



Cultivating Original Enlightenment : Wŏnhyo's Exposition of the
Vajrasamādhī-Sūtra (Kūmgang Sammae-gyōng Non)

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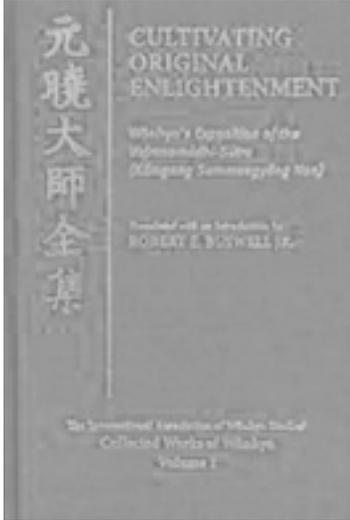
**Cultivating Original Enlightenment:
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Richard D. McBride, II

Cultivating Original Enlightenment is the first volume in the International Association of Wōnhyo Studies' Collected Works of Wonhyo (Wōnhyo) series, published by the University of Hawai'i Press with the generous financial support by Dongguk University, Seoul, Korea, and the State University of New York, Stony Brook. Although the *Exposition of the Vajrasamādhi-Sūtra* was probably the last commentary written by the Silla Buddhist exegete par excellence Wonhyo (617-686), it is fitting that it is the first to be published in this series because it captures Wonhyo at the peak of his intellectual prowess and introduces and emphasizes several themes common in Wonhyo's oeuvre that will be repeated in later volumes of the series. These themes include the role of meditative absorption (*samādhi*,

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sammae) in achieving enlightenment, in this scripture the “contemplation practice that has but a single taste” (*ilmi gwanhaeng*); emphasis on the doctrine of *tathāgatagarbha* (*yeoraejang*, womb/embryo of enlightenment) in the process of liberation; original enlightenment (*bon-gak*); and the relationship of these Mahāyāna doctrinal concepts to the Yogācāra doctrine of the underlying “immaculate consciousness” (*amalavijñāna*, *amarashik*). In other words, the primary thrust of this, and other writings by Wonhyo, is an intellectual affirmation of

the mature Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrine that all beings can become awakened like the Buddha, since all beings are inherently enlightened.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part (pp. 1-44) is a study intended to introduce readers not only to Wonhyo’s commentary on the *Vajrasamādhi-Sūtra*, but also to the genre of Buddhist exegesis. The second part (pp. 45-308) comprises Buswell’s annotated translation of the *Geumgang sammaegyeong non*. The third part is composed of background materials, such as a schematic outline of Wonhyo’s *Exposition* (pp. 309-334), notes to the text, a glossary of Sinitic logographs, and so forth. Buswell previously published a study and translation of the *The Formation of Ch’an Ideology in China and Korea: The Vajrasamādhi-Sūtra, a Buddhist Apocryphon* (Princeton University Press, 1989). Although, unavoidably, there is some repeated information in the introduction, his translation of the scripture has been revamped and improved for its presentation in Wonhyo’s *Exposition*. In the study portion, Buswell crystallizes his earlier argument about Wonhyo’s relation to this apocryphal scripture that was proba-

bly composed in Silla Korea during the mid-seventh century by a proponent of the early Chan tradition. That there are few typographical errors for a text of this complexity attests to the great care Buswell has put into his annotated translation.

Buswell's approach to translating and presenting Wonhyo's *Exposition* to readers is ambitious. He has attempted to preserve and lay bare to the conscientious reader the complex hermeneutical superstructure imbedded in the original Sino-Korean text. Buswell does this by embedding in his translation guides linked to his schematic outline of the work, which show readers how Wonhyo moves through the text of the scripture and how Wonhyo intellectually approaches doctrinal and logical issues presented by the scripture. Because Wonhyo freely quotes from the *Vajrasamādhī-Sūtra* throughout the text of the *Exposition*, Buswell uses bold type in a gothic font to distinguish more clearly for readers when Wonhyo quotes, paraphrases, or comments on words, phrases, and passages from the scripture.

Frankly speaking, even with all of Buswell's aids to the reader, *Cultivating Original Enlightenment* is not an easy read, nor was it ever intended to be such. Because Wonhyo understood this scripture as being a "compendium of the Mahāyāna," Wonhyo alludes to the myriad Buddhist intellectual concepts found in medieval Sinitic Buddhist literature and freely associates these concepts (many of which are comprised of lists) to issues he raises and as solutions to problems presented in the text. In comparison to other works by Wonhyo, such as his writings in the thematic essentials (*jongyo*) genre with which I am personally more familiar, Wonhyo's *Exposition* is a challenging work. Although the introductory essay in Buswell's study portion is extremely accessible to general readers, the translation will require great patience because it was originally intended for a small audience of fellow monastic exegetes and perhaps some lay intellectuals in medieval East Asia who were thoroughly conversant in the idiom of the Buddhist scriptures in literary Chinese. Also, because Buswell has labored diligently to preserve the feel of the original

Sino-Korean where possible—in this respect I believe he is successful and his translation a triumph of scholarship—the translation follows a cadence quite different than modern books on Buddhism composed for popular audiences. This being said, Buswell’s translation will be immensely beneficial to scholars and graduate students in Buddhist studies as a proto-typical example of East Asian scholarly exegesis and as a model of how to translate Buddhist Sino-Korean into English.

The popular image of Wonhyo among non-specialists in Korean Buddhism, which is based primarily on anecdotes about him contained in Iryeon’s (1206-1289) *Samguk yusa* (Memorabilia of the Three Kingdoms) and Zanning’s (919-1001) *Song gaoseng zhuan* (Lives of Eminent Monks Compiled in the Song), is as a non-conformist, unbridled by the strict monastic precepts, and willing to break them for the benefit of his country; and as a monk who trusts in the intellectual capacity of his own mind in seeking the Buddhadharma. The Wonhyo readers will find that Buswell’s translation of the *Exposition* tends toward the latter rather than the former. Wonhyo is a fully committed proponent of a unified or comprehensive vision of the message of Mahāyāna Buddhism and its myriad doctrines and practices. This is what I believe his junior colleague, the famous Chinese exegete Fazang (643-712) meant by using the expression “comprehensive” or “interpenetrating” (*tong*) to describe one aspect of Wonhyo’s vision of the Buddhadharma (see *Huayan jing tanxuan ji* 1, T. 1733, 35.111a25-b1).

The heart of Wonhyo’s *Exposition* is his detailed description of six approaches to contemplation practice that lead toward awakening, “spiritual perfection that has but a single taste” (Buswell’s expression):

- (1) Rejecting All Characteristics of Sense Objects to Reveal the Signless Contemplation (pp. 65-115)
- (2) Extinguishing the Mind-Subject to Production in Order to Explain the Practice of Non-production (pp. 116-137)

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- (3) The Inspiration of Original Enlightenment (pp. 137-166)
 - (4) Abandoning the Spurious to Access Reality (pp. 166-210)
 - (5) Sanctified Practices Emerge from the Voidness of the True Nature (pp. 211-243)
 - (6) Immeasurable Dharmas Access the *Tathāgatagarbha* (pp. 243-271)

Buswell's translation captures the true visage of Wonhyo: he is not merely a proponent of meditative absorption and that doctrine of *tathāgatagarbha*, but a master Mahāyāna logician in the tradition of the great Madhyamaka and Yogācāra thinkers in his construction and deconstruction of intellectual concepts and arguments posited in Buddhist scriptures as spiritual aids (*upāya*, *bangpyeon*) to hint at what is meant by "Buddhahood": "acquiescence to the non-production of dharmas" (pp. 118-120), "the great perfection of wisdom" (pp. 232-234), and other technical terms used provisionally to describe the nature of enlightenment. This clearer version of Wonhyo is a welcome addition to the fields of Buddhist studies and Korean studies.

Before I wax prolix by attempting to unpack more of the allusions found in Buswell's translation of this seminal work, let me conclude by reiterating that *Cultivating Original Enlightenment* is a thoroughly scholarly work of translation and exegesis. Although it describes six approaches to contemplation practice, it is not a meditation manual. The book is not intended for popular readership; nevertheless, it is a doubly welcome addition to the small but growing library of works in English on Korean Buddhism and will serve as an example for future generations of scholars, especially those desiring to study intellectual Buddhism in medieval East Asia.