Japanese Buddhist Modernism and the Thought of Sŏn Master Toeong Seongcheol 退翁性徹禪師 (1912–1993)

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Abstract

Few scholars and followers of the Buddhist faith are aware of how much modern Japanese Buddhist studies have influenced Sŏn Master Toeong Seongcheol's thought. It is, indeed, a well-kept secret. However, as an instance, a close examination of Seongcheol's ideas on the Madhyamaka doctrine (*chungdoron* 中道論), and of his resulting interpretation of Chan-Sŏn 禪 history, reveals how strongly the scholarly position and the main arguments of Miyamoto Shoson 宮本正尊 influenced Seongcheol. This appears all too clearly when reading *Chudo siso oyobi sono hattatsu* 中道思想及びその發達 (Madhyamaka thought and its developments), Shoson's magnum opus. As a consequence of such Japanese influences, Seongcheol's Buddhist scholarship largely stems from a frame of reference defining all forms of Buddhism as sharing—and being reducible to—a fundamental, all-pervading, and ultimate essence. However, the one, entirely unified and interpenetrating system of thought, or so-called *t'ongbulgyo* 通佛教, emerging from this frame and its resulting perspective render him incapable, not only of grasping the historical context in which the Madhyamika viewpoint he so unconditionally embraces was born, but also of seeing the problems and political implications its birth engendered. For that reason, Seongcheol's Madhyamaka ideology fails to avoid the pitfalls of fundamentalism, reductionism, and totalitarian tendencies, because it glosses over the multiple facets of Buddhism, and thus gives way to an unbalanced, over-simplified definition of it as the "Religion of Awakening."

Keywords: Toeong Seongcheol (T'oeong Sŏngch'ŏl) 退翁 性徹, *Sermon of One Hundred Days* (*Paegil pŏmmun* 百日法門), Madhyamaka doctrine (*chungdoron* 中道論), Miyamoto Shoson 宮本正尊, Japanese Buddhist modernism, Japanese imperialism

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Introduction

The reputation of Toeong Seongcheol (T'oeong Sŏngch'ŏl) 退翁 性徹 (1912–1993) as a great traditional Sŏn 禪 master is well established, but very few people know that his scholarly orientations were deeply influenced by the tenets of modern Japanese Buddhism. In fact, from the 1950s until the last years of his life, he was one of the most assiduous Korean readers of modern Japanese Buddhist scholarship. This naturally suggests that he was significantly exposed to its influence. Indeed, it appears clearly that his knowledge and information on modern Buddhism essentially came from those readings, which directly affected his views on the Buddhist tradition. To be sure, the main traits of this Buddhist literature can be recognized in his various writings. It is particularly so in his collection of sermons, among which the famous *Paegil pŏmmun* 百日法門 (Sermon of One Hundred Days) (Seongcheol 2014a; 2014b) is a case in point. This is a collection of dharma talks preached by Seongcheol on a daily basis at Haeinsa 海印寺 during the 1967 winter retreat,[1] i.e., the year he was appointed Sŏn master of the Dharma Jewel of Korean Buddhism (*pŏppo sach'al* 法寶寺刹).[2]

To date, however, only a few studies have critically examined Seongcheol's scholarly position: how his ideas were formed, whom they were influenced by, and what they imply.[3] It is bearing this in mind that an article on the *Sermon of One Hundred Days* has underscored how heavily modern Japanese Buddhist studies influenced Seongcheol's view on Buddhism (Cho Myungje 2006a, 35–43). However, the focus of its analysis was limited to questions of how the *Sermon of One Hundred Days* came into being, and how much Miyamoto Shoson 宮本正尊 (1893–1983) influenced its ideas, particularly Seongcheol's interpretation of the Middle Path (*chungdogwan* 中道觀). Its content did not extensively discuss Japan's modern Buddhist overall influence on his conception of Buddhism.

Accordingly, this paper starts with exploring in detail how modern Japanese Buddhist studies influenced Seongcheol's Buddhist thought. Next, it discusses the problems inherent to his conception of the Madhyamaka doctrine and then critically evaluates—in four points—his overall understanding of Buddhism from its standing point. Finally, it makes a critical evaluation of Seongcheol's resulting interpretation of Chan-Sŏn history.

Seongcheol's Exposure to Modern Buddhist Studies in Japan

In the wake of Western modernism during the late Chosŏn period, Korean Buddhist intellectuals, who had been exposed to the diversity and richness of modern knowledge, were asking themselves how to modernize Buddhism in their own country. Discovering through various media the trends of modern Buddhism in Japan, and sometimes going abroad to study (Cho Myungje 2006b, 50–53), they ended up—perhaps inevitably—accepting modern Japanese Buddhism as their model.

Although Seongcheol was initially trained in the Korean Sŏn tradition and practiced in it, he naturally became acquainted with the trends of modern Buddhism that were already wide-spread and popular in his day. For instance, he was exposed to modern Buddhism by reading *Pulgyo* 佛敎, one of the Buddhist periodicals of the time. While he was recovering from an illness at Taewŏnsa 大源寺 and Haeinsa 海印寺 (in the early 1930s), an acquaintance named Kim Pŏbnin 金法麟 (1899–1964)[4] strongly recommended that he go to Japan for Buddhist studies, but he did not do so. Rather, he continued to adhere to traditional Sŏn practice. In other words, Seongcheol's full-fledged exposure to the influence of modern Buddhist studies did not take place at this early stage, which was entirely dedicated to Sŏn practice, but at a later one, from the 1950s onwards. This fact can be confirmed by reading his personal notes and the many books that he wrote, as well as by examining the contents of his personal library.

Seongcheol's readings appear to have been as diverse as they were extensive. This fact can be easily discerned from his many writings; it is also confirmed by the testimony of his disciples. It becomes even more obvious when surveying and analyzing the contents of the books stored in the library of Paegnyŏnam 白蓮庵, where he lived for twenty-five years (1967–1993) (Cho Myungje 2006a, 38–39). Seongcheol's book collection is strikingly representative of Japanese Buddhist scholarship: the complete works of Ui Hakuju 宇井伯壽 (1882–1963); works by Nukariya Kaiten 忽滑谷快天 (1867–1934), Suzuki Daisetsu 鈴木大拙 (1870–1966), Nakamura Hajime 中村元 (1912–1999), and Hirakawa Akira 平川彰 (1915–2002). To these must be added the works of Hakuin 白隱 (1686–1769) and Ryokan 良寬 (1758–1831), that are part and

parcel of traditional Japanese Buddhist writings (Seongcheol 2014a, 56–57). This vast collection shows how keenly Seongcheol was interested in the achievements of modern Japanese Buddhist scholarship. It also suggests how strongly his ideas on Buddhism were determined by his knowledge of it. Furthermore, it appears that he maintained this interest in Japanese Buddhist studies throughout his life.

As a simple but rather clear instance of this influence, Seongcheol once said that he concluded, after having read numerous books on religion and philosophy in his youth (Seongcheol 2014a, 56–57), that the common goal of all religions is to "achieve eternal happiness, by entering into a realm of absoluteness and infiniteness, out of the world of the relative and the finite" (Seongcheol 2014a, 97–98).[5] Rather than expressing his own view on religion, this quotation appears to come from the *Seimeino Zisso* 生命の實相 by Danikuchi Masaharu 谷口雅春 (1893–1985), the founder of the new Japanese religion named Seichō no Ie 生長の家.

As another instance, Seongcheol frequently emphasized that "Buddhism is a science." To prove the legitimacy of his so-called scientific interpretations of Buddhist theories, he enthusiastically drew out from various sources what he considered to be "scientific evidence." Unfortunately, such affirmations, which appear frequently in his sermons and teachings, are poorly substantiated and thus remain unconvincing. Similarly, his attempts to prove the existence of supernatural powers and reincarnation, through the selection of numerous examples, are far from being up to the standards of contemporary science. Likewise, his claims that the Madhyamaka doctrine has been scientifically verified, thanks to Einstein's theory of relativity and Minkowski's formula on the four-dimensional world (Seongcheol 2014a, 97–98), all sound as so many attempts to draw water to his own mill.

In good measure, Seongcheol criticized what he considered to be irrational aspects of Korean traditional Buddhism, and tried to rid temples of what he perceived as superstitious elements: the Sansingak 山神閣 (a shamanic shrine) and the Ch'ilsŏnggak 七星閣 (a Daoist shrine consecrated to the Big Dipper).[6] This kind of attitude and the ideology underlying it originated in the claims of European Buddhist scholars during the nineteenth century. Indeed, their research particularly focused on a historical approach to Buddhist texts

that consisted in understanding Buddhism as the ideal taught by Siddhārtha Gautama (ca. 563 BCE–ca. 483 BCE), the founder of the tradition. Hence, they considered the Buddhist practices of their time as "degenerate forms of Siddhārtha Gautama's original, pure and scientific Buddhism" (Simoda 2006, 189–192). Such modern prejudices and criticisms, besides images of superstition, also projected elements of witchcraft onto Buddhist faith as it could be observed in everyday life. As they spread in Japan, these prejudices were easily accepted by both scholarly circles and ordinary people. The reconfigurations done by modern Buddhist studies in Japan thus spread throughout East Asia. Therefore, Seongcheol's critique of the degeneration of Buddhism from its original form, and his claims that he was returning to that original form, are both derived from the perspective of modern Japanese Buddhism as it looked at the realities of its time.

The influence of modern Japanese Buddhist scholarship can also be found in the traditional Buddhist texts Seongcheol naturally relied upon and frequently quoted in his sermons, teachings, and works. Indeed, for the most part, these texts are the ones compiled and edited by modern Buddhist studies: the *Taishō Shinshu Tripiṭaka*, two complete sets of which he kept in Paegnyŏnam's library; the *Pali Canon*, and other compiled texts. These belong, of course, to a category quite different from that of the aforementioned modern Japanese Buddhist scholarship.

To emphasize our point, let us recall that the *Taishō Shinshu Tripiṭaka*, compiled at the initiative of Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 (1866–1945) and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭 (1872–1933), is the most used compilation of the Chinese Tripiṭakas worldwide. As such, it is a major achievement of modern Buddhist studies in Japan. Its compilation was inspired by the publication of the Pali Buddhist Scripture Series, which exemplifies the achievements of Buddhist scholarship in Europe. In modern Japan, Buddhist Tripiṭaka were continually compiled, resulting in the publication of such works as the *Dainihon Syukusai Daizokyō* 大日本縮刷大藏經 (Japan revised Tripiṭaka) and the *Dainihon Zokuzokyo* 大日本續藏經 (Japan continued Tripiṭaka), one after another. The *Taishō Shinshu Tripiṭaka* is a culmination of the publication of such Chinese Tripiṭaka. On the other hand, even after the publication of the *Taishō Shinshu Tripiṭaka*, studies of so-called pristine Buddhism based on Pali

scriptures continued in Japan. These were undertaken by Nagai Makoto 長井眞琴 (1881–1970), Yamamoto Kairyu 山本快龍 (1893–1948), Mizuno Kōgen 水野弘元 (1901–2006), and others. In all, these scholars published 70 volumes of the *Pali Canon*.

The Chan texts Seongcheol frequently quoted and had translated,[7] such as the *Biyan lu* 碧巖錄 (Blue cliff record), *Congrong lu* 從容錄 (Guidance record), *Hongzhi lu* 宏智錄 (Record of Hongzhi), and *Yuanwu xinyao* 圓悟心要 (Yuanwu essentials on the mind), are Chan texts that traditionally had either never been published or were rarely circulated in Korean Buddhist circles before the late Chosŏn period and the Japanese colonial era (1910–1945).[8] For example, the *Biyan lu* has long been acknowledged as the "foremost text of the Chan school" or the "climax of Chan texts," and has been accepted as such by the contemporary Buddhist community in Korea. However, it is in the Japanese Zen schools that such wording as "foremost" and "climax" of Chan texts was originally used. Furthermore, the *Biyan lu* was regarded as belonging to the Zen sects of Japan rather than to the Chan sects of China or the Sŏn sects of Korea (Cho Myungje 2015, 228–229). In fact, those texts had been, if not completely ignored, rarely recognized in Korean Sŏn tradition. Therefore, the high importance held by the *Biyan lu* in the contemporary Korean Buddhist community speaks to the great influence exerted on it by the Japanese Zen school since the Meiji era (1868–1912). Similarly, the *Congrong lu* and *Hongzhi lu*, which are works highly respected in the Japanese Soto school 曹洞宗, had rarely received any attention in the Korean Buddhist community. Therefore, most of the Chan-related texts to which Seongcheol referred are the ones which have primary value in Japanese Zen Buddhism. However, even in Japan, those texts somehow only began to be used under the influence of modern Japanese Buddhism.

The Problems with Seongcheol's Understanding of the Madhyamaka Doctrine

Seongcheol once told his disciples that no one had ever explained Buddhist scriptures, including those belonging to the Chan-Sŏn tradition, as he did, i.e. through a unique insight into the Middle Path. Indeed, as aforementioned, for

Seongcheol, because he considered the fundamental core of Buddhism to lie in the Madhyamaka doctrine, any teaching on Buddhist scriptures taught outside of that doctrinal frame was not the Buddha's *ipsissima verba* (Seongcheol 2014a, 68).

The *Sermon of One Hundred Days* is an excellent representation of Seongcheol's understanding of Buddhism, because it summarizes almost the whole gamut of Buddhist thought from his perspective, i.e., in terms of the Madhyamaka doctrine. Although his interpretation of the various Buddhist philosophical systems is well expressed in this sermon, it is neither his own interpretation nor does it display any creativity. As demonstrated in the first part of this essay, his interest in the Madhyamaka doctrine and his interpretation of it were mostly inspired by his study of the modern achievements of Japanese Buddhist scholarship.[9]

Seongcheol's Madhyamika perspective, with its systematic and theoretical attempt to reach an overall interpretation of Buddhist teachings, was derived from the critical responses to the Meiji-period claim according to which "Mahāyāna Buddhism is not the teaching of [Gautama] Buddha" (*taesŭng pibulsŏl* 大乘非佛說). This idea, which first appeared in Murakami Senshō's 村上專精 (1851–1929) *Bukkyo toitsuron* 佛教統一論 (On the unification of Buddhism),[10] provoked controversy in Japan in 1901, and was followed by a series of works in reaction to it. As is well known, Murakami is the scholar-monk who adopted, for the first time in Japan's history, historical methods to study Japanese Buddhism. He initially intended to overcome the framework of dogmatic studies characterizing Japanese Buddhist sectarianism, and to re-write the history of Japanese Buddhism in a way allowing for the unification of all Buddhist sects. His method consisted in extracting common denominators from the dogmatic tenets held by each sect. In doing so, is intention was more practical than ideological (Klautau 2012, 83–118). Indeed, he merely intended to overcome what he perceived as the excessive factionalism characterizing Japanese Buddhism. Be this as it may, Murakami's "Mahāyāna Buddhism is not Buddhism" led other Japanese Buddhist scholars to an in-depth investigation into the origins of the Mahāyāna tradition (Sueki 2013, 301–305).

As Seongcheol tells his audience in the *Sermon of One Hundred Days*, he first became interested in Murakami's claim because he was acutely aware of

the developments of scientific knowledge and modern scholarship that were making traditional approaches to Buddhism look completely outdated. In other words, he was aware of the fact that new ways of understanding and explaining Buddhism were needed in order to answer the needs of changing times (Cho Myungje 2006a, 37–38). Although Seongcheol highly appreciated Ui Hakuju's ideas, the *Sermon of One Hundred Days* is above all deeply influenced by Miyamoto Shoson, who belongs to the generation of scholars following Murakami Shenshō and continued to deal with the origins of Mahāyāna as a major academic subject.

Miyamoto published *Daizokyo to shōjōkyo* 大乗教と小乗教 (Mahāyāna Buddhism and Hīnayāna Buddhism), as one volume of the series *Iwanami kōza toyosichou* 岩波講座東洋思潮 (Oriental trends of thought of the Iwanami Kōza; 1935). This was followed by *Konpon chu to ku* 根本中と空 (Fundamental middle and emptiness; 1943); *Chudo-siso oyobi sono hattatsu* 中道思想及びその發達 (Madhyamaka thought and its developments; 1944); and *Daizo to Shōjō* 大乗と小乗 (Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna; 1944), in a three-volume series on the fundamental problems of Buddhist studies.

In his first work, Miyamoto defined "Mahāyāna" in technical, not ideological, terms. However, his definition was adopted as a tool of political manipulation and as justification for Japan's imperialism. Indeed, it was used in slogans justifying the military expansionism of Japan and the Asia-Pacific War. Even as the only purpose of this expansionism and the war it led to boiled down to national interests, "Mahāyāna" was utilized to hide this truth behind the high ideals of both Asian and world peace. Miyamoto's military perspective is explicitly manifested in the works he wrote during the 1940s. For instance, in *Hudosin to Bukkyo* 不動心と佛教 (Imperturbable mind and Buddhism), which was published in 1941 and revised before being republished in 1942, Miyamoto unambiguously endorsed the Pacific War. For example, he repeatedly insisted that the Japanese should defeat "the fiendish animals of Britain and America," like they had earlier defeated the Mongolian invasion with the help of kamikaze in the thirteenth century.[11] In good measure, he argued that discussions regarding the meaning of "Mahāyāna" should not be limited to traditional religious contexts, but extended to those defining guidance on how to lead ideological warfare in favor of Japan-led Asian revivalism.

Miyamoto's research on the Madhyamaka doctrine is encapsulated in the aforementioned *Chudo siso oyobi sono hattatsu*, his magnum opus, a bulky volume of over 900 pages. In it, he maintains that the Buddha's pristine Middle Path idea evolved into the key doctrines of dependent arising (Skt. *pratītyasa-mutpāda*, K. *yŏn'gi* 緣起), no-self (Skt. *anātman*, K. *mua* 無我), together with that of the Middle Path (Skt. *madhyamā-pratipad*) as found in the *Madhyama Āgama*, in Nagarjuna's *Eightfold-Negations* (Skt. *catuṣkoṭi madhyamā-pratipad*, K. *p'albul chungdo* 八不中道), and in the Mind-Only doctrine (Skt. *Vijnaptimatrata madhyamā-pratipad*, K. *yusik chungdo* 唯識中道). Running on from these assertions, Miyamoto concluded that the primary ideals and the guiding principles of Mahāyāna Buddhism are also rooted in the Madhyamaka theory. Consequently, for him, Jizang 吉藏 (549–623), Zhiyi 智顗 (538–597), Fazang 法藏 (643–712), and Chengguan 澄觀 (738–839) all inherited and transmitted the Madhyamaka doctrine. Furthermore, he considers texts like Linji's 臨濟 (?–866) *Siliaojian* 四料簡 (Four synopsis) and Dongshan Liangjia's 洞山良价 (807–869) *Wuwei* 五位 (Five ranks) to belong fully to the vein of the Madhyamaka doctrine.

In the *Sermon of One Hundred Days*, Seongcheol's interpretation of the Madhyamaka doctrine and its evolution, from early Buddhist texts to the Mahāyāna tradition, not only completely accepts the views expressed by Miyamoto in his magnum opus, but also relies very heavily on the latter's quotations. In other words, it appears beyond doubt that Seongcheol's Madhyamaka doctrine, and the overall interpretation of Buddhism it leads to, are not his own, but the result of his plain and totally uncritical acceptance of Miyamoto's views. For instance, the *Sermon of One Hundred Days*' third part, in which (so-called) pristine and fundamental Buddhism is defined, borrows most of its quotes from Miyamoto's writings. More concretely, as an example, in this third part one can read a selection of phrases, coming from the *Kātyāyana-sūtra* (*Kajŏnyŏn kyŏng* 迦栴延經), and considered as representing the core of Madhyamaka doctrine. The same phrases can all be found as such in Miyamoto's major work. Other instances are the fact that Seongcheol also entirely relied on Miyamoto's thought to explicate how Indian Madhyamaka doctrine evolved into the Middle Path of East Asian thought, of the Mind-Only doctrine, and of the Nirvāṇa Sūtra.

Keeping in mind how deeply Seongcheol was influenced by modern Japanese Buddhist scholarship, let us now attempt to critically evaluate—in four points—his overall understanding of Buddhism from the standing point of the Madhyamika doctrine.

A Critical Evaluation in Four Points of Seongcheol's Overall Understanding of Buddhism

First, it is no exaggeration to say that Seongcheol's Buddhist scholarship revolves entirely around a perspective that considers all forms of Buddhism as fully reducible to a single essence. This original "oneness" can be defined as a discourse on the "interpenetration (*sangho ch'imt'u* 相互侵透) of all Buddhist systems of thought." According to this, all streams of Buddhist thought that he considers can be summed up—without any exception—in the Madhyamaka doctrine. As it is expressed in Seongcheol's works, this interpretation of the complex and diverse systems of Buddhist philosophy, with only the Madhyamaka doctrine as a key idea, sounds powerfully convincing on the one hand, but on the other, it also comes across as rather far-fetched and simplistic to adopt this single doctrine as the unique framework through which to explain the diverse trends of Buddhist thought in their entirety. This is even more the case when considering that this explanation is done without much textual evidence, but rather through a long, and all too often quite arbitrary, series of brief quotations.[12] Indeed, it is clear that Seongcheol's understanding of the very methodology he uses is quite limited, in the sense that he is neither aware of the historical characteristics of the Japanese context it was born in, nor of the problems that arose with its birth.

Such oversimplification is not surprising when keeping in mind that the methodology that consists in looking for the Madhyamaka doctrine in Buddhist practices and scriptures, as a way of exploring Buddhism as a whole, is a theoretical approach developed during the Meiji era and reflects the Buddhist scholarly preoccupations of the day. Although it aims at objectively extracting the undercurrents of Buddhist practices and detecting the religious-philosophical theories underlying various texts, the method entails the risk that

its practitioners may tend to subjectively project into them what they are looking for. Such a tendency culminated in the claim that all forms of Buddhism share—and are reducible to—a fundamental, all-pervading[13] and ultimate essence that gives rise to the so-called *t'ongbulgyo* 通佛教. The sinogram *t'ong* 通 contains a great variety of meanings, and *t'ongbulgyo* can be translated in just about as many ways, for instance, "complete Buddhism," "whole Buddhism," "all-communicating Buddhism," "frontier-less Buddhism," "integrated Buddhism," "ecumenical Buddhism" (Muller 2014, 1571), "interpenetrating Buddhism," etc. Needless to say, Seongcheol's subordination of Buddhism in its entirety to the sole Madhyamaka doctrine is reminiscent of the Meiji-era discourse on the overall oneness of Buddhism.

Let us underscore that this kind of discourse was first proposed while Japanese Buddhism was trying to achieve a complete and in-depth reform of itself (Klautau 2012, 89–95). A major part of this effort was the need to overcome problems arising from its excessive sectarianism. Consequently, a new tendency, intending to grasp Buddhism as a whole, i.e. from a unified perspective, took shape within it. As noted above, it is—in part—in reaction to Murakami's declaration, according to which "Mahāyāna is not Buddhism," that this new trend of Buddhist thought and a number of corresponding movements were born during the Meiji era. The promoters of this trend also understood too well the necessity, and the urgency, of breaking free from this denominationalism in order to convert a fragmented Buddhism into a far more effective tool of sociopolitical transformation.

Accordingly, running on from Murakami's declaration, in 1879, Ouchi Seiran 大內青巒 (1845–1918) and Simaji Mokurai 島地默雷 (1838–1911) founded the Wakeikai 和敬會 (Association Respecting Harmony). They were followed by Simaji Inoue Enryo 井上圓了 (1858–1919), who in 1884 founded the Reichikai 令知會 (Association Making [people] Know) (Kasiwahara 1990, 60–62). This unification movement was further organized and spread by Inoue Seikyo 井上政共 (dates unknown), who formed a Buddhist study group on ecumenical Buddhism, by Takada Dogen 高田道見 (1858–1923), who proposed the Hōōkyo 法王教 (Dharma King teaching), and by Kato Dotsudo 加藤咄堂 (1870–1949), who led the Shin Bukkyo undō 新佛教運動 (New Buddhist Movement).[14]

After coming to the fore during the Meiji era, this discourse on ecumenical Buddhism became a prevalent issue during the 1900s.[15] Naturally, it was introduced into Korea, by way of Buddhist periodicals and through Koreans returning to their homeland after studies in Japan. It did not take long for this discourse to spread widely across the peninsula. However, as much as they were forced to live under Japanese colonial rule, Korean Buddhist intellectuals and monks ardently desired to underscore the long history, uniqueness, and superiority of Korean Buddhism relative to that of Japan (Cho Myungje 2016, 104–105). As a result, they developed a *sui generis* narrative corresponding to their need, and thus capable of satisfying their desire, albeit in fact very strongly inspired by the ecumenical Buddhism of the very nation they hated.

When outlined, this narrative unfolds as follows: Indian Buddhism in its original and pristine form spread by the Silk Road into Northeast Asia; it traversed China and finally reached Korea. Although Chinese Buddhism with its doctrinal diversity flowered harmoniously during the Tang dynasty (618–907), it later fell into conflicting and sterile sectarianism. Fortunately, however, the outstanding scholar-monk Wŏnhyo 元曉 (617–686), thanks to the creation of a methodology allowing for the reconciliation of disputes (*hwajaeng* 和諍), successfully overcame this excessive denominationalism when it reached Korean soil (Ch'oe Namsŏn 1973, 12–18). Wŏnhyo's methodology thus amounts to what may be called a "Buddhism reconciling disputes" (*hwajaeng pulgyo* 和諍佛教) between antagonizing doctrines. When put into practice, it culminates in an "ecumenical Buddhism" (*t'ongbulgyo*). The narrative goes on to claim that later, Puril Pojo Kuksa 佛一普照國師, aka Chinul 知訥 (1158–1210), during the Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392), and Sŏsan Taesa 西山大師, aka Ch'ŏnghŏ Hyujŏng 淸虛休靜 (1520–1604), during the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910), both inherited and transmitted Wŏnhyo's "ecumenical Buddhism." Finally, this ecumenical Buddhism is identified with the unique and eternal characteristic of Korean Buddhism, and contrasted with the chief trait of Japanese Buddhism, defined in turn as, "chronic divisiveness." With such a simplified and compelling narrative, the progressive and complex geo-historical process through which various forms of Buddhism, both popular and elite, religious as well as philosophical, were transmitted from India to China and then to Korea, is transformed into a theoretical and ideological synthetizing system of thought.

When he inherited this narrative in the second half of the twentieth century, Seongcheol, already familiar with the Japanese version from which it had originated, had no problem in blindly accepting the idea of an original and pristine transmission of the Buddha Śākyamuni's thought to Korea. However, true to himself, nowhere does he display in his sermons and writings the slightest sign of awareness about the historical context that led to this narrative's development. Furthermore, he very substantially modified its contents and appended an older narrative to it. To begin with, in his dealings with the Madhyamaka doctrine in India, China, and Korea, besides paying courteous and minimal lip service to Wŏnhyo, Seongcheol does not display any significant interest in the thought of the Silla dynasty's most emblematic scholar-monk. Next, far from acknowledging any role of Chinul in the transmission of Wŏnhyo's mind, Seongcheol spent—throughout his entire life—considerable time and energy in debunking the sudden-gradual doctrine of awakening and practice (*tono chŏmsu sujŭngnon* 頓悟漸修 修證論) so consistently advocated by the Koryŏ dynasty's most towering figure. Finally, instead of the transmission of Gautama Buddha's original thought through those two Korean Buddhist giants, Seongcheol adamantly promoted the idea of its transmission through Bodhidharma (fifth and/or sixth century), the Sixth Patriarch Huineng 慧能 (638–714), and the masters of the Yangqi 楊岐 branch of the Linji 臨濟 school (K. Imjaejong Yanggip'a). According to this narrative, the link between this Chinese lineage and Korea, i.e., the so-called Sino-Korean connection (Senécal 2012a, 104–105), was established in the fourteenth century, through a number of Korean monks—among whom T'aego Pou 太古普愚 (1301–1382)—who traveled to China to obtain the dharma-seal (*pŏbin* 法印) of famous Yangqi lineage masters.[16] Seongcheol's narrative goes on to say that during the Chosŏn dynasty, Sŏsan inherited this dharma transmission and communicated it to his disciples.[17] Seongcheol then goes on to claim that *kanhwasŏn* 看話禪—the primary meditative practice of Korean Buddhism, according to the Jogye Order (Chogyejong 曹溪宗)—was, and still is, the very content of this transmission originating with the Buddha Śākyamuni. In other words, Seongcheol deems *kanhwasŏn* to be the uppermost and ultimately orthodox meditation technique. By doing so, he literally hijacks the core idea of the Korean narrative in favor of a new one, entirely centered on the transmission of *kanhwasŏn* and finally leading to him and the Jogye Order.

Second, as a direct consequence of the methodology Seongcheol employs and of that hijacking, his interpretation runs into the pitfalls of reductionism, fundamentalism, and totalitarianism. Common sense has it that Buddhism has been in contact, throughout the 2,500 years of its development, with the local histories and various cultures and ideas of the vast Asian territories it encountered. How then can such a complex and multilayered tradition with its long history, moving across so many radically diverse geographical areas, often in constant interaction, be "boiled down" to a single origin and a fundamental core, i.e., the Madhyamaka doctrine? Unlike some other established global religions, Buddhism is not a tradition with a single canon, as, for instance, the Jewish Bible, Christian Bible, or Quran. On the contrary, Buddhism has given birth to numerous canons accepting all kinds of literature, including interpolated texts as well as forged and falsely attributed ones. All are still widely considered by Buddhist followers as Buddha's real life story and direct teachings. Despite all these facts, Seongcheol never pays attention to the various contexts in which various Buddhist trends of thought took shape and Buddhist works were written, before being ultimately recognized as canonical texts in diverse Buddhist traditions.

Seongcheol's *ad fontes* structure of thought makes him obsessed with the need to go back to an absolutely crystalline source he may claim to rely upon. Such a mentality, unfortunately, betrays an astonishing lack of historical consciousness. It appears to have locked him up in a superficial—and essentially conceptual—understanding of Buddhism and its literature.

Third, Seongcheol did not denounce the absurdity of the prejudices contained in the conventional views of modern Buddhist scholarship on traditional Buddhism. For instance, he never even paid lip service to the existence of Esoteric Buddhism, even though it was appraised in India and Tibet as the culmination of Mahāyāna Buddhism. To be sure, Seongcheol espoused the views of modern Buddhist scholarship, which severely criticized Esoteric Buddhism, looking down on its magic as sheer superstition in the light of modern science and rationality. Furthermore, Seongcheol deemed Hīnayāna Buddhism unorthodox, under the pretext that it did not correspond to Gautama Buddha's fundamental teachings.

Fourth, Seongcheol defined Buddhism as the "religion of Awakening," and Awakening as the ultimate and urgent purpose of all Buddhist practice. Thus, Seongcheol ended up with a lopsided understanding of Buddhism that brushes aside the salvific expectations of ordinary individuals, which are based on faith in the saṃgha, popular beliefs, and a series of everyday practices. It is no exaggeration to say that the universal appeal of Buddhism lies far more in people's desire to be relieved from their sufferings and be reborn in the Pure Land by virtue of the Buddhas' and/or Bodhisattvas' compassion, than in the abstract idealism of too many a Buddhist philosophy.

Because they are chiefly based on the trends of thoughts and the methodology of modern Buddhist studies in Japan, Seongcheol's views are mostly inspired by a kind of elitist rationalism that led him to minimalize too easily, not to say simply ignore, the importance and the role of popular Buddhist faith. As a result of those influences, Seongcheol ends up with an extremely limited narrative of the history of Korean Buddhism that is both ultimately and essentially focused on an awakening to the Middle Path, through the practically exclusive use of *kanhwasŏn*. When reading Miyamoto's works on Madhyamaka doctrine and assimilating the core of their methodology, Seongcheol certainly did not accept the legitimacy of the Japanese nationalism they so strongly advocated. Nevertheless, by failing to recognize the limits and the potential dangers of that methodology, he ended up producing a compelling but extremely narrow narrative that in many regards mirrors the one produced by modern Japanese Buddhist scholarship with its potential political consequences.

Seongcheol's Understanding of the History of Chan-Sŏn 禪 and its Limitations

Time and again, Seongcheol made it very clear, particularly in *Han'guk pulgyo ŭi pŏmmaek* 韓國佛教의 法脈 (Dharma lineage of Korean Buddhism), published in 1976, that he exclusively considered the Linji school (K. Imjaejong 臨濟宗) as the legitimate Chan-Sŏn lineage (*pŏpt'ong* 法統). In good measure, he argued throughout his life that the sudden-sudden paradigm of awakening and cultivation (Ch. *dunwu dunxiu*, K. *tono tonsu* 頓悟頓修) was the sole authentic one. In a critical essay on Seongcheol's philosophy, Senécal has

already underscored that it is characterized by a lack of genuine historical consciousness. In it, he points out that this deficiency rendered Seongcheol practically incapable of understanding the philosophical underpinnings of the viewpoint of his arch-rival Chinul, who was—as we know—an amazingly well articulated representative of a philosophical lineage that consistently espoused the sudden-gradual paradigm of awakening and practice (Ch. *dunwu jianxiu*, K. *tono chŏmsu* 頓悟漸修) (Senécal 2016, 113; 2019b, 853). Senécal adds that this same insufficiency also rendered Seongcheol himself incapable of recognizing the underpinnings of his own philosophy. Running on from that, and in conformity with the overall orientation of this essay, the third part of this article intends to determine the impact modern Japanese Buddhist scholarship had on Seongcheol's understanding of Chan-Sŏn history. As we shall see—in contrast with the considerable influence exerted on him by the Middle Path doctrine as promoted by Miyamoto Shoson and others—this impact was very limited.[18]

First, although Seongcheol was somewhat familiar with modern research on Chan, true to himself, he dealt with it in a highly selective, if not subjective, way. Despite the fact that he knew the importance of the Dunhuang 敦煌 documents, and how the research of D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966), Hu Shih 胡適 (1891–1962), and others based on these documents ended up seriously correcting traditional views of Chan history, he firmly stood with its old sectarian interpretation.

As is well known, for instance, Hu Shih's *Shenhui heshang yi ji* 神會和尚遺集 (Collection of extant works of Shenhui), published in 1930, is one of the monumental works that contributed to the establishment of new approaches to the study of Chan, and thus helped to transform it into a modern academic discipline. As he tried to avoid deep-seated sectarian interpretations, based on the transmission of the lamp-genre, Hu Shih adopted scientific methods to objectively analyze and cross reference the documents excavated from the Dunhuang caves. It is this drastic change in research methodology that allowed Suzuki to entirely rewrite the history of Chan. Iriya Yoshitaka (1910–1998), Yanagida Seizan (1922–2006), and many others adopted a similar orientation in their research.

However, Seongcheol, as mentioned, far from displaying any significant interest in the outcomes of historical criticism regarding the traditional interpretation of Chan, simply stuck to the old view, with its supposedly orthodox version of the transmission of the lamp (Ch. *chuandeng*, K. *chŏndŭng* 傳燈) and the sudden-gradual debate. As he did so, he only rarely, briefly, and superficially questioned the authenticity of the Chan texts he referred to. Let us underscore that Seongcheol's conservatism exactly mirrors the orientation of traditional Zen studies in Japan until the 1940s.

Seongcheol highly evaluated the *Liuzu tanjing* 六祖壇經 (K. *Yukcho tangyŏng*) (Platform sutra of the sixth patriarch). However, research by Yanagida Seizan and others on new versions of the *Liuzu tanjing* discovered in Dunhuang have proven, beyond doubt, that the story describing in it the transmission of the Dharma, from the Fifth Patriarch Hongren 弘忍 (594–674) to the young Huineng 慧能 (638–713), is the result of interpolations done by Shenhui's followers eager to secure and enhance the status of their master and, in turn, their own position in the supposedly orthodox line thus fabricated. The same research also demonstrates that the narratives about the "28 patriarchs from the West" (*sŏch'ŏn isipp'al cho sŏl* 西天二十八祖說) and the "transmission of the dharma robe" (*chŏnŭi sŏl* 傳衣說), as well as the antagonizing concepts of sudden and gradual awakening, are all forgeries. Until the advent of historical criticism, these falsifications have deluded generation after generation of both Buddhist followers and scholars, and misled them to believe that there really was an historical tug of war between a Southern school, advocating the immediacy of awakening, and a Northern one advocating its gradualism. Moreover, despite the results of historical criticism, the legends invented by Shenhui and his followers—to be best positioned in the "orthodox line"—have been handed down until today, and are still accepted by many as indubitable historical facts.

In line with such beliefs, Seongcheol plainly accepted the view that the teachings of the Southern school of Chan are absolutely superior, therefore that they were matchless and solely orthodox. As a result, for Seongcheol, Huineng is the most emblematic figure of Chan, and his *ipsissima verba* are enshrined in *The Platform Sutra* (Seongcheol 2014, 105–106) as the pinnacle of Chan teachings (Senécal 2016, 106). Furthermore, Seongcheol utilized historical criticism, not to humbly accept the conclusion of Yanagida Seizan and others, but, on the

contrary, to draw water to his own mill, i.e., to render his own convictions apparently rational and thus indubitable.[19] Furthermore, even though it obviously sounds radically contradictory, and consequently makes already quite complicated matters even more inextricable, Seongcheol did not hesitate to claim that Shenhui was an ardent advocate of the sudden-gradual paradigm of awakening and cultivation (*tono chŏmsu* 頓悟漸修)—and thus an illegitimate heir of Huineng (Seongcheol 2014, 313).

Let us recall that the so-called extremely clear-cut and mutually antagonizing differences between the Northern and the Southern schools are the result of the fabrications of Shenhui and his protagonists. In reality, those differences were far more nuanced. In good measure with one of the key tenets of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the Northern and Southern schools considered all living beings to be endowed with Buddha nature or Buddha mind (Ch. *foxing*, K. *pulsŏng* 佛性/Ch. *foxin*, K. *pulsim* 佛心). On the one hand, the monks of the Northern school upheld that this innate nature is clouded by delusions (Skt. *klesha*, Ch. *fannao*, K. *pŏnnoe* 煩惱), and that the elimination of these illusions through assiduous practice (Skt. *sādhanā*, Ch. *xiuxing*, K. *suhaeng* 修行) could reveal this nature. On the other hand, Shenhui insisted that this Buddha nature was not a goal to reach step-by-step through practice, but a reality already active within the cognitive process (Skt. *vidyā*, *vijñā*; Ch. *zhi*, K. *chi* 知). Since the mind is originally perfect, and endowed with an unsoiled and mysterious capacity to cognize, i.e., undisturbed by delusions, Shenhui denounced all conscious and deliberate pursuits of absolute transcendence as deviations from the mind's original purity. According to Shenhui, it is the direct experience of this nature by oneself that ultimately leads to awakening. This denial of a step-by-step *sādhanā* considerably impacted the later Chan tradition, to the point of drastically modifying its philosophical orientation (Ogawa 2007, 72–73).

In fact, Shenhui was not the first Chan master to emphasize the importance of a sudden awakening experience. Indeed, quite surprisingly, he was preceded by Houmo Chenyan 侯莫陳琰 (660–714), a disciple of—very precisely—Shenxiu 神秀 (606–706), the figurehead of the Northern school whose position has traditionally been presented as drastically opposed to Shenhui's. Let us also underscore that in his early statements, Shenhui simultaneously maintained the suddenness of awakening and the gradualness of cultivation

(Ogawa 2007, 69–70). By doing so, he merely intended to affirm that "sudden awakening is nothing but seeing one's true nature" (Ch. *dunwu jianxing*, K. *tono kyŏnsŏng* 頓悟見性). For that reason, Shenhui's early position is far from solely advocating the suddenness of awakening, while dismissing the gradual practice of meditative concentration; on the contrary, he recognizes the mutual complementarity of the two (Ogawa 2007, 108–112). Therefore, when Seongcheol goes as far as accusing Shenhui of being, not only a gradualist, but also a "follower of speculative intellectualism" (*chihae chongdo* 知解宗徒), an extremely disparaging term, he displays a striking ignorance of the complexity characterizing the way early Chan tradition took shape.

Second, being essentially focused on both the Linji lineage and *kanhuachan*, Seongcheol is incapable of discerning, appreciating, or painting the whole picture of the history of Chan traditions. Stuck in his bias, he cannot but completely neglect the extraordinary diversity of doctrines and practices developed by the Chan schools under the Tang and Song dynasties. Being content with his fundamentalist stance, he does not even pay lip service to the historical context in which the sudden-gradual debate took place. In addition, he too often adopted a god-like attitude that led him to interfere in complex scholarly debates. He thus made judgments solely based on flat, cursory, and—above all—inaccurate evaluations of many reputable Chan masters, all based on his narrow viewpoint.

Let us recall that during the Tang and Song dynasties, Chan tradition evolved in two chief directions, which until lately had not always been recognized with sufficient clarity. Mazu Daoyi 馬祖道一 (709–788) embodies the one that is representative of Chan during the Tang period. While it was then the norm for Chan masters to teach a specific kind of practice allowing one to become awakened, Mazu insisted that "the mind is in itself Buddha" (Ch. *jisin shifo*; K. *chŭksim sibul* 卽心是佛) (Muller 2014, 1440). As a result, he neither pursued the achievement of awakening nor attempted to articulate a discourse on the process allowing—through practice—the transformation of a deluded mind into a Buddha-mind; rather, he insisted that the "ordinary mind is the Way" (Ch. *pingchangxin shidao*, K. *p'yŏngsangsim sido* 平常心是道) (Muller 2014, 1598). This positive acceptance of daily life as it is, without any other particular practice to achieve awakening, constitutes Mazu's core tenet

and perfect ideal. It is also expressed succinctly in the phrase "everyday life without any trouble" (Ch. *pingchang mushi*, K. *p'yŏngsang musa* 平常無事). As a result of Mazu's influence, the chief characteristic of Chan during the Tang dynasty became the self-realization of awakening through "[master-disciple] encounter dialogues" (Ch. *chanmenda*, K. *sŏnmundap* 禪問答).[20] For that reason, Chan thought was not expressed in a theoretical form; rather, these encounter dialogues, together with their implicit genealogies, were continuously compiled and enshrined in "recorded sayings" (Ch. *yulu*, K. *ŏrok* 語錄), which were handed down from generation to generation (Ogawa 2006, 353–355). Because these encounters were extraordinarily dynamic, lively, and spontaneous, the dialogues were formatted in a "one-shot question and quick-answering" style.

On the other hand, as is well established, throughout the Song dynasty (960–1276), Chan practice tended to be chiefly based on the study of selected words or sentences, extracted from the recorded sayings of previous Chan masters and named *gongan* 公案 (K. *kongan*). Wenzi Chan 文字禪 (literary Chan), which enjoyed great popularity for some time during the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127), exemplifies this tendency. It consisted in exploring the *gongan* through a systematic process of dialogue, criticism, and/or interpretation of its meaning constituted of five steps. First, the master responded to the intriguing question he had asked his disciple about the old *gongan* when the latter had failed to do so (Ch. *daiyu*, K. *taedap* 代語). Second, the master corrected the disciple's answer when it was not satisfactory (Ch. *bieyu*, K. *pyŏrŏ* 別語). Third, the master and/or the disciple composed their own verse on the old *gongan* (Ch. *songgu*, K. *songgo* 頌古).[21] Fourth, they attached their verses to that *gongan* (Ch. *niangu songgu*, K. *yŏmgo songgo* 拈古頌古). Fifth, they added to it a comment with an exhortation (Ch. *pingchang*, K. *py'ŏng-ch'ang* 評唱). As is well known, Wenzi Chan originated from the *Fenyang songgu* 汾陽頌古 (Songgu of Fenyang), a collection of *gongan* each accompanied by a *songgu* written by Fenyang Shanzhao 汾陽善昭 (947–1024), a monk of the early Northern Song dynasty. Together with the *Xuedou baize songgu* 雪竇百則頌古 (Hundred cases and songgu of Xuedou), a collection of a hundred *gongan*, all selected and commented upon by Xuedou Zhongxian 雪竇重顯 (980–1052), it exemplifies the peak of this Chan orientation in the

Song period. But the best known of such collections of *gongan* with added comments remains the aforementioned *Biyan lu* 碧巖錄, Yuanwu Keqin's 圜悟克勤 (1063–1135) magnum opus. It is entirely based on the *Xuedou baize songgu* to which, in order to facilitate its reading and understanding, Yuanwu added three elements: a teaching (Ch. *chuishi* or *chuijiao*; K. *susi* 垂示 or *sugyo* 垂教); brief critiques (Ch. *zheyu*; K. *ch'agŏ* 着語); and a comment with an exhortation, as seen above. Further, Yuanwu intensely urged his readers to go beyond the conventional interpretations and comments on *gongan* by performing themselves the three practices that he had added to the *Xuedou baize songgu*. By doing so, he opened a new direction for Song-dynasty Chan, which had become mired in Wushi Chan 無事禪 (trouble-free Chan), a kind of practice that tended to encourage its practitioners to keep themselves aloof from the world (Tsuchiya 2003, 220–228).

As mentioned above, in line with Mazu's core tenet and ideal, Chan during the Tang Dynasty chiefly emphasized the innate original mind, within which Buddha nature already exists in ordinary life, so that it was assumed that no further practice was required to become awakened. However, this well-intended trend of thought ended up deviating into the odd and damaging ideals of "no practice" (Ch. *wuxiu*, K. *musu* 無修) and "original awakening" (Ch. *benxue*, K. *pon'gak* 本覺). These deviations induced a decay with long-lasting consequences within the tradition. It is when Song Chan masters inherited and continued these distorted tendencies that the latter became known as Wushi (Trouble-Free) Chan, a term with strongly negative connotations. As this Trouble-Free Chan spread far and wide, a new trend of practice gradually took hold as a reaction against it (Tsuchiya 2003, 212–220).

After having made a careful examination of Chan practice in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Yuanwu Keqin scathingly criticized Wushi Chan. Because he wanted Chan adepts to be "greatly enlightened" (Ch. *dawu*, K. *taeo* 大悟), he opened a new direction for the Chinese meditative school. By compiling the Trouble-Free Chan dialogues in the *Biyan lu*, Yuanwu laid the groundwork that would allow his disciple Dahui Zonggao 大慧宗杲 (1089–1163) to give birth to *kanhuachan*. This new practice is the development of an older practice named the "living phrase" (Ch. *huoju*, K. *hwalgu* 活句), which appeared within the Yunmen 雲門 school at the beginning of the Five

Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period (907–960). *Kanhuachan* chiefly consisted in raising the sinogram "*mu* 無" as a *huatou* 話頭 (K. *hwadu*), i.e., the core, critical phrase or keyword of a *gongan* (Ogawa 2011, 219–338). This meditation technique was designed to allow one to become awakened by oneself. In other words, thanks to Dahui, at the crossroads of the Northern and Southern Song, Chan practice shifted from a master/disciple system of encounter to *kanhuachan*. This new practice was adopted by Dahui's successors and was successful for a while. However, as time passed, in contrast with Dahui who spent his entire life fully immersed in sociopolitical matters (Senécal 2012a, 103–104), the masters of the Línjì school failed to adapt their practice to new historical circumstances. As it evolved into a more popular form of exercise, *kanhuachan* progressively lost its vitality and became obsolete.

All the above suffices to remind one that the realm of Chan tradition has never been monolithic, quite the contrary. Consequently, common sense dictates that a correct understanding of *kanhuachan* requires one to know the historical process that led to its development and the reasons why it ended up taking the first place in Chan—at least for a while.

Nevertheless, despite that obvious historical complexity, Seongcheol adamantly claimed throughout his life that *kanhwasŏn* was by far the best ever practical method for realizing awakening. He did not hesitate to deem it the very meditation technique used by Siddhārtha Gautama himself to achieve Awakening in Indian antiquity 2,500 years ago. For him, this universally approved technique was definitively beyond the vicissitudes of time and space. In so thinking, Seongcheol displayed a complete lack of interest in the transformation and differentiation process Chan underwent during the Tang and Song dynasties, as well as a total disregard for all other possibilities of practice. In other words, he ignored the ever changing religious and social contexts that led, not only to the formation of Chan in Chinese history, but also to its decay.

Third, following uncritically Seongcheol's claims on the orthodoxy of *kanhwasŏn* will ineluctably lead one to the complete neglect, not only of the religious and philosophical developments of Buddhism throughout its history, but also of its traditional involvement in socioeconomic and political matters. The importance of Seongcheol's role as the supreme patriarch (*chongjŏng* 宗正) of the Jogye Order during the last part of his career as a monk (1981–1993) was

considerable. He virtually represented and guided the major order of Korean Buddhism in every aspect of its destiny. As a result, all the aforementioned shortcomings of Seongcheol's Buddhism ended up exerting a considerable influence on the shaping of Korean Buddhism in the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century.

Kanhuachan undeniably had a significant impact on East Asian intellectual history. To be sure, many deem it the culmination of East Asian Buddhism's development. However and unfortunately, at the same time it may also be considered as its termination. As a matter of fact, *kanhuachan* stopped moving forward in terms of religious and philosophical developments. That is because *kanhuachan* is in itself short of historical consciousness.[22] As a result, all too often Seongcheol's adepts fail to answer to the urgency of engaging themselves in the world as it is. *Kanhuachan* practitioners, indeed, tend to be afraid of socioeconomic and political entanglements. In other words, they shy away from what they consider worldly bondages that will prevent them from achieving a decisively liberating awakening experience. In order to avoid the pitfall of such an idealized conception of awakening, all Chan practices should be based on, and rooted in, an historical consciousness that fully takes into account the diversity of historic and cultural contexts.

Seongcheol's kind of Sŏn radicalism has, albeit inadvertently, encouraged the manifestation of surprisingly anti-moral and anti-social behaviors within the *sŭngga* 僧伽 of the adepts of *kanhwasŏn*. This alarming byproduct of *hwadu* absolutism (*hwadu chŏltae chuŭi* 話頭絶對主義) exemplifies the potential consequences for practice and awakening of a doctrine that fails to take into account the human condition. It has been proven that it was a very similar situation—in Chinese intellectual history—among the practitioners of *kanhuachan* that resulted in the birth of Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (1130–1200) Neo-Confucianism during the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279). As a Chan critic, Zhu Xi severely criticized not only Chan's extreme asceticism, but also its neglect of the universal human relationships within which each individual has a defined status and a corresponding role to play. As a result of the sum of those criticisms, and in overall reaction to Chan tradition, Zhu Xi developed the new system of thought called Neo-Confucianism. Because it was not able to answer in a satisfying way the series of new criticisms it was confronted with,

Chan Buddhism progressively lost its vitality, thus giving way to the rise of Zhu Xi Neo-Confucianism (Cho Myungje 2004, 189–191).

Considering how *kanhuachan* failed to develop—because of a lack of historical consciousness—new philosophical and practical orientations during the Southern Song dynasty, and how, as a result, it eventually became marginalized in Chinese history, how can it still be relevant to claim that *kanhwasŏn* practice remains the *nec plus ultra*, for both Korean and world Buddhism?[23] Whatever the reason, Seongcheol could not break away from the traditional orthodox view of Chan and Sŏn, albeit he was, at least for a while, well-informed and abreast of modern Japanese Buddhist scholarship.

Did Sŏn Master Seongcheol ever Travel to Japan?

Contrary to the common understanding of Buddhist followers and many monks in Korea, today's Korean Buddhism was not directly inherited from a so-called original Buddhism. Rather, it is a new system of thought resulting from a long process of reconstruction of religion that started in Japan during the Meiji era. This modernization movement was widely accepted on the Korean Peninsula during the late Chosŏn period. Although it was born later, i.e., in the second half of the twentieth century, the Jogye Order, the major Buddhist sect in Korea, is also an outcome of this course of events. However, even though it definitely revolves in the orbit of this reconstruction effort, the Jogye Order did not choose to completely break away from its previous Sŏn tradition. On the contrary, it made the unambiguous choice to restore it, just as the monks of the Chosŏn dynasty had successfully done in the seventeenth century, in the wake of the *imjin* 壬辰 (1592–1598) and *pyŏngja* 丙子 (1636–1637), Japanese and Manchu, invasions (Senécal 2012a, 105–106).

Likewise, Sŏn Master Seongcheol, even as he taught the guidelines of orthodox Sŏn practice at Haeinsa (1967–1993), emphatically claiming that the Linji lineage was the only orthodox one, and as he guided the Jogye Order as its supreme patriarch (1981–1993), never departed from the influences of modern Japanese Buddhist scholarship and its worldview. The traits of the achievements of that scholarship are easily found throughout Seongcheol's

sermons and writings. His claim to be "returning to the basic teachings of Gautama Buddha," his interpretations of "the Madhyamaka doctrine as the key by which to interpret all of Buddhist thought," and his resulting definition of Buddhism as "one, entirely unified and interpenetrating system of thought" (*t'ongbulgyo* 通佛教), are not at all his own scholarly creations but, rather, mere adaptations of modern Japanese Buddhist scholarship. Since this scholarship was widely disseminated on the Korean Peninsula during the period of Japanese colonial rule, it was only natural that Seongcheol should encounter it. However, Seongcheol did not assimilate this new knowledge through systematic scholarly training, but, rather, as an autodidact, i.e., by sporadic readings, which, though diverse, were chiefly guided by his curiosity and points of interest. The socioeconomic and political situation Korea faced under Japanese colonial rule, following liberation and the subsequent North-South division, and after the Korean War, assuredly help explain the limitations of Seongcheol's scholarly training.

Be this as it may, many still consider Seongcheol deserving of praise for having led a reform movement of Buddhism, through Sŏn practice, in an attempt to put an end to the sectarian disputes between the pro-Japanese sect of married monks (*taech'ŏsŭng* 帶妻僧) and the traditional sect of celibate *pigu* 比丘 over the ownership of monastic fixed properties. Indeed, in the context of that confused and violent period of internecine feuding, Seongcheol's heartfelt appeals in favor of a "return to original Buddhism and the strict observations of precepts" may be deemed—at least by some—appropriate and timely.

However, Seongcheol's dogmatic explanation of Buddhist philosophies, together with his rigid interpretation of the precepts, created a predominantly *sŭngga*-centered perspective that appears to completely deprive the Buddhist laity of any kind of significant role, besides of course that of providing offerings to monks. This perspective naturally matches Seongcheol's lack of historical consciousness with its accompanying overall disdain for social realities. But, considering that today's Korean laity, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, lives in a well-functioning democracy, within which men and women tend to be fully involved in all kinds of social and political issues, one may wonder how relevant Seongcheol's fundamentalism and idealism are to the current situation and future of Korean Buddhism.

A number of Korean monks and scholars have made scathing criticisms of Seongcheol's Buddhism (Senécal 2012b, 179, 182; 2016, 112–118). By pointing to the considerable influence exerted on Seongcheol by modern Japanese Buddhist scholarship, this essay adds a new element to an already relatively long list of negative evaluations. Until today, the fact of this Japanese influence has not only been a well-kept secret, but its mention a quasi-absolute taboo. As if to conceal the tracks of this influence, Seongcheol himself neither quoted Zen masters nor significantly hinted at how much modern Japanese Buddhist studies inspired him. Moreover, when asked if Seongcheol ever went to Japan, year after year Venerable Wŏnt'aek 圓澤—the strongest promoter ever of Seongcheol's thought—invariably answers that current research is still endeavoring to determine that. Furthermore, Hwang Soon-Il, in his preface to the translation of the *Sermon of One Hundred Days*, does not even mention Miyamoto Shoson, to say nothing of that scholar's considerable influence on the overall structure and content of Seongcheol's work.[24] Given the fact that this influence is obvious, why then keep attempting to dissimulate it?

Considering the strong ties between the spirit of Miyamoto Shoson's thought and the rise and expansion of Japanese imperialism, there is room to argue that the kind of *hwadu* absolutism advocated by Seongcheol—and the compelling but narrow and exclusive narrative that he put forward to rationalize it—went hand in hand with the spirit of an authoritarian regime that excluded all public space for debate. Coincidentally, other research has brought to light a compelling "constellation of six points of structural resonance between the spatiotemporal coordinates of Seongcheol's activity and the overall organization of his discourse, on the one hand, and the way of proceeding of the state under which he carried out his overhaul of Buddhism on the other" (Senécal 2012a, 119; 2019a, 193).[25] Running on from that perspective, one may see in the *Sermon of One Hundred Days* a kind of "doctrinal coup d'état" aimed at taking control of Korean Buddhism in view of its reform, and echoing Park Chung-hee's 朴正熙 (1917–1979) military coup d'état of May 16, 1961 (Senécal 2012a, 108), which aimed at putting South Korea on the course of economic development and prosperity. Such a perspective is reinforced by the fact that Seongcheol's first work, *Han'guk pulgyo ŭi pŏmmaek* 韓國佛敎의 法脈 (Dharma lineage of Korean Buddhism), was published in 1976: the year

Sŏong 西翁 (1912–2003), the Jogye Order's fifth patriarch, announced the beginning of a revitalizing reform (*yusin* 維新) of Korean Buddhism. Spearheaded by Sŏngch'ŏl, this Buddhist *yusin* started four years after President Pak made his famous political Yusin Declaration. The reform of Buddhism was to be based on the exclusive promotion of the practice of *kanhwasŏn* and the *tono tonsu* doctrine transmitted by the Yangqi branch of the Linji school.[26]

Be this as it may, the overall spirit of the Japanese sources that inspired Seongcheol's hermeneutics and his reform of Buddhism in the second half of the twentieth century is clearly and essentially pre-democratic, not to say "imperialistic." Undoubtedly, some will argue that Seongcheol had no choice when he let himself be inspired by those sources. Perhaps—if not probably—but to persist in refusing to acknowledge the origin and the very nature of these sources will only contribute to maintain major parts of contemporary Korean Buddhism within the Babel tower Sŏn Master Seongcheol locked them in (Senécal 2016, 93, 118).

Notes

1 For detailed and critical information on the context in which the *Paegil pŏmmun* was pronounced, its contents, and its publication, see Senécal (2016, 100–105).

2 The name of Haeinsa when it is considered as one of the three treasures or jewels (*sambo sach'al* 三寶寺刹) of Korean Buddhism, the two other treasures being Songgwangsa 松廣寺 (*saṃgha* treasure, *sŭngbo* 僧寶) and T'ongdosa 通度寺 (Buddha treasure, *pulbo* 佛寶).

3 Senécal has published several essays, in English, Korean, and French, dedicated to Seongcheol's thought. Although his research is well aware of the influence of modern Japanese Buddhist scholarship on Seongcheol (Senécal 2016, 93), it is not chiefly focused on it.

4 A monk from Pŏmŏsa 梵魚寺, who took part in the March First Movement (*samil undong* 三一 運動). He graduated with a degree in philosophy from Paris University (1926), and studied modern Buddhism at Komazawa University (1930).

5 "Relative and finite" as well as "absolute and infinite" are key concepts of Kiyozawa Mansi's definition of religion. See Imamura (2001, 16–24).

6 In a sermon preached on May 15, 1982 (lunar calendar) to the Pongamsa Religious Association, Seongcheol talks about the necessity of purifying Buddhist temples and monasteries from non-Buddhist elements, such as the Ch'ilsŏnggak and the Sansingak.

7 The resulting translations were published in a series of thirty-seven volumes called the *Sŏllim kogyŏng ch'ongsŏ* 禪林古鏡叢書 (Old mirrors of the groove of meditation's [Sŏn school] library) (Senécal 2016, 99–100, 130).

8 These Chan texts were published before the Northern Song (960–1127) and introduced to the Sŏn Buddhist community during the Koryŏ dynasty. However, it is assumed that most of them were included in *kongan* 公案 collections such as the *Sŏnmun yŏmsongjip* 禪門拈頌集, and were not published as separate volumes. Furthermore, since during the late Koryŏ, *kanhwasŏn* practice became prevalent the demand for Chan texts from the Song dynasty diminished. This phenomenon seems to have led to the disappearance of a number of such texts on the Korean Peninsula (Cho Myungje 2015).

9 With the exception of the work of Cho Songtaek (2006) and Senécal, the bulk of the research done on Seongcheol's Middle Path doctrine amounts to an introduction to, and a summarization of, the main points of the *Sermon of One Hundred Days* that displays almost no awareness of its problems.

10 It is composed of the following five works: Vol. 1, *Bukkyo toitsuron taikoron* 佛教統一論大綱論 (Outline of the unification of Buddhism; 1901); Vol. 2, *Genriron* 原理論 (On principles; 1903); Vol. 3, *Buttaron* 佛陀論 (On Buddha; 1905); Vol. 4 was not published; Vol. 5, *Zissenron* 實踐論 (On practice; 1927).

11 Just as Japanese Buddhism once supported the war, and afterwards began to cry for peace, Miyamoto jumped on the bandwagon without any repentance. When he travelled to America in the postwar period, he said he thought it was a good democratic country. And when he gave a lecture to the Emperor Shōwa (1901–1989), he said that the Middle Path was the frontier spirit between Eastern and Western civilizations (Sueki 2013, 301–305).

12 With its 326 quotations, Seongcheol's *Sŏnmun chŏngno* 禪門正路 (Correct path of Sŏn) is a remarkable illustration of that kind of practice. See Senécal (2016, 106–107).

13 Or interpenetrating.

14 See Yosinaga Sinichi 吉永進一 et al. (2012).

15 The spread of the discourse on ecumenical Buddhism is confirmed by the publication of diverse writings and lecture collections in the 1900s. Representative sources

are: Inoue Seikyo's 井上政共 *Saisin kenkyu tsubukkyo* 最新研究通佛教 (Latest research on ecumenical Buddhism; 1905) and *Tsubukkyo kōenro ku* 通佛教講演錄 (Records of readings on ecumenical Buddhism; 1911); Takada Dogen's 高田道見 *Tsubukkyo issekiwa* 通佛教一席話 (Talks on ecumenical Buddhism; 1902) and *Tsubukkyo ansin* 通佛教安心 (Mind peace and ecumenical Buddhism; 1904), together with *Tsuzoku bukkyo henran* 通俗佛教便覽 (A guide for popular Buddhism; 1906); Suzuki Hotsin's 鈴木法琛 *Sinshu to tsubukkyo* 眞宗と通佛教 (True religion and ecumenical Buddhism; 1908); Kato Dotsudo's 加藤咄堂 *Tsubukkyo no genre* 通佛教の原理 (Principles of ecumenical Buddhism; 1903).

16 Senécal (2012a) provides detailed information on the historic and political background of this connection.

17 To better understand how this part of Seongcheol's narrative was formed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Senécal (2012a, 105–106).

18 The contents that follow do not add anything significantly new to the history of Chan-Sŏn as established by historical criticism. They are a mere reminder of facts that constitute the background against which this part intends to define how Seongcheol understood that history. Accordingly, readers already familiar with this history may go directly to the conclusion of this last part.

19 The article, "Le *Sūtra de l'Estrade* dans la Corée contemporaine" (The Platform Sūtra in contemporary Korea) offers an in-depth analysis of the way Seongcheol used the *Liuzu tanjing* (Senécal 2009).

20 A synonym is dharma test (Ch. *fajuliang*, K. *pŏpkŏryang* 法擧量) (Muller 2014, 496).

21 "To attach one's own verse to an 'ancient' precedent," which is usually a classical *gongan*, but can also be a famous scriptural passage (Muller 2014, 877).

22 "Judging from Seongcheol's overall aloofness from the world, and lack of interest in any historical perspective beyond his overwhelmingly sudden/sudden approach, his philosophy definitely appears more otherworldly than this-worldly" (Senécal 2016, 115).

23 For a critical evaluation of the Jogye Order's campaign for the worldwide propagation of *kanhwasŏn*, see Senécal (2011).

24 For good measure, the "Seongcheol" entry of the Wikipedia online dictionary does not even evoke the influence exerted on him by modern Japanese Buddhist scholarship, but, rather, provides his "criticism of the Japanese style of meditation."

25 It is well known that Seongcheol had strong connections to the Blue House (Ch'ŏnghwadae 靑瓦臺), albeit indirectly. A good instance is the monk Chŏngdam

青潭 (1902–1971), his senior and friend, who was closely acquainted with Yuk Young-soo 陸英修 (1925–1974), Park Chung-hee's wife.

26 Moreover, Seongcheol was appointed the Jogye Order's sixth supreme patriarch (*chongjŏng* 宗正) in 1981—one year after Chun Doo-hwan's (Chŏn Tuhwan 全斗煥 [b. 1931]) coup d'état—and its seventh in 1991. Although he retained this responsibility until his death in 1993, Seongcheol's capacity to work was considerably diminished after 1987, i.e., the year South Korea adopted a democratic political regime.

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