

**Faith in Wŏnhyo's *Commentary on the Sutra of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life: The Elevated Role of Faith over Contemplation and Its Implication for the Contribution of Korean Buddhism to the Development of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism***

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**D**URING THE THREE KINGDOMS PERIOD (from the second and third centuries to 668) of Koguryŏ, Paekche, and Silla on the Korean Peninsula, there is indirect evidence of the existence of Pure Land thought and practices, but no clear textual evidence to describe them in detail. However, this period laid the foundation for the burst of Pure Land activities and writings that took place in the United Silla period (668–918).

Beginning in the early part of the United Silla period, scholar-monks pursued various fields of study as found in China at the time, but in general the most popular areas of study were Wŏnyung (Hua-yen or *Garland Sutra* school), Yusik (consciousness-only), Chŏngt'ŏ (Pure Land), and the indigenous Korean Pŏpsŏng (Dharma-nature school). However, much of the study and practice of the doctrinal (i.e., “academic” or “scholarly”) schools was in fact basically limited to the members of the aristocracy. Among them were a number of scholar-monks who made vital contributions to the creative innovations of these areas of Buddhism in general, and also specifically to producing commentaries and treatises on the Pure Land sutras. They include a list of writings by such eminent figures as Chajang (608–677), Wŏnch'uk (612–696), Wŏnhyo (元曉, 617–686), Ŭisang (625–702), Ŭijok (seventh to eighth centuries) and Kyong-hung (seventh to eighth centuries). These writings involved interpretations of Pure Land teachings and practices from the doctrinal points representing the various schools discussed above. Because of the high caliber of these works, many of these were highly respected in Japan, particularly those of Wŏnhyo, Ŭisang, and Ŭijok.

## WŎNHYO'S WRITINGS ON PURE LAND BUDDHISM

Of these figures, perhaps the most representative and prominent figure is Wŏnhyo. Among the astoundingly large number of works, one hundred one in all by one account,<sup>1</sup> attributed to Wŏnhyo, there are eleven commentaries and treatises whose primary focus are the teachings and practices connected to the Pure Land teachings. They are:

1. *Panju sammae-gyŏng so* 般舟三昧經疏
2. *Panju sammae-gyŏng yakki* 般舟三昧經略記
3. *Panju sammae-gyŏng yakso* 般舟三昧經略疏
4. *Muryangsu-gyŏng so* 無量壽經疏
5. *Muryangsu-gyŏng sagi* 無量壽經私記
6. *Muryangsu-gyŏngchonggyo* 無量壽經宗要 (*The Commentary of the Sutra on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*), Taisho 1747
7. *Amit'a-gyŏng so* 阿彌陀經疏 (*Commentary to the Sutra on Buddha Amitābha*), Taisho 1759
8. *Amit'a-gyŏng t'onch'on so* 阿彌陀經通鑽疏
9. *Yusim allak to* 遊心安樂道 (*The Path Where the Mind Plays in the Land of Peace and Joy*), Taisho 1969
10. *Kwangyŏng chongyo* 觀經宗要
11. *Mit'a chungsong ke* 彌陀証性偈 (*Verses on the Nature of Amitābha's Enlightenment*), *Hanguk pulgyo chŏnsŏ* 1.843a (See below for translation of the verses.)

Four of these are extant: *Muryangsu-gyŏngchonggyo* (#6 above, henceforth *Commentary*), *Amit'a-gyŏng so* (#7), *Yusim allak to* (#9), and *Mit'a chungsong ke* (#11). Of these the *Commentary* provides us with the most authentic and reliable source for understanding Wŏnhyo's Pure Land thought. For one thing, the *Commentary to the Sutra on Buddha Amitābha* was written after the *Commentary* and is basically a summary of the points in the *Commentary*, without any distinctive thought beyond the latter.

As for *Yusim allak to*, many modern scholars seriously question the authenticity of the text as being the work of Wŏnhyo.<sup>2</sup> Even a cursory look at the text reveals that much of it is the same as the *Commentary*, mostly word for word. This and other factors have led a Japanese researcher to suggest that *Yusim allak to* was compiled in Japan during the tenth century by someone affiliated with the Tendai school.<sup>3</sup> These views are not without their opponents, however, for there are some who defend Wŏnhyo's author-

ship, while others attribute the authorship to other Korean figures. Han Po-Kwang summarizes the arguments involved in this controversy while carrying out an exhaustive research of his own in his monumental work, *Shiragi jōdokyō no kenkyū* (*A Study of Silla Pure Land Buddhism*).<sup>4</sup>

In light of this previous research, the question to be asked at this point is, How did Wŏnhyo, who is known primarily as a proponent of *tathāgatagarbha* (buddha-womb) thought as expressed in the *Treatise on the Awakening of Faith*, come to learn about Pure Land teachings? According to one view, Wŏnhyo studied Pure Land thought from Chajang, who in turn had studied with Daochuo in China. Chajang traveled between Changan and Wudai shan, both when he went to China and upon his return from China. And there is a possibility that he could have visited Xuanzhong Temple, a center of Pure Land practice led by Pure Land masters such as Danluan and Daochuo, and located half way between these two points. When Chajang returned to Silla in 643, Wŏnhyo (at the time twenty-seven years old) was able to learn the most current teachings prevalent in Changan that included those of Pure Land, Vinaya, and Shelun traditions.<sup>5</sup>

However, this does not answer the *personal* reasons that may have led Wŏnhyo to take such keen interest in the Pure Land teachings and to write commentaries on them. It turns out that Wŏnhyo not only wrote scholarly commentaries on Pure Land sutras but also engaged in and even propagated Pure Land practices among the people. The most extensive source for this aspect of his life is the *Samguk yusa* (*Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms*). In commenting on this text, Richard McBride, Jr. has commented on this text, taking note of three instances (told in an obvious hagiographical style) that are most relevant.<sup>6</sup>

The first concerns his relationship with a noble woman. According to the account, King Muryōl (r. 656–661) came to learn that Wŏnhyo wanted to get married and bear a son to benefit the country. At the time, a young widowed princess living in the Jasper Palace had fallen in love with the young handsome monk. The king, therefore, set up a rendezvous for the two in her chambers in the Jasper Palace, and that night the princess conceived and later gave birth to a son, Sōl Chong, who grew up to become an eminent Confucian in his own right. Having broken the precept by his affair with the princess, Wŏnhyo disrobed to return to lay life, referring to himself as a “humble householder” (*sosōng kōsa*). If this account of his return to laity is correct, it is easy to conceive of the high probability that Wŏnhyo turned to Pure Land practices that are traditionally more amenable to the outlook and life-style of laypersons.

After leaving the monastic life, Wŏnhyo traveled among the people living in the thousands of hamlets of the Korean countryside, teaching them to orally recite the name of Amitābha (*yōmbul*) for gaining birth in the Pure Land. In spreading his teachings, he employed the techniques of singing and dancing that connected well with the hearts and minds of the

populace, including the unlearned and the indigent. His proselytizing effort appears to have been enormously successful as the *Samguk yusa* notes: "All came to know the name of the Buddha as they chanted 'I take refuge in [Amitābha].' Wōnhyo's propagation efforts had great success."<sup>7</sup>

A modern historian, Lee Ki-baek, has gone so far as to postulate that eight or nine of every ten Koreans were converted to Buddhism as a result of his effort.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, we have no clear records of the songs Wōnhyo may have sung during his tours, but we may gain a glimpse of them from a poem of praise, *Mit'a chungsōng ke* (*Verses on the Nature of Amitābha's Enlightenment*):

From a distant past and over innumerable generations  
 There has been one eminent sage called Dharmākara.  
 Having first aroused the thought of supreme enlightenment  
 He went forth from the mundane world and entered the path,  
     shattering all signs.  
 Even though he knows that the one mind does not have signs  
 He has pity for the flocks of sentient beings  
     drowning in the ocean of afflictions.  
 He made forty-eight great salvific vows  
 To fully cultivate wholesome actions and forsake all defilements.<sup>9</sup>

The third example of Pure Land involvement from his personal life is related to the account of two friends, Kwangduk and Ŭmjang. It tells a story of Kwangduk's passing and birth in the Pure Land, and his widow's remarriage to his friend, Ŭmjang. On their first night of marriage, as Ŭmjang makes his amorous advances on his new wife, she rebukes him, saying to him, "Your seeking of the Western Paradise is like looking for a fish in a tree." She then relates to Ŭmjang that she and Kwangduk shared a devotion to Pure Land practice that was so dedicated that they refrained from any sexual relationship for the ten years of their married life. She explained how they practiced the recollection of the name of Amitābha and how they had mastered the sixteen visualizations that are discussed in the *Guan Wuliang shou jing* (*Sutra on the Visualization of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*). Wōnhyo's connection with this tale is through these practices, for Kwangduk credits him with having properly taught them the recollection and the visualization practices they came to master. Upon hearing the dedication that she and her deceased, former husband had, Ŭmjang repented and dedicated himself to the visualization practices and eventually gained birth in the Pure Land.

As these narratives of Wōnhyo reveal, he made enormous contributions to the propagation of the Pure Land practice of *yōmbul* (*nian fo*) in its recitative and visualization forms. Pure Land would end up becoming extremely popular in Korea, not only as a pervasive mode of practice for the common

people but also as vital elements in the practices of many of the monastics, very similar to the pattern we saw in China. And it still continues to be the case up till the present time as sounds of recitative *yōmbul* can be heard in many of the Buddhist temples in Korea.

### FIRST KIND OF FAITH: DEEP FAITH

We turn now to the main subject of this essay, faith as discussed in the *Commentary on the Sutra of the Buddha of Immeasurable Life* (無量壽經宗要, henceforth, the *Commentary*), one of the two surviving works. As I believe there are two kinds of faith found in this text, I shall refer to them as (1) "deep faith" and (2) "devotional faith," which are represented in their original terms as (1) *zhen-xin* (深信) or *xin-jie* (信解) and (2) *yin-xin* (仰信), respectively.

With regard to "deep faith" (the first of two), it is found in Wōnhyo's explanation of the section on the lowest of the three grades of rebirth that appears in the *Sutra on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life* (henceforth, the *Sutra*). Wōnhyo speaks of deep faith in connection to "those of bodhisattva nature" (菩薩種性人) who are one of two categories of people, the other being "those of unsettled nature" (不定性人). To understand Wōnhyo's deep faith, it is necessary to look at his views of those of unsettled nature first, which is seen in the following statement:

As for the first group (those of unsettled nature), first, even though they are unable to perform virtuous deeds they ought to generate *bodhicitta* (the aspiration for enlightenment; 發無上菩提心); this is the main cause (正因). Secondly, they ought to contemplate on the Buddha (Amitābha) for at least ten thoughts (乃至十念專念彼仏); this constitutes a supplementary practice (助滿業). Thirdly, they aspire to be reborn in that country (願生彼国); this and the former two practices combine to constitute the cause for rebirth of those of unsettled nature.<sup>10</sup>

This explanation can be summarized as follows:

1. The main cause of faith is having generated *bodhicitta*.
2. The supplementary cause is to contemplate the Buddha for at least ten thoughts.
3. As for one's vow, one ought to aspire to be reborn in the Pure Land.

Thus, the main practice is generating *bodhicitta*. Now, there is no explanation concerning the position of these people of unsettled nature on the path (Skt. *mārga*), the Mahayana category system of the levels of spiritual attainment. However, based on Wōnhyo's *Commentary to the Awakening of Faith*, they would be situated at the level of ten faiths or below, since Wōnhyo explains there that practitioners attain "settled nature" first at the level of ten dwellings, one level above that of ten faiths.<sup>11</sup>

As for the supplementary cause, we have seen above that one is to practice the ten-thought contemplation of the Buddha. This is in accordance with the statement found in the sutra, "With single-minded concentration, contemplate the Buddha of Immeasurable Life for at least ten thoughts." The same can be said with regard to the vow (the third of three causes), which is in accordance with another sutra passage, "Aspire to be reborn in that country." With regard to the nature of "contemplation," it is the focusing of the mind on the Buddha, thus, differing from the oral recitation promoted most vigorously by Shandao.

Next, let us see how Wōnhyo thinks about those of bodhisattva nature, whom he considers different from those of unsettled nature:

There are three qualities to them. First, in listening to the profound dharma, they rejoice and have faith. They also generate *bodhicitta* as their main cause, *but differ from the previous group in that they foster deep faith (深信)*. Second, they contemplate the Buddha even as few as one moment (乃至一念念於彼仏); this constitutes a supplementary cause. Whereas the previous group had to practice ten contemplations since they lack deep faith, this group does not have to engage in the ten contemplations, since they have deep faith (為顯前人無深信故、必須十念、此人有深信故、未必具足十念). Third, they aspire to be reborn in that country; this and the former [two] practices combine to constitute the cause for rebirth of those of bodhisattva nature.<sup>12</sup> (emphasis mine)

This statement can be summarized as follows:

1. The main cause is generating *bodhicitta*, attended by deep faith.
2. The supplementary cause is contemplating the Buddha for at least one thought.
3. As for one's vow, one ought to make the vow to be reborn in the Pure Land with sincerity.

In comparing these two groups, generating *bodhicitta* constitutes the main cause for both groups. However, the one significant difference lies in that those of bodhisattva nature have "deep faith." This has implications for what the two groups are required to practice. To understand this, let us look

once again at Wōnhyo's statement, "Whereas the previous group (those of unsettled nature) had to practice ten contemplations because they lack deep faith, this group (those of bodhisattva nature) does not have to engage in the ten contemplations since they have deep faith." Those of bodhisattva nature are not required to practice ten contemplations *because* they have deep faith.

I find this explanation to be extremely interesting, for it throws light on the relationship between ten contemplations and faith. According to Wōnhyo's view, faith is adequate by itself. In other words, faith has become independent of the ten contemplations. Hence, one or the other (contemplation for even one moment of deep faith) is necessary as a supplementary cause, but *both* are not deemed necessary. This is a departure from the passage in the *Sutra* regarding the Eighteenth Vow, which reads, "One should with sincere mind, serene faith, desire to be reborn *and* perform at least ten contemplations." Thus, both faith and ten contemplations were required. However in contrast, Wōnhyo has, thus, separated the two and determined that faith could stand on its own.

One can make a further observation with regard to the relationship between faith and the ten contemplations. Not only does faith not require ten contemplations, but it is *superior* to it. One can make this claim based on Wōnhyo's view that those with deep faith are located higher on the path than those who engage in the ten contemplations. Those of bodhisattva nature, who have deep faith, are situated at ten faiths or above, while those of unsettled nature are at ten faiths or below.

The superior status of those of bodhisattva nature is also seen in Wōnhyo's discussion of "*bodhicitta* in accordance with principle" (順理發心) and "*bodhicitta* in accordance with phenomena" (順事發心). He identifies the former with those of bodhisattva nature and the latter with those of unsettled nature. In regards to "*bodhicitta* in accordance with principle," one seeks to cultivate deep faith (深信) in the fact that all dharmas are empty like a dream, and then engage in the *samādhi* of emptiness, non-form, and desirelessness. Deep faith, thus, involves quite an advanced level of wisdom, for it entails realization of emptiness. In contrast, "*bodhicitta* in accordance with phenomena" calls for one to raise three vows (three of the well-known Four Bodhisattva Vows), that is, to sever one's blind passions no matter how uncountable, to cultivate virtuous teachings no matter how immeasurable, and to save beings no matter how innumerable. The level of understanding in this case is clearly not at the same level as the previous one.<sup>13</sup>

As these discussions show, deep faith as one of the practices for those of bodhisattva nature indicates a higher level of attainment on the path than that of the ten contemplations associated with those of unsettled nature. This further confirms the high regard that Wōnhyo had toward deep faith.

## SECOND KIND OF FAITH: DEVOTIONAL FAITH (仰信)

Let us now examine the second kind of faith. The closing lines of the *Commentary* acknowledge the fact that there is still hope for those of unsettled minds (the first of the two groups discussed above), even though they are unable to fully realize the objects of the four kinds of wisdom. They are exhorted to have devotion and whole-heartedly give oneself in faith to the Tathāgata. By such action, one would not have to be confined to the hinterland, an undesirable section, in the Pure Land.<sup>14</sup> Wōnhyo reasons that because what the sutra is attempting to describe cannot be known by one's cognitive understanding, especially by those with shallow knowledge, people must simply believe in the words of the sutra.

Accompanying Wōnhyo's exhortation of faith is his recognition of the workings of the "great power of Buddha's wisdom" (仏智大勢力). Wōnhyo, in fact, argues for the greatness of the Buddha by employing two metaphors. The first metaphor is that of "firewood that's been piling up for a thousand years." Having accumulated over a thousand year period, the pile reached a height of a thousand *li*.<sup>15</sup> However, that huge pile catches fire and burns in just one single day. The metaphor ends with a rhetorical question as to how a one-thousand-year pile could burn up in just one day, suggesting that the answer lies in the greatness of the Buddha's power.

In the second metaphor, entitled "a traveler and a ship," it points out the fact that a person with a physical disability can travel only about one *yojana*<sup>16</sup> even after a great number of days, but a ship propelled by a strong tail wind and a skilled captain can travel up to a thousand *li* in a single day. However, the Tathāgata's power exceeds that of the captain by incalculable times!

These two metaphors are similar to other well-known metaphors from earlier Chinese Pure Land sources. The "firewood that's been piling up for a thousand years" is similar to the "extremely long night and the light" in Tanluan's *Commentary*, while "a traveler and a ship" reminds us of the metaphor found in relation to the idea of the "two paths of the difficult and the easy" found in Nāgārjuna's "Chapter on Easy Practice." It is not clear whether these earlier works had a direct influence on Wōnhyo. However, there is general agreement among these metaphors that fire, ship, and light represent the workings of the "Other Power," and are on a superior level that transcends that of the firewood, long night, and traveling on land that represent "Self Power."

Elsewhere, Wōnhyo explains the greatness of the Buddha's power. For example, arhats and *pratyekabuddha*-s are unable to be born in the Pure Land, but those of the unsettled nature are all able to do so on account of having generated the mind of Mahayana (大乘心). And they are able to do so be-



cause of the workings of the Buddha's power as an external condition (外縁力). This power, also termed "the power of the Tathāgata's original vow" (如来本願力), is conceived and imagined in accordance with the sensibilities of the people of unsettled nature, but the vow cannot be realized by the power derived from self-generated karmic action (自業因之力).

We can, therefore, see that Wōnhyo acknowledged the efficacy of devotional faith, but he did distinguish it from the first category of faith, that is, deep faith. And he found devotional faith and the people involved to possess the following characteristics. (1) They are seekers on levels below the ten faiths on the path, not those of ten faiths and higher. (2) The objects of their faith are the Tathāgata and the scriptures, not sophisticated doctrinal concepts such as thusness and emptiness. (3) What is called for of the seekers is confined to faith, which is supported by the power of the Buddha, and not any self-generated karmic actions. The third characteristic certainly constitutes precursory traits of "Other Power" and "faith only" that come to full development in later Pure Land Buddhist development.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Wōnhyo's understanding of faith as found in his *Commentary* can be summarized as: (1) the importance of faith in his soteriological scheme, (2) the recognition of faith as a superior form of action over that of the ten contemplations, and (3) the differences in the characteristics of the two types of faith.

Regarding this difference between devotional faith and deep faith, the one observation that we can make with confidence is the importance of the role Wōnhyo gave to faith. And this faith contains qualities that are very similar to the radically "Other Powered" faith as represented in the teachings espoused by later Japanese Pure Land Buddhists such as Shinran (1173–1262). In this type of faith ("devotional faith") the karmic action carried out by the aspirants ("Self Power") doesn't constitute an efficient cause for their birth in the Pure Land, but, instead, requires the workings of the "Other Power" or the "original vow" from the side of the Buddha. Further, Wōnhyo recognized that this type of faith was meant for those with relatively low spiritual capacity as it was directed to those with unsettled nature.

Also evident in Wōnhyo's thought is the priority given to "contemplation for one moment" (一念) over "contemplations for at least ten moments" (十念). This shift can be seen in the thought of other Silla Pure Land commentators, such as Ūjok and Kyong-hung. And it is believed that the importance given to "contemplation for one moment" influenced the practices of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism starting in the Heian period.

One proponent of this view is Ishii Yoshinaga whose following statement leaves us with a glimpse into the nature of the relatively unexplored area of research in Pure Land Buddhist studies. I shall close with Ishii's observation in hopes that others will take up the task of pursuing this topic of the relationship between Korean and Japanese Pure Land Buddhism:

The interpreting of the practice of contemplation as oral recitation and simplifying of ten contemplations to one contemplation constitute an inevitable process for Pure Land Buddhism, which is committed to making salvation accessible in keeping with the Mahayana spirit. However, long before Pure Land Buddhism emerged as an independent school focused on oral recitation in our country (Kamakura Period, Japan), the teaching of birth in the Pure Land by oral recitation, rooted in the doctrine of one thought, had already been promoted in and around Kyoto during the Heian Period. And I wish to point out once again the role that Silla Pure Land Buddhism played as one facet in the formation of Japanese Buddhism.<sup>17</sup>

## NOTES

1. Han Bo-Kwang, *Shragi jōdo shisō no kenkyū* (Osaka: Tōhō Shuppan, 1991), pp. 83–93.
2. Muraji Tetsumyō, “Yushin-anrakudō Gangyō saku setsu e no gimon” (“Doubts on Wŏnhyo’s Authorship of *Yusim allak to*”), *Ōtani gakuhō* 144 (1960): p. 45. His strongest argument is that this work cites texts that were clearly written after Wŏnhyo’s death. Etani Ryūkai, “Shiragi Gangyō no Yushin-anraku-dō wa gisaku ka” (“Is *Yusim allak to* by Wŏnhyo of Silla an Apocryphal?”), *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 45 (1974): pp. 16–23. Etani suggests that the text was ascribed to Wŏnhyo to garner Wŏnhyo’s authority in promoting the message that “ordinary beings” were similarly able to be born in the Pure Land along with the “saints.”
3. Ochiai Shunten, “Yushin-anraku-dō no chosha” (“On the Theory of Japanese Authorship of *Yusim allak to*”), *Bukkyō ronsō* 24 (1980): pp. 134–137; “Yushin-anraku-dō no chosa” (“The Author of *Yusim allak to*”), *Kachō daigaku kenkyūkiyo* 25 (1980): pp. 180–210.
4. Han Bo-Kwang, *Shragi jōdo shisō no kenkyū*, p. 105.
5. Kamata Shigeo, *Shiragi bukkyōshi josetsu*, p. 192. Shelun is a Chinese school that was based on Asaṅga’s *Mahāyānasamgraha*.
6. Richard McBride, Jr., “Wŏnhyo’s Approach to Rebirth in the Pure Land” (unpublished article), pp. 5–8.
7. The original passage of *Samguk yusa* is found in Han Bo-Kwang, *Shragi jōdo shisō no kenkyū*, p. 81.
8. Lee Ki-baik, *A New History of Korea*, trans. Edward G. Wagner (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 83.
9. McBride, “Wŏnhyo’s Approach,” p. 6. The translation is by McBride, and the original is found in *Hanguk pulgyo chŏnsō* 1, 741a. Cited in McBride, p. 7.
10. *T.* vol. 37, p. 128b.
11. Kakehashi Shingyō, “Gangyō no jōdokyō-shisō nit suite” (“Wŏnhyo’s Pure Land Thought”), in *Nihon Chūgoku Bukkyō shisō to sono tenkai*, ed. Misaki Ryōshū (Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin, 1992), p. 200. Kakehashi’s reference is based on his reading of Wŏnhyo’s *Commentary to the Awakening of Faith*.
12. *T.* vol. 37, p. 128b–c.
13. *T.* vol. 37, p. 128b–c.
14. *T.* vol. 37, p. 130c.

15. One *li* = 3.9273 km.

16. One *yojana* is variously defined as 160, 120, or 64 km.

17. Ishii Yoshinaga, "Gusoku jūnen to ichinen ōjō: Heian Jōdokyō ni okeru Shiragi Jōdokyō juyō no issokumen" ("Birth in the Pure Land by Ten Contemplations or One Contemplation: One Dimension in the Reception of Silla Pure Land Buddhism in Heian Pure Land Buddhism"), *Indogaku Bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 101 (2002): pp. 106–109.