquaries, shrines, and images—as perversions of “true religion” (pp. 20-21); and that this conception of where “true religion” is located originates in 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant polemics (p.22).

In line with these Protestant Christian presuppositions, the field of Buddhist Studies, following Schopen, has been plagued with Protestant overtones from its inception. One way to calculate this influence is to correlate Protestant aspirations with the frames of early Buddhist Studies. Early Buddhist interests were preoccupied by the life and teachings of Śākyamuni, as suggested by Arnold’s *Light of Asia*, referred to above, and Olcott’s description of his faith as a “pure, primitive Buddhism;” in the process, he eschewed the tradition of his Sinhalese mentors in favor of an adapted tradition that “[facilitated] the interaction between Protestantism and Buddhism in the late-nineteenth-

---

<sup>11</sup> “Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism,” *History of Religions*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (1991), pp. 1-23.

<sup>12</sup> Schopen, “Archaeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Indian Buddhism,” pp. 22-23.

century.”<sup>13</sup> It goes without saying that the “pure, primitive Buddhism” imagined by Olcott and others was a creative fabrication suitable for Buddhist reformers, but hardly a premise for the academic study of Buddhism.

Schopen was not the first to notice the spell to which the scholarly study of Buddhism had succumbed. As early as 1973, David L. Snellgrove made explicit the problems associated with the Protestant inspired quest for the historical Buddha:

Despite the admonitions of responsible scholars, writers of books on Buddhism still tend to assume that a reasonably historical account of the life and personal teachings of Śākyamuni Buddha may be extracted from the earliest available canonical accounts. This quest of the historical Buddha began as a Western nineteenth-century interest, imitating both in its pre-suppositions and its methods of inquiry the parallel quest of the historical Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>14</sup>

In deliberate response to the famous 19<sup>th</sup> century German Indologist, Hermann Oldenberg, who produced a widely-read work on Buddhism, *Buddha, sein Leben, seine Lehre, seine Gemeinde* (Berlin, 1881) [*Buddha, His Life, His Doctrine, His Order* (London: Williams, 1882)], Snellgrove continues:

Within the terms of his enunciated principles, Oldenberg’s work is responsible and scholarly. He has created a figure of the historical Buddha, which has been now popularly accepted by Westerners, and by Westernized Asians. However, cast as it is in the mold of European nineteenth-century

---

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Prothero, “Henry Steel Olcott and “Protestant Buddhism,”” p. 285.

<sup>14</sup> “Śākyamuni’s Final ‘nirvāṇa,’” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2, In Honour of Walter Simon (1973), p. 399.

liberal and rational thought, it might seem to bear on examination no relationship to the religious aspirations and conceptions relating to Śākyamuni Buddha, as revealed in the earliest Buddhist literature. Furthermore it can easily be shown that the whole process of deliberately abstracting everything of an apparent unhistorical and mythical character, all too often leads away from any semblance of historical truth. This is because the elements that are deliberately abstracted, usually those relating to religious faith and the cult of the Buddha as a higher being, may be older and thus nearer the origins of the religion, than the supposed historical element. This easily reveals itself at best as an honest but comparatively late attempt at producing out of floating traditions a coherent story, and at the worst as a tangle of tendentious fabrications produced to justify the pretensions of some later sectarian group.<sup>15</sup>

To make explicit the Protestant paradigm suggested in the motivations to focus on the study of early Buddhism, let me suggest the following parallels: Śākyamuni was viewed as the true originator of Buddhism, akin to the position of Jesus in Christianity; the *Dialogues of Buddha*, the alleged record of Śākyamuni's teachings, were likened to the Christian *New Testament*, the record of Jesus' activities and teachings; subsequent elaborations and explanations of Buddhist teachings were regarded as a deterioration or corruption of Śākyamuni's original message, just as Catholic doctrinal explanations came to be viewed as a perversion of the "pure," original Christianity developed by Jesus and his early followers as revealed in the New Testament; the quest of the Protestant discoverers of Buddhism for the original, true teachings of the historical Buddha came to be associated with "true

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.



Buddhism,” in a manner not unlike the Protestant quest for the historical Jesus and “true Christianity.”

The influence of Protestant orientations over Buddhism have been well noted. Kevin Trainor, in his review of Reginald Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India: a Study of Buddhist Values and Orientations*, comments that Ray’s account “bears more than a passing resemblance to influential nineteenth century narratives of an original authentic monastic tradition that was later corrupted by a Buddhist laity incapable of understanding the Buddha’s true teaching.”<sup>16</sup> In specific reference to Tibet, Don Lopez writes how “Mahayana had been condemned by an earlier generation of scholars as a deviation of the Buddha’s original teachings.”<sup>17</sup> A comprehensive overview of the situation is provided by Chatherine Newell, who speaks of how discourses about religion were shaped by expectations dating back to the Reformation.

Protestantism downplayed the importance and efficacy of religious ritual and the soteriological mediation of a professional clergy, and asserted the centrality of individual access to texts in understanding a religion. It emphasized the personal rather than the social focus of religion. This rational, ritual-free, “true” Christianity, *based in scripture rather than tradition*, was presented in contrast to Catholicism, which was seen to have moved far away from the original teachings of the Early Church, and to have allowed itself to be sullied by clerical hierarchy, devotionism and excessive ritual.

The superiority of Protestantism over the perceived idolatry and ritual of the Catholic Church was well established in the minds of many of the early

---

<sup>16</sup> *History of Religions*, Vol. 37 No. 1 (1997), pp. 96-98.

<sup>17</sup> *Prisoners of Shangri-La* (University of Chicago Press), p. 4.

European scholars of Buddhist Asia, particularly within the Anglo-German strand of scholarship.<sup>18</sup>

As a result, Newell concludes, the study of Buddhism was divided into two disparate poles: 1) an idealized Buddhism of distant antiquity, reconstructed by scholars based on linguistic criteria giving preference to older texts; and 2) the Buddhism of contemporary Asia, whose practices and preferences stood in marked contrast to the idealized reconstruction.<sup>19</sup> This dichotomy perpetrated an ideal “true” Buddhism construed as a transhistorical essence in contrast to its contemporary manifestations.<sup>20</sup>

The spell cast by the myopic European fascination with Indian, especially early Indian Buddhism was broken in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century through the writings of D.T. Suzuki. Suzuki, well-known as a proselytizer of Zen Buddhism in the West, carved out a space for Zen (and by extension Chan) as a legitimate expression of Buddhism beyond the Indian cultural sphere. The victory he won, however, was a mixed one, as he did so with an interpretation of Zen that attempted to transcend the Protestant presuppositions that the discipline of Buddhist Studies assumed, cast, ala Snellgrove, “in the mold of European nineteenth-century liberal and rational thought.”

Through the work of others, the nature of Suzuki’s impact and his inspirations are now well-known but let me review some salient aspects.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> “Approaches to the Study of Buddhism,” in Bryan S. Turner, ed., *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion*, p. 390 (emphasis mine).

<sup>19</sup> “Approaches to the Study of Buddhism,” p. 391.

<sup>20</sup> Donald Lopez, *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism* (University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> For a succinct review of Suzuki’s life and influence, see Robert Sharf, “Suzuki, D.T.,” in Lindsay Jones, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Macmillan, 2005), vol. 13, 1884-1887. For a full exposition of Sharf’s work on Suzuki, see “The Zen of Japanese

Suzuki was a student of Western philosophy and lay Zen practitioner who accompanied Zen master Shaku Sōen (釋宗演, 1860-1919) to the United States to attend the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, to serve as his translator. Suzuki went on to become an indefatigable proponent of Zen, and his efforts almost single handedly created a new field of Buddhist Studies focusing on Zen (and Chan). Suzuki was broadly interested in Theosophy and even founded a branch in Japan of an offshoot organization in 1911, together with his wife Beatrice Lane Suzuki—also an avid Theosophist.<sup>22</sup> Suzuki also formed an interest in another fashionable movement of the time, Swedenborgianism, based on the writings of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Swedish mystic and theologian Emanuel Swedenborg. Suzuki was instrumental in introducing the movement in Japan, and actively promoted it for several years.<sup>23</sup> Influenced by William James notion of mysticism as “pure experience,”<sup>24</sup> Suzuki charted an interpretation of Zen as a singular transformative experience, the fundamental and authentic basis for “one single original Faith, deeply

---

Nationalism,” in *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 107-160. On Suzuki’s impact following the World Parliament of Religions, see Judith Snodgrass, *Presenting Buddhism to the West: Orientalism, Occidentalism and the Columbian Exposition* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 245-277.

<sup>22</sup> See Thomas A. Tweed, “American Occultism and Japanese Buddhism: Albert J. Edmunds, D. T. Suzuki, and Translocative History,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 32 (2) (2005): 249–281; on Beatrice Lane Suzuki, see Algeo, Adele S., “Beatrice Lane Suzuki: An American Theosophist in Japan,” *Quest*, 95 (1) (2007): 13–17.

<sup>23</sup> On Swedenborg, see Erland J. Brock, ed., *Swedenborg and His Influence* (Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania: The Academy of the New Church, 1988). Suzuki’s work, *Swedenborg: Buddha of the North* is available through the Swedenborg Foundation (West Chester, Pa: Swedenborg Foundation, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> *Varieties of Religious Experience*, first published 1902.

embedded in the human soul.”<sup>25</sup> In Suzuki’s mind, *Zen satori*, or enlightenment, represented the pivotal moment in religious experience, the very foundation of religiosity and spirituality itself, foundational to all religions which were but a species of this transformative insight. Zen thus represented the seminal moment of religious experience, transcending culture and history, that served as the foundation of all religions. Yet, Suzuki was not content to share Zen experience, to deem it as one mystical experience among many, but to situate Zen experience as *the* fountain from which all other religious experiences might be compared (even though other species of mysticism might at times, according to Suzuki, come close).<sup>26</sup> Zen, in Suzuki’s interpretation, was neither a religion nor a philosophy, and remarkably, not even Buddhism.<sup>27</sup>

While Suzuki broke the spell of Indo-centrism in Buddhist Studies, the effect of his mission was to promote a Japan-centric model in its place. Although aware of the Indian, and especially Chinese context that it grew from, Suzuki insisted that true Zen emerged only with the meeting of Buddhism and Japanese culture in the Kamakura period, when Japan truly awakened to religious and spiritual life. The flowering of this period became “the basis for the Japanese Character, thought, religious faith, and esthetic taste,” from which in the future, Suzuki believed “there can be constructed something new

---

<sup>25</sup> D.T. Suzuki, Editorial, *Eastern Buddhist* 1, no. 2 (1921), p. 156 (cited from Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism,” p. 18.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Suzuki’s *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist* (first published by George Allen & Unwin, 1957), and his work on the medieval Christian mystic, the Dominican, Meister Eckhart.

<sup>27</sup> *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (Kyoto, 1934), p. 14.

of world-wide significance,” and that this is “the mission of today’s Japan.”<sup>28</sup> Zen, according to Suzuki, was instrumental for the Japanese in finding their spiritual depth. “Though it came by way of China, its imported character altogether vanished following its introduction, and it became Japanese,” to form “an essential rapport between Zen and the Japanese character.”<sup>29</sup>

As a result, the breaking of the spell cast by Indian Buddhism did not lead to a true renaissance of Chan and Zen Studies. Suzuki’s Zen was firmly rooted in the Protestant religious paradigm that privileged the notion of a true religion that predated the institutional, ritual, and social encumbrances associated with religious deterioration. Somewhat magically, and mysteriously, Zen emerged in Japan as a pristine form of spiritual nonduality (*the* pristine form of spirituality), which Suzuki would claim as more authentic than even Protestant Christianity. As a result, Zen Studies shaped our understanding of Chinese Chan Buddhism in two significant ways: 1) it treated Chinese Chan as prelude to a full expression of Japanese Zen spirituality; and 2) it privileged those aspects of Chinese Chan that confirmed and contributed to a new and modern Japanese interpretation of Zen as suggested by contemporary Rinzai Zen orthodoxy. The result is that even when the story of East Asian Chan, Sōn, and Zen has been told, it has been done inaccurately, outside a proper historical model. Historical events were not treated as phenomena intrinsic to their own development, but in the service of another narrative.

---

<sup>28</sup> Suzuki, *Japanese Spirituality*, Norman Waddell, trans. (Tokyo: Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, Ministry of Education, Japan, 1972), p. 46; originally published as *Nihonteki reisei* 日本的靈性 (Tokyo: Iwanami bunko, 1972; originally written in 1944).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

## II. Concluding comments

Having acknowledged the fallacies of our previous models, how should we begin to renarrativize Chan/ Sōn/ Zen Buddhist Studies for the Twenty First Century? What can we do to reposition East Asian Buddhism to occupy the central place in Buddhist Studies that it deserves? Let me offer a few suggestions.

In the first place, we need to periodize the study of Buddhism to accurately reflect general parameters that guide and orient our investigations. Periodization parameters can be incredibly fluid (and misleading), and we must exercise caution in their judicious execution, lest we become imprisoned in our own conceptual fallacies. Yet, without more accurate periodization schemes, our efforts have become reduced to the false presumptions and inaccurate depictions of East Asian Buddhism I outlined above. As an attempt to remedy the situation, I propose four periods: (1) an Indian period depicting the early development of Buddhism on the Indian subcontinent; (2) an Indo-centric period depicting the expansion of Buddhism throughout the Asian region, while still looking toward India for inspiration; (3) an East Asian period, as described above, where indigenous East Asian resources become central to the development of uniquely East Asian forms of Buddhism; and (4) an international period marking the adaptation processes as Buddhism accommodates and responds to developments in modern science, technology, and communication, liberal and social political movements, and so on. While this periodization scheme overlaps somewhat with traditional models of Buddhist teachings via “vehicles” — Śrāvakayana, Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana — used throughout Buddhist Studies to discuss the development and expansion of Buddhism, the periodization scheme is intended to supplant the “vehicles” dissemination model, which is by default Indo-centric and

supposes an organic trunk-branches schemata. Replacing the trunk-branches schemata with a temporal and regional model based on the development of hubs/centers is intended to reposition Buddhist developments to indigenous networks.

Secondly, having acknowledged Buddhism's distinct phases and regional independence brings us to the characterization (or recharacterization) of East Asian Buddhism, particularly Chan/ Sōn/ Zen traditions. In my own work, I emphasize the role of China in actively reimagining Buddhism in unique and indigenous ways to form an intrinsically authentic form of East Asian Buddhism. I especially situate my work in the Hangzhou region, centered in Hangzhou, former capital of China during the Southern Song dynasty, and including the entire Jiangnan region of southeastern China, as a focal point for these developments. The Hangzhou region has long been one of the most important cultural hubs in China, and has had a wide-ranging impact on Chinese culture and Buddhism. It came to prominence in the tenth century, when Hangzhou was known as Qiantang, and served as the capital of the state (or kingdom) of Wuyue. As the capital of the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279), new forms of Buddhism spread throughout East Asia, especially to Japan and Korea. As a result, when we speak about East Asian Buddhism today, we are largely speaking about forms of Buddhism that were initiated in the Hangzhou region, and adopted and adapted in other regions and time periods. While my own work tends to be sino-centric, working specifically out of the hub created by the Hangzhou region, a major aspect is the dissemination of Buddhism throughout the wider East Asian region. Although this initiated a so-called "borderland complex" where Korea and Japan were viewed as peripheral and subordinate to a Chinese Buddhist homeland, just as China overcame its borderland complex with Indian Buddhism, so did Korea and

Japan eventually overcome their “inferior” status to forge centers and hubs to rival and supplant the Buddhism of the Chinese mainland.

In general, I am proposing three paradigms for the study of Buddhism: (1) an Indian and Indo-centric paradigm, (2) an East Asian paradigm, and (3) a modern international paradigm. Buddhist Studies thus far has operated largely in terms of (1) and (3), while studies that naturally belong in (2) are either neglected or reduced to an aspect of (1) or (3). The insertion of a paradigm between (1) and (3) will provide recognition of critical indigenous developments in East Asian Buddhism.

Finally, in the current context one might ask what this reorientation means for the study of Ganhwa Sŏn? In general, it asks that one be mindful of historical context in the way outlined above—how and why did Ganhwa Sŏn develop in the East Asian period to contribute to indigenous East Asian resources central to the development of uniquely East Asian forms of Buddhism? This is not a new perspective, but the reorientation will hopefully serve to enhance its already well-deserved reputation. The periodization scheme also serves to distinguish unique aspects of modern Ganhwa Sŏn intended to revitalize and reinvigorate a tradition facing new challenges and opportunities. And just as Ganhwa Sŏn developed in connection with Chinese and East Asian trends in the premodern period, it is hoped that modern Ganhwa Sŏn will reengage with contemporary Chinese Chan and Japanese Zen traditions to form a circulation of knowledge vital to Chan/ Sŏn/ Zen’s renaissance.



# Chan is Alive and Well and Living... Just About Everywhere

Steven Heine

Florida International University

## Abstract

This paper offers an explanation for the remarkable growth in popularity and worldwide spread of Chan theory and practice in contemporary global society. First, it draws on parallels with the famous 1968 musical production, *Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris*, originally an off-Broadway hit that became an international sensation by featuring the songs of a Flemish singer-songwriter who was until then unknown outside of French-speaking countries but he ended as a tremendous influence on popular culture lasting at least several decades. In a similar vein, the Chan school, once long diminished, marginalized and even persecuted in its native country, and for a long time considered an eccentric footnote when Buddhism was being introduced to the West, has emerged with monumental impact on a wide variety of social and intellectual developments.

The main reason is that the traditional Chan worldview based on Song Chinese standpoints of multiperspectival understanding and situational adaptability—or what I refer to as the notion of “Turnabout Chan”—has significant resonance with numerous post-truth-as-correspondence approaches to gaining self-awareness of the modern world, ranging from the

principle of uncertainty in quantum mechanics to stream of consciousness in literary modernism. Some of the main Chan examples to be discussed include the witty philosophical repartee of *gongan* commentaries in the *Blue Cliff Record (Biyuanlu)*, the template for spiritual progression expressed in the *Ten Oxherding Pictures*, portrayals of egolessness in “apparition” paintings and poetic evocations of Chan pivot-moments, in addition to other expressions of “realizing the self by forgetting the self.” In short, Chan provides rich resources for illuminating *u-topia* (in the literal sense of no-particular-place) manifested any and everywhere.

**Keywords:** multiperspectival, Turnabout Chan, Jacques Brel, *gongan*, apparition paintings

“Whoever does not see God everywhere does not see Him anywhere.”

— Kotzker Rebbe (Hasidism)

“Do not let your mind be identical with sensations or separated from them. . . be free everywhere so that nowhere is there a place that the Way cannot be practiced.”

— Huangpo, *Transmission of Mind*

“Whether or not you are able to understand it/ In South Mountain and North Mountain, there is the driving of a torrential rain.”

— Yuanwu Keqin (*Blue Cliff Record*, case 46)

## I. INTRODUCTION: WHY NOT CHAN?

This paper offers an explanation for the remarkable growth in popularity and worldwide spread in contemporary global society of traditional Chan/Zen/Seon Buddhist theory and practice based on analyzing some of the main accomplishments evident in philosophical texts, literary works, symbolic paintings, and other Chan creative productions stemming from Song-dynasty China (960-1279), as well as examples of adoptions and adaptations in medieval Japan. Some of the Chan forms of expression to be discussed below include the witty philosophical repartee of *gongan*(公案) commentaries in the *Blue Cliff Record*(*Biyānlù*) and related collections, the template for mystical advancement featured in the *Ten Oxherding Pictures*, portrayals of egolessness in “apparition” paintings showing people communing or seeming to merge with the natural environment, and lyrical poetic evocations of Chan pivot-instants, in addition to other suggestions of an adept’s ability to “realize the self by forgetting the self,” as suggested in a key passage of the “Genjōkōan” (Enlightenment Realized Here-and-Now) fascicle of Dōgen’s *Shōbōgenzō* (Treasury of the True Dharma-Eye).

These exceptional rhetorical and visual artistic developments reflect in diverse fashion the personal attainment, through the efficacy of self-reliance and self-discipline, of a holistic realization of all-encompassing, interdependent reality that unifies, without neglecting or suppressing the independence of universality and particularity. I refer to the intensely subjective experience that fully embraces the objectivity of all phenomena as the notion of “Turnabout Chan”<sup>1</sup> This capability overcomes doubt and anxiety based on embracing uncertainty by leading to an open-ended

---

<sup>1</sup> See Steven Heine, *The Rhetoric of Uncertainty in the Blue Cliff Record: Sharpening a Sword at the Dragon’s Gate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). Note: All citations from the *Blue Cliff Record* in this article are from *Taishō* vol. 48.2003.

flexibility and resourcefulness of spirit in ways that have sparked a profound resonance with various types of modern Western intellectual and imaginative constructions in addition to significant appropriations of Chan thought undertaken by numerous leading contemporary thinkers and artists.

The first question to consider is, Why is it that Chan, more so than other instances of Eastern spirituality, seems to enjoy a privileged place in playing such an important role in modern society?,” to which I often answer, “Why not Chan?,” but then quickly start to wonder whether the answer is really so simple. In its earliest forms in pre-Tang and Tang dynasty China, Chan functioned as a utopian mystical cult primarily intended for reclusive monastics, who vigorously practiced meditation and other austerities while located in remote mountain hermitages far removed from the dusty world of societal hypocrisy and corruption. Reflecting a conscious withdrawal from conventional society, the sparse lifestyle of seeking transcendence through poverty as exemplified by the attitude of Chan masters in ancient China does not appear to hold much relevance for the fast-paced, hi-tech, post-industrial routine of the modern era.

But, I suggest, it is precisely the core Chan qualities developed outside the social mainstream a millennium ago and further polished in urban centers like Hangzhou, the capital of the Southern Song dynasty where scholar-officials interacted the monk-poets at dozens of leading temples, that have long had a strong appeal for non-clerical or lay followers in East Asian countries. These attributes continue to exert a commanding influence in society as a possible form of relief or release for some of the ongoing foibles and frustrations of stressful life today. In other words, modernity has much in common with and more to learn from twelfth- and thirteenth-century East Asian culture than might be imagined. Many current personal concerns can be constructively

reconsidered in light of an investigation and assessment of what occurred during that era in terms of developing an outlook of taking self-responsibility amid a bewildering world of disparate perceptions and multiple perspectives that is often symbolized by the typical zigzag or nine-turn bridge allowing walkers to see things from many angles as featured in landscape gardens throughout China and Japan.

On the other hand, Chan indeed appears to be an unlikely candidate for such a prominent role, not only for the historical reasons cited but also because of its somewhat mixed contemporary standing in that its traditional identity has been shaken and occasionally shattered over the years. While Chan practice centers representing different lineages and cultures are prevalent in many areas in America today, it seems clear that the most popular or practical forms of Asian mysticism are Yoga, Traditional Chinese Medicine, Feng Shui (Geomancy), or various Martial Arts. The best-known personality in all of Buddhism is the Dalai Lama rather than a Chan master or advocate, who are lesser known to the general populace (beyond any given faction) since the heyday of D.T Suzuki in the 1950s and 1960s.

Moreover, Chan, along with many of the other examples, is frequently subjected to the criticism that Asian sources of wisdom have turned into mere commodified and commercialized entities that are used ironically to support essentially non-spiritual styles of behavior far removed from their original intention. This is suggested in the essay, “From Western Marxism to Western Buddhism” by Slavoj Žižek who writes (recalling how many must feel, for example, when looking at their iPhone’s “Kōan App”):

The ultimate postmodern irony today is the strange exchange between Europe and Asia: at the very moment when “European” technology and capitalism are triumphing worldwide at the level of the “economic

infrastructure,” the Judeo-Christian legacy is threatened at the level of “ideological superstructure” in the European space by New Age “Asiatic” thought, which, in its different guises ranging from “Western Buddhism” to different “Taos,” is establishing itself as the hegemonic ideology of global capitalism.<sup>2</sup>

Another critique of Chan is unfortunately sometimes suggested within the world of religious studies scholarship. I have attended several workshops at national conferences dealing with the general topic, How to Teach the Intro Course on East Asian Religions. Most participants, who are generally not Chan research specialists, have spent a good amount of time exploring ways to get students excited about various kinds of folklore and mythology, rituals and pilgrimages, ideology and theology. But when it comes to discussing the teaching of Chan, the conversation has usually concentrated on something quite different; that is, how to de-mystify, de-romanticize, and debunk the Chan tradition that has supposedly been overly idealized by Suzuki and other proponents but was exposed for its true worth, at least in Japan, in *Zen at War* and other sustained attacks regarding apparent moral deficiencies.

However, to paraphrase the memorable remark made on two different occasions by Mark Twain, “The reports of Chan’s death are greatly exaggerated.” After reading accounts in the *New York Times* that he had drowned in a boating accident, Twain said sardonically that he would conduct “an exhaustive investigation of this report that I have been lost at sea. If there is any foundation to this report, I will at once apprise the anxious public.” If death was an exaggeration twice for Twain, then there are surely instances for individuals and institutions whereby reports of revival or flourishing are

---

<sup>2</sup> Slavoj Žižek, “From Western Marxism to Western Buddhism,” *Cabinet: Mapping Conversations* 2 (2001).

greatly underestimated in that developments are not necessarily taken seriously or seem confusing at the time, and are only appreciated long after.

To account for the complexity of Chan's current societal status, which is characterized by both a great appreciation for and a somewhat cynical depreciation of its institutional structures and individual activities, I draw on parallels with recent cultural expressions such as the famous 1968 musical show, *Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris*. This surprisingly popular performance was originally an off-Broadway hit that soon became an international sensation in featuring the songs of a Flemish singer-songwriter, who was until then almost entirely unknown outside of a couple of French-speaking countries but he ended serving as a tremendous influence on international popular music that lasted for at least several decades near the end of the twentieth century. The rapturous response to the music of Jacques Brel—even though the show about his work did not actually include his appearance or feature his distinctive voice, as part of a theatrical misdirection that no doubt added to the overall mystique and allure—was at once expected, in that his songs were inspirational, and unforeseen, since there seemed to be so many obstacles to rapid, widespread acceptance of an obscure musician. It was also not unexpected that the production's impact would eventually subside, with the exception of a film version in 1975 in addition to occasional Broadway revivals in more recent years that usually tailor the original material for a contemporary audience.<sup>3</sup>

In a similar vein prior to and during the boom of global interest in Chan that was generated, especially in the post-WWII era based in large part on Suzuki's

---

<sup>3</sup> One revival featured significant changes compared to the original as the order of songs was rearranged, numbers were re-orchestrated, and some songs were dropped or added, while the staging and choreography was expanded.

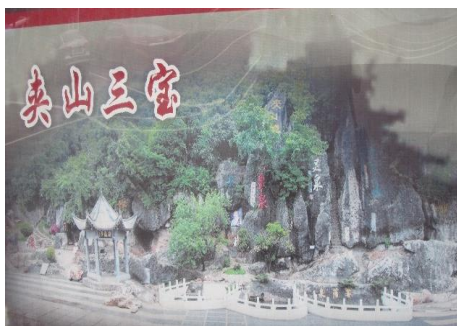
sway over the Beat writings of Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg about attaining *satori* in a modern context in addition to John Cage's radical compositions, the Chan school has struggled with various internal and external challenges to establishing a strong sense of identity. For centuries, the role of Chan was greatly diminished, marginalized, and even persecuted in its native country while only being restored over the past thirty years, albeit with some important caveats about the authenticity of these developments.

For example, the Mount Jiashan monastery situated in a remote part of northwestern Hunan province was supposedly the home of the initiator of tea ceremony, the master Jiashan in the ninth century, and also the formation of the *Blue Cliff Record* with Yuanwu's prose comments on Xuedou's verse remarks on 100 *gongan* cases that were delivered originally as oral sermons during the summer retreats of 1111 and 1112. The temple was apparently quite dilapidated after hundreds of years of neglect and it was almost entirely destroyed during the Long March, except for a single hall in which some Maoist soldiers holed up for a while and on leaving the grounds wrote on the back wall the slogan, "Death to all wealthy landowners." Beginning in the late 1900s, the temple has gradually been restored as a celebrated location that it now listed near the top of the official assessment tourist sites in the region (which is near the ever popular Zhangjiajie National Forest Park, where the film *Avatar* was partly shot), and is visited regularly by dignitaries.

Figures 1.a and 1.b show the current condition of the temple, with 1.a providing an aerial view of the main structures and pagoda near a recently manmade lake in the mountains used for recreational boating. The other illustration proclaims "Jiashan's Three Jewels," which include the notion of "Tea and Chan are One Taste," as shown in Figure 2.a, and the production of the *Blue Cliff Record*, as shown in Figure 2.b. Those images are part of the



narrative, which includes many hagiographical and pseudo-historical allusions, told at the temple today. The supposed third, non-classical-Chan-related jewel is the tomb of late Ming rebel Li Zecheng, now considered a hero by the Communist Party even though historians generally agree that the legend of the general residing as a monastic recluse at the temple for thirty years has no real basis.



**Figures 1.a and 1.b**

**Mount Jiashan Overview**

**“Jiashan’s Three Jewels”**



**Figures 2.a and 2.b**

**“Chan and Tea are One Taste”      Publishing *the Blue Cliff Record***

Another limitation affecting Chan’s modern role is that for a long time when Buddhism was first being introduced to the West, Chan was considered a kind of eccentric footnote to the older Indian and Chinese schools. Then, the initial

large-scale boom of Chan was frequently met with skepticism or rejection, or Chan was more or less forced to compete with many other examples of Eastern spirituality. Moreover, Chan has also suffered reproach for issues of corruption or excessive behavior in East Asian societies. Witness the Critical Buddhism (Hihan Bukkyō) movement that emerged in Japan in the late 1980s, with the main book on the topic in English, *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm Over Critical Buddhism* (U of Hawaii Press, 1997) recently translated into Korean.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, Chan has emerged to exert a monumental impact on a wide variety of contemporary cultural developments in a uniquely impactful way. Why?

## II. CHAN DISCOURSE AND THE MODERN WEST

The primary reason for its current attractiveness and appeal, I argue, is that the traditional Chan worldview based largely on Song Chinese standpoints of multiperspectival understanding and situational adaptability is comparable to numerous post-truth-as-correspondence approaches to gaining self-awareness, ranging from Werner Heisenberg's principle of indeterminism in theoretical physics to the impressionism of Van Gogh in the fine arts, John Cage's minimalism in classical music, and James Joyce's stream of consciousness in literary modernism, among too many other examples to enumerate succinctly. According to the standpoint of Turnabout Chan, an adept resolves a sense fundamental uncertainty and misgiving by accepting the multiplicity of truth while demonstrating a facility with engaging occasions of spiritual realization

---

<sup>4</sup> My understanding is that the translation was sponsored by a Christian group, which invited Matsumoto Shirō, one of the two leading figures in the movement, to speak in Korea in 2015.

at any appropriate place or moment and taking advantage of transformative encounters with rivals or disciples.

A prominent explication of the significance of Turnabout Chan appears in case 45 of the *Blue Cliff Record*, in which Yuanwu remarks on the famous encounter dialogue in which a monk asks Tang-dynasty master Zhaozhou, “What is the meaning of Bodhidharma coming from the west?,” and the master replies, “The cypress tree in the courtyard.” When the monk retorts, “Do not instruct people by pointing to objects,” Zhaozhou says, “I never use objects to instruct people.” Yuanwu maintains of Zhaozhou’s perplexing responses, “See how at the ultimate point, just where it seems impossible for him to be able to make a turn (or transform the situation), he does indeed turn and thereby spontaneously reveals the whole universe. If you cannot undergo such a turn, wherever you walk on the road you will no doubt get stuck in the mud under your feet.” Yuanwu also points out that Zhaozhou’s replies do not depend on, but also do not overlook the need to conjure Buddhist doctrine: “If you think he did discuss the meaning of Buddhism, then why did he never speak of mind and nature or mystery and marvel? But if you think he did not discuss Buddhism, then when did he never turn his back on any disciple’s question?”

Also, Yuanwu praises Xuedou’s verse in case 25 by saying, “He creates a space to turn around by not getting stuck in one corner(有轉身處. 不守一隅).<sup>5</sup>” Another interesting expression of the Chan pivot occurs in Dōgen’s “Shunjū” (Spring and Autumn) fascicle, which refers to expounding to monks the teachings of the *Qilin* (J. *Kirin*) *Sutra* about what happens when someone has the opportunity to meet Buddha. The *Qilin Sutra* seems to be an alternative name for the *Spring and Autumn Chronicles*, the only work directly attributed

---

<sup>5</sup> T48.2003.165c.

to Confucius, and Dōgen may be expounding what he considers to be a Buddhist equivalent of that text. The *qilin* is a fabulous and auspicious beast, often considered to be the East Asian equivalent of a unicorn, with the body of a deer, the tail of an ox, the hooves of a horse, and one fleshy horn, with the hair on its back made up of variegated colors and yellow hair on its stomach. Dōgen refers to a question about why the *qilin* has only one horn and notes that an ancient master once said, “Although there could be many horns, a single horn is enough.”<sup>6</sup> This image is a metaphor for a Dharma heir who is highly skilled in innumerable means to help others realize truth but recognizes that for each pedagogical opportunity at any given moment, using just one method suffices. In short, Chan provides rich resources for illuminating the meaning of *u-topia* (in the literal sense of no-particular-place) that is manifested wherever an adept discloses realization. This recalls a dictum of late medieval Jewish mysticism attributed to the Ketzker Rebbe, “Whoever does not see God everywhere does not see Him anywhere,” and also the Albert Einstein saying about the dynamism of quantum mechanics, “Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving.”

The modern Western outlook indicated in so many different kinds of examples with which the Song Chan worldview converges can be characterized in terms of the aftermath to overcoming the traditional view of truth as correspondence. Among the many critiques that unfolded in philosophy and the arts regarding the standpoint of correspondence (or equivalence) that dominated Western thought until the end of the nineteenth century, including Kantian idealism and American pragmatism, Friedrich

---

<sup>6</sup> Dōgen’s *Shōbōgenzō* is published in *Dōgen zenji zenshū* (7 vols.), vols. 1-2 (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1988-1993). 1:415.

Nietzsche provides one of the most compelling examples.<sup>7</sup> In an unpublished essay, “On Truth and Lies in the Non-Moral Sense,” Nietzsche elaborates an early version of his genealogical account of the concept of truth that he opposed that remained deeply embedded in the presuppositions of both everyday common-sense attitudes and conventional philosophical theories based on views that: (1) Truth is essentially one; (2) Truth is a relation of correspondence between inner discursive or perceptual knowledge and outer reality; and (3) Truth is essentially a preexistent, objective concept that can be discerned by human beings, who play a mainly reactive role in terms of scientific discovery and moral accountability. Nietzsche’s own theory of multiperspectivism, which was at least indirectly influenced by Asian thought (though not Chan), in a nutshell states that any judgment or belief is an interpretation of the world from a particular and limited point of view, so that language and reality as well as subjectivity and objectivity are inseparably interrelated and can never be completely distinguished or fully attained without some degree of partiality and the need for continuing correction.

As a key to fulfilling a non-correspondence approach to gaining knowledge, the Chan school, like Nietzsche, seeks to strike a middle way between naïve affirmation of ordinary reality, which is not intended but could be implied by such positive sayings as Mazu’s “Everyday mind is Buddha” or Yunmen’s “Everyone has a radiant light,” and at the other end of the spectrum, a hopeless sense of nihilism suggesting that there is no meaning or purpose whatsoever to existence as conveyed in notions of emptiness or vacuity such as the *Wu Gong’an* (J. *Mu Kōan*). Instead, truth is to be sought and found in unique

---

<sup>7</sup> Tomislav Zelić, “Nietzsche’s Theory of Multiperspectivism Revisited,” *Synthesis Philosophica* 43 (2007), 231-244. See also Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, in: *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1992), 179–436, particularly § 4, 201.

articulations whereby dichotomies between positive and negative, subjective and objective, internal and external are finally overcome. Figures 3.a and 3.b illustrate two seminal anecdotes revealing the nuances of Turnabout Chan anecdotes: one in which Lingyun gains *satori* while viewing peach blossoms, and the other showing Xiangyan's illuminative experience when, while sweeping, he hears the sound of a pebble striking a bamboo tree. Although often interpreted as affirming natural surroundings as the key to enlightenment, the real point is that interior awareness is at once triggered and confirmed by an exterior sensation that unifies the realms of subjectivity and objectivity.

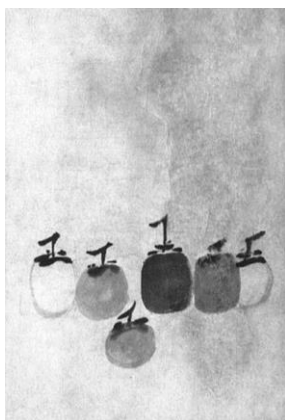


**Figures 3.a and 3.b**

**Lingyun's Peach Blossoms      Xiangyan's Pebble Striking Bamboo**

Some of the representative Chan expressions of multiperspectivism can be juxtaposed with the so-called “secular altarpieces” of modern Western literature and art demonstrating the post-correspondence standpoint, as in Figures 4.a and 4.b, which feature Muqi's thirteenth-century ink drawing of the “Six Persimmons” that became an icon in postwar culture and the springboard for a thousand analyses and arguments in addition to Van Gogh's

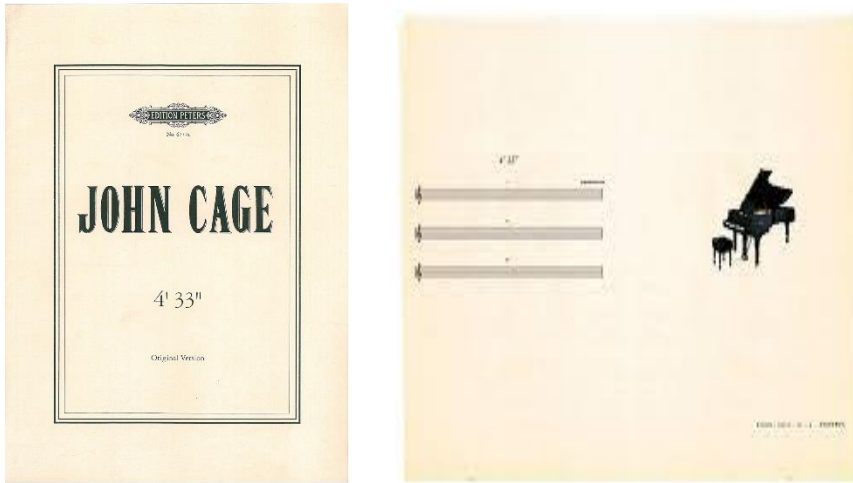
“Sunflowers,” which the artist enthusiastically told his brother Theo in a letter written in August 1888 was “a symphony in blue and yellow.”



**Figures 4.a and 4.b**

**Muqi’s “Six Persimmons” Van Gogh’s “Sunflowers”**

Despite the obvious difference between Muqi’s monochromatic painting, which was especially innovative and unique at the time of its creation, and Van Gogh’s fabulously colorful depiction, the common ingredient is that, while seeming to remove subjectivity in illustrating external, natural objects, the impression made on the viewer formed by both works is that of the mind of the beholder in that reality is deliberately distorted in order to reflect the inner function of sensations. In that sense, the rendering and placement of objects in these paintings are a form of self-expression (or, perhaps, no-self-expression) that stirs endless appreciation. Moreover, the minimalism of Muqi helped inspire John Cage’s renowned composition, in Figures 5.a and 5.b, known as *4’ 33”*, in which the pianist came on stage but made no sound for four minutes and thirty-three seconds, thereby allowing the audience members to be silently sensitive to the throb of their own heartbeat or the quiet hum of electric instruments in the performance hall.



**Figures 5.a and 5.b**  
**From the original program of Cage's 4' 33''**

Another intriguing affinity with the breakthrough type of turnaround experience depicted in the poetic or prose remarks of the *Blue Clue Record* occurs in the final passage of James Joyce's "The Dead," the fifteenth story of *Dubliners* that evokes mystical hearing associated with the lyricism of natural events. Joyce writes with deceptively simple eloquence of the main character's experience of epiphany—a notion that is now very well known, but was singlehandedly invented by Joyce, who radically reinterpreted a regular, mechanical religious ritual in terms of attaining unpredictable momentary flashes of self-awareness—as a kind of cosmic resonance in dealing profoundly with newfound understanding based on a revelatory view of his wife's past: "His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly



through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead.”<sup>8</sup>

This lyricism at once disguising and revealing subjective realization recalls Yuanwu’s capping phrase comment on a line in Xuedou’s verse remark to case 46 about a monk hearing the sound of raindrops, “Whether or not you understand/ In South Mountain and North Mountain there is the driving of torrential rain(曾不會. 南山北山轉雨霈).” Similarly, in his discussion of Xuedou’s poetic line on case 37, “The flowing spring forms a lute/ Tunes ring out, but no one gets it./ When evening rains pass through, water grows deep in the autumn pond(雨過夜塘秋水深)”, Yuanwu notes, “This line is like hearing thunder that is so swift there is no time to cover the ears... It is a verse praised by the Hanlin Academy [arbiters of classical verse] because anyone who listens [to the lute] likely goes deaf.”

### III. TURNABOUT CHAN, THEN AND NOW

There are several main qualities of Turnabout Chan that are greatly appreciated from both historical and current standpoints. One feature is minimalism and simplicity in everyday contemplative cultivation, which helps foster a sense of detachment toward any preoccupation with external rewards or acquisitive consumerism. Another quality is aesthetic eloquence evoked through poetry and fine arts, which develops the role of self-expression in gaining and articulating insight into the mysteries of existence attuned to the varieties and vagaries of all human and natural phenomena. At the root of

---

<sup>8</sup> James Joyce, *Dubliners*, trans. Brenda Maddox (New York: Bantam, rpt. 1990, from 1914), 192.

Chan's resourceful approach to spiritual realization is an emphasis on coming to terms with and accepting fundamental ambiguity and inconclusiveness or uncertainty. Chan teachings do not try to provide fixed or final interpretations but instead encourage, or even demand, that each and every individual find truth. This is not a nihilistic or relativist position, but an outlook that highlights how reality is invariably contingent on perception by observing and evaluating multiple perspectives seen from every possible angle while these views are being turned upside-down, inside-out, and topsy-turvy in the twinkling of the mind's eye.

For Chan, the notion of uncertainty places full responsibility on the particular person who, through engaging multiple standpoints without fixation or limitation, attains spontaneous liberation from intellectual fetters and emotional attachments. Embracing uncertainty requires a willingness to topple dramatically or reverse drastically staid and stereotypical opinions. According to the *Blue Cliff Record*, this transformation is grounded on a Chan master's symbolic ability to "overturn a trainee's meditation seat and chase the great assembly." Or, more expansively, the skillful teacher is able to "turn back the flow of the great seas, collapse Mount Sumeru [the mythical cosmic Buddhist summit], and scatter the white clouds."

The origins of many of the primary expressions of Turnabout Chan are rooted in the distinctive conditions of Song Chinese society that featured the seeds of democracy (while still under imperial rule), the rise of meritocracy that to some extent overtook aristocracy as the basis for social mobility, and the rise of the literati class of scholar-officials who could for the first time enjoy leisure time that was generally spent for the purposes of gaining erudition and edification rather than mere entertainment and amusement. In a highly competitive though tolerant religious environment involving several

schools of Buddhism in addition to Neo-Confucianism and Daoism, Chan maintained a focus on attaining self-awareness by means of self-reliance in the face of ambiguity, instability, and indeterminism. A key to this development was an emphasis on completing a transition from realism or objectivism to idealism or subjectivism in philosophy and the arts.

The main elements of Turnabout Chan are summed up in the list below:

- Gaining self-knowledge(自知) realized by means of creative self-expression, sometimes free from and at other occasions adhering to literary rules/regulations, likened to singing or sounding a tune with wind, percussion or string instrumentation
- Undergoing a profound experience of doubt 疑 and anxiety, including physical symptoms of malady that can be intense and prolonged and make one feel that he is putting his whole life at stake
- Seizing opportune moments(機緣) of verbal and nonverbal exchange and testing in order to develop a special mentorship relationship that fosters total growth and realization/awakening rather than the accumulation of data
- Probing further(請益) by looking into the matter from all sides/angles (upside down, inside out, sideways and backwards) whereby one word or phrase, or sound or gesture, becomes an entryway demonstrating the knack of a card player finding his way out of being dealt a losing hand in knowing “when to hold ’em, when to fold ’em”
- Leading to an inconclusive and ambiguous result yet making one’s own personal judgment based on an assessment in accord with circumstances(對機), accepting, sometimes reluctantly, alternative views,

but severely criticizing those who fall into conceptualization and cliché or idle contrivance

- Persuading others while admitting that ultimately communication is a scattering of sand into the eyes(撒眼沙) of the reader, yet not wanting to interfere with their power of observation and insight or try to predetermine what they see and how it is interpreted.

These elements complete a transformation to full subjectivism, in that Yuanwu and other leading Chan teachers consistently insist to their followers, “Others say this or that, but this is what I think! What about you?” Or, “Here’s how I experienced this, and you can do it too. But you must find your own way!”

The multiple expressions of Turnabout Chan reflect a goalless process of attaining self-awareness involving: (1) narrative structures in hagiographies and parables telling of a personal quest through symbolic actions and sayings dealing with the turmoil of doubt or difficult external circumstances; (2) intimate stories of antidotes to the suffering and ailments of the Chan malady that is overcome by gaining redemption and well-being; (3) encounter pivots in *gongan* case interpretations that provide lyricism and minimalism in teaching by exploring a limitless rabbit hole of citations, allusions, diversions, indirections, reversals; (4) additional expressions reinforcing that uncertainty must always be confronted so that a continuing corrective of tentative outlooks needs to be perpetuated.

### **1. Personal Quest**

Song Chan narratives highlight the struggles of prospective Chan masters who overcome the malaise of doubt in the early stages of their career, as with Yuanwu who left his teacher Wuzu out of disappointment but soon returned after becoming ill just as Wuzu predicted, or continued to struggle with and

prevail over sociopolitical matters that often resulted in exile or imprisonment, such as Dahui spending fifteen years in the malarial south before returning in the mid-1150s to lead Mount Jingshan, then the premier Chan temple located outside Hangzhou.

How does a potential adept like Yuanwu or Dahui attain a sufficient degree of confidence in his or her capacity to embrace uncertainty as the key to attaining a breakthrough experience? Xuedou, one of the two authors of the multilayered *Blue Cliff Record*, said that the effort to reach enlightenment, as symbolized by the image of searching for and then seizing a precious gem from the jaws of a proverbial undersea dragon, left him in a perpetual state of doubt and anxiety that becomes transformed a crucial, constructive part of the process of self-realization. According to Xuedou's four-line verse that is cited here along with Yuanwu's capping phrases set in parenthesis playfully calling into question Xuedou's claims of realization by focusing attention on the implicit ultimatum that the reader must find the proper pathway and be able to express what the gem really means through his or her own efforts:

For twenty long years I have suffered bitterly;

(This is your own falling into the weeds, but that's none of my business. He's like a mute eating bitter fruit.)

How many times have I gone down into the Blue Dragon's lair for your sake!

(Was it worth the trouble? Don't misuse your efforts, but let's not say there wasn't anything extraordinary about your doing this.)

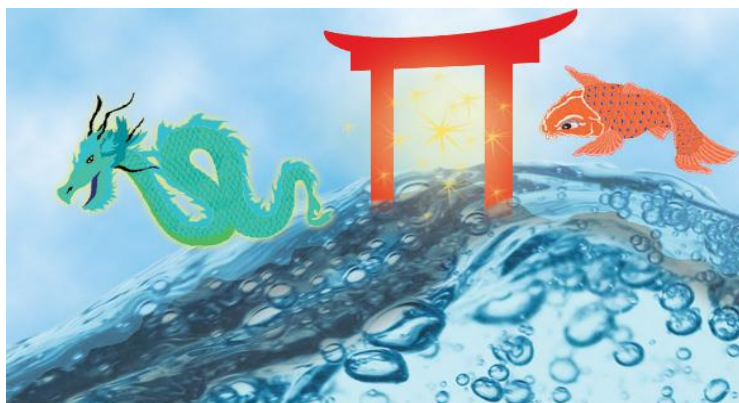
The grief this has caused me

(He saddens people to death. Sad man, don't speak sad thoughts to sad people.)

Can hardly be told;

(To whom would you speak of it? If you speak of it to sad people, you will only sadden them to death.)

If you want to be an authentic monk, do not take this lightly.  
(You must be even more thoroughgoing. Bah! Fall back three thousand miles!)



**Figure 6**  
**A Modern Illustration of Crossing the Dragon's Gate**

Figure 6 shows a modern *manga*-type of illustration of another famous ancient Chinese dragon legend that was appropriated by Chan discourse, as cited in Xuedou's verse on case 7 of the *Blue Cliff Record*, of carp swimming upstream to cross the magical Dragon's Gate during a violent thunderstorm so as to be transformed. A traditional metaphor for passing examinations, Chan writings used this image to symbolize the rare attainment of enlightenment by the most advanced practitioners.

## **2. Antidote to the Chan Malady**

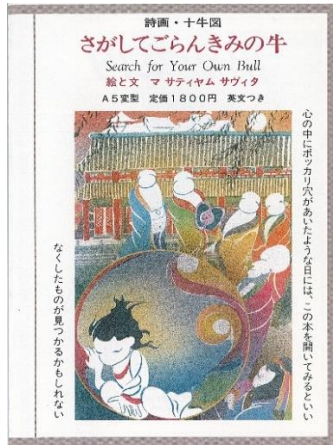
According to case 87 of the *Blue Cliff Record*, alluding to how Buddha knew how to give medicine fitting to the disease, Yunmen maintains, "Medicine and disease subdue each other: the whole earth is medicine; what is your self?" Xuedou's verse comments purposefully vacillate back and forth regarding the traditional analogy of building a carriage outfitted to suit the ruts

on the road that represents understanding external reality either by staying within or going outside one's home, "I don't make a carriage sitting behind closed doors—/ Since the pass road is quiet and empty all by itself. Not! Not!" In additional remarks, it is said, "Even if you are an adept and have no illness, still you must seek a bit of medicine to take," but at the same time there is the warning, "Don't be a fool who hangs a medicine bag on the back of a hearse." Furthermore, it is noted of the mutuality of remedy and ailment, "Something received is returned; sickness is treated by taking effective medicine; hunger is conquered by eating a royal meal; sauce is flavored with salt; and a snowy day is heated by burning coal(還委悉麼.病遇良醫.饑逢王膳.醬裏得鹽.雪中送炭.)."

One of the primary articulations of an antidote for the Chan malady caused by doubt is the now-perennial parable of the *Ten Oxherding Pictures*, which draws on earlier Asian imagery of spiritual progression involving the gradual taming and training of elephants or horses over the course of several stages. As shown in Figure 7.a, one of countless recent Japanese publications sitting on bookshelves about the series that are shown in 7.b, the cover makes use of typical Western adage, "Search for Your Own Bull," which translates the book's title, *Sagashite goran kimi no ushi*. This phrasing reinforces that the cure for the illness comes solely from within, and thus links traditional with modern interpretations of attaining authentic selfhood.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Similarly, taming a tiger is seen in Chan records as a sign of realizing the steadiness of concentration and there are images of a master riding the beast or of a tiger snoozing serenely in a cozy heap with eccentric practitioners Hanshan, Shide and Fenggan, known as the Holy Trio (*sansheng*) of Mount Tiantai, who are considered the manifestations of bodisattvas; see Denise Patry Leidy, *The Art of Buddhism: An Introduction to Its History-Meaning* (Boston: Shambhala, 2008), 226.



**Figures 7.a and 7.b**

**“Find Your Own Bull” Selection of Books in Tokyo Bookstore**

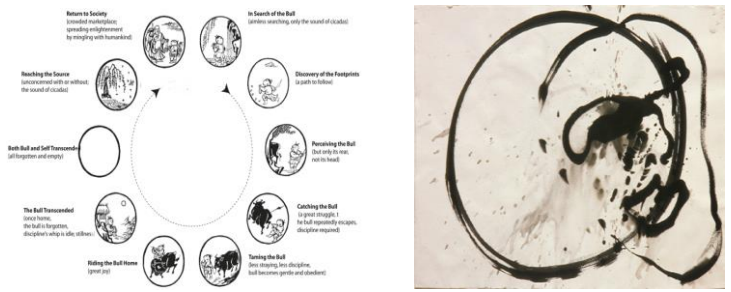
Next, Figure 8 shows a modern portrayal of the sixth stage of the parable, in which the boy is so much at peace with the beast that he can use his hands freely to play the flute rather than needing to hold the bull’s nose ring. The poetic comments for the main version of the parable that ends with the boy entering the marketplace highlights the theme of musical harmony (highlighted by italics): “Mounting the bull, slowly I return homeward./ *The voice of my flute intones through the evening./ Measuring with hand-beats the pulsating harmony, I direct the endless rhythm./ Whoever hears this melody will join me.*”



**Figure 8**  
**Stage Six: Playing the Flute**  
**in Harmony with the Bull**



In addition, it is interesting to juxtapose Figure 9.b showing John Cage’s abstract impression of the empty circle (as the eighth stage in the main version of the parable, but the last stage in another well-known version) with a circular construction of the ten stages in 9.a.



**Figures 9.a and 9.b**  
**Depictions of Ten Stages      John Cage’s “Empty Circle”**

The Cage drawing emphasizes the transition from realism to idealism in portraying the significance of the parable. In pre-Song Chinese art, bulls were generally shown realistically with detailed presentations but were also depicted iconically as symbols of pastoral life. In the *Ten Oxherding Pictures*, the aim is to “forget the bull,” so that presenting it as an objective entity or representing it in terms of conventional symbolism is consistently deconstructed. As Tom Wolfe notes of trends in modern Western art, “No more realism, no more representation of objects, no more lines, colors, forms, and contours, no more pigments, no more brushstrokes.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Tom Wolfe, *The Painted Word* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1975).

### 3. Encounter Pivots

Encounter dialogues demonstrating Chan pivot-movements form the literary basis of *gongan* commentaries in poetry and prose. According to the *Blue Cliff Record*, the aim of remarks is to not take anyone else's assessment for granted by "reviewing and reversing case judgments(翻案法)" in showing how the exchange partners are "continuously circling one another(交馳)" and revealing that whoever is the phony has been "exposed!(勘破了也)", while taunting fools with such zingers as "the sound of your thunder is great, but there's no rain at all(雷聲甚大.雨點全無)".

Depicted in Figure 10.a is a famous early ninth-century exchange between the Confucian scholar Li Ao and Chan master Yaoshan, who outsmarts the non-Buddhist interlocutor. To understand the radical reversal or ordinary social roles reflected in that anecdote, Figure 10.b shows a typical Chinese magistrate sitting at his bench in a way that highlights the original legal meaning of *gongan* as "public record." According to the dialogue, having heard of the teacher's impeccable reputation for instruction the scholar visits but is at first disappointed when Yaoshan does not speak and remarks, "Seeing your face is not as good as hearing your name." The master replies, "Do you distrust your eyes, but value your ears?" Then, pointing up and down he indicates that the ultimate reality is whatever can be seen, "Clouds are in the sky, and water is in a vase." Li Ao is awakened and writes a verse: "The disciplined body is like a crane,/ Flying among myriad pines with boxes of sutras./ When I came to ask about the Way—'Clouds in the sky, water in the vase.'"<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Gregory Levine, Yukio Lippitt, Yoshiaki Shimizu, eds., *Awakenings: Zen Figure Painting in Medieval Japan* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 134.



**Figures 10.a and 10.b**

**Li Ao's Encounter with Yaoshan Chinese Magistrate's Bench**

The next illustration in Figure 11 is an apparition-style painting of the Li Ao-Yaoshan encounter by an anonymous Southern Song-dynasty artist, in which the key figures and objects seem to disappear amid the natural scenery. The Yanxi Guangwen's poetic inscription reads "All moments of enlightenment come in a flash,/ Why distrust your eye and value your ear?/ What lies between the water and the clouds?/ Do not say that nothing is there."<sup>12</sup>



**Figure 11**

**Apparitional Style Painting of Li Ao-Yaoshan Encounter**

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

#### 4. Uncertainty and Continual Corrective

No adept of Turnabout Chan can stand pat with a certain understanding since they need to adjust and seize upon new opportune moments for self-realization. According to an aphorism by modern playwright Samuel Beckett, “Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.” This recalls Dōgen’s words about realization as an endless process disentangling entangled vines by means of entangled vines” (Ch. *geteng*, Jp. *kattō*; 葛藤), or his saying, “Therefore, there is one mistake compounded by another mistake. Because there is mistake after mistake, this is recognizing a mistake as a mistake [or: making the right mistake] (このゆゑに錯錯なり. 錯錯なるがゆゑに將錯就錯なり).”. In another passage, he writes “When one side is illumined, the other side is dark(一方を証するときは一方向はくらし).”<sup>13</sup>

The point is that after attaining enlightenment, an adept must continue to engage with his own ambivalence and doubt and find the means to perpetually deconstruct and correct his (mis)understanding. An intriguing evocation of ambivalence about his meditative efforts in relation to literary pursuits in prolonging the experience of enlightenment is expressed by the eleventh-century monk, Touzi, who was well known for his extensive and creative poetic commentaries on puzzling and perplexing *gongan* cases, in addition to other kinds of Chan writings. This was in an era when such literary practice was becoming increasingly commonplace or even expected from exalted Chan masters.

---

<sup>13</sup> *Dōgen zenji zenshū*, 1:3.

雖然所業空	Although I am in the business of articulating emptiness,
免被才情役	I cannot avoid being at the mercy of my inclinations.
忝曾學參禪	Even if I have long been practicing Chan meditation,
叨以習文義	Instead, I remain preoccupied with literary content. <sup>14</sup>

A similar sense of uncertainty regarding the value of renunciation in relation to experience based on sensations that stimulate aesthetic appreciation is expressed in Dōgen's poem, which ends by confessing an inability to capture either sense in his literary constructions:

久舍人間無愛惜	Living for so long in this world without attachments,
文章筆硯既拋來	Since giving up using paper and pen.
見花聞鳥風情少	I see flowers and hear birds without feeling much,
乍在山猶愧不才	Dwelling on this mountain, embarrassed by my meager efforts. <sup>15</sup>

Musō Sōseki's verse deals with the issue of whether expression distracts or enhances comprehension of realization of true reality right before our eyes:

秋色辭柯落葉多	Autumn-colored word-branches dropping many leaves,
寒雲載雨過山阿	Frosty clouds carrying rain passing this nook in the mountains.
人人自有娘生眼	Everyone is born with the same sort of eyes

---

<sup>14</sup> In Zijue(自覺) section of *Touzi Yiqing chanshi yulu* in *Xu zangjing* vol.71.423.742a, one of three verses on “Staying at a Mountain Hermitage.”

<sup>15</sup> *Dōgen zenji zenshū*, vol. 4:276.

爭奈現成公案何 Why don't they see the kōan right in front of us  
(*genjōkōan*)?<sup>16</sup>

In a similar vein, as cited in case 7 of the *Blue Cliff Record* Tiantai Deshao, a prominent tenth-century leader of the Fayan lineage and restorer of Tiantai thought, considers whether impressions of reality are beneficial or not: “Standing atop the summit of the Great Peak,/ I am beyond the ordinary human world;/ Outside of mind there are no things,/ Green mountains fill my eyes.” This lyricism resembles a poem by Fayan about the unity of everlasting and evanescent realms that is cited in another famous *gongan* collection, the *Record of Serenity (Congronglu)*: “Wherever I go, the frosty night’s moon,/ Falls as it may onto the valleys ahead./ The Big Dipper hangs down its handle,/ At night over fresh waters.” That verse, in turn, recalls an old Zen saying, “The clear autumn moon turns its frosty disc,” which in turn evokes a Chinese couplet often used today for celebrations of the harvest moon, “The bright moon shines over the sea/ Wherever you may be, we share this time together.”

#### IV. Inconclusive Conclusion

On the one hand, the realization of Turnabout Chan frequently culminates with a deceptively simple and direct affirmation of natural surroundings in a way that effaces the self, as in medieval Japanese monk Zekkai Chūshin, a disciple of Musō who traveled to China for ten years and crafted a calligraphy (Figure 12.a), based on a Tang-dynasty saying by Wei Yingwu, “The mountain is empty; A pine cone falls(山空松子落),”<sup>17</sup> (Figure

---

<sup>16</sup> *Taishō* vol. 81.2562.36b.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/60473>.

12.b shows an idealistic portrayal of a Chan temple by a Japanese monk-painter), or modern Kyoto School philosopher Nishida Kitarō’s “White sand, green pines(白砂青松)”.<sup>18</sup>



**Figures 12.a and 12.b**

**Zekkai Chūshin Calligraphy and Painting**

Another angle of Chan discourse, however, serves to correct that standpoint, in case it becomes a source of attachment, by reminding that true awareness must be attained by means of the self, as in the fourteenth-century monk Giun’s verse comment on Dōgen’s “Genjōkōan” (Enlightenment Realization Here-and-Now) fascicle that highlights the open gate of everydayness from which an adept cannot be deterred:

面前一著莫蹉過	Do not overlook that which is right in front of you,
空劫春容此早梅	The endless spring appears with the early plum blossoms.
一字入公門內了	Using a single word, you can enter the open

---

<sup>18</sup> Michiko Yusa, *Zen and Philosophy: An Intellectual Biography of Nishida Kitarō*, University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 5.

gate,  
九牛盡力挽無迴      Nine oxen pulling with all their might cannot  
lead you astray.<sup>19</sup>

Or, as the medieval Japanese monk Kōzei once said in commenting on the significance of self-cultivation, “Growing wise is nowhere near the trouble of growing orchids!”<sup>20</sup>

My final thought is to offer a brief ironic comment on the issue of uncertainty that is relevant then and now: What about uncertainty? What about it? You tell me. I am uncertain. About? I am uncertain about uncertainty. Are you certain of that? Certainly (not).

---

<sup>19</sup> Giun, *Taishō* vol. 82.2591.476a.

<sup>20</sup> Cited in David Pollack, trans., *Zen Poems of the Five Mountains* (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 63.



Keynote Address

## **Buddhism and Seon in Contemporary Society**

**Subul Sunim**

Founding Master, Anguk Seon Center

In 2016, a Go match that drew global attention was held in Seoul. The match was between the professional Go player Lee Sedol, a 9<sup>th</sup>-level master, and “AlphaGo,” an artificial intelligence program developed by Google DeepMind to play Go. In this showdown between humankind and computer, AlphaGo triumphed by winning four games and losing just one, a victory that shocked many. Many other professional players have taken up the challenge since, but none have managed to defeat the computer, not even once. Perhaps Lee’s lone victory shall remain as a singular record.

During the First Industrial Revolution, which started in the latter half of the 18th century, machines replaced human labor. Now, contemporary society in the 21st century is entering the Fourth Industrial Revolution, in which machines are replacing human intelligence. Thanks to the various networks deriving from the Digital Revolution, such as information and communications technology, the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence, and big data, an era of technological convergence has begun, which is realigning our concept of time and space by diluting the boundary between physical space and virtual space.

In their complexity, the fundamental changes humanity will have to endure in its ways of life—changes brought about by the sudden social

transformations resulting from dizzyingly fast technological innovation—present an unprecedented, indeed almost unimaginable, challenge. One of the most important tasks we face in meeting this challenge will be “controlling the mind and awakening,” a task that is directly connected to human happiness.

Compared to science and technology, which have progressed rapidly, human beings remain all too ignorant of who they actually are. Accordingly, they still possess only a limited capacity to control their minds. Humanity’s external environment is becoming an epochal information society in which anyone can easily access relevant data thanks to the development of big-data technology and various media. In inverse proportion to that external comfort and convenience, however, humanity’s internal spirit is growing fatigued because of information overload and excessive speculation. The external world of contemporary society might be overflowing in physical garbage, but internally, it is also experiencing a dramatic loss in its basic humanity because of such psychic garbage as anger-management issues and emotional trauma.

In order to catch up with the speed of computers, the human brain is consuming and depleting tremendous energy, and the pervading stress that results is amplifying the pain that has become universal in daily life. The defilements and deluded thoughts resulting from contemporary society’s information overload are growing by the day, and as science and technology continue to progress, the chronic, vicious circle of spiritual pain will become a blot on contemporary society.

For this reason, it is perhaps inevitable that meditation and Buddhist practice would begin to earn a global spotlight as means to awaken to and ultimately to cure these wide-ranging impediments of the mind. This is because Buddhism offers a treasure trove of wisdom on how to control the mind.

Buddhism, founded by Śākyamuni Buddha, pursues liberation from the four kinds of suffering: birth, old age, illness, and death. The Buddha's first dharma talk after his enlightenment taught the Four Noble Truths, the truths of "Suffering, its Origination, its Cessation, and the Path to its cessation." You could call this teaching, for the most part, a therapeutic approach. This is why we call Śākyamuni Buddha the "Great Healer" or the "Medicine King."

In these four noble truths of "suffering, origination, cessation, and path," "suffering" is the diagnosis that existence is stuck in the sea of suffering. "Origination" is the discovery that the cause of pain is ignorance (*avidyā*) and craving (*tṛṣṇā*). "Cessation" refers to nirvāṇa, which is the alleviation of suffering. "Path" means the techniques of practice that enable one to reach nirvāṇa.

This wise teaching that sprouted in India was sublimated into Mahāyāna Buddhism, whence it blossomed as various flowers and finally bore fruit. Seon—the essence of Mahāyāna Buddhism—is a direct method able to enlighten inner ignorance through prajñā wisdom, and it reveals in a straightforward manner the key secrets of the very point of truth.

Brought from India to China by the First Patriarch Bodhidharma, Seon adopted the tenet, "Seon is a separate transmission outside the teachings, which does not rely on words or letters; it points directly to the human mind, so that one may perceive the nature and achieve buddhahood." The Sixth Patriarch Huineng inherited Bodhidharma's dharma and helped Seon to flourish in future generations by elucidating the "Discourse on the Sudden Teachings," so that all people could all at once awaken to their true natures.

Seon reduces the Four Noble Truths to the issue of a "single thought." Past and future are all in your head: in reality, there is nothing but the "here" and "now" that is right before your eyes. Accordingly, if you miss reality because

you are enthralled with the “single thought” you are having at this very moment, you become trapped in suffering; and, if you can’t realize that fact, the cycle of suffering repeats itself. But if you realize the “single thought” and lay it down, you will see your original, unblemished true self and attain nirvāṇa. Accordingly, by reflecting on the single thought, you can achieve sudden awakening and see your nature.

Awakening from doubt to your true nature through direct interviews with a clear-eyed master is called Patriarchal Seon (Josaseon). Becoming one with your essence through silent meditation in accordance with the teaching of “awakening to your original pure nature” is called Silent-Illumination Seon (Mukjoseon). To experience the great liberation of enlightenment by thoroughly doubting the “hwadu,” the key phrases the patriarchs used to reveal the place of truth, is called the Seon of Examining Meditative Topics (Ganhwaseon). All three are one in their fundamental tenets; only the methods, which have been developed according to the tenacity of the Buddhist community, differ. Patriarchal Seon is closer to original, pure Seon, while Silent Illumination Seon and the Seon of Examining Meditative Topics are expedient techniques that were popularized later.

Korean Buddhism is an ecumenical form of Buddhism (Tong Bulgyo) with Seon at its core; it adopts Ganhwaseon as its official method of practice. Ganhwa Seon is the practice method of the Supreme Vehicle (Choesangseung); for, by making practitioners focus on the meditative topic, or *hwadu*, they can awaken to their original faces in accordance with the causal passage of time instead of getting hung up on all sorts of adverse sensory environments. Not only does Ganhwa Seon awaken you to your original pure self by relying on a master, but it also offers a concrete method of practice that can control defilements, deluded thoughts, and adversity.

Should your doubt about your essence become a “live word,” in which internal and external have fused into a single mass, your body and mind will soon become gratified and feel lighter in accordance with the causal passage of time. It will be like lightning striking down from the sky, like a cicada shedding its skin, or like unburdening yourself of the heavy load you’ve been carrying on your back. You feel lighter than a down feather and you will grow cool and lighthearted; everything before and behind you will be wide open. Things become clear, like storm clouds parting to reveal the sky after a rain shower. All things become obvious, as if you are waking from a dream. As all the affinities you couldn’t see before in your practice reveal themselves, you will simply nod your head.

This kind of opportunity must be experienced to be understood. If you experience it, you must immediately seek out a master to have it confirmed. You should also put down everything—including all you have studied—and pass the time well, simply going with the flow. If you gain the strength to control your mind and achieve unhindered freedom, you will be able to help others, in accordance with your affinities with them, attain enlightenment by engaging in the practice of a bodhisattva and thereby requite the grace of the Buddha and the patriarchs. “Seon” is a revolutionary teaching that awakens humanity from its ignorance. It would be an auspicious event if everyone in the world were able to awake from ignorance and live happier, healthier lives through this precise, speedy, and simple technique of Ganhwa Seon.

As the technological development of contemporary society grows ever faster, the shadow that that development casts over human nature grows darker. “Seon,” the essence of wisdom, drags that shadow into the light in order to make people happy; that Seon continues to be taught still today cannot but be a matter of great good fortune for all humankind.

## 현대사회에서의 불교와 선

수불스님

안국선원 선원장

지난 2016년 서울에서는 세계적인 주목을 끈 바둑시합이 열렸다. 세계 정상급 프로기사인 이세돌 9단과 구글 딥마인드가 개발한 인공지능 바둑프로그램 ‘알파고’ 사이에 바둑시합이 열린 것이다. 인간과 컴퓨터의 대결에서 알파고가 4승 1패로 이겼고, 이 사실로 인해 많은 사람들이 충격을 받았다. 그 후 다른 기사들이 도전했지만, 인간이 컴퓨터를 이긴 적이 단 한 번도 없다. 그나마 이세돌이 알파고에게 거둔 1승이 유일한 기록으로 남을 것이다.

18세기 후반, 인간의 노동을 기계로 대체한 제1차 산업혁명에 이어 21세기 현대사회는 인간의 지능을 기계로 대체하는 제4차 산업혁명기에 접어들고 있다. 정보통신기술, 사물인터넷, 인공지능, 빅데이터 등의 디지털 혁명에 기반한 다양한 네트워크에 의해 물리공간과 가상공간 사이의 경계가 희석되는 등 시공의 개념이 재배치되는 기술융합의 시대가 열린 것이다.

정신없이 빠른 기술혁신과 그에 따른 급속한 사회변화로 인해 앞으로 인류가 겪게 될 삶의 방식의 근본적인 변화는 그 복잡성의 면에서 상상을 뛰어넘는 전대미문의 도전을 불러오고 있다. 그 도전의 중요과제 중의 하나는 인간의 행복과 직결된 ‘마음의 통제와 깨달음’이 될 것이다.

비약적인 진보를 이룬 과학기술에 비해 인간은 자기가 누구인지에 대해서는 너무나 무지하며, 따라서 자신의 마음을 통제하는 능력은 아직도 일천하다. 인간의 외부 환경은 빅데이터 기술과 다양한 미디어의 등장으로

누구나 쉽게 관련 정보에 접근하는 획기적인 정보사회가 이루어지고 있지만, 그 편리함과 대중성에 반비례하여 인간내면은 각종 정보와 사랑분별의 과잉으로 몸살을 앓고 있다. 현대사회는 외부 환경에도 물질적 쓰레기가 넘쳐나지만, 내면에도 분노조절장애와 트라우마 등 정신적 쓰레기로 인한 인간성 상실이 극에 달하고 있다.

인간의 두뇌는 컴퓨터의 속도를 따라잡기 위하여 엄청난 생체에너지의 소비와 고갈을 겪고 있고, 그 결과 만연되는 스트레스는 일상의 보편화된 고통을 가중시키고 있다. 현대사회의 정보 과잉으로 인해 번뇌 망상은 날로 증가하여, 과학기술이 진보하면 할수록 정신적 고통의 고질적인 악순환은 현대사회의 오점으로 자리 잡을 것이다.

이런 광범위한 마음장애의 자각과 그 치유를 위하여 명상과 불교수행이 전 세계적으로 각광을 받으며 급속히 퍼져나가고 있는 것은 너무도 당연한 결과라고 할 것이다. 불교는 마음을 다루는 지혜의 보고이기 때문이다.

석가모니 부처님에 의해 창시된 불교는 생노병사의 고통으로부터의 해탈을 추구한다. 부처님이 깨달으시고 처음으로 하신 설법은 ‘고집멸도’의 사성제였다. 이 가르침은 다분히 정신의학적인 접근법이라고 할 수 있다. 그래서 석존을 의왕(醫王)이라고 부르는 것이다.

‘고’는 인간의 실존상황이 고행에 빠져있다는 진단이며, ‘집’은 고통의 원인이 무명과 갈애라는 점을 밝히신 것이다. 그리고 ‘멸’은 고통을 해소한 열반을 제시한 것이고, ‘도’는 열반에 도달하는 수행법이다.

인도에서 싹튼 지혜로운 가르침이 대승불교로 승화되어 다양한 꽃을 피우며 열매를 맺어왔다. 대승불교의 정수인 선(禪)은 반야지혜를 통해 내면의 무명을 밝힐 수 있는 직접적인 방법으로, 단도직입으로 진리당처의 핵심 오의(奧義)를 곧바로 드러낸다.

달마대사에 의해 인도에서 중국으로 전해진 ‘선’은 “문자를 세우지 않

고, 교박에 따로 전하며, 사람의 마음을 직접 가리켜, 성품을 보아 부처를 이룬다.”를 종지로 삼았다. 달마대사의 법을 이어받아 후대에 ‘선’을 크게 융성시킨 육조혜능은 모든 사람이 본래 갖추고 있는 자성을 그 자리에서 몰록 깨치는 ‘돈교법문’을 천명하였다.

‘선’은 고집멸도의 사성제를 ‘한 생각’의 문제로 압축한다. 과거와 미래는 생각 속에 있을 뿐 실제로는 눈앞의 ‘지금, 여기’밖에 없다. 따라서 지금 이 순간 ‘한 생각’에 사로잡혀 실상을 놓치면 고통 속에 갇히게 되고, 그 사실을 자각하지 못하면 고통의 윤회가 되풀이되는 것이다. 하지만 ‘한 생각’을 자각하고 내려놓으면 본래 청정한 자성을 보고 열반을 성취하며, 따라서 한 생각을 돌이켜 즉각 ‘돈오견성’할 수 있는 것이다.

근본에 대한 의문을 품고 있다가 눈 밝은 선지식과의 직접 대면으로 언하에 본래 갖춰진 성품을 몰록 깨닫는 것을 ‘조사선’이라 하고, ‘보리자성 본래청정’의 가르침에 따라 ‘지관타좌(只管打坐)’ 하여 근본에 계합하는 것을 ‘묵조선’이라 하며, 조사들이 진리당처를 직접 드러내 보인 ‘화두’를 철저히 의심하여 눈앞에 보이지 않게 드리워진 정신적인 벽을 깨트리고 대자유를 맛보는 것을 ‘간화선’이라고 한다. 이 세 가지는 근본종지에서 일치하며, 다만 대중의 근기에 따라 펼쳐진 방편이 다를 뿐이다. 조사선은 선의 순수한 원형에 가깝고, 묵조선과 간화선은 후대에 대중화된 방편적 모습이다.

한국불교는 선종을 중심으로 한 통불교이며, 간화선을 공식 수행법으로 채택하고 있다. 즉 수행자로 하여금 화두에 집중하게 함으로써, 온갖 역순 경계에 끄달리지 않고 시절인연 따라 본래면목을 밝힐 수 있도록 한 최상승 수행법이다. 간화선은 선지식에 의지하여 본원청정심을 깨달도록 할 뿐만 아니라, 번뇌망상과 역순경계까지 다스릴 수 있는 공부법을 구체적으로 제시하였다.

근본에 대한 의심이 활구가 되어 안팎이 한 덩어리가 되면 곧 시절인



연에 따라 마른 하늘에 벼락 치듯, 매미 허물 벗듯, 등에 진 무거운 짐을 일시에 내려놓듯 온 몸과 마음이 통쾌하고 시원해진다. 마치 새의 깃털보다 가볍고 앞뒤가 탁 트인 것이 끝간 데가 없이 시원하고 홀가분해진다. 소나기가 내린 뒤 먹구름이 걷히고 하늘이 몽땅 드러난 듯 확연하며, 또한 꿈속에서 깨어난 듯 분명해진다. 그동안 알 수 없었던 공부상의 인연들이 드러나면서 고개를 끄덕이게 된다.

이와 같은 기연은 직접 체험해봐야 알 수 있는 것이다. 이런 체험을 하게 되면 즉시 선지식을 찾아가 점검을 받고, 공부한 것까지도 다 내려놓고 흐름에 따라 세월을 잘 보내야 한다. 힘을 얻어 마음을 조복하고 무애자재하게 되면, 인연 따라 보살행을 하며 불조의 은혜를 갚게 된다.

‘선’은 인류를 무지에서 깨어나게 하는 혁명적인 가르침이다. 정확하고, 빠르며, 쉬운 간화선을 통해 전 세계인들이 무명을 밝히고 보다 행복하고 건강한 삶을 영위하게 된다면 한없이 기쁜 일이 될 것이다.

현대사회 과학기술의 발전이 빨라질수록 인간성의 이면에 드리우는 그림자는 더욱 짙어져가고 있다. 그 그림자를 광명으로 이끌어 인간을 행복하게 만드는 지혜의 정수인 ‘선’이 전해지고 있는 것은 인류에게 다행한 일이 아닐 수 없다.