

Introduction

What Is the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*?

The *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* (Ch. *Yüan chüeh ching* 圓覺經 [SPE])¹ is a Buddhist scripture that has its origins within the Ch'an and Hua-yen circles of learning, probably composed in China around the beginning of the eighth century. The *SPE* was extremely popular and influential within the meditation-oriented Buddhist schools of East Asia: first in Chinese Ch'an, where its influence was considerable, and then later in Korean Sön, where it grew in popularity to the extent that it was made part of the official monastic curriculum of the main Korean school, the Chogye. The *SPE* also had some influence in Japan, although it never received the kind of attention from the Zen schools there that it did in China and Korea.

The high degree of influence and popularity of this scripture can be attributed to two main factors. The first is the distinctly East Asian metaphysical dimension of its soteriology, as the *SPE* contains, in a tightly organized format, focused discussions of the most important theoretical issues concerning the nature of enlightenment that were at the fore of the East Asian Buddhist consciousness at its period of maturation. These are discussed through conceptual frameworks that have their antecedents in East Asian indigenous Buddhist texts such as the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* and *Vajrasamādhi-sūtra*, in indigenous schools such as T'ien-t'ai and Hua-yen, as well as in the pre-Buddhist thought-systems of Confucianism and Taoism.

The second is the *SPE's* highly practical and concise orientation: much of its content consists of direct instruction on matters of meditation and other related religious issues, such as monastic ritual, confession, the means of selecting a proper teacher, how to maintain a proper relationship with such a teacher, and so on. A large portion of the meditation-related explanations are not merely descriptive, but performative, which means that the reading of such passages is in itself a meditative

exercise. The *SPE* does not only explain to its reader the philosophy that grounds the “as-illusion *samādhi*”—it directly leads him/her through an exercise aimed at its attainment in the course of reading.

The introduction to the *SPE* offered in the following pages will serve to frame the background of the scripture, in terms of the circumstances of its production, its doctrinal/practical content, and its seminal role in the development of subsequent East Asian, and especially Korean, Buddhist meditative practice. This introduction will be followed by the main segment of the present work: a translation of the sutra along with the full commentary by the influential Chosŏn Korean monk Kihwa.

Chinese Origins and Effects

The Production of Indigenous Scriptures

Assimilation of Buddhism in East Asia. The period of time that it took for Buddhism to become fully assimilated and stabilized throughout the entire East Asian region was rather long—at least seven centuries. That such a length of time was required is due to two general circumstances: (1) the wide diversity and deep complexity of the Buddhist teachings, and (2) the considerable cultural and linguistic distance that lay between the peoples of the Indian and the East Asian regions.

This long period of assimilation can, for the sake of the present discussion, be roughly divided into three periods of early, middle, and late. The early period, from around the first through third centuries, was the time during which the initial studies and translations of Buddhist texts were being undertaken, but wherein Buddhism was, for the most part, only partially and poorly understood. During the middle period, from approximately the fourth through the sixth centuries, the task of translation of the majority of the important Indian scriptures was completed, with the work of interpretation and categorization of these materials well on its way. This allowed for the formation of distinct sects based on certain Indian scriptural traditions, such as the San-lun, Nirvana (sutra), and Satyasiddhi sects. During the late period, from the middle of the sixth through the ninth centuries, a dramatic new chapter unfolded, with the appearance of new, indigenously originated schools of Buddhism, whose leaders began to articulate new interpretations of the *buddhadharma* that accorded more fully with native East Asian metaphysical and soteriological intuitions.

This third period can again be further subdivided into early and late. The formulators of the East Asian doctrines during the earlier part of this period tended to go to greater lengths to provide an Indian footing for their new ideas. Later thinkers on the other hand, tended to demon-

strate greater cultural self-confidence, gradually abandoning the practice of expressing everything through Indian paradigms. Nonetheless, in both the early and late phases of this third period, the general type of Buddhist doctrinal texts that were generated were no longer concerned merely with the transmission of the religion as the perpetuation of its Indian schools and their doctrines. Rather, they paid attention to the articulation of new East Asian interpretations, which in turn were reflected in the formation of new indigenous schools. The major new sects that formed during this period, and that imparted long-term influence on East Asian Buddhist philosophy and practice were the schools of T'ien-t'ai, Pure Land, Hua-yen and Ch'an (Zen).

Indigenous Schools. The first "original school" to appear on East Asian soil was T'ien-t'ai, based primarily on the writings of its de facto founder Chih-i (智顛 538–597). Chih-i was the most successful early figure in terms of his ability to systematically organize the various types of teachings that had been imported from India in such a way that their relationship with each other made sense. Based on his studies of such texts as the *Lotus Sutra*, *Hua-yen ching*, and *Ta-chih-tu lun*, Chih-i devised his own system of practice utilizing the basic Indian Buddhist meditation exercises of *śamatha* and *vipāśyanā*. Although the T'ien-t'ai school would not continue to hold widespread influence as a distinct entity in later periods of Chinese Buddhism, its doctrinal and practice-related innovations played an important role in the formation of the two later influential schools—Hua-yen and Ch'an.

The seventh century also witnessed the flowering of the Pure Land school, which received its greatest impetus through the works of Shantao (善導 613–681), who popularized the practice of chanting the Buddha's name and faith in rebirth in the pure Western paradise. Pure Land became popular in all of the regions of East Asia, especially among the common people, as most of its practices could be followed without needing a deep scholarly understanding of Buddhist philosophy. Many of Pure Land's doctrines, such as that of declining stages of the power of the Buddhist dispensation and the conception of rebirth in the Pure Land, would end up becoming assimilated into the general East Asian Buddhist consciousness, as can be seen by the frequent appearance of Pure Land terminology in the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, *Awakening of Faith*, and other influential East Asian Buddhist texts.

The Hua-yen school emerged as the product of a dialectical interaction between a highly developed form of Indian Buddhist dependent-origination based metaphysics and indigenous East Asian metaphysical intuitions of an organically interconnected universe. The early formulators of Hua-yen doctrine, inspired by the miraculous worldview described in the Indian-originated *Avatamsaka Sutra*, translated into Chinese as

the *Hua-yen ching*), rearticulated this view, creating a new array of East Asian metaphysical terminology for its description. At the center of this new articulation was the language of the relationship of the four *dharmadhātus*, or four "realms of reality" (*ssu fa-chieh* 四法界): the realm of phenomena (*shih* 事); the realm of principle (*li* 理); the realm of non-obstruction between principle and phenomena (*li-shih wu-ai* 理事無礙); and the realm of nonobstruction between individual phenomena (*shih-shih wu-ai* 事事無礙). The early Hua-yen thinkers produced a large corpus of influential philosophical material, and although the Hua-yen school, like T'ien-t'ai, would also eventually decline as a major separate and distinct force within the Chinese Buddhist landscape, its doctrines made a deep impression on the formation of Ch'an thought, as well as on the orthodox Neo-Confucian metaphysics of the Ch'eng brothers and Chu Hsi.² The Hua-yen school had its deepest and longest-lasting impact, however, in Korea, where, under the Korean name of *Hwaōm*, it flourished as the leading doctrinal sect for several centuries. Later, after Hwaōm's forced assimilation into the Korean meditational Sōn school, Sōn monks remained deeply affected by the Hwaōm worldview, and many continued to carry out full-scale Hwaōm scholarship, a tendency that continues down to the present day.

The Ch'an movement came into being sharing with the Hua-yen worldview of non-obstruction between phenomena, coupled with a strong practical orientation that came as a reaction against a perceived unbalanced stress on scholarly endeavors. This is not to say that prior forms of East Asian Buddhism had been wholly devoid of the aspects of meditation and concrete practice toward enlightenment. But the Ch'an founders came to focus with marked intensity on these aspects of the religion, developing and fine-tuning them for more comprehensive application in ways that were in accord with the adaptations of Buddhism to East Asian metaphysical/soteriological intuitions. The rhetoric derived from this emphasis on concrete practice as opposed to textual study would later reify, to the extent that the Ch'an movement came to be caricaturized as "antitextual."

Yet, while many Ch'an writings of the late T'ang and Sung periods debunked scriptural study, all of the main soteriological positions of the movement were initially articulated in scriptures. Early Ch'an had relied on scriptures of Indian origin such as the *Diamond Sutra* and *Lankavatāra-sūtra*. But the most significant influences on Ch'an would end up coming from texts that were composed in East Asia. Among these East Asian scriptures were texts written by East Asian monks, whose local origins were plainly indicated in the texts themselves. Such works include the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (*Liu-tsu tan ching*), attributed to a monk named Hui-neng (慧能 638–713),³ and the *Song of Enlightenment* (*Ch'eng tao k'ao*) by Hui-neng's student Yung-chia

Hsüan-chüeh (永嘉玄覺 665–713). There were also other texts, produced in the same intellectual circles, whose authors attempted to dissimulate their East Asian provenance. These comprise the Ch'an/Hua-yen/*tathāgatagarbha*-related segment of the East Asian Buddhist *apocrypha*.

Indigenous Texts. The term *apocrypha* is derived from the Greek *apokruphos*, referring to writings that are "secret." The field of English-language Buddhist studies, lacking preexistent technical terminology for the Chinese words *i-ching* (疑經 "scriptures of doubtful authenticity") and *wei-ching* (偽經 "spurious scriptures") borrowed the rubric *apocrypha* from biblical studies, where it had been used to designate a class of literature that, although not necessarily considered heretical, had not, for various reasons, been included into the biblical canon during its formation during the first few centuries after Christ, usually due to doubts regarding authorship or questions of doctrine.⁴ Although the term has various shades of meaning, in its most common usage it carries pejorative connotations, as do the original Chinese terms that it is used to translate.

The writing of Chinese scriptures categorized as *i-ching* and *wei-ching* in Chinese Buddhism began at the time of the first introduction of the new religion into East Asia from India and Central Asia, as East Asian Buddhists began to write texts to which they attributed Indian origin and presented as the words of the Buddha. The composition of these "forged" texts in East Asia occurred as a component of the process of assimilation of the new Indian religion into the sinic cultural sphere. In order to gain full acceptance into East Asia, the Buddhist religion needed to make a wide range of adjustments to new cultural, political, and philosophical sensibilities, and much of the expression of these adjustments came in the form of new compositions.

The new indigenous texts were written on a wide range of themes. A major portion of the earlier East Asian apocryphal texts attempted to overcome problems of initial acceptance. Other scriptures were addressed to issues of the relationship between Buddhism and the rulership, while still others paid attention to the relationship of Buddhism to indigenous religious/philosophical beliefs, and so on. Beyond these, throughout the early and late periods of the assimilation of Buddhism into East Asia, texts were written that were ostensibly the product of divine inspiration, or at least that made claims to be the truly revealed teaching of the Buddha. Among all these categories, there were wide variations in quality.⁵

The apocryphal texts that would end up having the deepest influence, and that would attain the highest level of acceptance, was a group of works produced in connection with the process of Buddhism re-

expressing itself as a thoroughly “East Asian-ized” religion with distinctive metaphysical and soteriological underpinnings. Such Buddhist works as the *SPE, Treatise on Awakening Mahāyāna Faith* (*Ta-sheng ch’i-hsin lun* [AMF]), and *Sutra of the Heroic March Samādhi* (*Śūraṅgama-sūtra, Shou-leng-yen ching* [SHM]), despite being East Asian products, were universally recognized as containing profound and enlightening discussions that not only accorded with the most recondite of Buddhist principles, but that also more fully and completely defined these principles for their East Asian audience than had even the most important of the previously translated *bona fide* Indian scriptures. As a result, these works became “more than canonical”—they came to form the core of the corpus of texts upon which the distinctive doctrines of the new East Asian schools of Buddhism were based.

In considering this class of texts in their role as vehicles of the articulation of distinct sinicized metaphysical and soteriological agendas, we must remain aware of their close relationship with the equally instrumental nonapocryphal texts that were produced during the same general period, and within the same religious/philosophical circles—that is, such important works of overt East Asian provenance as the *Platform Sutra*, the *Song of Enlightenment*, and other essays by eminent members of the Ch’an and Hua-yen movements. What we will be discussing henceforth, then, will not merely be texts that are called “apocryphal,” but a broader category that I will provisionally label “East Asian Ch’an-Hua-yen definitive texts.”

Major Soteriological Issues of the Ch’an-Hua-yen Definitive East Asian Texts

What were the distinctive concerns addressed in these East Asian texts? Many issues were derived from ambiguities inherent in the doctrine received from India—one of the most prominent of which was the problem as to whether the human mind was at its basis originally pure or impure. This matter was one for which well-defined indigenous positions had been articulated in China since the mid-Chou, and which had been openly debated at least since the time of Mencius (371–289? BCE).⁶ The question was, if the mind was originally pure (as most forms of the Buddhist doctrine seemed to indicate), how could such a thing as defilement and ignorance occur within it? And if the mind was originally impure or ignorant, then how could such a thing as enlightenment, or nirvana, be attainable?

This problematic issue, firmly implanted in the East Asian religious consciousness several centuries before the assimilation of Buddhism, was replayed in the *ālayavijñāna-tathāgatagarbha* debate in fifth–seventh century China and Korea. Copyright © 2003 by World Wisdom, Inc.

point understood the fundamental human mind to be defiled/ignorant and those of *tathāgatagarbha* influence saw the basic mind as pure/enlightened. The East Asian text that addressed this issue most directly was the *AMF*, whose conclusions on this matter would become the basis for the positions taken in subsequent works such as the *SPE*.⁷

Another of the more important soteriological issues was one that would be pursued with intensity in the *Platform Sutra* during the same approximate era as the writing of the *SPE*: the assertion that the Buddhist enlightenment was not attainable by gradual practice, and could only be met in a sudden flash of insight—an experience of enlightened wisdom. This was a matter of serious concern for East Asian Buddhists, and one that has never died as an issue of contention during the long history of the tradition. On one hand, it is obvious that people can gradually improve themselves by means of serious study and reflection, by living a life based on moral principles, or by meditation on some religious principle. But a thorough understanding of the Buddhist concept of *śūnyatā* seems to undermine the possibility of thoroughgoing awakening based on gradualistic (dualistic) constructs. Why? One who undergoes a penetrating experience of emptiness sees that all things are at bottom devoid of characteristics and that the impediments to enlightenment that are to be removed by gradual practice, such as desire and ignorance, are also inherently empty. From this perspective, the conceptual framework that grounds “gradual practice” is rendered meaningless. Suddenists hold not only that gradual enlightenment is impossible, but also that it is exactly one’s attachment to gradualistic/dualistic perceptions of existence and the Way that prevents direct perception of reality. Thus they recommend that practitioners not be trapped in the confines of gradualistic frameworks, but instead endeavor to see correctly, to view existence in an enlightened way, right here, right now; to eliminate all falsity in one sweep, since falsity does not in fact exist. Gradualists in turn reply to such pronouncements by citing the suddenist tendency to ignore the aspect of moral cultivation, and further ask what is to be done in the case of a practitioner who is simply unable to attain such a sudden insight.⁸

The arguments advocating the positions of sudden enlightenment and innate enlightenment overlap, since both are based in a nondualistic view of existence and the Way. From the standpoint of sudden enlightenment, it can be said that all sentient beings are originally buddhas, and hence nothing special needs to be done in order to make them into buddhas. They merely need to awaken to their own Buddha-nature. The gradualist position, on the other hand, tends to see human beings in terms of their deeply rooted ignorance and desire that keep them trapped in the endless cycle of death and rebirth, enmeshed in a web of alternating pleasure and pain. From this standpoint, the only way out

is by continuous practice, through many lifetimes if necessary, of the threefold program of morality, concentration, and wisdom.

In addition to the fundamental metaphysical and soteriological questions such as innate enlightenment/ignorance or sudden/gradual illumination, were a number of other matters of a practical nature concerning which East Asian Buddhists perceived a need for a more thorough treatment in their own parlance. For example, a variety of meditation techniques had been transmitted from India, and these remained alongside newly developing meditative strategies of East Asian origin. But the relationship between these techniques had not been sorted out, nor had their relative value in application. Would-be meditators were therefore confused about what type of meditation was most appropriate for their own situation. They also needed to know concrete details about the proper way to arrange meditation retreats, to practice ritualized penance, and so forth.

Resolving Dualistic Opposition in the East Asian Scriptures: Essence-Function. The authors of these East Asian texts with their special soteriological and metaphysical questions had their own distinctive methods of resolving these issues, of which by far the most pervasive was the hermeneutical tool of essence-function (Ch. *t'i-yung*; Kor. *ch'e-yong* 體用).⁹ This metaphysical principle, which has its origins deep in the recesses of early Chou thought in such seminal texts as the *Book of Odes*, *Analects*, *I Ching*, and *Tao Te Ching*, became formally defined and used with regularity in the exegetical writings of Confucian/Neo-Taoist scholars of the Latter Han and afterward.

Scholars of the pre-Buddhist Chinese classics had utilized *t'i-yung* and its earlier equivalents, such as *pen-mo* (本末 "roots and branches") in Confucianism and *hei-pai* (黑白 "black and white") of Taoism, among other things, to explain the relationship of inherent human goodness or spiritual harmony with its not-always-manifest permutations. The Confucian concept of inherent goodness is intimated in the early Chou works, and fully articulated in the *Analects* and the *Mencius*. Of central importance in these texts is the basic human quality of *jen* (Kor. *in*; 仁 "humanity," "benevolence"), which expresses itself in various "functions" such as propriety (*li* 禮) and filial piety (*hsiao* 孝). In the practical application of this relationship, the innate purity of human beings is understood to manifest itself through the effect of a transparent penetration (*t'ung-ta/t'ongdal* 通達) into manifest appearance or active function (*yung/yong* 用).¹⁰

The process of human perfection then, as it is broadly conceived in the classical East Asian tradition, is one of working toward manifesting one's perfect *t'i* in one's variable *yung*. Or from the other perspective, training one's *yung* to be in harmony with one's *t'i*. Accordingly, methods

of spiritual training can also be categorized into two general types: those that are *t'i*-oriented, and have an inner-to-outer focus, and those that are *yung*-oriented, and have an outer-to-inner focus. For example, methods of cultivation that emphasize the training of the social human being through moral practices, such as the Confucian Five Relationships or the Buddhist Ten Precepts, can be seen as *yung*-oriented, and those that concentrate on direct perception of reality through contemplation can be seen as *t'i*-oriented. It is because of this fundamental conceptual view of essence-function in personal transformation that there is such a rich development, in East Asian "study-as-practice"¹¹ language, of metaphors of "polishing," "training," "smelting," "purification," "accordance," "harmonization" (of, or with the essence), and so on.

In Taoist works such as the *Tao Te Ching* and *Chuang Tzu* there are also implications of the fundamental human capacity for sagehood, but in contrast to Confucian texts such as the *Analects* and *Mencius*, its accomplishment tends to be explained through a more "hands-off" and observant approach, and with a greater emphasis on recognizing and harmonizing with *t'i* (the Tao) rather than external training of and through *yung*. The human mind in its pure nature is alluded to variously in the *Tao Te Ching* as the "uncarved block" (*p'u* 樸), which in improper function ends up becoming fragmented in the form of "utensils" (*ch'i* 器), and the "newborn babe" (*ch'ih-tzu* 赤子), originally soft and pliant but that becomes in improper function rigid and lifeless. The process of attaining sagehood is a "return" (*kuei* 歸, *fan* 反) to this pristine state. Instead of attempting to be transformed by following Confucian norms such as benevolence, filial piety, and respect for one's ruler, the Taoist aspirant is advised to free him/herself from rigid adherence to worldly values such as "loyalty" and "righteousness."

Formally being defined in the *t'i-yung* hermeneutical formula in the Latter Han,¹² *t'i* becomes the ontological ultimate of *pen-t'i* (本體) in Neo-Taoism, and commentarial works from all disciplines begin to rely on *t'i-yung* as an overt hermeneutical principle for analyzing earlier literature. Neo-Taoism and Taoist alchemy become much more systematic in their programs for the refinement of the "embryo of the Tao," explaining their path exclusively through *t'i-yung* language.

The Buddhist religion owed much of its success in East Asia to its affinities with this East Asian conception of the person. In the general Mahāyāna Buddhist view that would come to prevail in East Asia, sentient beings, although varying greatly at the level of *yung*, or manifest activity, possess a pure enlightened Buddha-nature at the level of *t'i*, their essence. This "innate-buddhahood" aspect of the Buddhist dharma, although present in Indian *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, had not received anything like the attention that it would draw from East Asian interpreters of the religion, who became wholly preoccupied with the

articulation of the relationship of the innate (本 *pen=t'i*) and actualized (始 *shih=yung*) aspects of enlightenment.¹³ Indeed, we might say that the AMF was written almost entirely with the resolution of this issue in mind, and that its author set a precedent for definitive apocryphal texts by casting the entire argument within the framework of essence and function. He did this by declaring that the One Mind has both an essential (true thusness) aspect and a functional (defiled/undefiled) aspect. These two aspects are further subcategorized along essence-function lines.

In its specific East Asian Buddhist hermeneutical applications, essence-function is used as a way of looking at things that attempts to resolve the conflicts brought about by the two opposing tendencies to see things in either (1) a fragmentary/dualistic way, or (2) a simple monistic, undifferentiated way. Thus apparent conflicts between the positions of sudden and gradual, or innate and actualized enlightenment (which arise as a result of dualistic interpretation), are perfect objects for essence-function analysis. We can take the Buddhist soteriological problems mentioned above and say that one is advised to see the human being as pure (empty, enlightened) at the level of *essence*, and that it is at the level of *function* that people differ. Those whose minds are properly functioning, that is, *functioning in accordance with their essence*—are called “buddhas” and “bodhisattvas.” Those whose innately enlightened minds are functioning improperly—*whose essence is not properly manifested in their function*, are called “sentient beings” or “worldlings.” In terms of suddenly versus gradually attained enlightenment: to see human beings, enlightenment, ignorance, and desire as empty (the sudden view) is to apprehend them in terms of their basic nature, or *essence*. To see human beings, enlightenment, ignorance, and desire as existent (the gradual view), is to grasp them in terms of their *function*.

The AMF also adds an intermediate category of “attributes” (*hsiang* 相) to distinguish the marks of enlightenment from its active function. The essence-function construction is also the basis for the suddenistic arguments of the influential nondualistic text, the *Platform Sutra*. The essence-function construction furthermore appears in other analogous forms in the texts of other East Asian Buddhist schools, one of the most prominent being the *li-shih* (“principle-phenomena” 理事) terminology used by the philosophers of Hua-yen.

Texts Most Closely Related to the SPE. We know from catalog records that the SPE was a relatively late apocryphal work.¹⁴ Its lateness is also suggested by the degree to which the author shows a mature grasp of three central components of its discourse that were articulated in other late developments: the discussion of original enlightenment in the late *tathāgatagarbha* texts, the assertion of sudden enlightenment in the early

Ch'an writings, and the explication of principle and phenomena (*li* and *shih*) by the Hua-yen patriarchs.¹⁵

Of all these sources however, it is on the *AMF* that the *SPE* shows the most reliance for metaphysical and soteriological formulations. Of first importance is the primacy in both texts of the discourse on original enlightenment/original ignorance and the similarity in the language with which these positions are articulated. For example, both texts state unequivocally that "all sentient beings are originally perfect Buddhas."¹⁶ Given this position, both texts need to address the problem of how original ignorance and original enlightenment are simultaneously possible (or how they are the same thing in essence). Closely related to this are the discussions in both works of exactly how the transition from the unenlightened to the enlightened states occurs. In the *SPE*, Vajragarbha Bodhisattva asks the Buddha:

World Honored one; if all sentient beings are originally perfect buddhas, then how is it that they all possess ignorance? If sentient beings are originally ignorant, how can you say that they have always been perfect buddhas? If all the worldlings in the ten directions are originally perfectly enlightened, but later give rise to ignorance, at what point does this happen?¹⁷

The *AMF* asks:

[I]f all sentient beings have suchness and all of them are permeated by suchness equally, then why are there differences between those who have faith and those who do not, as well as differences in the various times when faith arises?¹⁸

Both texts give the same basic answer to the question of the nature of ignorance, denying its substantiality. Ignorance itself can only be perceived through aberrant function. The *SPE* says:

What is ignorance? Good sons, all sentient beings carry manifold inverted intuitions from the beginningless past, and are just like a person who has lost his sense of direction. These people deludedly take the amalgamation of the Four Elements as their "body" and the cognition of the Six Objects as their "mind." Because of this delusion they repeatedly undergo the suffering of life and death. Therefore, we say there is "ignorance."¹⁹

The *AMF* says:

[T]herefore, all sentient beings are not called "enlightened." Since, according to original incessant continuity of thought, they have never been free from thought, we say there is "beginningless ignorance."²⁰

Both texts also place strong emphasis on the essence-function relationship of enlightenment and ignorance. The author of the *AMF*, after telling the famous water-waves simile (an essence-function analog), concludes by saying “the characteristics of ignorance are not different from the nature of enlightenment; they are neither destructible nor indestructible.”²¹ In the *SPE*’s chapter of Samantabhadra, the Buddha says in a similar vein, “Good sons, all sentient beings’ various manifestations of illusion are born from the perfectly enlightened marvelous mind of the Tathāgata, just like the sky-flowers come to exist in the sky. Even though the illusory flowers are erased, the nature of the sky is indestructible.”²² The *SPE* and *AMF* also share, together with the *SHM*, the sky-flowers simile, the simile of disorientation of East and West, the discussion of the Two Hindrances, and the presentation of a program for the complementary development of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā* meditation techniques. The points of thematic and linguistic correspondence between the *SPE* and *AMF* are ubiquitous, with the *SHM* also coming very close in many places.

The major difference between the *SPE* and these other texts is that the *SPE*, having a greater degree of direct Ch’an influence, shows greater reluctance to enter into extended metaphysical discussions than the *AMF* on such matters as the nature of the *ālayavijñāna* and its reception of permeation by suchness and defilement. The author of the *SPE* also does not emulate the lengthy and repetitive contemplations of the nature of the six faculties and six objects in the manner of the *SHM*. While the *SPE* addresses these themes, it does so much more concisely.

Two other texts worthy of mention at this point, which treat the same topics (sudden/gradual and innate/actualized enlightenment) through an essence-function framework, and which are in some ways even closer to the *SPE* than either the *AMF* or *SHM*, are the two works by Yung-chia: the *Compilation of Yung-chia of the Ch’an School* (*Ch’an-tsung Yung-chia chi* [CYC])²³ and the *Song of Enlightenment*. Said to be a direct disciple of Hui-neng, Yung-chia, like many monks of the period, had extensive background in Ch’an, T’ien-t’ai, and Hua-yen. In both of his texts he deals with the above-mentioned important themes of the period, which are also the topics of the *AMF*, *SPE*, and *SHM*.²⁴

Tsung-mi and the SPE’s Chinese Historical and Commentarial Course

We find the *SPE* first formally listed in the *K’ai-yüan Catalog of Buddhist Texts* in 726, the putative translator being an obscure monk named Bud-dhatrāta (佛陀多羅).²⁵ The *SPE* apparently began to gain some measure of popularity soon after its publication, as at least four commentaries

were soon written on it.²⁶ But the greatest part of the popularization of the text came a century after its writing, at the hands of one of East Asian Buddhism's premier scholar-monks, Tsung-mi (宗密 780–841).

Tsung-mi is one of the most important figures in East Asian Buddhist history, especially valued by modern scholars for his detailed analyses of the development of Ch'an and Hua-yen in the context of the intellectual religious climate of his times. He was both a recipient of, and a great contributor to the development of the new forms of indigenous Buddhism.²⁷ Tsung-mi had his feet well planted in both the scholastic and meditational streams of Buddhism, to the extent that he would later be counted as a patriarch of both the Hua-yen school and the Ho-tse line of Ch'an. He was, like many later Korean monks whom he influenced, deeply interested in both the practical and doctrinal aspects of Buddhism, and especially concerned about the means for the harmonization of the views of those who tended toward exclusivity in either direction.

Tsung-mi studied all the major texts of the Chinese Buddhist canon of his time, specializing in those works with Hua-yen, *tathāgatagarbha*, and Ch'an affinities, and is especially noted for his work in the area of doctrinal classification (i.e., attempting to account for the apparent disparities in the doctrines of various Buddhist sects by categorizing them according to their specific aims). Although he conducted important studies on other texts such as the *Hua-yen ching*, *Awakening of Faith*, and *Diamond Sutra*, and wrote essays on such issues as the rapprochement of the three teachings and the relationship of various schools of Ch'an, Tsung-mi's work on the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* was the centerpiece of his scholarly career. His major exegesis of the sutra was his *Great Commentary on the Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* (*Yüan chüeh ching ta shu*), during the course of the composition of which he wrote an extensive series of related abridgments, outlines, and subcommentaries.²⁸

Tsung-mi praised the *SPE* as a text that offered both philosophical and practical dimensions: a clear and concise description of the attitudes and mechanics related to meditation practice, along with a solid grounding in *AMF*/Hua-yen metaphysical and soteriological principles. The *SPE* was much shorter and more concise than related works such as the *Śūramgama* and *Hua-yen* sutras. It was not as philosophically complex as the *AMF*, yet offered more variety in terms both of philosophy and meditation technique than the *Diamond Sutra*. The fact that Tsung-mi, who would eventually be considered as one of the founding fathers of the Hua-yen school, should have rated the *SPE* to be of greater value than the *Hua-yen ching* is worthy of note. He said, in this regard:

If you want to propagate the truth, single out its quintessence, and thoroughly penetrate the *Copyrighted Material*, do not revere the *Hua-*

yen Sutra above all others. Ancient and modern worthies and masters of the Tripitaka in both the western regions and this land have all classified its as supreme, as fully related in [Ch'eng-kuan's] introduction to his commentary. Yet its principles become so confused within its voluminous size that beginners become distraught and have difficulty entering into it. It is not as good as this scripture (the *SPE*), whose single fascicle can be entered immediately.²⁹

Subsequent to Tsung-mi's commentaries on the *SPE*, it continued to be a popular subject of commentary in China down through the Ch'ing period. Among the more famous of these commentaries are those by the Southern Sung Buddhist emperor Hsiao-tsung (孝宗 1127–94)³⁰ and the Ming scholar-monk Te-ch'ing (德清 1546–1623).³¹ An examination of the post-Tsung-mi *SPE* commentaries produced in China reveals the deep influence of Tsung-mi on the subsequent tradition, as the later commentators tended greatly to follow and refer to his works.³²

The *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* in Korea before Kihwa

While the *SPE* became quite popular in Chinese Ch'an Buddhism, it would achieve a decidedly more pronounced influence within the Buddhist culture of the Korean peninsula, where it was gradually popularized through its usage by masters of the Korean Sŏn sect. There are a number of reasons for its eventual attainment of high status in Korean Buddhist circles, which we shall explore below at some length. But first we should gain some background on the history of Buddhist textual assimilation in Korea prior to the *SPE*.

Early Scriptural Influences in Korea

Being geographically attached as it was to the Chinese mainland, the transmission of Chinese cultural developments into the Korean peninsula was always fairly rapid. Once the Korean kings had a sufficient conception of the impact of Buddhism on the mainland, they followed the Chinese emperors quickly in accepting and encouraging the growth of Buddhism as a state religion. Although there were often delays due to internal Korean political conflicts, information about Buddhism, including translated texts, always managed to work its way into the Three Kingdoms of Koguryŏ, Paekche, and Silla. During the fifth and sixth centuries of the Three Kingdoms period, translations of important Indian works from the Mādhyamika tradition, as well as Vinaya works and the *Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra*, held significant influence. Toward the

end of the Three Kingdoms and during the early part of the Unified Silla (668–936) however, the Korean Buddhist world received a wide variety of other textual influences, most important of which were the *Hua-yen ching* and its related commentarial works, as well as such “original enlightenment” scriptures such as the *Awakening of Faith* and *Lañkāvatāra-sūtra*. Beyond these, there was also considerable influence from Consciousness-only (Yusik 唯識) and Pure Land.

While these texts were studied and commented on by a number of energetic Silla scholars, by far the most prolific and influential interpreter of the incoming Chinese Buddhist textual corpus was Wŏnhyo (元曉 617–686), who wrote a commentary for virtually every major Buddhist text available at the time.³³ Wŏnhyo is widely recognized by scholars for having inculcated Korean Buddhism with his applied combination of Hwaōm-interpenetration and AMF essence-function philosophy toward the resolution of sectarian disagreements. In his most influential works, such as the *Harmonization of Doctrinal Controversies in Ten Aspects* (*Simmun hwajaeng non*), his commentaries to the *Awakening of Faith* (*Taesŭng kisillon so* and *pyŏlgi*), the *Sutra of Adamantine Absorption* (*Kŭmgang sammaegyōng non*) and the *Nirvana Sutra* (*Yŏlban'gyōng chong'yo*), Wŏnhyo repeatedly demonstrated how the two inseparable themes of interpenetration and essence-function could be universally applied to mitigate the tensions resultant of mutual sectarian exclusivity. The precedent toward sectarian harmonization set by Wŏnhyo tended to be followed with regularity by the leading Korean Buddhist thinkers of successive generations. This tendency is typified in the example of Chinul (the individual most fully responsible for the initiation of the synthetic Hwaōm-Sŏn character of Korean Buddhism) and is also obvious in the “three-teachings” ecumenical efforts of Kihwa and Hyujōng during the Chosŏn.

Although Wŏnhyo was not an exclusive adherent of the Hwaōm school, his high evaluation of Hwaōm philosophy, along with the influence of the works of his colleague Ŭisang (義湘 625–702), contributed greatly to the initial popularization of Hwaōm. As it turned out, the Hwaōm school ended up becoming the most influential stream of scholastic Buddhism on the peninsula from the time of Wŏnhyo down to the present. The majority of teachers throughout the Koryŏ and Chosŏn dynasties were deeply influenced by Hwaōm, as most of them started their ecclesiastical careers with a strong Hwaōm background. Beyond this, there were external political and societal pressures that tended to force the meditational and scholastic branches of Korean Buddhism together. The combined result of these various forces was that the mainstream Korean Sŏn school ended up exhibiting a Hwaōm textual-philosophical character quite distinct from that seen in Chinese Ch'an or Japanese Zen. In this Korean Buddhist environment, such a concise text

as the *SPE*—which dealt with the most vital soteriological issues related to meditation practice and offered clear explanations of the process of meditation itself, yet which was permeated with a strong Hua-yen flavor—was especially well suited.

Delayed Arrival of the SPE

Since Wōnhyo's commentaries included such seminal apocryphal works as the *AMF* and *Vajrasamādhi-sūtra*, the lack of a commentary or even mention of the *SPE* in his writings is another indication that the *SPE* is a relatively late-period apocryphon. If Wōnhyo would have had access to such a text, which combined Hua-yen, *tathāgatagarbha*, and Consciousness-only philosophy in such an erudite and syncretic manner, at the same time presenting clear guidelines for meditation practice, it would have been so close to his own agenda that there is little doubt that he would have paid it great attention.

As Robert Buswell has noted in *Formation of Ch'an Ideology*, it seems that Wōnhyo's life was reaching its close just as tidings of the new Ch'an school were arriving in Korea.³⁴ Knowing this and given the fact that the *SPE* was probably written within a generation of Wōnhyo's death (686), it has to seem a bit odd that there is little or no reference to the *SPE* in Korean Buddhist literature until the time of Ūich'ōn (義天 1055–1101), some four centuries later. Yet if we reflect on the sectarian history of the situation, especially in light of the perceptive analysis provided in *Ch'an Ideology*, the relatively late currency of the *SPE* in Korea can probably be explained.

Although the *Vajrasamādhi-sūtra*, which was apparently written a bit earlier, and quite possibly in Korea, was ostensibly a product of an incipient Ch'an movement, it was still a text that was placing much of its bid for canonicity on its Indian-suggestive attributes, as indicated by the creation of a Sanskritized title and the extensive usage of Indian terminology in its metaphysical discussions on the nature of consciousness. In any case, the *Vajrasamādhi-sūtra* was accepted in Korea along with the array of other scriptures that had received commentaries from Wōnhyo, which means that it was accepted, to one degree or another, into the corpus of texts studied by the Silla scholastic Buddhist community. But the *SPE*, written only a generation or so later, did not make it in with this group, nor would it gain any noticeable recognition in Korea during the next few centuries.

Why did it take the *SPE* some four centuries to gain recognition on the peninsula? If we pay close attention to the timing, we can note that although the *Vajrasamādhi* was the product of an incipient Ch'an movement, that movement itself, as a distinct entity, had not yet entered into Korea on a large scale at the end of the seventh century. Ch'an

finally did arrive in Korea on a widespread basis during the eighth and ninth centuries, through the efforts of Korean monks who had traveled to T'ang China for instruction. These early Korean Sōn leaders established the "Nine Mountain" schools, taking up, in opposition to Silla scholasticism, a strident line of anti-scriptural rhetoric. A strong anti-scriptural attitude is evident in the sermons of early Sōn leaders such as Toūi (道義 d. 825) and Muyōm (無染 801–888), who sharply criticized the scholastic teachings as inferior to the "direct transmission from mind to mind" and the "tongueless" teaching.³⁵ Although the mid-T'ang Ch'an masters who were the source of initial instruction for these early Korean Sōn teachers may not have ever been so vehemently antischolastic, the early transmitters of Korean Sōn tended to place strong emphasis on this aspect, a major part of the reason being the need to establish for themselves a clear identity in contrast with the firmly entrenched Silla scholastic establishment.

Given this outpouring of antitextual rhetoric, it certainly would not have been efficacious for the founders of the Nine Mountain schools to turn around and introduce a *text*, and especially such a text of such dubious origins as the *SPE*, as a basis of canonical support for their position, or as a guide to their system of practice. The *SPE* was not accepted on a wide scale until the Sōn school had become firmly enough established on the peninsula such that the criticisms from the scholastic schools no longer carried enough weight to cause serious problems. Therefore, while the slightly later timing of the production of the *SPE* would have the effect of making it into a more fully Ch'an-characteristic text than the *Vajrasamādhi-sūtra*, this lateness seems to have ended up delaying the text's proliferation in Korea by a few centuries.

First Appearances of the SPE in Korea

The first significant mention of the *SPE* (known in Korean as the *Wōn'gakk'yōng*) that I have been able to locate in Korean Buddhist literature is in the writings of Ūich'ōn, an important Hua-yen scholar of the early-mid Koryō who is known for his popularization of Ch'ōnt'ae (T'ien-t'ai) Buddhism.³⁶ In his *Taegak kuksa munjip*, Ūich'ōn includes a short essay on the *SPE* (*Kang Wōn'gakk'yōng palsa*) that is telling in terms of the manner in which the sutra was received and the type of later influence it would carry.

In the first half of the *Palsa*, Ūich'ōn identifies the themes of the *SPE* with those of the *AMF*, using an essence-function analysis. The second half of the essay is dedicated to the praise of Tsung-mi's commentaries on the text. Ūich'ōn reiterates Tsung-mi's high assessment of the *SPE*, as reflecting the most profound content of the *AMF* and *Hua-yen ching*, and as containing the teaching that equally informs the Sōn and Kyo

schools. This short essay well adumbrates the role of the *SPE* as it would be received in the subsequent Korean tradition: first, the reception and influence of the *SPE* in Korea can never be separated from the personage of Tsung-mi, who, in conjunction with his commentaries on the text, held a commanding influence on the development of orthodox Sōn doctrine; second, its citation and its influence would invariably come in close conjunction with two other texts whose meaning it is understood as having captured and reflected in condensed form—the *AMF* and *Hua-yen Ching* (*HYC*); and finally, its role as a text that bridged the gap between Sōn and Kyo. The only other important role of the *SPE* not mentioned here, but which is nonetheless implicit in the invocation of the name of Tsung-mi, is the role of the *SPE* as an arbiter of innate/actualized and sudden/gradual soteriological polarities.

The SPE in the Works of Chinul

The individual most responsible for the initial impact of the *SPE* on Korean Sōn is the same man who introduced an array of related issues in defining the entire future course of Korean Sōn—Chinul (知訥 1158–1210). Enough has already been published on Chinul that we need not go into extensive detail here regarding his life and thought.³⁷ It suffices to say that aside from Wōnhyo, Chinul played the most important role of any figure in Korean Buddhism for determining its future orientation. Besides the basic work of defining and maintaining a pure system of Buddhist study and practice in what was a declining religious environment, Chinul devoted his energies to the effort of reconciling divisive factors that threatened to break down the progress of the solidification of Korean Sōn, and that threatened to obstruct the course of personal practice. In solving these concerns, Chinul turned to, as two of his most consistent resources, Tsung-mi and the *SPE*.³⁸ The prominence of the *SPE* in Chinul's writings has much to do with the basic affinity between the text and Chinul's views on innate and actualized enlightenment, the nature of ignorance, and methods of practice.

The most direct way to summarize Chinul's view on practice and enlightenment is to say that his perspective is overwhelmingly essence-function oriented. In virtually all of his writings, Chinul identifies the basic quality of the human mind to be pure enlightenment, which means, at the level of their most basic nature, human beings are equally buddhas. The distinctions between "enlightenment-actualized" and "enlightenment-nonactualized" people are related to the degree to which they are manifesting their basic nature in their function. This, of course, is also the central argument of the *SPE*. Since this is also a seminal position of texts such as the *AMF*, *Hsin hua-yen ching lun*,³⁹ *Platform Sutra*,

and the writings of Yung-chia, these other works are also extensively cited in Chinul's writings.

As might be expected, it is in Chinul's most overtly essence-function-oriented works that he cites the *SPE* with greatest frequency. Most prominent in this regard is his "Direct Explanation of the True Mind" (*Chinsim chiksöl*). This work is divided into fifteen topical sections, each of which treats the relationship between the true mind and its various phenomenal manifestations in terms of essence-function. For instance, in answer to the question of why, even though all people possess the true (enlightened) mind, there are differences such as that between sage and worldling, Chinul answers by citing one of the *SPE*'s most famous essence-function similes—that of the *mañi*-pearl, which says:

Good sons, it is like a pure *mañi*-pearl which reflects the five colors, depending upon its surroundings. The foolish see that pearl as really having these colors. Good sons, it is the same with the pure nature of Perfect Enlightenment: it appears in people's bodies and minds, according to their individual type. Yet these fools say that pure Perfect Enlightenment really has body and mind.⁴⁰

The *mañi*-pearl represents the pure (empty) enlightened mind, which varies in manifestation according to its function. In the following section of the same text, Chinul again cites the *SPE* in answer to a question regarding how one may escape the condition of delusion and accomplish sagehood:

An ancient teacher said, "When there is no place for the deluded mind, that is bodhi. *Saṃsāra* and nirvana are originally equal." The *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* says: "Good sons, since the illusory body of this sentient being vanishes, the illusory mind also vanishes. Since the illusory mind vanishes, illusory objects also vanish. Since illusory objects vanish, illusory vanishing also vanishes. Since illusory vanishing vanishes, non-illusion does not vanish. It is like polishing a mirror: when the filth is gone its brightness naturally appears."⁴¹

Chinul responds to the question of how one may transcend birth and death by saying that they are originally nonexistent, and that they only appear to exist because of false thinking. Chinul accentuates his reply by citing the sky-flower simile and the simile of confusion of direction, which he quotes directly from the *SPE*:

The *SPE* says: "Good sons, all sentient beings fall into various inverted views without beginning. Just like a disoriented person who confuses the four directions, they mistakenly take the Four

Elements as the attributes of their bodies and the conditioned shadows of the Six Objects as the attributes of their mind. It is just like when our eyes are diseased and we see flowers in the sky. . . . Similarly, when the sky-flowers disappear from the sky, you cannot say that there is a definite point of their disappearance. Why? Because there is no point at which they arise. All sentient beings falsely perceive arising and ceasing within this condition of non-arising. Therefore they say that there is transmigration through life-and-death."⁴²

Chinul cites the *SPE* with almost unmatched regularity⁴³ throughout his works, and even when not making an exact citation, often alludes to its themes. This is especially the case in his *Excerpts from the Dharma Collection* (*Pöppjip pyörhaeng nok chöryo pyöng ip sagi*), which is a commentary to an earlier work by Tsung-mi. Since Tsung-mi's main text was the *SPE*, the *Dharma Collection* naturally includes much of its imagery and paraphrase, as when, for example, he distinguishes the various Ch'an sects by means of the metaphor of the *mani*-pearl. The *SPE* also turns out to be a text well suited for the delivery of flexible interpretations of sudden and gradual soteriology that were at the heart of the oeuvre of both Chinul and Tsung-mi. The *Platform Sutra*, the other major East Asian sutra that most directly addressed the sudden/gradual problematic, took an exclusively suddenistic stance on the matter, effectively denying the possibility of gradual practice. The *SPE*, while granting priority to the sudden view, nonetheless acknowledges the need for the gradual teaching and offers a rationale for its existence along with examples for its undertaking. The *SPE* was also a suitable text to serve as a canonical basis for the Tsung-mi/Chinul attempt at reconciliation of extreme views toward the usage or nonusage of texts in the course of Buddhist religious cultivation, since, although the *SPE* was certainly a sutra, the positions that it articulated were very clearly of a Ch'an bent. Finally, with its Hua-yen metaphysical positioning, the *SPE* also accommodated the Hua-yen proclivities of both these masters. The *SPE* becomes, from the time of Chinul, an integral part of the Korean meditative tradition, along with a strong interest in Tsung-mi, a reinvigoration of *AMF* studies, a lasting concern for the sudden/gradual issue, and reinforcement of the influence of Hua-yen interpenetration metaphysics.

After Chinul

In comparison with pre-Chinul writings, the frequency of direct citation of the *SPE* and the discussion of its prominent themes increases noticeably in the writings of Chinul's dharma heirs. Chinul's student

Hyesim (慧謙 1178–1234) shows the influence from his teacher by having a keen interest in scriptures, as evidenced in his monumental *Sōnmun yōmsongjip*.⁴⁴ It is in his teaching record,⁴⁵ however, where Hyesim's fondness of the *SPE* is most clearly demonstrated, as he cites the sutra extensively. As with Chinul and other contemporary writers, he tends to cite the profound discussions on the nature of enlightenment and ignorance from the first two chapters of the sutra, along with its popular similes, such as sky-flowers, the *maṇi*-pearl, finger-pointing-to-the-moon, four-directions disorientation, and so on.⁴⁶ He also writes a special *gāthā* on the *SPE*, summarizing the sutra's introduction and each of its twelve chapters,⁴⁷ an honor that he does not accord to any other work except the *Diamond Sutra*.⁴⁸

Throughout the remainder of the Koryō period, the same basic set of texts remained popular in the Sōn schools: the *SPE*, *AME*, *SHM*, *HYC*, *Diamond Sutra*, as well as the works of Yung-chia. The continued regular presence of Yung-chia is worthy of note, since, although it is commonly assumed that the *Platform Sutra*, attributed to Yung-chia's teacher Hui-neng, is one of the most important texts in Korean Sōn, in terms of quantity of citations and allusions, it is clearly the works of Yung-chia that commanded the greater attention among Koryō and Chosōn Sōn writers.

Passing down through the next century, Sōn writings maintain the general character described above—a lot of interest in a reasonably well-defined group of texts, with a gradual increase in attention to *kong'an* literature and Ch'an anthologies. But after this time there is a noticeable change in the writing style of these Sōn masters, marked by an increase in emphasis on *kong'an/kanhwa*-related lectures, imagistic/nature-influenced poetry, and a new kind of literary terseness. Much of this tendency can be attributed to the second transmission of the Lin-chi (臨濟; Kor. Imje) line of Ch'an, which began to penetrate the peninsula at the end of the Koryō.

Three important monks of this period who were instrumental in this Imje revival, and who figured prominently in charting the future course of Korean Sōn, were contemporaries and friends: Kyōnghān Paeg'un (景閑白雲 1298–1374), T'aego Pou (太古普愚 1301–82) and Naong Hyegūn (懶翁慧勤 1320–76). All three went to Yüan China to learn the Imje *kanhwa* teaching that had been popularized by Chinul, and all three returned and established the sharp, confrontational methods of the Imje school in their own teaching. Each of the three also had a large number of disciples, and so this new Imje infusion into Korean Sōn had considerable impact.

Among the three it was Kyōnghān who seemed to retain the greatest interest in textual studies. This can be seen in his teaching record,⁴⁹

which, although showing a strong *kanhwa* orientation, is permeated with citations from numerous texts, most prominent of which are the *SPE* and the writings of Yung-chia. The works of T'aego and Hyegün are even more strongly *kong'an* oriented, with ubiquitous usage of phrases such as "the mind to mind transmission outside of words and letters" and repeated explanations of how to investigate Chao-chou's *mu kong'an*. With this nonscriptural predilection, there is little wonder that these men rarely cited any text at all, much less the *SPE*. But interestingly enough, as we read through T'aego's biography, we come across this passage which describes the early part of his dharma-career:

During the autumn of 1337 [T'aego] stayed at Pulgaksa occupying a single room alone. Studying the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, he came across the line that said "The cessation of all illusion is called 'unchanging.'" At this point all that he knew suddenly fell away. Immediately after this, he raised Chao-chou's "*mu*."⁵⁰

Not only did T'aego study the *SPE*, but it also played an instrumental part in his early awakening.

Hyegün's writings, like T'aego's, were almost exclusively *kong'an*-oriented sermons and poetry, showing a strong Imje orientation. While their remaining writings are not especially extensive, T'aego, Hyegün, and Hyegün's famous student Muhak (Chach'o 無學自超; 1327-1405) had large numbers of disciples and their Imje *kong'an*-centered teaching methods, especially the focus on Chao-chou's *mu*, had a deep impact on the later Sōn tradition.

Kihwa (Hamhō Tūkt'ong)

General Observations

It is Kihwa (己和, Hamhō Tūkt'ong 涵虛得通 1376-1433) to whom we now turn, as the major Korean commentator on the *SPE*, and whose exegesis is translated in full in this work. Kihwa is the inheritor of a Sōn tradition whose practices were derived mainly from the Imje school, which he received through his teacher Muhak, who was in turn taught by Hyegün, both of whom had traveled to Yüan China to receive direct instruction from Chinese Lin-chi masters. The high quality and broad scope of Kihwa's writings would lead him to be later recognized as one of Korean Buddhism's most important scriptural commentators, as well as one of the best poets and essayists of the combined Koryō and Chosōn periods.

Kihwa's Life

Kihwa was born with the name Yu Su-i (劉守伊) into an aristocratic family less than two decades before the demise of the Koryŏ in 1392. His father was a government minister in charge of the reception of foreign emissaries, and Kihwa was educated at the prestigious Sŏnggyun'gwan (成均館) Confucian academy. In the course of his studies at this institution, Kihwa is regarded as having attained to a remarkable level of proficiency in Chinese philosophy and literature, as his biographer goes to unusual lengths to convey the extent to which he was esteemed by his professors.

Entering the academy as a youth, he was able to memorize more than a thousand phrases daily. As time passed, he deeply penetrated the universality of the single thread, clarifying the meanings of the classics and expounding their content. His reputation was unmatched. Grasping the subtlety of the transmitted teachings, all their meanings were disclosed in his explanations. He possessed a sonorous voice and graceful beauty, like flowers laid upon silk brocade—even such metaphor falls short of description. People said that he would become the minister truly capable of transmitting the heavenly mandate, extending upward to the ruler and bringing blessings down to the people. In his grasp of the correct principles of society he had no need to be ashamed even if he were to face the likes of Chou and Shao.⁵¹

Admitting the hyperbole that is inevitably seen in the biographical sketches written by disciples of eminent teachers, we must nevertheless pay close attention to what is contained in this passage as (1) there is not, in the entire corpus of Korean Sŏn hagiographies, an appraisal of scholarly (Confucian) acumen comparable to this, and (2) this strong assessment of Kihwa's early abilities is corroborated in the degree to which he, later in his Buddhist career, took such a strong interest in, and showed such unusual ability in literary/philosophical/exegetical pursuits.

According to the same biographical sketch, at the age of twenty-one, Kihwa was so profoundly affected by the death of one of his close friends, that he abandoned his Confucian studies and began a quest for enlightenment through the Buddhist path. After various wanderings and encounters with other teachers, he arrived, in 1397, at Hoeam temple (檜岩寺), where he came under the tutelage of Muhak Chach'ŏ, the National Preceptor of the generation, who instructed him in Imje soteriological methods. His initial training with Muhak was followed by the period of wandering study and practice that was common for

Korean Sōn monks.⁵² In the spring of 1404 he returned to Hoeam-sa, where he entered into a period of isolated, intensive practice in a small hut in the mountains. It is during this period that he had his first major awakening experience. The *Haengjang* says:

One night, while taking a refreshing walk to conquer the demon of sleep, suddenly, without intention, he blurted out a verse, saying: "Walking, walking, suddenly I turn my head. Lo! The mountain rock pierces the clouds!" Another day, he entered the privy and when he came out, 'dropped the wash bucket'⁵³ saying: "There is only this single affair of reality—if there is a second, then it cannot be true. These words themselves—how empty!"⁵⁴

After this Kihwa returned to an itinerant life, staying at various monasteries, practicing and teaching. In 1414 he came to Yōnbong-sa at Mt. Chamo, where he stayed for a time in a small hermitage called "Hamhō" (涵虛 lit., "nourishing emptiness"), working unstintingly at the triple practice of morality, meditation, and wisdom. During this stay at Mt. Chamo he also led a number of study sessions on the commentaries of five masters who had expounded the *Diamond Sutra*.⁵⁵ After this time, he seems to have passed through another stage of enlightened freedom, as his biographer reports this major change in his lifestyle:

From this time he never spent a long period of practice stuck in any particular place but allowed his mind to follow its own destiny "wandering free and easy"⁵⁶ among the nooks and crannies of the mountains and streams. How could he have a destination at a particular place? Only if strongly invited would he spend the night. He grasped the innermost mind of each person, and his reputation spread throughout the land. Valuing deeply the mind of every person, he responded perfectly to their needs.⁵⁷

In 1420 Kihwa traveled to Mt. Odae in Kangnūng. This was a dharmafilial pilgrimage for him, since the patriarchs of his lineage were descended from Odae. While in this region, he paid respects to the image of Hyegūn. Here Kihwa seems to have had a third deepening of his enlightenment. As the biographer reports:

He stayed at this hermitage for two nights. One night, in a dream, he was approached by the spirit of a monk who addressed him saying, "You will be called Kihwa, styled Tūkt'ong." Kihwa bowed his head and received this with reverence. Suddenly waking from the dream, his body and spirit were refreshed and calm and he experienced an exalted condition of purity. The next day he went down to Wōljōng temple. He threw away his staff, cast off his shoes

and peacefully took up residence in a single room. From this time forth he continuously nurtured the embryo of the Tao. When hungry, he ate. When thirsty he drank, just enjoying the passage of time.⁵⁸

His disciples reported that after this time Kihwa's whole presence and demeanor were transformed such that his influence on those around him became effortlessly powerful. Yet despite his enlightened "freedom and ease," Kihwa was engaged in a series of difficult tasks toward the end of his life, as he was compelled to defend the Buddhist church against the increasingly strident attacks from the Neo-Confucian element that had inexorably moved into the center of political power.

Also, in the early autumn of 1421, he was summoned by the king to teach and perform rituals in the royal temple. While the early Chosŏn rulership had rather strong anti-Buddhist inclinations, it seems that the king T'aejo (r. 1418–50) had softened his personal stance toward Buddhism in his later years. Kihwa spent three years as personal tutor to the king and his family, but in the autumn of 1424, he petitioned the throne to be relieved of this duty. He spent the last several years of his life once again traveling, studying, and teaching at various mountain monasteries in Korea. He ended his wanderings in the autumn of 1431 when he returned to Pongam-sa of Mt. Huiyang in Yongnam, where he supervised the refurbishing of the temple. The repair work done, Kihwa calmly observed the conditions of the times to the end of his life. On the twenty-fifth day of the third month of 1433 he came down with a sickness that lasted to the first day of the fourth month. During the first half hour after 3:00 PM he arose from meditation saying:

How void and empty! Originally there is not a single thing. The spiritual luminosity pervades and penetrates perfectly throughout the ten directions, but there is neither mind nor body to undergo birth and death. Past and future go and return without the slightest hindrance.⁵⁹

A moment later he continued, saying: "About to depart, I raise my gaze to the ten directions of the vast heavens where there is no path to the Western Paradise." Upon this, Kihwa passed away.

Kihwa's Main Works

Kihwa's writings are extensive, including a large collection of poetry, sermons, and short essays on Buddhism and religious cultivation in general. He is best known for his four major works: (1) the *Taebanggwang wŏn'gak sudara yoŭi kyŏng sŏrŭi* (Commentary on the Sutra of Perfect