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저자
(Authors)

EUN-SU CHO

출처
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Pak Chonghong's Philosophical Analysis of Korean Buddhism and His Steps Towards Establishing an Eastern Philosophy

CHO Eun-su

CHO Eun-su is a professor of Buddhist Philosophy in the Department of Philosophy at Seoul National University in Korea. She taught in the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of Michigan before she joined SNU in 2004. She received her PhD in Buddhist Studies from the University of California, Berkeley. Recent publications include "Repentance as a Bodhisattva Practice: Wŏnhyo on Guilt and Moral Responsibility," *Philosophy East & West* 63 (2013), an English co-translation of the *Chikchi simgyŏng*, and the edited volume *Korean Buddhist Nuns and Laywomen: Hidden Histories and Enduring Vitality* (SUNY Press, 2011).
E-mail: escho@snu.ac.kr

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Abstract

Modern expansion in the scope of philosophy began an ongoing philosophical introspection into traditional Korean thought and Korean Buddhism, how they can be defined, and what they mean. Yŏram Pak Chonghong (1903–1976) was a seminal figure who initiated this effort by making a groundbreaking proclamation for the existence of a distinct Korean thought and identity. By proclaiming that the past critically informed the present and vice versa, he tried to renew and revitalize the Korean philosophy of the past, which had been locked away and displayed as an artifact or fossil, transforming it into a relevant, living philosophy of the present. On the other hand, he was a dedicated scholar of Korean thought who explored its practical boundaries and content. He published works on Wŏnhyo and other Korean Buddhist philosophers, as well as T'oegye and other Korean Confucians. Pak pointed to Korean Confucianism and Buddhism as treasures awaiting excavation—and the need for a new methodological tool that could integrate Korean thought with the concepts and logical methods of Western philosophy. These efforts firmly placed Korean thought—and by extension, Eastern philosophy—on the shelf of philosophy as a discipline. The breadth of sources and the scrutiny he gave them in his work set the standard of Korean Buddhist scholarship that was unmatched for some time. Even now, his theories on Korean Buddhist philosophy still guide scholars. So translated into a modern context, the study of Korean Buddhism became an important field of Korean philosophy, and these efforts became the catalyst for a wealth of lively discourse on Korean thought in the Korean academic world.

Key words: Pak Chonghong, Buddhist Philosophy, Korean Philosophy, Eastern Philosophy, Sŭngnang, Wŏnch'ŭk, Wŏnhyo

Introduction

Whether there is such a thing as "Korean thought" or "Korean philosophy," and how to define it if it exists, has been a topic of long dispute within modern Korean philosophy. At its core, this debate is keenly related to the question of what philosophy is. In its narrow sense Korean philosophy should be defined as the historical accumulation of philosophical thought in Korea. Specifically, this refers to traditional Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. This definition, however, limits Korean philosophy to the thought of the past, even to the exclusion of current research on traditional thought. A counter to the previous definition suggests that the study of traditional thought should belong to philosophical history, and that philosophical history and philosophy itself must be clearly distinguished.

Nevertheless, Eastern philosophical discourse has mostly consisted of commentaries and detailed studies of previous philosophical writings and thought. Would we dismiss the entire Eastern philosophical tradition as merely philosophical history? Thus, even if it is traditional, "historical philosophy," if it informs our thought and perspectives, and continues to influence those residing in the East or Korea then it should be considered a philosophy of the present. Yŏram Pak Chonghong 朴鍾鴻 (1903–1976) tried to renew and revitalize Korean philosophy of the past, which had been locked away and displayed as an artifact or fossil, transforming it into a relevant, living philosophy of the present.

He "rediscovered" Buddhist and Confucian thought and tried to harmonize and reestablish themas a living Korean philosophy, a model of an Eastern tradition of philosophy. Although Korean Buddhism had a long history of doctrinal and theoretical study, it was always under the aegis of the pursuit of religious truth. Before the modern era, this tradition of Buddhist doctrinal research and education only took place through seminaries, institutions of education reserved for ordained Buddhists. These Buddhist thinkers did not have the opportunity to influence the knowledge sphere of average members of the public. None would have claimed that this was part of a noble Korean philosophical tradition, and certainly not that it was a relevant philosophy that pervaded and dictated aspects of present-day life. Indeed, the Western thought that flooded into Korea along with the shifting currents of civilization in the modern age provided the impetus for the rediscovery of Korean traditional knowledge and philosophy.

Change of the Times and Awakening of Consciousness

Pak Chonghong's epoch-making 1958 article on Korean philosophy, "Prolegomenon for Establishing a Study of Korean Thought,"[1] (hereafter "Prolegomenon") made a groundbreaking assertion of the existence of a distinct Korean thought and identity. On this task of defining and rediscovering Korean thought, he states: "We are Korean people. Before we ever explored the question of Korean thought we were already living as Koreans. Korean thought was created and explored by Koreans living as Koreans" (1972a, 13).

He called the exploration of Korean philosophy and its establishment as a proper discipline the duty of all Koreans. One may think that talking about Korean thought in an increasingly global and cosmopolitan age is a conservative and feudal notion. Another might even question what Korean thought even existed in the first place. Pak responded to these criticisms saying it is a pity to pass judgment on something without paying attention or making an effort to understand it. He claimed that Korean thought is like an artifact awaiting excavation, an undiscovered country full of riches (Ibid., 14).

He stated that the thought of the Korean people had to be none other than Korean thought. Borrowing his expression, "No matter where in the world they go, Korean people must pose as Koreans; if this is an inescapable truth, then the thought of the Korean people must also be Korean thought" (Ibid., 14). And this Korean thought "was not created one morning in a single person's head; it is a noble manifestation of the accumulated experiences of our ancestors who sweat and bled for them on this Korean peninsula" (Ibid., 15).

Pak Chonghong wrote a short piece called "On Submitting this Manuscript" and attached it in an edited volume by Sin Ilch'ŏl, called *Han'guk sasangsa: Kodaep'yon* (History of Korean Thought: Ancient Korea), and describes his feelings on publishing a history of Korean thought as follows. First of all, he defines the history of philosophy as a project tracing a more intellectual and theoretical essence of thought in comparison to a general history of thought. Moreover, he confesses that his study on the history of Korean philosophy is a matter of existential inquiry to establish his own identity of thought, stating that he began his research because he wanted to explore the Korean tradition of thought himself:

> It would probably be the correct scholarly attitude to refrain from any hasty

> linguistic analysis of ancient thought before proper philological theories have even been established. It is difficult to know whether, unbeknownst to me, being caught in the grip of bias [because of my lack of knowledge], I have forced together a specious work that will be the laughingstock of future generations. . . . If a history of thought carries these risks, it seems like an almost foolishly reckless adventure to attempt writing a history of philosophy, which must further pursue the development of rigorous intellectual theories. . . . These series of texts are not the presentation of a polished product of research as much as a documentation of my wandering around to sate my own desire to learn. . . . Thus, my text will first attempt to shed light on the majestic gleaming shape of the highest peak to the highest peak. . . . It is an attempt to approach the essence of thought that is more scholarly and theoretical than a general history of ideas, taking a more philosophical stance and organizing it chronologically. (Pak 1966a, 24)

On the other hand, he was a dedicated scholar of Korean thought who explored its practical boundaries and content. He published works on Wŏnhyo and other Korean Buddhist philosophers, as well as T'oegye and other Korean Confucians. Pak pointed to Korean Confucianism and Buddhism as treasures awaiting excavation—and the need for a new methodological tool that could integrate Korean thought with the concepts and logical methods of Western philosophy. These efforts firmly placed Korean thought—and by extension, Eastern philosophy—on the shelf of philosophy as a discipline.

What caught his attention first and foremost was the philosophical characteristics of Korean Buddhism. He emphasized the need for further study on Korean Buddhist philosophy in his many books and articles. For example, in an article entitled "Korean Philosophy and Korean Buddhism," he declares that "the constitution and capability of Korean people towards philosophical thinking is well represented in the intellectual development of Buddhist thought." His philosophical exploraton of Korean Buddhist thinkers began with his articles on Sŭngnang, Wŏnch'ŭk, and Wŏnhyo published in the journal *Han'guk sasang* (Korean Thought).[2] Then these works were published as an anthology, *Han'guk sasangsa: Kodaep'yon* in 1966 by Ilsinsa, followed by a monograph titled *Han'guk sasangsa: Pulgyo sasangp'yŏn* (History of Korean Thought: Buddhist Thought) in 1972 by Sŏmundang. In this final form he explored the philosophical significance of Sŭngnang, Wŏnch'ŭk, and Wŏnhyo,

as well as Ŭich'ŏn and Chinul. He also mentions the debates over the theory of mind by such monks as Yŏndam and Muk'am in the Chosŏn dynasty, arguing that new seedlings of thought were budding in the late Chosŏn dynasty. The reason Yŏndam and In'ak's commentaries were so popular was that there was a great demand for those who could teach the Buddhist canon. He came to three conclusions: first, there has been a lack of effort in trying to examine Buddhism through a philosophical lens; second, separating Korean philosophy from Korean Buddhist thought is a difficult task; and third, even in the Buddhist world there is a need to more actively clarify the theoretical characteristics that have been developed and transmitted throughout the ages, even though it still has its place as a religion.[3]

On the other hand, there was a newfound zeal for establishing an infrastructure for rigorous academic study of Korean Buddhism. Intellectuals who had lost their own country after the Japanese annexation found new enlightenment in their own national traditions, spurring research in Korean Buddhist history. The Myŏngjin School was established by those who keenly felt the need for monks to have a modern education in the face of a quickly changing modern world, including the expansion of the influence of other religions. This institute changed its name to Hyehwa Special School, then became Dongguk University, the leading institution for Buddhist studies in Korea. Thereafter, Buddhist studies became a field of academic inquiry in universities instead of the traditional seminaries. Additionally, journals on Buddhism published since the 1910s examined Buddhism from academic points of view and exalted the Korean Buddhist tradition. Some were close to the academic standards of scholarly journals. However, in spite of this enthusiasm and effort for the scholarly exploration and promotion of Korean Buddhism, it was mainly contained within the boundaries of the Buddhist community. Only Western philosophy was taught in secular universities. As a result, Buddhism and philosophy have even now developed in two largely separate domains without significant contact with each other.

What is Philosophy and what is Eastern Philosophy?

Scholarly consciousness develops from possessing a historical perspective. Pak set about finding a historical source of Korean philosophical thought in order

to lay a foundation for the discipline of Korean philosophy. Pak began his journey by locating the first instance in which the word *ch'ŏrhak* 哲學 (philosophy) was used in Korea.[4] First used by the Japanese philosopher Nishi Amane in 1872 to describe Western philosophy, the same two Chinese characters, *zhexue*, pronounced *tetsugaku* in Japanese and *ch'ŏrhak* in Korean respectively, have become the standard term used to designate "philosophy" throughout East Asia. His studies of Yi Chŏngjik and Yi Injae thus began.

According to Pak, the term *ch'ŏrhak* appeared in Korea for the first time in a study of Kant (1724–1804) by Yi Chŏngjik (1840–1910), "Kang ssi ch'ŏrhaksŏl taeryak" (A Brief Thesis on the Philosophical Theory of Mr. Kang [Kant]). Yi traveled to China in 1868 at the age of 28, while accompanying a group of envoys. In Beijing he was exposed to the broad knowledge and intellectual foment of Qing China and learned of new trends in Neo-Confucianism, as well as Western philosophy. Yi's essay on Kant is clearly influenced by Liang Qichao's (1873–1929) *Yinbingshi wenji* (Anthology of the Ice-Drinkers' Studio) that compared Buddhism and Kant. Pak therefore concludes that "Kang ssi ch'ŏrhaksŏl taeryak" was written between 1903, the year that Liang's book was published, and 1910, the year that Yi died. Liang used Buddhist Huayan philosophy in interpreting Kant while Yi compared Kant with Zhu Xi's (1130–1200) "understanding matters" (*gewu*), finding similarities between the two. Liang claimed that Buddhist thought was similar to Kant's philosophical theories, and that Zhu Xi was inferior to Kant; Pak claims that Yi therefore wrote this paper to retort that Kant's philosophy is in fact similar to Zhu Xi's and in no way inferior.[5]

Pak also studied Yi Injae (1870–1929), a scholar of the late Korean Empire.[6] Written in 1912, his *Ch'ŏrhak kobyŏn* (Treatise on Philosophy) is likely the first Korean study of Western philosophy. This work is a history of Ancient Greek philosophy that criticizes the ideas of Greek philosophers from a Neo-Confucian standpoint. In reflecting on his reasons for delving into Western philosophy, he said, "My teacher [Mr. Kwak] advised me not to shut myself off from reading these new books, and explore them, even though from the lofty point of view of standard Confucianism this (Western philosophy) might be considered beneath us. I thought there must be a reason for the advancement of Western civilization. I learned from these new books that their advancement sprang from their philosophy, and I dove into their works of philosophy."[7]

The words that come closest to the concept of philosophy in traditional

Confucianism is probably *tohak* (study of the Way) or *ihak* (study of principle). *Tohak* and *ihak* were terms that had been used for many centuries in East Asian Neo-Confucian culture. To scholars like Yi Chŏngjik and Yi Injae, *tohak* or *ihak* not only included knowledge of practical matters but also a way of understanding the universe and earth, as well as developing humanity and morality. Western philosophy was merely about science and utility whereas their own thought is a holistic knowledge of man and the world, buttressed by a comprehensive value system aimed towards the humanistic development of individuals and society. They not only claimed that Western philosophy and Eastern *tohak* were similar, but they argued that Eastern thought was superior to Western thought. In the epilogue to Yi Injae's *Ch'ŏrhak kobyŏn,* Yi's teacher Kwak Chongsŏk states, "I firmly believe there will come a day when Korean *tohak* will flourish in the West."

The early response to Western philosophy soon changed with the full inception of Western powers, and the status of Confucianism as a tradition of *tohak* fell into oblivion. During the Japanese colonial period, people harshly criticized Confucianism, blaming it for the misfortunes that befell the nation. However, in the 1930s nationalist scholars and intellectuals such as An Chaehong (1891–1965), Ch'oe Namsŏn (1890–1957), and Chŏng Inbo (1892–1950) started the *Chosŏnhak* (Korean studies) movement. The movement aimed to revive the beleaguered condition of Korean thought by reinterpreting the reformist Confucian theories of Chŏng Yagyong (1762–1836) and other *Sirhak* scholars. Despite coming from a background of Confucian scholarship, they were critical of traditional Confucianism. *Sirhak* (Practical Learning), developed in the late Chosŏn dynasty, was praised as a progressive and practical thought derived from Confucianism. It was argued that *Sirhak* had overcome the limitations of traditional Confucianism, demonstrating the vitality and practicality of Korean thought. By emphasizing and illuminating *Sirhak* thought, they intended to fill the void left by Confucianism at the center of new Korean thought.

Despite these efforts during the colonial period to safeguard traditional thought, to most people, Korean thought was the very image of backwardness after liberation. Furthermore, traditional Korean thought was not even included within the modern curriculum. Even during the Japanese colonial period, the philosophy curriculum was absolutely dominated by Western philosophy, German idealism in particular. Pak Chonghong taught at the

Department of Philosophy at Seoul National University during this time, when philosophy referred to Western philosophy and traces of the long Korean philosophical tradition had been forgotten. After the Korean War, German idealism, existentialism, and analytical philosophy were the most popular interests in academia. It was also a time when interest in philosophy had spread to the public. Young people, who felt devastated by war and oppressed by various societal problems, readily welcomed the numerous textbooks on Western philosophy and existentialism that appeared in this period. The fact that *Sasanggye* (World of Thought), one of the most popular political journals in the 1950s, included an article on a philosophical subject in nearly every monthly issue provides ample evidence of this trend.

Pak Chonghong's studies of Yi Chŏngjik and Yi Injae provided an opportunity to recognize the inversion of the identity of Korean thought. Sixty years earlier, at the end of the Chosŏn dynasty, traditional Confucian scholars defended their traditions upon encountering Western philosophy. Though it was neither the same era nor the same country in 1960s Korea, it appears Pak questioned what relationship he, as a Korean, had with the Western philosophy he had learned and of his own identity as a scholar of Western philosophy. This questioning is reflected in Pak's "Prolegomenon," where he reconfirms the fact that he is [not a Westerner, but] a Korean person, who speaks Korean and thinks in a Korean manner every day. Pak Chonghong saw through the paradox of the disconnect, of the changes between the views on Western philosophy by Confucian scholars sixty years prior, and the self-understanding of Koreans and self-consciousness of present Korean society. Therefore, though his attention to Korean thought may have been his duty as an intellectual or a philosopher in forming the cultural and intellectual identity of a new nation, it was also an existential effort as a Korean and a scholar of Western philosophy to clarify his own intellectual roots and identity.

The Scope of Korean Philosophy

What should be included in this history of Korean thought? Moreover, what does it mean to be "Korean"? In Pak's "A Conception of Research on Korean Thought," he says, "it might be claimed that great thoughts have no national boundaries. . . . But why then do we speak of specific categories such as English

and American philosophy, German philosophy, French philosophy, etc. rather than just ancient, medieval, and modern philosophy? Though all of these must have the aim of reaching a universal truth, as long as thought is something that cannot serve its proper purpose without spreading its roots deep into the daily life of human beings, [it seems to me that] nationality and ethnicity will naturally always be expressed" (Pak 1966b, 10). Though philosophy aims towards discovering universal truths, the expression of regional and ethnic characteristics create a diversification of thought.

Is there then a "Korean" thought or a thought "unique" to Korea? Pak answers as follows.

> Some may object that Korean thought must either be Buddhist thought or Confucian thought, and aren'tBuddhism and Confucianism just imported traditions? . . . But following that logic, there should only be one culture in the various civilized nations of the West, and there would be no individual originality to speak of. In fact, strictly speaking, there shouldn't even be an independent thing called Western civilization. . . . I believe there is absolutely no thought that has not been influenced by others if one traces their lineage. (Ibid., 14–16)

In other words, thought is something that is created and developed through mutual interaction with others; there is no thought that exists independently of other cultures or thought. Uniqueness is something that is cultivated through the process of creation and development.

Though Koreans were clamoring for political and economic independence in their struggle for nation-building at the time, Pak criticized that they were too lax and indifferent about the independence of thought that ought to serve as the foundation (Ibid., 12). Here, he describes the absence of theoretical identity amongst Korean intellectuals of the time:

> Some might ask what Korean thought even existed in the first place. . . . But to those I want to ask whether they have even spent effort or time to find Korean thought [as much as they have for foreign thought]. . . I feel that we are forgetting ourselves far too often. Forgetful of itself, these empty minds are busy running around, chasing after new intellectual trends as if they were the only truth. But to remain doing so without taking any time to digest [these

> new intellectual trends] and make them their own is just superficial and empty imitation. This is a problem of the so-called attitude of "serving the great powers" [*sadae*], and it is a sad weakness to which people in countries without self-consciousness are susceptible. (Ibid., 11)

He cites Chinul (1158–1210) as an example of Korean thought worth seeking and studying.

> Though Korean Buddhism has been centered on Sŏn (Ch. Chan, Jp. Zen), the Chogye order [here, referring to the Chogye Sŏn tradition developed by Chinul] together with the doctrinal schools, has constituted the mainstream.This tradition has birthed such creative, bright and wise master monks such as Chinul. By exploring and elucidating Chinul's thought, I hope it will shed light on how his influence is reflected in Korean Buddhist thought. . . . I believe that these [studies] have clearly demonstrated the philosophical mind and capability of the Korean people. (Ibid., 15)

Yet, Pak warns that "one must not think of Korean thought as a simple matter that one can expect to just find hidden someplace, like a jewel buried in the dirt, and have it cast a radiant gleam on the spot. Even if there might be something like that diamond in the rough, it will require effort in finding it; the gleam will only appear when it is cut" (Ibid., 11). Pak's rediscovery of Korean thought is not a creation of something where nothing had existed before. It is finding something that already exists but has since been both forgotten and obscured by age. Pak claimed that though Korea had a long tradition of thought, it was not recognized as a philosophy because it had not been explained in a modern, logical manner. The task of researching Korean Buddhist philosophy was thus expertly presentingthe intellectual content of this tradition in a logical fashion.

Exploring Korean Buddhist Philosophy

Pak Chonghong wrote four articles, one each on Sŭngnang, Wŏnchŭk, Wŏnhyo, and Chinul, and published them in *Han'guk sasang* magazine. His rhetorical method and language was qualitatively different than previous

Buddhist studies: he did not write purely in defense of Buddhism.[8] This was in part due to Pak's skill in Classical Chinese and erudite knowledge of traditional classics and Korean history. He learned the Chinese classics in traditional elementary school, and later taught Korean and Classical Chinese in Taegu. Only at the age of thirty did he enter university, where he absorbed himself in the study of German idealism. His familiarity with the classics is made evident in his brushwork manuscript copies of the Confucian classics and the *Yijing* that still circulate today.

In his study on Sŭngnang, "Sŭngnang of Koguryŏ's Theory of Knowledge and Ontology," he explains that if the means of uncovering or understanding the truth are defined as the method of cognition, then Sŭngnang's unique method of cognition is the middle way, illuminated through combining the two truths: conventional truth and ultimate truth. He analyses the crux of Sŭngnang's philosophy as the three-level progression of consciousness from the shallow to the profound. In the first level, worldly existence is conventionally true while the ultimate truth is that the world is empty; in the second level, conventional truth is that the two truths are both affirmed, while ultimate truth is that the two truths are both negated; in the third level, affirmation of both truths of the second level is conventional truth, while negation of the same is ultimate truth. By establishing these three levels, Sŭngnang suggested a new way of knowing the truth: combine the two truths to illuminate the middle way. He explains that this resembles the Western dialectical interpretation of consciousness (Pak 1966c, 28–38).

In "Wŏnch'ŭk's Yogâcāra Philosophy," he states that there are two Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophies: Mere-Representation (Yogâcāra) and the Three Treatises (Madhyamaka). During the early development of Korean Buddhist philosophy, Sŭngnang's Three Treatises and Wŏnch'ŭk's Mere-Representation are considered as two "stately peaks." Wŏnch'ŭk's fine analysis of consciousness not only met eye to eye with representative Chinese thinkers of the Yogâcāra school but even greatly surpassed them.

In describing Wŏnch'ŭk's scholastic prestige, he particularly devotes much space to refuting the infamous "eavesdropping incident," where Wŏnch'ŭk purportedly eavesdropped on Xuanzang talking to Kuiji in Xuanzang's translation bureau. First, he notes that Wŏnch'ŭk was a master monk who was respected by Empress Wu (r. 690–705) as the Buddha himself, and provided him with patronage during her reign. He also served in Divākara's translation

bureau as verifier of meaning, leading a five-member team, and was called whenever a master monk would arrive from India. He cites the *Memorial Inscription of the Late Venerable Wŏnch'ŭk of Great Virtue of Ximing Monastery in Great Zhou,* written by Song Fu in 1115, stating that there was nobody except Wŏnch'uk to represent Chinese Buddhist philosophy at a time when Xuanzang had passed away over twenty years ago and Kuiji a few years prior. Given that Wŏnch'uk was someone who enjoyed quiet meditation and nature, Pak states that it was preposterous to believe that he would do something against anyone's wishes for a moment of fame. Furthermore, when the *Cheng weishi lun* was translated, Kuiji was 28 years old and Wŏnch'ŭk was 45. Pak says it is difficult to accept that Wŏnch'ŭk would eavesdrop to compete with someone the age of his pupils (Pak 1966d, 38–43).

Pak cites these several ideas as Wŏnch'ŭk's independent theories. The four-parts cognition theory of Indian Yogâcāra Buddhism is traditionally understood as having been initiated by Sthiramati (Anhui 安慧), who first posited a self-aware aspect only, which is the so-called "one-part" (*ilbun* 一分) theory; then Nanda (Nantuo 難陀) distinguished this into the objective and subjective aspects (*ibun* 二分); Dignāga (Chenna 陳那) formulated the three-part (*sambun* 三分) model by adding self-witnessing; it was then finalized by Dharmapāla (Hufa 護法) as a four-part (*sabun* 四分) theory by the addition of rewitnessing. Wŏnch'ŭk instead suggested that the one-part theory corresponds to the theory of "three realms are only mind" (*samgye yusim* 三界唯心); the two-parts are the subjective and objective aspects of mind, which were advocated by Asaṅga and Vasubandhu; the three-part and four-parts are the same as the traditional interpretations. Wŏnch'ŭk said, however, that those different theories conflict with each other when analyzed logically but from the perspective of their principles they do not negate each other. That was his grand premise.

Second, in regard to mind, thought, and cognition, Wŏnch'ŭk did not endorse the ninth *vijñāna*, the so-called *amala-vijñāna*, labeling it as "something that cannot be doctrinally proved." If it is called an "undefiled consciousness," it should correspond to the undefiled aspect of the eighth consciousness. Thus he did not see the reason why the ninth *vijñāna* needed to exist. Third, Wŏnch'ŭk regarded the six consciousnesses as a single body, and the seventh and the eighth, respectively, as separate entities.

Finally, Pak said Wŏnch'ŭk's interpretation on the theory of "five classifications of human beings" is something that is in sharp contrast to that

of Kuiji's Faxiang school. The Faxiang school held the view that some beings were absolutely devoid of any wholesome faculties, and that it would therefore be impossible for them to become enlightened.

Pak illustrates the various arguments and evidence that Wŏnch'ŭk provides in his *Commentary on the* "*Saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra*" as follows: first, Wŏnch'ŭk stated that Xuanzang and his disciples argued that sentient beings are divided into five categories, and that there was one category of people who are devoid of the nature of enlightenment (i.e. Buddhahood). Wŏnch'ŭk provides a list of the scriptures that endorse the Faxiang theory, such as the *Saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra* and *Bodhisattvabhūmi-sūtra*. On the other hand, there are other types of scriptures, such as the *Nirvana Sūtra* and *Ratnagotravibhāga-śastra*, that state that every sentient being possesses the tathāgatagarbha (embryo or womb of Buddha-nature), and that all five categories of beings have Buddha-nature.

Moreover, Wŏnch'ŭk adopts a paradigm of "nominal" and "real" for interpreting the seemingly conflicting positions represented by these various scriptures. For example, the *Lotus Sūtra* and *Nirvana Sūtra* take a nominal three-vehicles position while in reality preaching one-vehicle teaching. On the other hand, the *Saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra* seems to preach the teaching of one-vehicle nominally, but in reality talks about the teaching of the three-vehicles. He argues that the *icchantika* doctrine as it appears in the sūtras was intended as a "skillful means" that was preached in order to motivate some people so that they would increase their efforts to transcend existence. Therefore, those scriptures that say certain people cannot reach enlightenment are based on cases when one's religious capacity has not yet matured, not that they can never become enlightened. It is true, he said, that everybody inherently possesses the Buddha-nature or the tathāgatagarbha; unfortunately, however, some have yet to fulfill the conditions that would allow them to become enlightened. The help of the buddhas and bodhisattvas must also be taken into consideration as a means by which it would be possible for everybody to become a buddha. In summary, Wŏnch'ŭk introduced a new paradigm into the debate over whether the nature of a human being is good or evil: "skillful means," or the concept of a "direct cause" and "the conditions to help it come to fulfillment." Pak argues that this is an absolutely remarkable way of solving the issue. In conclusion, Pak says that now is the time for Wŏnch'ŭk's thought to be investigated and reevaluated, as so far only the Faxiang school had received significant scholarly attention (Pak 1966d, 51–59).

Research into Wŏnhyo and *hwajaeng* Theory

However, Pak paid the most attention to Wŏnhyo in his studies of Korean Buddhist philosophy. In particular, his essay on Wŏnhyo titled "Wŏnhyo's Philosophical Thought" still shines in its depth of understanding and its breadth of source material. Although his essay is dense in rhetoric and full of citations from primary sources in Classical Chinese, his logical analysis is outstanding and the work is thorough and broad to the point of spanning nearly all of Wŏnhyo's voluminous works. This work is divided into four chapters: "The Logic of *hwajaeng* (harmonizing reconciliation)," "The Principle of Enlightenment," "The Methods of Enlightenment," and "The Embodiment of Freedom in Action." The first chapter "The Logic of *hwajaeng*" is subdivided into four more sections: "Analytical and Syncretic Approaches to Buddhism and Wŏnhyo's 'Thematic Essentials' (*chongyo*)," "Apophasis versus Kataphasis in Buddhist Doctrinal Description," "The Logic of Syncretism (*hwajaeng*)," and "The Quandary of Syncretism: 'It leaves behind all extremes and yet is not in between.'"[9] Furthermore, it is not an exaggeration to say that Pak's analysis of Wŏnhyo primarily in terms of *hwajaeng*, sublating both Three Treatises and Mere-Representation dogmas, has since become the standard for understanding Wŏnhyo in Korean Buddhism.

Pak surmises that the fundamental characteristic of Wŏnhyo's thought is *hwajaeng*, in which a pattern of sharp dialectical logic is revealed. Pak especially praises the way Wŏnhyo develops his logic, pointing to the concept of *kaehap* (opening and integrating) as a characteristic methodology of Wŏnhyo's philosophy. Using the words of the *Tongmunsŏn* 東文選 (Korean Literary Anthology), he describes Wŏnhyo's *hwajaeng* thusly:

> While the Buddha Śākyamuni was still alive, relatively few doctrinal disputes arose within the Buddhist religion, for people heard his sermons personally and could thus realize for themselves their true significance. By the time Buddhism was transmitted to Korea, however, several centuries had already passed and the religion had been widely disseminated; accordingly, a number of variant theories had appeared. If one group were to make exclusive claims for the orthodoxy of its dogma, while rejecting those of all other groups, then its rivals would challenge it. This process created persistent controversies between the various schools of Buddhism. The most basic feature of Wŏnhyo's thought

> was its attempt to unify these disparate views and to resolve the controversies within Buddhism, just when these long-simmering controversies had escalated into a threat to the viability of the religion itself. (Pak 1966e, 60; Buswell tr., 47)

To Pak, *chongyo* and *kaehap* are the logical foundations for Wŏnhyo's *hwajaeng* theory. He defines *chongyo* as "developing into the many" and "returning to the one." Describing the scholastic diversity is "developing into the many" and unifying them all together is "returning to the one." He states that it was for this reason Wŏnhyo described no less than seventeen types of *chongyo*. On the other hand, *chongyo* and *kaehap* are one and the same.

> "Analysis" (lit. "open," *kae*) opens up to the reader the vast numbers of different ideas presented in a text, while "synthesis" (lit. "combine," *hap*) provides a synthetic perspective which can reveal how those various ideas complement one another. When both analytic and synthetic hermeneutics are applied simultaneously in the explication of a text, one is free to advocate certain positions and critique others. One can open up for analysis different viewpoints without creating unnecessary complications, as well as synthesize those viewpoints into a single overriding perspective without creating untoward parochialism. Put another way, treating a text either analytically or synthetically neither adds anything to it nor takes anything away. Hence, one may advocate something without gaining anything, or critique something else without losing anything. . . . Wŏnhyo's method for ascertaining truth was to apply these hermeneutical principles of analysis and synthesis with thoroughgoing consistency. (Pak 1966e, 61; Buswell tr., 49–50)

He emphasized "but if one sublates all discriminative knowledge from the standpoint of the equanimity of the 'single taste,' then one should acknowledge the validity of all perspectives. This is the flexible logic of Wŏnhyo's syncretic approach, which combines apophasis with kataphasis. . . . We can now appreciate that what Wŏnhyo sought to accomplish through his syncretic logic was a sublation of the Three Treatises and Mere-Representation dogmas. In other words, as compared to the more explicitly sectarian philosophies of Sŭngnang and Wŏnch'ŭk, the Korean Buddhism that would evolve after Wŏnhyo brought about a reconciliation between these schools from a more profoundly fundamental and comprehensive standpoint. We may even go so far as to say

that Wŏnhyo pointed out the correct direction that all of Buddhism should take" (Ibid., 63).

For specific examples, Pak brings up the syncretism of concepts such as "existence and nonexistence" and "same and different." For example, with "one" (i.e. same) and "many" (i.e. different), "one" is only "one" in reference to "many"; without the "many" the "one" could not exist. But, the view that "many" is differentiated from "one" is already based on the premise that "difference" or "many" exists. Thus "one" is discussed in terms of "many" and "many" is revealed by "one" (Ibid., 65). That "it exists in reality" implies an existence that does not differ from emptiness. "The latter statement, that 'it does not fall into existence,'" means that it does not fall into an existence that differs from emptiness. Therefore, while both [alternatives] are acknowledged, they are not mutually exclusive. As neither alternative is incorrect, neither may be acknowledged. "Incorrect" here is not something that differes from "correct" (Ibid., 68). It is the logic of syncretism that amalgamates duality, yet is not unitary. Leaving the extremes yet not remaining at the middle; not located at the middle and yet being far from the extreme—this is the method of the *hwajaeng* dialectic.

When mentioning logic, it is usual to conjure up images of formal logic; Wŏnhyo however includes and transcends formal logic, freely commanding the logic of syncretism that cannot be exactly equated with Western dialectics. "At any rate, the syncretic logic is a methodology that threads its way consistently through all of Wŏnhyo's philosophy. Even given the obviousness of this evaluation, however, it is in that methodology that Wŏnhyo's philosophical greatness—which includes both the breadth of his claim that there is nothing that is not embraced and the depth of his statement concerning the one taste that absorbs all words—is formed" (Ibid., 69).

However, Wŏnhyo's philosophical thought, what Pak describes as "a towering peak of logic and intellectualism," would soon be reframed and distorted for a vastly different purpose. Pak Chonghong became a member of Presidential Council and the National Regeneration Movement Council under the Park Chung Hee dictatorship for a number of years, and his activities during this period have been the subject of much criticism by successive scholars. Pak's exaltation of *hwajaeng* provided the first step for its re-interpretation in the political realm of the 1970s as an ideology promoting not merely social harmony and peace, but also a strict conformity. As a philosopher

who led Korean society at the time, he likely felt a need to discover new moral principles in *hwajaeng*, and propagandize Wŏnhyo's philosophy as a Korean example of harmonizing various dissenting opinions and divisions. Pak's theories ultimately revived traditional philosophy and values in the here and now, providing justification for the new social hierarchy at the time. Further, it provided the foundation for the argument that sacrifices for the greater good was the highest moral principle for the public. However, it is probably more accurate to say that this was not Pak's original intention, but that *hwajaeng* was transformed into a nationalistic ideology promoting national harmony and rigid conformity by the regime.[10]

Subsequently, through the late 1970s and 1980s with the fall of the Park Chung Hee regime, a more intensive wave of nationalistic passion arose. This wave was characterized by the search for national identity and the revaluation of traditional culture. Rather than a response to pressure from the government, this was a spontaneous development by the public that reflected their desires to identify an indigenous national philosophy and discover traditions unique to Korea. Government-initiated projects such as the 1981 Kukp'ung (National Wind) festival movement were part of this shift. The popular cultural sphere of this time also witnessed the introduction of "spiritual" books by Indian religious mystics such as Rajneesh, as well as books describing mystical indigenous Taoist figures of past and contemporary Korea, such as those depicted in the novel *Tan* (the Taoist concept of crystallizing one's inner power), which set a record for that time as the best-selling book in Korean history. Though these projects and publications appeared to address a personal quest for spirituality, it showed that the passion for one's own tradition of thought was easily combined with nationalistic sentiment.

Conclusion: The Mission of Establishing Korean Thought

Though Pak Chonghong's research on the history of Korean philosophy and Korean Buddhism, which began in the post-liberation late 1950s, was limited in that it began with a nationalistic agenda, it also laid the cornerstone for a philosophical establishment of Korean thought in Korean society. His effort to categorize Korean thought was also an effort to unite his life and his scholarship. It appears that he understood the epistemological and

historicalinversion in his identity of thought, after studying the accommodation of Western philosophy by the late Chosŏn Confucian scholars.

These scholars had tried to explain Western philosophy using the language and interpretive framework of their own traditional thought—Confucianism. In contrast, the modern Korean intellectuals of the 1950s, too busy absorbing Western knowledge and culture, were asking themselves whether a philosophical tradition had even existed in Korea. Pak's mission of establishing a Korean philosophy was based on problematizing the lack of self-respect by his contemporary intellectuals in these circumstances.

The path of his life and scholastic development reveals the trajectory that philosophy took in Korean society after liberation. He was trained at Kyŏngsŏng (Jp. Keijō) Imperial University's Department of Philosophy during the colonial period, studying German philosophy under Japanese professors, particularly focusing on Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger. After liberation, he taught at his alma mater (then Seoul National University), dedicating his life until retirement to research and teaching. Though there are many explanations as to how Pak, a scholar of Western philosophy, and in particular German existentialism and metaphysics, gained interest in traditional Korean philosophy, his family gives the following testimony. "On returning to Korea after visiting many Western nations in the 1950s, he began his study on Korean philosophy in earnest. He once said that 'our ancestors also left many great accomplishments; I am working to uncork [these works] so that many people can study them.'"[11]

Having read extensively in a broad range of difficult Buddhist texts, the breadth of sources in his work and the analytical scrutiny he applied set a standard of Korean Buddhist scholarship that was unmatched for some time. Even now, his theories on Korean Buddhist philosophy still guide scholars. Thus transformed, the study of Korean Buddhism became an important field of Korean philosophy, and these efforts became the catalyst for a wealth of lively discourse on Korean thought in the Korean academic world.

Pak approached Korean Buddhism from a philosophical standpoint, and attempted to analyse Buddhism through a new methodological tool that could integrate Korean thought with the concepts and logical methods of Western philosophy. His attempt at analysing Buddhism through new language while fastidiously avoiding the jargon within Buddhism was the first of its kind in Korean academia. His study of the Buddhist philosophy of Sŭngnang, Wŏnch'ŭk, and Wŏnhyo all focus on logicality. For him, the standard of

philosophy was a tradition of logical and rational theories. Finding and sorting the theories that fit these criteria within the Eastern tradition of thought was his process of excavating their riches.

Notes

1 Pak's "Prolegomenon" was included in different forms across many works, finally making its way into the introduction of Pak's compilation (1972a). The *Confucian Thought* compilation was published later in 1983.

2 Pak wrote many textbooks on philosophy, such as *Logic* (1948), *The Logic of Cognition* (1953), and *Lectures on Introductory Philosophy* (1953). *Lectures on Introductory Philosophy*, in particular, was a collection of lectures given at a university, which was later expanded in 1961. In this expanded volume was included the theories of traditional Korean thinkers. This was the first time in which Korean thought was included in textbooks, and served as a foundation for the concept of Korean thought and philosophy to take root in the future (So 2011, 11).

3 Pak (1967). Reprinted in the *Pak Chonghong chŏnjip* 4 (1980, 206–211).

4 Before Yi Chŏngjik and Yi Injae used the word *ch'ŏrhak*, for example, in books on Catholic teachings imported from China, a transliteration of "philosophia" in Chinese characters was used.

5 Pak (1973). Reprinted in *Pak Chonghong chŏnjip* 4 (1980, 257–259); On Liang Qichao's study on Kant and its influence on the intellectual development of neighboring countries, see Kim (2009).

6 Pak (1972b). Reprinted in *Pak Chonghong chŏnjip* 4 (1980, 443–452).

7 Yi Injae, "Sang Myŏnu sŏnsaeng" [To Mr. Myŏnu Kwak Chongsŏk], in *Sŏngwa munjip* [Collection of Sŏngwa Yi Injae's Writings], volume 2. All translations from Korean are mine unless otherwise noted.

8 As intellectual activity blossomed after liberation, various introductory texts to Buddhism began to appear in the field of Buddhist studies. In the 1960s and 1970s, texts on Indian Buddhism and doctrinal studies also appeared in order to meet rising public interest. Cho Myŏnggi and Kim Tonghwa were among the leading Buddhist scholars that represented this era. Because most researchers then had received their education in Japan, their understanding of Buddhist studies was strongly influencedby Japanese currents of thought. The result was that *Abhidharma* (*Kusa*) and Yogâcāra (Yusik) were understood to be the apex of Buddhist thought, and "Buddhist studies" was equal to doctrinal research. "Eight years of *Kusa* and three years of Yusik" was a popular motto of the time.

9 Titles and subsequent citations of "Wŏnhyo's Philosophical Thought" are taken from the translation of Pak Chonghong's manuscript by Lewis Lancaster, with some changes (Pak 1991, 47–103).

10 Postwar period Japanese scholars were aware of this and had already begun examining how the sprit of harmony, *wa* (harmony; *hwa* in Korean pronunciation), has been promoted and used by wartime politicians. Hakamaya Noriaki, who launched a major religious and cultural critique of Buddhism, known as "*hihan Bukkyō,*" or "Critical Buddhism," suggests that it was Wŏnhyo and not the commonly credited Prince

Shōtoku who was responsible for the idea of *wa*, a concept long held in Japanese culture, appearing at the very head of the Seventeen Article Constitution. (It begins: "Harmony is to be valued.") Hakamaya called Wŏnhyo's *hwajaeng* theory an "extreme syncretism," and criticized it for having laid the groundwork for the ideology of "harmonization" and "conformity." He blamed Wŏnhyo's ideology for contributing to the resurrection of totalitarian ideas in later wartime Japan (Hakamaya 1987, 11; reprint. 1990, 275–304).

11 *Kajok iltong* (From the family), "Kŭriun abŏji, Yŏram Pak Chonghong" [Dear father, Yŏram Pak Chonghong], (Yŏram Kinyŏm Saŏp'hoe 2003, 21); Also the same is attested by So Kwanghŭi, his colleague sum junior in the Department of Philsophy: "Pak spent a year in Minnesota in 1955, and visited European institutions on the way back to Korea. He interviewed many international intellectuals during this time, and often reported on them" (So 2011, 9).

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