# Review of One Koreans Approach to Buddhism
## The Mom/Momjit Paradigm by Sung Bae Park

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# Review of *One Korean's Approach to Buddhism*: *The Mom/Momjit Paradigm* by Sung Bae Park.

*Charles Muller*

## Abstract

*This is a review of the book One Korean's Approach to Buddhism: The Mom/Momjit Paradigm, by Sung Bae Park, published by SUNY Press (2009). This book represents an overview of the author's personal quest for enlightenment through the non-dual path of Buddhist practice and academic scholarship, forged through the mode of the mom/momjit paradigm—a close analog of the better-known ti-yong ("essence-function") paradigm.*

Key words: Che-yong, Essence-function, Hwadu, Wŏnhyo, Awakening of Faith, Tathāgatagarbha.

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## I. Preliminary comments

When I was first invited by Prof. Kim Yong-pyo, editor of the *IJBTC*, to review this book, I declined, due to the fact that Prof. Park was my teacher and mentor at SUNY Stony Brook, not only as a graduate student, but as an undergraduate as well. For this reason I was afraid that I would not be able to bring the requisite critical distance to the task. After having had the opportunity to read the book, however, I changed my mind, for two main reasons: (1) I realized that it might be personally satisfying to take the opportunity to re-engage myself in the kind of Buddhist soteriological discourse that originally atfter ed me to Buddhist Studies to begin with, and (2) the potential for lapses in proper critical distance notwithstanding, I felt that there is some sense in which I could bring some insights into the appraisal of this book probably only accessible to myself, given my long relationship with Sung Bae Park and my deep personal interest in his project. So I hope readers of this review will accept it with these factors in mind.

There is one question that we may want to ask before dealing with a book like this: Is there a place in our Buddhist Studies academia for the discussion of personal religious experience, or for the investigation of the phenomenon of *religiosity*? I know of more than a few who would answer such a question with an outright "no." Others might say, "it depends upon how one goes about it." And still others may be very excited by such a prospect.

Certainly, the academic field as a whole is not going to be interested in hearing simple professions of faith, or some kind of sectarian or exclusivist religious discourse. But the author is not talking about making simple professions of religious experience. Rather, he is attempting to show that the very basis of our existence itself is the religious, and remains so regardless of whether we choose to acknowledge it. And if we *do* choose to acknowledge, or to even embrace, or enhance this religious aspect, such a course of action ultimately has nothing to do with rejection or devaluation of our daily mundane experiences, because the religious is wholly interpenetrated with

these. And in the same way that an authentic religiosity cannot but enhance our day-to-day lives, it can serve to inform and give meaning to that which is referred to as "Buddhist scholarship," while, at the same time, Buddhological scholarship done in a religiously informed manner can naturally serve to enhance one's own religiosity, along with producing more insightful understandings of Buddhist texts.

Before we can begin to ask these questions about integration of religious experience with daily living, or scholarship, we must first have a clear idea about what Park means by the term "religiosity." This is of primary importance, as it underlies every aspect of the book. The religiosity that he would espouse is an unpretentious, honest, and most of all *non-utilitarian* form of religiosity. It is not a religiosity of guarantees of happiness and promises of gain, but of self-reflection and self-awareness that cannot but make us uncomfortable with where we are here and now, and which asks us not to expect where we *will be*—religiously, that is.

So is there a way we can discuss the phenomenon of personal religious experience in the context of academic discourse? If so, then how? Park takes a paradigmatic structure that he sees represented best in Buddhism, but clearly identifiable in the discourses of other religions—and indeed, in secular activities as well, and presents this as a marvelous gateway into the religious, but a religious experience that never closes itself off from the mundane, and which has in fact never been separate from the mundane. This is the *mom/momjit* paradigm.

## II. The meaning of *Mom and Momjit*

*Mom* (the "o" is pronounced as in the English *home*) is the Korean vernacular term for "body" and *momjit* means "gesture"—thus, the various bodily motions and expressions. Here these terms are utilized in a philosophical sense that is familiar to Koreans, where *mom* indicates the deeper, underlying aspects of something and *momjit* the external, relatively superficial aspects. For those of us coming to this topic with a background in

Buddhist studies, one way to approach this structure is as being similar to the Buddhist "two truths,"—the absolute truth (*paramārtha-satya*) and relative truth (*saṃvṛti-satya*).

We can draw nearer to the application of *mom/momjit* by taking these two truths not as abstract Buddhist philosophical concepts, but as a way of talking about the reality of everyone's daily existence, recognizing that human experience, as explained by Buddhism, has a deeper, underlying, more authentic[1] dimension, that defies linguistic description and direct conscious control, and yet which underlies our every thought, word, and action. This would be *mom*. Together with this we are immersed in the world of conventional experience, wrapped in the package of language, wherein fire is not water, water is not fire, and "what you see is what you get." This is *momjit*. We can draw again closer to the meaning of *mom/momjit* by recognizing that the two truths of absolute and conventional are actually not two, but are only defined as such in terms of their relationship with each other.

While in itself neither good nor bad, the mundane consciousness can function in such a way as to lead us astray from the awareness of what we really are. Yet at the same time it can be used to redirect us back to what we really are. The absolute truth, usually characterized as being difficult to access, is always right here with us. It is not just good: it is goodness itself; it is not just correct: it is correctness itself. It is not something distant, only accessible to the buddhas—it is our very being. But deep and sustained access to the absolute through the fickle decisions and determinations of the intellect is virtually impossible. It only appears to those who desire—or rather need—it more than anything else. With this, we can begin to approach the signification of the *mom/momjit* pair being presented by Park in this book.

Those with a background in East Asian thought and/or who know of Park's previous work may wonder up front as to whether this *mom/momjit* paradigm is not related to the better-known *ti-yong* paradigm (K. *che-yong* 體用; usually translated into English as "substance-function," or

1 "Authentic" is my own term, not the author's.

"essence-function") on which Park has often focused in his works. The answer is "yes," and given that fact, one may—as I was—be motivated to ask the question as to why he did not use the better-known Chinese term, or even perhaps one of the standard English renderings of the term in the title of the book. In fact, there is confusion on the matter in the book, as on page 77 he indicates that "many people, when learning about the terms *mom* and *momjit* for the first time, mistakenly believe they are identical to the well-known paradigm of *t'i* and *yung*, which originated in China." He then points out (1) that he has fully explained this Chinese paradigm in his earlier work, *Buddhist Faith and Sudden Enlightenment* (*BFSE*), (2) that both the Chinese *ti-yong* paradigm, and the Western substance-function structure have long and complex histories of development in their respective traditions, which would serve to complicate their usage in the present context, and (3) that anyhow, the notion of *mom* as body and *momjit* as the body that one uses daily is simpler to grasp.

However, I am much relieved to read on page 132 that "I can truly say that throughout the course of my lifelong study of this matter, I have found that the only Asian teaching that has addressed [the matter of the universal principle of religiosityosityin us] adequately is the *mom/momjit* paradigm, or the *t'i-yung* construction, as it is better known." We can also see the unity of the two constructions in his discussion of the Huayan *li-shi* notion (widely seen by scholars as a *ti-yong* analogue) at the bottom of page 92.

So why *mom/momjit* instead of *che-yong*? During the years of my direct study with Prof. Park, he almost always referred to the structure with the Chinese term *ti-yong*, very rarely using the Korean vernacular *mom/momjit* form. But I believe that he makes a good move by putting *ti-yong* on the shelf at this point, for both reasons alluded to above.

First, the freshness and directness of the image *body/gesture* allows him to show better the personal and human intention of his message, whereas as the long history of *ti-yong* in Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist hermeneutical discourse tends to render the term into a philosophical abstraction—as also happens to the Buddhist two truths. English renderings such as

"essence-function," "substance-function" and the like, as he points out, necessarily invite all kinds of unwanted baggage from German and Aristotelian philosophy. One more issue that Park does not mention, which is probably even more problematic, is that of the postmodern essentialization of the concept of essentialism, the great enemy of Derrida and all those who were awakened by his writings to the problems of reification. This has been compounded in the interaction of postmodern lit-crit discourse with that of Buddhist studies, since the central cognitive problems of Buddhism are those of reification of persons and phenomena into essences. Thus, although the Chinese notion of *ti* as used in the *ti-yong* construction does not originally have these Western essentializing connotations, once one renders it into English that way, there is little hope of escape.[2] *Mom/momjit* is better.

## III. Overview

First, in characterizing this book as a whole, while the unifying thread is the articulation of the application of *mom/momjit* as a principle for attuning oneself to the religious dimension within and without, it is not a highly structured work that builds toward a particular conclusion. It could be better characterized as a summation, a recapitulation of Park's personal philosophy, his understanding of Buddhism, through a set of essays on the *mom/momjit* paradigm. With it being, to some extent, a collection of essays, one sees the attendant occasional repetition. Those familiar with Park's writings and conference presentations will find many of this favorite topics revisited—this time d all together in one volume, all either in service to, or in utilization of the *mom/momjit* principle. The underlying theme that motivates the work is very close to that of his first book—that of the matter of the meaning of *unconditional faith* in a Buddhist context. For it is only through faith that true religious transformation can occur, and the meaning and purpose of Buddhism as understood in this book is not simply as an object of academic curiosity. The meaning and purpose of Buddhism is entirely that of dramatic personal

2 I have, in own work on this topic, often run up against objections from scholars of Buddhism—usually specialists in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism, who exclaim: "there is no *essence* in Buddhism!"

transformation, which is not something that need be put off to a more convenient time, or to the afterlife, or to rebirth in the Pure Land, or for three *asaṃkhya* kalpas—it is something for the present moment—if one really wants it.

The first part of the book is devoted to explaining the view into the religious life—especially a Buddhist religious life—facilitated by this paradigm. This part of the book is not at all limited in its target to scholars. It is for anyone who seeks deeper religious understanding through Buddhist principles, with the author personally opting for a Zen approach,[3] but not in an exclusive manner. As in *BFSE*, the centrality of faith plays a seminal role here, even if it is not always overtly mentioned. But from Park's perspective, this key component of faith may be viewed as what is either missing, or at least poorly understood in the Zen discourse that has come to the West in our generation. Along the way in this section, Park provides several interesting narratives from his own life experience, most notably in connection with the events that led him to enter the *saṃgha* as a student of the eminent Haeinsa master Seongcheol, and the conclusions he drew from that experience. This section, while working through the various permutations of *mom* and *momjit*, provides much insight into the core meaning and content of practice of the *hwadu* (better known in the West by the Japanese word *kōan*), along with other forms of meditative practice.

The next part, labeled "Other Teachings," can be characterized as an effort at applying *mom/momjit* as a hermeneutical device, or perhaps, a revelatory device, in treating a few of the texts and concepts that Park takes to be essential to (Zen) Buddhism, especially *his* understanding of Zen Buddhism. This again is a free-wheeling discussion that is not arranged in any special systematic structure. Also included in this part are discussions of a few of his pet peeves concerning issues of textual interpretation. Some of these are older issues, and some are recent.

The last portion of the book, consisting of the sections "Present Day

3 Although most students of Zen, unless they have already read *BFSE*, may find themselves presented with notions and perspectives regarding Zen that they have never heard of before, especially if they have learned their Zen through a Japanese/American approach.

Applications" and "Final Thoughts on *Mom* and *Momjit*" returns to a similar theme as the early part in that it focuses once again on the application of *mom/momjit* as a means of access to religiosity in daily life, with the important subtext of *non-letter culture* vs. *letter culture*. Like the first part, it consists mostly of examples of *mom/momjit* within the Buddhist teaching, along with anecdotes from daily life.

## IV. Introducing *Mom/Momjit* in daily life

The centerpiece of the book's introduction is Park's telling of the story of the experiences leading to his becoming a disciple of the renowned Ven. Seongcheol of Haeinsa. Park had originally been an assistant professor of Buddhist studies at Dongguk University, and was a faculty advisor to a group of active Buddhist students who were attempting to carry out a full-scale attempt at emulating monastic training while fulfilling their standard academic program. After reaching the level of near-breakdown from the difficulties of their double burden, they sought advice from some of the leading Seon masters of Korea, the last of whom was Ven. Seongcheol. After meeting his strict "fee" for an interview (consisting of 3,000 prostrations before the Buddha-image), Seongcheol met them, and told them that their problems were based on their attachment to *momjit*—i.e., their schematized, language-based view of their situation. They were attempting to follow an artificial construct, which did not match to the reality of their true personal capacities (*mom*).

Park's eyes were opened by this assessment, to the extent that he subsequently resigned from his position at the university to practice under Ven. Seongcheol's guidance, before later returning to the academic world to pursue a PhD at UC Berkeley. He reports that since that fateful meeting with Ven. Seongcheol in 1965, he has continually been questioning himself in all his activities: "What are you doing? Are you merely imitating the external appearance, the *momjit*?" He explains that his entire being was transformed by the experience of the monastery, where everything was focused on religious goals, and thus he received another shock when he returned to lay life,

brought on by the apparent conflict between the *mom*-oriented experience of the monastery as distinguished from the *momjit*-orientation of the secular world. Further reflection and study led him to see that:

> All the great sages of Korea, both Confucian and Buddhist, have been deeply aware of the distinction between *mom* and *momjit*. Each in his own way has striven to impart the primary value of *mom* to his disciples and students. After I had experienced a *mom*-oriented way of life for myself, I truly appreciated for the first time the crucial point these sages were trying to convey. I believe that the crux of their message is this: in order to operate freely, *mom* cannot be forced or interfered with, nor can it be produced by the manipulation of *momjit*. Many people attempt to imitate a spiritual leader's deeds or actions [his *momjit*] in the hopes of attaining what he has attained. This is a self-defeating task. To try to produce an effect based on one's own limited understanding or desires will never yield the hoped-for results. Rather, what is needed is for *mom* to operate on its own, in its own way, in its own time. Only then, when the conditions are right, will the desired result spring forth. (Park 2009, 7-8)

The main point of this section, which he develops through a number of other examples is: first *mom* and *momjit* must be identified, with their roles and implications being properly distinguished. Once this is accomplished, one may live a life wherein attention to each happens appropriately to the situation.

Chapter One "Initial Considerations" functions to deepen the reader's grasp of the notion of *mom* and *momjit* through examples from nature, Buddhist doctrinal equivalents, and personal anecdotes. A key metaphor in understanding *mom* and *momjit* is that of a tree in its totality, its roots, *mom*, which lie invisible, underground, the support of the life of the tree, with the trees branches and leaves—its external, visible aspect as *momjit*. The focus here is the analysis of the condition of human suffering through this paradigm. For Park, the problem of human suffering (*dukkha*) as taught by the Buddha can be summarized as a fragmentation of the individual, who is unable to reconcile his inner world (*mom*) with the behavior that is required in

interaction with society.

> We all have very active internal lives, yet often our experience of our own inner world causes us enormous suffering. What does it mean that an increasing number of people are seeking the aid of psychologists and psychiatrists in order to manage their lives? This fact, I believe, points to our inability to reconcile our own inner *mom* world with the *momjit* world, which exists outside of us. We insist on creating a separation between the two where none exists. We split *momjit* off from *mom* and then proceed to spend most of our time and energy catering to the distorted *momjit* we have created. For example, following our parents' teaching, we tell our children that they mentsalways try to look happy in front of others, that they should smile, and say the right thing, and so forth. This manifestation of *momjit* represents a distortion of *mom* and prevents its natural expression, causing us deep, often unconscious, inner distress. (Park 2009, 13)

This then, pertains to the very meaning of the religious itself, as:

> In what sense, then, is something considered to be religious? A Buddhist might say that the religious aspect of something allows for the simultaneous existence of two fundamentally different or opposing conditions. It is in this way that we may begin to comprehend the religious dimension of *mom*. In this context *mom* is both individual, that is, partial and impermanent, as well as universal or eternal. Thus, its religious, or universal, aspect includes the ordinary or temporal. It should be clear here that *mom* embraces and includes *momjit* as well. This religious aspect may be equated with the Buddhist term *emptiness*. This emptiness does not mean the same thing as nothingness, however, but is rather an all-embracing completeness, which is empty only in the sense that it possesses no inherent identity of its own. (Park 2009, 22)

So how is *mom* to be experienced? We might expect here to be advised to follow some standard Buddhist approach, such as engagement in meditation, or perhaps meditation combined with scriptural study and chanting, or devotion to a moral life, engaging in charitable works, etc. While Park will return to

discuss these dimensions later in the book, the most important factor is something discussed at length in *BFSE*—the undergoing of the experience of "brokenness." And in this instance, as at several other junctures in the book, the encounter with, and entry into *mom* is presented as a universally accessible religious experience, limited to neither Zen nor to Buddhism. It is an experience directly accessible to any human being, but especially those experiencing deep suffering in the form of physical illness, personal tragedy, or those simply in a state of unbearable uncomfortableness in some kind of existential crisis in reconciling contradictions between inner and outer realities —to the extent to which one is willing to discard all of one's conceptual and conditioned ways of perceiving himself and his universe—"an experience that enables [one] to access a radically altered view of existence." This "is not difficult" "for those whose suffering is great, and for those who feel intensely the need to solve their own soteriological question" (Park 2009, 23).

He goes on to relate some examples of this event occurring in non-Buddhist, and even non-religious contexts[4], after which, he notes "we can see by these stories and examples that the *mom/momjit* paradigm may easily be applied to any aspect of human existence. One does not need to be a sage or practice meditation for many years in order to experience *mom*" (Park 2009, 25).

With this being the case (and as noted previously in *BFSE*) while Park's own training and background lies within the Zen approach, and that is the one he will center on in this book, Park will readily accept profound experiences of encounter with the religious dimension described in other religious traditions equally as experiences of *mom*—the religious aspect of our awareness. When a Christian claims to have "met God," and we subsequently see in that person a profound and lasting change toward selfless and compassionate behavior, it is reasonable to assume that a similar sort of basic experience may have been undergone. And with this as a basic approach, Park

4 One moving story is told of two friends, originally from disparate different social classes and backgrounds who formed an unbreakable bond at the level of *mom* based on having saved each other's lives during the Korean war. This story serves as a powerful example of the operation of this paradigm outside the context of organized religion.

regularly punctuates his elaborations with lines from the Gospels that exemplify the point, such as "love your neighbor as yourself." Who is really capable of such behavior, lacking the integration of *mom* and *momjit*?

The next subsection in the chapter "Initial Considerations" is a critical one in which a scheme will be established that will operate throughout the rest of the book. Here Park distinguishes the path to full religious awareness into three stages in terms of the way the person at each stage experiences the relationship between *mom* and *momjit*.

In the first stage, one has entered a religious or spiritual path that starts with the cultivation of a firm foundation of understanding of the nature and existence of *mom* itself. The fact that there does indeed exist an invisible yet universal aspect of reality, whether it be called God, emptiness, thusness, or *mom* is strongly emphasized. This stage is closely entwined with, and even motivated by the need to reduce suffering. This is done by recognizing that the causes of suffering are intimately related to one's deep attachment to things of the world of *momjit*, not the least of which are one's notions regarding one's own body and mind. One might seek access to *mom* via meditation, chanting, study, or some other *momjit*-based discipline, but the aim is to eventually be free from being based in, and wholly immersed in *momjit*.

In the second stage (which Park will later shift to referring as the "second revolution"), the religious seeker has attained a certain level of detachment from *momjit*, which enables the discovery of the previously hidden *mom*. "For practitioners of Western religions, to detach from self-concerns is to enter into the presence of God. For Buddhists, elimination of attachment represents an embarkation onto the path of enlightenment and indeed may lead directly to an experience of awakening" (Park 2009, 29). Yet there is now a dangerous pitfall, in that the practitioner can easily become identified with this incredible experience of *mom*, "whether it be of God or emptiness," and this attachment to the absolute can create many problems in one's life.

The third stage is that of the abandonment of all attachment to *mom*. Since one is now able to reject both *momjit* and *mom*, one is able to see these two aspects in their correct relationship to each other, a relationship of

non-duality, in which each exists within the other. In the process of achieving this stage, it is important is that one's *momjit* (behavior) has been qualitatively transformed, so that whatever *momjit* occurs, it does so as a clear manifestation of *mom*, rather than as a twisted, disconnected distortion of it. The character of Jesus as described in the Four Gospels is given as an example of one who lived in this state, exemplified in his proclamation "I am in the Father, and the Father is in me." The *momjit* that is not a direct reflection of mom, shall we say "disconnected *momjit*," is characterized by greed, but more importantly, a seminal term for many of Park's arguments: *utilitarianism*. And thus, words and acts which are ostensibly religious, or connected with religion, yet which have utilitarian aims, are nothing but a distorted form of momjit. Once falling into this category, it doesn't matter what the teachings are: Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, even the most arcane of the Zen *kōans*—once they are appropriated for utilitarian aims, they no longer have anything to do with authentic religiosity.

## V. Zen practice and the *hwadu*

Having established the groundwork of the range of religious ramifications of *mom/momjit* in the first chapter, in the second chapter, "Tools for Transformation," Park moves into the domain of Zen practice, armed with his operative paradigm. The crux here is the core theme of *BFSE*, but a much streamlined version that also presents issues and realizations that have come to him in the decades that have passed since the publication of that work. The primary tool for transformation presented here is the *hwadu*, still regarded as the core practice in Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism He reiterates the central ingredient for empowerment of *hwadu* practice elaborated at length in *BFSE*, the heightening tension between faith and doubt, a doubt that continues to grow in accordance with the growth of faith, for which, eventually, a resolution will come in the form of an experience of "brokenness" (also described throughout the book as a "shipwreck" experience). He places great emphasis on a notion that is often debunked in much of Western scholarly

discourse on Zen, the need for faith in one's teacher.

> To offset his doubts,...it is vital that the practitioner have faith in his teacher. He must have total respect for him. For many, this represents an obstacle in itself: how many people are willing or able to maintain that kind of trust? Thus, an internal need, a sort of existential demand, on the part of the practitioner is very important. If his need is strong enough, he will have an easier time with trusting. As a saying goes: if you are sick, you will seek the medicine. (Park 2009, 36)

Other key elements of working with the *hwadu* are related to the position one takes regarding it. One is not to seek it the literal meaning. "In fact, just the opposite effort is required: the practitioner must abandon all his usual modes of thought and perception in order to apprehend the intended message of the *hwadu's* riddle." What is to be sought is the "live word"—the bare words of the *hwadu* itself, as opposed to the "dead words"—all the thoughts and concepts one might entertain with regard to the words of the *hwadu*. Here, he relies extensively, as he has in the past, on the instructions regarding *hwadu* meditation passed on by Jinul (1158-1210), mainly as transmitted from the Chinese master Dahui (1089-1163). Park also offers some basic instruction (no doubt, to the great satisfaction of any *zazen* practitioners who might pick up this book) on preparatory meditative techniques, bodily posture, breathing, and so forth.

Getting down to the practice of the *hwadu* itself, Park first clarifies the oft-misunderstood notion of no-thought (無念) according to its role in Zen teaching, which is not a state of blankness, but a positively-characterized state of communion with *mom*, where one is not dragged about by the attachments and entanglements in the world of *momjit*. He continues on the discussion of *hwadu*, focusing on the major pitfalls involved, and the requirements for successful engagement in *hwadu* meditation. Most important is that the engagement with the *hwadu* be total, to be of critical importance to oneself, and for the practitioner to be thoroughly committed to its engagement, but

*without harboring expectations:* "Our worst enemy in this context is our expectation, or our hope for certain results, which again stems from our age-old conceptualizations and intellectualizations." (Park 2009, 44) That which thwarts proper application of the *hwadu* is that which thwarts the experience of authentic religiosity. As Park says: "The *hwadu* is not intended to be a means by which we may attain a preconceived goal or benefit. To view it as such is to view it from a causal, or utilitarian, standpoint, in which the practitioner is seeking some kind of gain, whether for himself or for others." (Park 2009, 54).

Intimately related to this non-utilitarian, non-goal oriented dimension in successful practice of the *hwadu* is the full understanding of the basic Mahāyāna principle of the immanence of enlightenment in oneself. It is not something that exists outside of ourselves, or which will exist in the future at a certain time, based on a certain set of circumstances. And this is the true meaning of *sudden enlightenment*, in that suddenness has nothing to do with time systems, but with the fact that there is nowhere to go to, and nothing extra to gain.

Throughout the rest of this chapter, Park offers various explanations regarding the nature of the *hwadu*, its purpose, the reasons why people have difficulty getting into the *hwadu*, and how these difficulties are to be overcome. He takes the opportunity here to comment on a situation that has developed in the Jogye school in Korea over the past couple of decades, where controversy has emerged as to whether *hwadu* meditation is indeed the best approach for all practitioners in the present age. There are some in the Korean saṃgha who have advocated abandoning *hwadu* practice, to replace it with "easier" methods of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*, borrowing from the traditions of Theravāda Buddhism. Others have sought to facilitate concentration by wearing headphones and earplugs and the like. Park doesn't take sides with either the pro or con group, but inquires instead into the attitudes and understandings of *hwadu* held by both parties. On one hand, he points out that the reasons for concern among Jogye leaders for the lack of popularity of *hwadu* may be in part motivated not by religious concerns, but

those of falling treasuries in the coffers if they end up offering a form of practice that is not widely popular. On the other hand is the misunderstanding of expectation on the part of practitioners for the *hwadu* to function like other popular forms of meditation: that it will bring ease, relaxation, calmness, improved mental and physical health, and so forth.

Here, Park will sharply distinguish *hwadu* from these other types of meditation by pointing out that the purpose of the *hwadu* is decidedly *not* to bring ease and comfort, but in a sense, exactly the opposite. It is to be used like a powerful hammer to smash the hardened mass of one's age-old attachments, conceptualizations, intellectualizations, and so forth, so proper engagement with the *hwadu* is never going to be easy or comfortable—especially at the beginning. And in the practice of the *hwadu* in a monastic situation under the auspices of an accomplished master, one is likely to be exposed to shouts, insults, and even beatings with a stick to ensure that one does not slip back into a mode of ease. Thus, "The beatings and shoutings work like a bomb, destroying all of the intellectual hiding places that have been created and maintained by the student throughout his life" (Park 2009, 61). And the *hwadu* itself is described exactly the same way (Park 2009, 71) There is much more here in this chapter that should be of great interest to dedicated *hwadu/kōan* practitioners.

## VI. *Mom/Momjit* hermeneutics

The labeling of Chapter Three with the title "Other Teachings" was slightly confusing to me, in that except for a relatively brief mention of Daoism and Confucianism at the end of the Chapter, most of the discussion is about Buddhist texts and teachers, including the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*, *Huayan jing*, *Diamond Sūtra*, *Vajrasamādhi-sūtra*, and the writings of Wonhyo and Jinul. In this section, Park shows how *mom/momjit* can be used as a hermeneutical principle to disclose the deep structure of many Buddhist texts, and how the principle can be shown to have informed the thinking of Wonhyo, Jinul, and others. Those who have seen or read Park's expositions of

the subject texts treated here will recognize this section as a summation of his long-held views on these texts, as well as on the matter of interpretation in general. Since the underlying structure of the texts themselves is discerned to be that *mom/momjit*, the *mom/momjit* paradigm can function best to unravel their meanings.

Also included here, both implicitly and explicitly, are some direct critiques of the way that the texts have been interpreted by other scholars heretofore. The underlying message is that in the reading and interpretation of at least some religious texts, without some kind of practical religious insight on the part of the reader/commentator/translator, the danger of the original message being missed is great. The reason for this is the understanding that the writers of these texts were operating from an enlightened position of nondualistic thinking, and thus attempts at understanding such texts from a dualistic standpoint contain the clear potential for a misreading of the message. A few examples are given, the most prominent being the interpretation of the *Platform Sūtra*, which, based on later textual analysis of Dunhuang materials, Shenhui's position in his recorded arguments with Huineng is given greater evaluation. In this section, Park laments:

> Most traditional scholars have tended to accept these conclusions drawn by the modern scholars, offering little, if any, criticism of their scientific methods. Yet we need to be careful here and not endorse these methods too hastily. We need to examine in depth the claims that these modern scholars are making.
>
> In my opinion, modern scholars are committing a grave error. Scholars in the field of religion need to understand that they are a breed apart from scholars in other fields. The field of religion itself should be distinguished as unique with regard to all other fields of study, as its aim is to investigate and acknowledge an awareness and understanding of oneness, of nonduality. The word religion is derived from the Latin *religare*, which means "to bind back together." All religious study, then, is a study of unity. Yet religious scholars neglect to understand this and instead treat their subject as if they were examining a specimen under a microscope. This indeed is the scientific method, but it should not be the only method by which religious scholars study their area of interest. The modern scientific

> methods, which include textural [sic] criticism, philology, historiography, and so forth, are worthwhile but only partially so. What is needed on the part of the scholar is the ability and willingness to go beyond the scientific method, so that he may begin to loosen his grip on his dualistic way of thinking....His understanding will now be deeper, simpler, and more insightful....This new understanding will accord completely with the logic propagated by the Buddha, the logic that scholars by and large are ignoring. (Park 2009, 98)

I think that many people currently working professionally in the field of Buddhist Studies may find this position difficult to accept. But in fact, I do personally share some sympathy with this view, and it is indeed, at least in part, the opportunity to study with someone who thought like this that attracted me to pursue graduate studies in the field of Buddhism. In fact, even as an undergraduate (but one who had already been engaged in meditation practice for several years) I was somewhat amazed upon reading a translation of the *Platform Sūtra* by one of the leading scholars in the field at the time. I was certain, based on my own experience with meditation and meditation teachers (who fluidly shift their rhetoric according to the circumstances of the question and the level of the student), that this scholar had been thrown by the text every time that Huineng shifted his perspective. And since that time—especially in the case of *Zen/kōan* materials—I have often felt that translations and expositions on textual materials done by those who had not engaged seriously in some form of Zen practice consistently for an extended period of time were simply unable to get the message, and thus tend to produce interpretations that do not tally with actual experience.

Taking the matter of the "scientific approach" to the limits of its logical extension in terms of recent technological developments, we are now able to benefit from philological research greatly assisted by computer programs using the digital texts at our disposal—and I myself have been a fairly extensive user of, and even significant contributor to the development of such tools. But I must admit that I have come across instances of published scholarly research recently where conclusions were drawn predominantly from computer-based textual analyses that frightened me. Conclusions about the overall positions of

a given thinker from a certain century, for example, that would be rejected immediately by someone fully intimate and versed in that thinker's full oeuvre.[5] Of course I do not reject such approaches as a first step for gathering information. But when philology (computer-assisted or otherwise) thoroughly predominates a field such as ours to the degree that there is utterly no awareness that other approaches exist, we may indeed be creating some kind of unnatural situation.

That being said, I can accept Park's position with a bit of rephrasing, to say that the emphasis on religious and experiential dimension of the individual in the academic study of Buddhism, is something that could certainly provide value, and certainly a more exciting variety of writing than we currently see. Such an approach would probably also help to open up Buddhist Studies to conversation with other traditions and disciplines, instead of being confined in its narrow philological-historical corner.

I do believe, however, that at our present stage of knowledge of Buddhism, the "scientific" approach is still of vital, primary importance, since there is just so much that we need to know, historically and linguistically, before we can be sure of the accuracy of our understanding of the language used in these texts. The most prominent case in point that comes to mind is the work that is being done on the earliest scriptural translations of the Han period. Many of these terms do not yet even appear in dictionaries, and their meanings will take much time to be deciphered by scientific methods. How can we even begin to approach such texts without relying on careful philological research? The same can be said for later materials, such as Yogācāra works, where the Chinese compound words are so often used in a way that is radically different from their original Chinese meaning in rendering a Sanskrit term. Until these concepts are properly matched with their Sanskrit original, translations and interpretations that are produced cannot but be flawed.

5 I recently read a dissertation, for example, in which conclusions were drawn regarding Wonhyo's thought based on analyses of passages generated by a CBETA program that were immediately recognizable to me as being wholly incorrect, based on my fairly comprehensive study of Wonhyo's works.

A further counterpoint can be raised to Park's position in the example of cases of the opposite extreme. That is, the case of translations done by monks or others deeply immersed in Buddhist practice, who are deficient in philological training and access to philological tools. Most of such translations that I have on my bookshelf are hardly worth the paper they are printed on. Yet there are numerous impeccable translations that have been produced by philologists with little or no practice experience. Admittedly, the translations I have in mind are not of Chan works, so we may need to make a distinction here, and point out that the matter of the need for practical experience and religious insight may depend to some degree on genre and authorship of the text under scrutiny. And I would agree that in poetic works that express deep religious experience (such as poetic prolegomena to works by Wonhyo and other great masters), without some degree of *mom* insight, one might be prone to make errors at critical junctures.

Nonetheless, whatever interpretation is produced, it is still going to be one's *personal* interpretation (unless it is a team job, like the translation committees in Tang China noted by the author on p. 98, wherein the task of translationp. s undertaken in stages, by teams with various types of expertise, including linguistic, experiential, een.),[6] which will reprincnt only the totalitor f skills, insight, experience, interest, and sincerity that one brings to the task. The claim of insight, unfortunately, will never be verifiable.

## VII. Confucianism, Letter/Non-letter culture

In his final distinctive discussion of a broad topic, Park deals with Confucianism. Here he is again able to draw deeply from his own experience of being raised in a society steeped in Confucian values. He raises the interesting point that the influence of Confucianism in Korea continues to be

6 I am intrigued by the author's statement on the bottom of page 98, where, after recounting the strict, multi-staged translation system used for Buddhist texts in the Tang, he writes: "Korea is now the only country in the world where this in-depth practice still occurs." Since I have not yet had the opportunity to be exposed to this kind of practice in Korea, and had not heard of it before this, I would like to know very much where, exactly, it is taking place.

powerful—regardless of whether one is a Christian or Buddhist—despite the fact that "Confucianism" has not existed significantly as a distinct institution for centuries. In tying Confucianism into the *mom/momjit* discussion, he draws on the argument made in the book by Herbert Fingarette (1972) that shows the deeper and pervasive dimensions of the concept of *li* (禮), and he identifies Fingarette's penetrating view of *li* with the notion of *mom*. Park also regards the Confucian teachings as being profound, addressing the inner person more than most people understand, and thus says: "Confucianism is often seen as a teaching of *momjit*, yet its real intention is to help us return to our true status as human beings, or persons of *mom*." This is an interesting and enlightening addition to a work that primarily deals with Buddhism. One might have hoped, however, to see a more clear tying-in of the notion of *momjit* in the discussion on education and training (Park 2009, 110-11).

The final chapter of the book, entitled "Present Day Applications," again covers a wide range of topics. It is as equally focused on Buddhist doctrine and *mom/momjit* philosophy as the rest of the book, with just a couple of actual anecdotes from daily life. An important notion is introduced here in the form of "letter/non-letter culture," which explores the way that the *mom/momjit* paradigm can be seen to operate in the context of the linguistic and non-linguistic functions of our mind. "Letter culture," associated with rational-analytical function (arising from the left side of the brain) would of course be associated with *momjit*, and non-letter culture, associated with intuition and other forms of non-linear function (arising from the right side of the brain) would be associated with *mom*. Here, Park invokes the structure of the One Mind taught in the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* to show how both aspects—the letter culture (arising-and-ceasing aspect) and non-letter culture (thusness aspect) are subsumed together in the One Mind. The One Mind contains both aspects at the same time, without any obstruction. If we use the notion of One Mind as an analogue for *mom*, then *mom* also can be seen as always containing both *mom* and *momjit* aspects.

As with most of the other things Park has written, I found this book extremely stimulating and illuminating. Whether he will be able, in writing

this work, to bring about any major changes in the way people carry out research on Buddhism in particular, or religion in general, remains to be seen. Some of those with whom I have discussed the book remain confused, asking: "Is not the opening up of the *mom/momjit* paradigm merely creating a duality, even though Buddhism teaches us to overcome dualities?" The answer to this question, one that I believe Park himself would endorse is: We can't begin to address our suffering—much less properly enter into the state of nonduality until we have made our own priorities, and the priorities of the world around us clear. We can't deal with the health of the tree until we have first properly distinguished its roots from its branches. As the *Great Learning* says: "When you know what comes first and what comes last, you are near the way." Once we have a sharp tool to help us distinguish the important from the less-important, we can then begin to see their mutual interrelation. This book can bring us to the entry way.

## Glossary of Chinese Terms

(K=Korean, C=Chinese, J=Japanese)

Chey-ong (K), Ti-yong or T'i-yung (C) 體用
Dahui (C) 大慧
Dunhuang (C) 敦煌
*Huayan jing* (C) 華嚴經
Huineng (C) 慧能
Hwadu (K) 話頭
Jinul (K) 知訥
Kōan (J) 公案
Li (C) 禮
Li-shi (C) 理事
Shenhui (C) 神會
Zazen (J) 坐禪

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