



Philosophical Aspects of the Goryeo-Joseon Confucian-Buddhist Confrontation

Focusing on the Works of Jeong Dojeon (Sambong)
and Hamheo Deuktong (Gihwa)

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Historical Perspective: Confucianism and Daoism during the Period of Buddhist Preeminence

The geographical proximity of Korea to China, along with the concomitant extensive and continuous exchange of commodities and ideas, allowed the people of the Korean peninsula to participate in the Chinese religious and philosophical world at a relatively early point in time, and even to make significant contributions to the greater East Asian philosophical discourse, as many Korean thinkers traveled to the Tang and Song centers of learning and made their own mark. Thus, Koreans learned Chinese ways of thinking well, and bringing Chinese ideas back to their homeland, made their own enhancements, and sometimes took off in their own creative directions.

During the several centuries during which Buddhism carried out its remarkable spread throughout East Asia, the Confucian tradition maintained its position as the framework for basic literary education and as the provider of the system for civil service examinations. Thus it was the

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1 case in China—and later in Korea—that the ministers, bureaucrats, teach-
2 ers, and those connected in any form with the governance of the realm
3 automatically had a Confucian education. But this Confucian tradition
4 could not do much to compete philosophically—or as a state religion,
5 with the dominant position that had been taken by Buddhists in terms
6 of providing the spiritual fabric for society—a dominance that reached its
7 peak during the early- to mid-Tang. During this period there was rela-
8 tively little in the way of new developments in Confucian philosophy, as
9 the same classics were simply learned by rote for the purpose of passing
10 civil service examinations. Except for occasional rumblings and purges
11 that were usually motivated by jealousy over the political and economic
12 influence of Buddhists (and Daoists), Confucians remained largely unable
13 to compete in the philosophical arena.

14 Most of the major religious and philosophical developments of this
15 period that lay outside of Buddhism were to be seen in the area of Dao-
16 ism, in the works of the Neo-Daoists, Daoist alchemists, and the Daoist-
17 influenced literati—all of whom were stimulated by Buddhist ideas. At
18 the same time, Daoist views influenced the evolving tendencies of East
19 Asian Buddhism, to the extent that sometimes their texts were almost
20 indistinguishable from each other.¹ Thus, philosophically speaking, the
21 first several centuries of the growth of Buddhism in China can be seen
22 as a period of philosophical stagnation for Confucianism, but Confu-
23 cianism nonetheless remained ensconced in its basic position within the
24 educational and bureaucratic system, while most creative philosophical/
25 religious activity took place within the Buddhist-Daoist matrix. It was
26 a period during which most major literary figures and political persons
27 of Confucian orientation showed neither the means nor inclination of
28 motivating any telling resistance to the Buddhist tradition.

29 Yet, regardless of the lack of active philosophical resistance, the
30 indigenous traditions transformed the incoming Buddhist religion in the
31 very course of translating it into their own vernacular, and so a Sinicized
32 form of Buddhism became part and parcel of everyday life. There was
33 no sustained *philosophical* confrontation—at least during the earlier cen-
34 turies, when doctrinal Buddhist schools were moving toward their final
35 formation. But from just about the time that schools such as Huayan and
36 Tiantai reached a level of maturity, and Chan began to emerge as promi-
37 nent Buddhist movement, ideological argumentation from the Confucian
38 side began to show itself.

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Beginnings of the Criticism of Buddhism 1

The beginnings of an overt criticism of Buddhism by Confucian leaders are usually traced to the essays of the Tang scholar Han Yu 韓愈 (768–824).² Han was an elite bureaucrat as well as a literary figure of considerable stature who was troubled by the steadily growing influence of Buddhism in the imperial court. He believed Buddhism was leading the rulership to a blindness that was endangering the security and well-being of the realm. He felt strongly enough about the excesses of Buddhism that he dared to vehemently memorialize the throne, knowing well that it would lead him into trouble. 2

Han Yu's two best-known critical essays on Buddhism are the *Origin of the Way* 原道³ and *Memorial on the Buddha's Bone* 諫迎佛骨.⁴ In these essays he lambasted Buddhism as a foreign religion that was leading the emperor to spend an inordinate amount of time at Buddhist monasteries and which involved great expenditure of resources for activities such as the carrying of the Buddha's *śarīra* around the capital. Han's arguments were aimed at highlighting the visible excesses on the part of the members of the Buddhist clergy and the rulers involved with them. These arguments were mostly emotional in character; they did not attempt to provide a serious criticism of the philosophical shortcomings of Buddhism. But they certainly raised enough hackles to get Han sent away into exile, and they served as the point of departure for the anti-Buddhist arguments that would be presented by later scholars.⁵ 3

However, as the Tang drew to an end and the Song began, the philosophical matrix of China, having been now long enough steeped in Buddhist and Daoist philosophy that many important concepts were taken for granted as being simply standard philosophical categories, not as specifically Buddhist or Daoist in origin, saw the birth of a new, drastically revamped form of Confucianism known as "Song learning" (Ch. *songxue* 宋學, known in the West as Neo-Confucianism). While the Chinese philosophical matrix had had sufficient chance to assimilate Daoist notions of the *dao* and alchemical transformation, and the Buddhist principles of karma and dependent origination as well as Huayan principle (Ch. *li* 理) and phenomena (Ch. *shi* 事) and Chan meditation, the gradual waning of doctrinal Buddhism in late Tang and early Song as a state institution, and the corruption and stagnation of much of the doctrinal Buddhist tradition itself, with the arrival of Chan as the predominant tradition, had left a 4

1 bit of a creative intellectual vacuum. The influence of the great doctrinal
 2 systems of Chinese Yogâcâra, Tiantai, and Huayan had faded. In their
 3 place were the flowering schools of Song Chan, which were known, even
 4 then, for the worst extremes of iconoclasm, antinomianism, and escapism,
 5 both in terms of their behavior and what was contained in the popular
 6 texts of the Song Chan schools. As de Bary points out (citing Yanagida),
 7 there were numerous texts that contained passages that provided good
 8 targets for Neo-Confucian critiques of nihilism.⁶ Yet it is surprising that
 9 no Buddhist scholars appeared at the time who might have been able to
 10 point out that most of the lines cited by Zhu Xi and his predecessors were
 11 skillfully selected out of the fuller context of discussions that were, taken
 12 in their entirety, not at all nihilistic.

13 Regardless of the honesty or accuracy of the criticisms of Chan
 14 made by the leading figures of this reenergized Confucian movement, it
 15 is no secret that there was a strong strain of anti-intellectualism in the
 16 literature of the Chan school, and regardless of whether this “stupefaction”
 17 was really a common state of affairs, there is no doubt that the overall
 18 tendency within the Chan tradition toward academic study was different
 19 from what had been seen in the doctrinal schools.⁷ This attitude demon-
 20 strated by the members of the Chan schools may well have contributed
 21 to the intellectual vacuum that would be filled by the New Confucians.

24 Sources of Neo-Confucian Doctrine

26 Although the classics that were the object of study for the Neo-Confucians
 27 were essentially the same as they had been for their Confucian prede-
 28 cessors (the Four Books,⁸ the Five Classics,⁹ and so forth), they were
 29 reanalyzed under the lens of a new hermeneutic that was the result of sev-
 30 eral centuries of Buddhist and indigenous Chinese cross-fertilization: the
 31 categories of *li* 理 (principle) and *qi* 氣 (*pneuma*, material force), which
 32 were derived from the *li* (principle) and *shi* 事 (phenomena)—popular in
 33 the Huayan and Tiantai schools—both of which were a new iteration of
 34 the classic essence-function (*ti-yong* 體用) approach. The Neo-Confucians
 35 brought this new metaphysics, which also included a heavy reliance on
 36 the *Yijing* and *yin/yang* cosmology, to re-explain the relation of humans
 37 to humans and humans to the universe, along with a much more pre-
 38 cisely articulated path of cultivation, relying heavily on the *Mencius* and
 39 the *Great Learning*.

The most important early figures in this movement were the Neo-Confucian patriarchs Zhang Cai 張載 (1020–1077) and Zhou Dunyi 周敦 1
 敦 1 (1017–1073),¹⁰ whose combined works established the bases of this 2
 new metaphysics while creating schema for a new way to understand 3
 humans and their world. What is especially noteworthy about their writ- 4
 ings, however, is the degree to which they were energized by anti-Buddhist 5
 polemic.¹¹ But this polemic is only started with these two, and is not 6
 especially vehement in their works. After all, Zhou was known to have 7
 been a Chan practitioner of sorts. 8
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It is in the writings of the Cheng brothers (Cheng Hao 程顥, 1032– 10
 1085; and Cheng Yi 程 11
 1, 1033–1107) that a distinctive Neo-Confucian philosophy really begins to take on its mature form, as the philosophical 12
 elaboration of the categories of *li* and *qi* within the framework of com- 13
 mentary on the classical texts takes on sophisticated form.¹² It was Cheng 14
 Hao who developed the *li-qi* cosmological view, and rereading classical 15
 passages such as *Analects* 12:1, declared that “the humane man forms a 16
 single body with the world.” Even more so than the works of the ear- 17
 lier generations of Neo-Confucians, the criticism of Buddhism becomes 18
 an integral part—and at times perhaps the central aspect—of the Cheng 19
 brothers’ discourse. Interestingly, the brother shown to have exhibited the 20
 more mystical, or “Channish” tendencies in his writings, Cheng Hao, is 21
 the one who composed the most damaging critiques of the Chan tradi- 22
 tion. The Cheng brothers criticized Chan Buddhism for its antinomian, 23
 escapist tendencies, and its doctrine of emptiness, which they construed 24
 as pure nihilism.¹³ The arguments composed by the Chengs and their 25
 mentors were digested, explicated, and systematized in the writings of Zhu 26
 Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), who would become recognized as the grand system- 27
 atizer of the Neo-Confucian tradition—as the one most singly responsible 28
 for the reinstatement of Confucianism as the predominant ideology of 29
 the Chinese imperial government until the opening of the modern era. 30

It is important to reiterate that when Zhu and the Chengs talk 31
 about “Buddhism,” they are talking about the form of Buddhism that 32
 was in vogue during their lifetime—which was Song Dynasty Chan— 33
 the same tradition that was in the process of compiling *gong-an* col- 34
 lections, teaching strike-and-shout Linji methodologies, and so forth. 35
 Popular Buddhist writings at that time contained almost nothing in the 36
 way of explanation of Indian-style dependent origination, emptiness, or 37
 the two levels of truth. The popular scriptures at the time were mostly 38
 East Asian apocrypha (such as the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* and the 39
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1 Śūramgama-sūtra) and works overtly composed within the Chan tradition
 2 (such as the *Platform Sutra*), that were suddenistic in their approaches,
 3 paying little attention to intellectual study and cultivation.

4 While the Chan schools were drawing continuous harsh criticism
 5 from their Confucian contemporaries, we can find virtually no literature
 6 that would represent any sustained effort made on the Chan side at writ-
 7 ten self-defense. Why the lack of works aimed at defending Buddhist
 8 teachings against these critiques? One possible explanation is that know-
 9 ing the general character of Chan with its self-proclaimed dissociation
 10 from discursive argumentation, such a debate was outside the purview of
 11 what a Chan teacher was supposed to be doing. It could also be that the
 12 Buddhists were sufficiently confident of the status of their religion that
 13 they believed that such diatribes were never going to have any real con-
 14 crete effect in terms of government-authorized restrictions. It may have
 15 also been the case that vibrant energy of the Neo-Confucian movement,
 16 coupled with the bright young minds being attracted to it, was simply
 17 too much for the Chan leaders to contend with.

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20 Neo-Confucianism in Korea

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22 During the two centuries after Zhu Xi, a confrontational situation between
 23 Neo-Confucianism and Buddhism developed in the Goryeo, although in
 24 a somewhat different context than that seen in Song China. The most
 25 important difference between the two scenarios was the markedly greater
 26 degree to which the Korean Buddhist establishment was embedded into
 27 the state power structure as compared with the situation in the Song. The
 28 Buddhist *saṃgha* owned vast tracts of tax-free territory, traded in slaves
 29 and other commodities, and was influential at all levels of government.
 30 There were too many monks who were ordained for the wrong reasons,
 31 and corruption was rampant. Thus, the ideological fervor with which Neo-
 32 Confucianism rose in Korea had a special dimension, since the venom of
 33 their rhetoric was fueled not only by the earlier philosophical arguments
 34 of the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi, but as well by the extent of the present
 35 corruption visible in the Buddhist establishment. There was a decadent,
 36 stumbling government in place, supported by, and supporting, a religious
 37 organization plagued by scandal and corruption. Thus, in Korea, the most-
 38 ly philosophical arguments against Buddhism that had originated with the
 39 Cheng brothers became the ideology of a rising movement of resistance
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on the part of influential members of the intelligentsia who were determined to overthrow a decaying Goryeo (918–1392) Dynasty—along with the rotting Buddhist monastic system that was deeply entangled with it. Thus, the anti-Buddhist polemical dimension of the Neo-Confucianism that developed in Korea took on a focus, a vehemence, indeed an exclusivism¹⁴ not previously seen in China.

A major portion of the Neo-Confucian polemical attack that energized these sweeping changes was sociopolitical in nature, focusing on the excesses engaged in by the Buddhist clergy. Buddhist temples had been tax-exempt, and many Buddhist leaders enjoyed wealth and power that came in the form of the possession of prize lands, slaves, and positions of privilege in the court. There was also a philosophical component to the Neo-Confucian criticism of Buddhist doctrine and practice that developed out of the writings of the above-mentioned Song Neo-Confucian architects. The main complaint expressed in these arguments was, once again, that Buddhist practices were antisocial and escapist and that the Buddhist doctrine was nihilistic. Buddhism, according to the Neo-Confucians, led people to abandon respect for the norms of society and to forget the all-important task of cultivating one's character in the midst of human relationships.

While there were anti-Buddhist memorials presented in Korea as early as 982, serious concentrated attack on Buddhism did not begin until the mid-fourteenth century. The major initial charges, presented by scholars such as I Saek 李穡 (1328–1396), were that excessive patronage was deleterious to the well-being of the state. The attacks made on Buddhism by Jo In-ok 趙仁沃 (?–1396) and Jeong Mongju 鄭夢周 (1337–1392) were also made on political and economic, rather than philosophical and religious, bases. After this period, the anti-Buddhist polemic took a turn toward the philosophical in the writings of such prominent Neo-Confucian figures as Gang Hoebaek 姜淮伯 (1357–1402) and Jeong Chong 鄭摠 (1358–1397), both of whom were active in the late fourteenth century.¹⁵ Toward the end of the fourteenth century the political and economic problems of the Goryeo court worsened, and with the Buddhists firmly embedded in the body of a weakened political structure, Neo-Confucian activists came to the side of the rebel general I Seonggye 李成桂 (1335–1408). I, in a sudden coup d'état, toppled the Goryeo government, establishing the Joseon Dynasty in 1392, and was automatically endowed with a cabinet composed of Neo-Confucian advisers.

With the 1392 coup, the Buddhists were thrust out of their position of political power. They would, over time, become mainly relegated to

1 an existence in the mountain monasteries, prohibited from setting foot
 2 in the cities. The final polemical push for the Buddhist purge came in
 3 the form of the essays of Jeong Dojeon 鄭道傳 (pen name: Sambong
 4 三峰; 1342–1398), I's main political strategist, who would end up play-
 5 ing a major role in the development of the political structure of the new
 6 Joseon Dynasty.¹⁶ Jeong wrote three major philosophical essays that were
 7 critical of Buddhism: (1) The *Simmun cheondap* 心問天答 (Questions
 8 from the Mind Answered by Heaven; 1375), wherein he presented a cri-
 9 tique of the Buddhist doctrine of karma, offering instead a Neo-Confucian
 10 interpretation of the interaction of principle and material force; (2) the
 11 *Simgiri pyeon* 心氣理篇 (On the Mind, Material Force, and Principle;
 12 1394), where he argues that the Confucian definitions and usages of the
 13 three terms of mind, material force, and principle are clear and consistent,
 14 and those of Buddhism are vague and inconsistent, and (3) the *Bulssi*
 15 *japbyeon*, which was his final and most sustained anti-Buddhist polemi-
 16 cal work, in which he carried out an extensive refutation of Buddhist
 17 doctrines and practices from a Neo-Confucian perspective, including the
 18 content of the prior two essays, along with summaries of the arguments
 19 of many of his Neo-Confucian predecessors.¹⁷

20 In these anti-Buddhist tracts Jeong's intention was to show that the
 21 Buddhist doctrine was deeply and intrinsically flawed. Thus, it was nec-
 22 essary not only to discipline the Buddhist establishment at the present
 23 moment: it was desirable to seriously curtail, and if possible, to perma-
 24 nently end the activities of this dangerous belief system. His critique is
 25 thorough, covering every major aspect of the Buddhist doctrine that was
 26 being taught at the time. Given the composition of Korean Buddhism at
 27 the time in question, the primary object of his criticism was the Seon
 28 sect, which the Neo-Confucians of course perceived as having strong
 29 tendencies toward other-worldliness, denial of the importance of human
 30 relationships, denial of respect for the state, and even denial of Buddhism's
 31 own principle of cause-and-effect.

32 The influence of Jeong's Chinese predecessors, primarily the Cheng
 33 brothers via Zhu Xi, is omnipresent in his writings. Almost every argu-
 34 ment, and every example made by Jeong is a citation drawn from one
 35 of the Cheng brothers, often through the commentaries of Zhu. While
 36 Jeong is often looked down upon by Korean intellectual historians as
 37 being more of an ideologue than a philosopher, none of Jeong's worthy
 38 predecessors had ever composed such a well-organized, complete, and
 39 systematic attack on Buddhism, from every angle, that can compare with
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the *Japbyeon*. We will return to look at some of its contents below. First, however, we need to familiarize ourselves as to what was happening in terms of the Buddhist response.

Buddhist Responses and the Influence of Zongmi

We have noted above that despite the intensity of the critiques of Chan Buddhism by the Song Neo-Confucian leaders, there was little in terms of sustained and reasoned written response from the Chan community from the time that the criticism took hold during the Song. The most significant early response to the Confucian critique occurs at the very outset of the renewed opposition in the mid-Tang from the scholar-monk Zongmi (宗密 780–841). Those with some knowledge of the history of Korean Buddhism will recognize Zongmi as one of the Chinese scholar-monks who brought the most direct influence on the later character of the Korean Seon tradition. In the history of the development of Korean Seon, issues related to the reconciliation of various approaches to practice came to play a central role, and one of the most significant of these was that of the relation between meditation practice and scriptural study. Zongmi, who would end up with the unusual distinction of being recognized as a “patriarch” of both the Chan and Huayan traditions, advocated that the approaches of meditative practice and scriptural study were mutually complementary. His statements on this and related matters, such as explanations of the notion of intrinsic enlightenment and discussions of the relationship between sudden and gradual in practice and enlightenment, were followed and repeated by the most influential of the Korean Seon formulators, including Jinul, Gihwa, and Hyujeong. And as it turns out, the set of texts that held the greatest level of interest for these later Korean Seon masters, the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*, *Diamond Sutra*, and *Huayan jing*, were also the subject of Zongmi’s most extensive commentarial efforts.

One of the works for which Zongmi is most noted in Chinese intellectual history is his *Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity* (*Yuanren lun* 原人論).¹⁸ Composed around 830, it was a treatise written for a broad audience. It was in some sense a work typical of Chinese doctrinal scholars from the sixth to the eighth century in being a hermeneutically oriented text that classified the teachings of Buddhism into five levels. Such classifications had been carried out before Zongmi by such people

1 as his Huayan predecessor Fazang, de facto Tiantai founder Zhiyi, and
2 many others.

3 While the *Inquiry* is primarily a textbook for understanding Bud-
4 dhism that utilizes the classification scheme as a pedagogical methodology,
5 the opening passages contain a clear polemic at Confucianism, apparently
6 in response to the attacks by Hanyu. Zongmi criticizes indigenous Chinese
7 philosophy for those of its doctrines that show a lack of discernment of
8 the basic laws of cause-and-effect. Thus, he debunks the Chinese classical
9 view of spontaneous production, the lack of reasoning for the differences
10 in individual endowments of vital force, and the unexplained unfairness
11 seen in the operation of the “mandate of heaven” (*tianming*).

12 According to Zongmi, all of these paradigms are logically unten-
13 able when really thought through, and cannot match the sophistication of
14 even the most elementary of the Buddhist teachings—that of the law of
15 karmic retribution. There is, nonetheless, an ecumenical character to the
16 *Inquiry*, since, although Confucianism and Daoism are seen to be inferior
17 to Buddhism, they are nonetheless accorded a certain amount of value,
18 with Confucius and Laozi being regarded as bona fide sages, along with
19 Śākyamuni. As Peter Gregory notes:

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21 Although it should be no surprise that Tsung-mi (Zongmi)
22 regards Buddhism as a higher level of teaching than either
23 Confucianism or Daoism, what is especially noteworthy is
24 that his attitude toward the two teachings is sympathetic and
25 inclusive. Even though his designation of them as exclusively
26 provisional places them in a category inferior to the Bud-
27 dhist teachings, it also—and far more significantly—places
28 them within the same realm of discourse. Its concrete forms
29 of expression may differ, but the truth realized by the three
30 sages is universal. (*Inquiry*, 81)

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32 Given the fact that Han Yu’s tracts and Zongmi’s *Inquiry* were writ-
33 ten in the early part of the ninth century, almost five centuries before
34 the exchange between Jeong Dojeon and Gihwa, the extent to which the
35 content from these early predecessors from both sides finds its way into
36 the treatises of the two Korean recipients of their respective traditions is
37 quite surprising. Jeong, for instance, will continue to invoke Han’s criti-
38 cism of Buddhism as a “foreign” religion. Gihwa, for his part, will open up
39 his own treatise by borrowing the correlation made by Zongmi between
40 the five constant virtues of Confucianism and the five basic Buddhist

precepts—a correlation first made as far back as the *Diwei Boli jing* 提謂波利經.¹⁹ While the *Inquiry* stands out as the major precedent to Gihwa’s work, there are nonetheless, significant differences in content and structure, based largely upon the circumstances in which they were written. The *Inquiry* is first and foremost a *panjiao* 判 (doctrinal taxonomy) text, which takes up the critique of Confucianism only in its opening sections. Zongmi’s Buddhist tradition at the time, even if suffering from the rants of the likes of Han Yu, certainly did not have its back up against the wall. The Buddhists in the early Joseon on the other hand were “on the ropes” as it were, and so Gihwa’s treatise is in its entirety a defense of the Buddhist tradition, with issues of doctrinal classification long since forgotten. There are also significant personal stylistic differences, but before addressing these, we need to introduce Gihwa.

Gihwa

Gihwa 己和 (Hamheo Deuktong 涵得通, 1376–1433) was born just sixteen years before the Goryeo/Joseon dynastic transition. The son of a diplomat, he was educated with other upper-class sons at the recently established Seongyun-gwan 成均館 Confucian academy—where Jeong Dojeon was a member of the faculty.²⁰ In the course of his studies here, Gihwa is said to have attained to a remarkable level of proficiency in Chinese philosophy and literature, as his biographer goes to unusual lengths to convey the extent to which his professors esteemed him:

Entering the academy as a youth, he was able to memorize more than a thousand phrases daily. As time passed, he deeply penetrated the universality of the single thread, clarifying the meanings of the classics and expounding their content. His reputation was unmatched. Grasping the subtlety of the transmitted teachings, he disclosed all their profundities in his explanations. He was possessed of a sonorous voice and graceful beauty, like flowers laid upon silk brocade—even such metaphor falls short of description. People said that he would become the minister truly capable of transmitting the heavenly mandate, extending upward to the ruler and bringing blessings down to the people. In his grasp of the correct principles of society he had no need to be ashamed even if he were to appear before the likes of Zhou and Shao.²¹

1 Acknowledging the obvious hyperbole that is invariably seen in the
 2 hagiographical sketches written by disciples of eminent Buddhist teachers,
 3 we must nevertheless pay attention to what is contained in this passage as
 4 (1) there is not, in the entire corpus of Korean Buddhist hagiographies an
 5 appraisal of scholarly (Confucian) acumen comparable in scope to this,
 6 and (2) this strong assessment of Gihwa's early abilities is corroborated in
 7 the degree to which he, later in his Buddhist career, took such a strong
 8 interest in and showed such outstanding ability in literary/philosophical/
 9 exegetical pursuits. Furthermore, a reading of his later Buddhist works
 10 shows an unusual frequency of citation from the Five Classics, Four
 11 Books, and Daoist canon.

12 Despite Gihwa's deep initial involvement in Confucian learning, he
 13 is said to have been greatly affected at the age of twenty-one by the tragic
 14 death of a close friend, and as a result, turned to the Buddhist path. After a
 15 short period of wandering and study, he became a disciple of the national
 16 preceptor Muhak 無學 (1327–1405), a master of the Imje Seon 臨濟禪
 17 (C. Linji Chan) *gong-an* 公案 tradition. Gihwa spent the rest of his days
 18 immersed in meditation, travel, teaching, and an extensive literary pursuit
 19 that included commentarial work, essay writing, and poetry. Despite the
 20 diminished influence of Buddhism, toward the end of his career he served
 21 as preceptor to the royal family. After this stint, he retired once again to
 22 the mountain monasteries, where he taught and wrote until his passing
 23 in 1433. During his life, Gihwa wrote several important and influential
 24 treatises and commentaries on Buddhist works that established him as
 25 one of the leading exegetes in the Korean Buddhist tradition.²²

26 Placed as he was in the position of being the leading representative of
 27 the Buddhist saṃgha at a time when it was coming under great pressure,
 28 Gihwa no doubt felt responsible to offer an answer to the Neo-Confucian
 29 charges. Respond he did, in the form of a philosophical treatise that has
 30 become a landmark in Korean intellectual history—the *Hyeonjeong non*
 31 顯正論 (“Exposition of Orthodoxy,” hereafter abbreviated as *HJN*). In the
 32 *HJN* Gihwa attempted to answer the entire accretion of criticisms made
 33 by the Neo-Confucians that had been organized and laid out in the *Bulssi*
 34 *japbyeon* 佛氏雜論. Therefore the relationship between the *Japbyeon* and
 35 the *HJN* is such that we might well characterize the latter work as a fairly
 36 direct rebuttal of the former, and thus, the two together can be said to
 37 constitute a debate.²³

38 As mentioned above, the circumstances of Gihwa's composition
 39 of this treatise in defense of Buddhism against Confucian-based criti-
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cisms have a direct precedent in those surrounding Zongmi's *Inquiry*. 1
 Zongmi and Gihwa held much in common, both being Chan-Seon/ 2
 Huayan-Hwaeom scholars of considerable classical Chinese philosophi- 3
 cal background and both holding an honest respect for many aspects of 4
 Confucian and Daoist learning. Both men shared in their broad vision 5
 of all three masters—Confucius, Laozi, and Śākyamuni—being genuine 6
 sages, but their way of evaluating the two non-Buddhist traditions differs 7
 somewhat. 8

While treating similar topics from similar perspectives, the two treatises differ in their basic line of argumentation. Zongmi's work, reflecting 9
 its author's interest in doctrinal classification, is primarily an attempt to 10
 show how Confucianism and Daoism are related to Buddhism as expedient 11
 but nonetheless heterodox 外가 (K. *oegyō*) teachings. His tone toward 12
 Confucianism and Daoism is conciliatory, but he will clearly distinguish 13
 the two from Buddhism as being even less sophisticated than the teach- 14
 ings of "men and gods"—basic teachings of karmic retribution for moral 15
 and immoral actions. Gihwa's argument, on the other hand, relies pri- 16
 marily on an understanding of interpenetration that operates equally in 17
 all three teachings of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, but that he 18
 claims has been brought to different levels of actualization by the practi- 19
 tioners of each of the three teachings. Gihwa perceives the three teachings 20
 as varying expressions of a singular reality. Thus, despite his conversion 21
 to Buddhism, he never really rejected his earlier Confucian and Daoist 22
 learning. Accordingly, in his Buddhist apologetic writings he did not seek 23
 to disparage the fundamental Confucian doctrine; nonetheless, while the 24
 Confucian teachings were worthy of deep respect, he argued that the 25
 Confucians had often missed the deeper implications of their own texts. 26
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The Texts: Content Analysis 29

Bulssi japbyeon 30

The chapter headings of the *Bulssi japbyeon* are as follows: 31

1. Critique of the Buddhist Doctrine of Transmigration 32
 佛氏輪迴之辨 33
2. Critique of the Buddhist Notion of Karma 佛氏因果 34
 之辨 35

- 1 3. Critique of the Buddhist Theory of Mind and Nature
2 佛氏心性之辨
- 3
- 4 4. Critique of the Buddhists' Conflation of Function and
5 Nature 佛氏作用是性之辨
- 6
- 7 5. Critique of the Buddhist Notion of the Mind and its
8 Functions 佛氏心跡之辨
- 9
- 10 6. Critique of the Buddhists' Obscuration of Principles and
11 Concrete Entities 佛氏昧於道器之辨
- 12
- 13 7. Critique of the Buddhists' Abandonment of the Basic
14 Human Relationships 佛氏「棄人倫之辨
- 15
- 16 8. Critique of the Buddhist Notion of Compassion 佛氏慈
17 悲之辨
- 18
- 19 9. Critique of the Buddhist Notions of the Real and the
20 Nominal 佛氏真假之辨
- 21
- 22 10. Critique of the Buddhist Notion of Hells 佛氏地獄之辨
- 23
- 24 11. Critique of the Buddhist Notion of Calamity and Fortune
25 佛氏禍福之辨
- 26
- 27 12. Critique of the Buddhists' Practice of Begging for Food
28 佛氏乞食之辨
- 29
- 30 13. Critique of the Buddhists' Seon Teachings 佛氏禪「之辨
- 31
- 32 14. Critique of the Samenesses and Differences between Con-
33 fucianism and Buddhism 儒釋同異之辨
- 34
- 35 15. On the Entry of the Buddhadharma into China 佛法入
36 中國
- 37
- 38 16. Serve the Buddha and Reap Misfortune 事佛得禍
- 39
- 40 17. Abandoning the Heavenly Way and Chatting about Bud-
dhahood 舍天道而談佛果
18. Serving the Buddha Assiduously, the Length of Reign
Considerably Shortens 事佛甚謹年代尤促
19. Critique to Expose Heterodox Teachings 闢異端之辨

Jeong starts off, in the first two chapters, with a critique of the Indian notions of karma and transmigration, arguing against these “foreign” Indian paradigms, based on Chinese cosmological schema such as were developed in connection with the *Yijing* and its commentaries: *yin/yang*, the five phases (Ch. *wuxing* 五行), *hun* 魂 and *po* 魄 souls, etc. These chapters do not offer much to clearly demonstrate a metaphysical high ground for Confucianism, as Jeong’s proof rests on such assertions as a declaration for the non-increase or decrease for the total number of beings in the world at a given time—positions that were never really articulated as such in the foundational Confucian works. He does make a point, however, of bringing to mind the fact that when it comes to practical matters, such as the healing of disease, virtually all East Asians of the time, Buddhists included, rely on Chinese *yin/yang* cosmology in the form of traditional medicinal practices.

It is in the third through fifth chapters that he really delves into the core of his philosophical argument, as he attacks Buddhism at one of its traditional weak points: that of the contradictory character of the discourse on nature and mind as found in the tathāgatagarbha-influenced texts such as the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith* and *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*—based on an argument that he had previously fleshed out in the *Simgiri pyeon* 心氣理篇. He provides textual examples from the *Śūramgama-sūtra* and from the writings of Jinul that show inconsistencies between the various accounts of the relation between mind 心 (K. *sim*) and nature 性 (K. *seong*). As Jeong shows in a series of citations, in one place, nature is equivalent to the mind; in another, it is an aspect of the mind, a principle contained in the mind; and then in another place, a function of the mind. Referring to the disparities and circular reasoning that he finds in the Buddhist descriptions of nature, he says:

The Buddhist explanations regarding nature are] all done based on nebulous supposition, rather than on explicit facts. The teachings of the Buddhists have lots of word play, but lack a definitive doctrine, and through this, their actual intentions can be understood. (SBJ 1.78b)

The Confucian teachings, are, by contrast, consistent from beginning to end. They clearly distinguish between the mind and its nature, between principle and external events. They allow for clear value and evaluation, with uniformity throughout.

1 A similar theme carries into the fourth chapter, where Jeong criti-
 2 cizes Buddhists, in this case, especially Chan Buddhists, for conflating the
 3 notion of nature with that of mundane function, citing the likes of Lay-
 4 man Pang, who said: “Hauling water and carrying firewood are nothing
 5 but marvelous function” (SBJ 1.78d). Jeong here relies on Zhu Xi, who
 6 said: “If you take functional activity to be [the same as] the nature, then
 7 are not peoples’ irresponsible actions such as taking a sword to mur-
 8 der someone and transgressing the Way [also] the nature?” (SBJ 1.79b).
 9 This line of argumentation is carried into chapter 6, where the focus is
 10 directly on the relationship between the mind and its external/functional
 11 manifestations. To clarify the Confucian position (which Jeong argues
 12 is rationally and metaphysically consistent), he cites the Mencian “four
 13 beginnings” (K. *sadan* 四端) that are innate to humans, along with their
 14 four directly associated manifest functions of humaneness (*in* 仁), pro-
 15 priety (*i* 禮), due-giving (*ui* 義), and wisdom (*ji* 智). The Buddhists, by
 16 contrast, espouse doctrines that dissociate the innate capacities of the
 17 mind from the manifestations of human activity. This chapter contains
 18 the passage that constitutes the crux of Jeong’s argument. He says:

19
 20 It is like the saying “essence and function spring from the
 21 same source; the manifest and the subtle have no gap between
 22 them.”²⁴ The Buddhist method of study addresses the mind,
 23 but does not address its manifestations. This can be seen in
 24 the Buddhist’s saying things like “The bodhisattva Mañjuśrī
 25 wanders through the taverns, but these activities are not his
 26 mind.” Excuses like this for sloppy behavior abound [in the
 27 Buddhist teachings]. Is this not a separation of the mind
 28 from its activities? Chengzi said: “The study of the Buddhists
 29 includes reverence to correct the internal, but does not include
 30 justice to straighten the external.”²⁵ Therefore those who are
 31 stuck in these [incorrect views] wither away. (SBJ 1.79c–d)

32
 33 Jeong’s critique runs through several chapters, addressing issues
 34 such as the Buddhists’ abandonment of societal obligations, perverted
 35 application of the notion of “compassion,” criticism of the idea of two
 36 levels of reality, the practice of begging, and most of all, the perceived
 37 escapist and nihilistic views of Chan. But all can be summarized with
 38 Jeong’s understanding of the components of the Buddhist doctrine to be
 39 disconnected from each other, of being contradictory, conveniently used
 40

for excusing responsibility, of not providing a viable system of values. 1
 Confucianism, by contrast, is completely aligned through essence and 2
 function, is unitary, without contradictions, and teaches a concrete system 3
 of values, articulating a clear relationship between inner and outer. 4

Hyeonjeong non 5
6

The section titles for the *Hyeonjeong non* are as follows:²⁶ 7
8

1. Prologue 9
10
2. Distinctions in Levels of Teaching 11
12
3. The Constant and the Expedient 13
4. Śākyamuni's Attainment of Freedom from Attachment 14
15
5. Societal Obligations 16
6. Harming Life 17
18
7. The Meaning of Humaneness 19
8. Drinking Alcohol 20
21
9. Making Offerings 22
10. Defense of the Doctrine of Karma and Rebirth 23
24
11. Defense of the Buddhist Practice of Cremation 25
12. Refutation of the Complaint against Buddhism as a Foreign Religion 26
27
28
13. Refutation of the Accusation of Buddhism as a Harbinger of Calamity 29
30
14. Refutation of the Accusation of Monks being Parasites 31
32
15. Refutation of the Charge of Decadence in the Saṃgha 33
16. Refutation of the Charges of Nihilism and Antinomianism 34
35
17. The Unity of the Three Teachings 36
37

To set the tone for his argument, Gihwa goes to some lengths to 38
 clarify the Buddhist position on the nature of the mind and the relevance 39
 40

1 and gradations of methods of practices—basically summarizing the view
 2 of mind that is expressed in the fundamental East Asian Buddhist scrip-
 3 tures, the *Awakening of Mahāyāna Faith*, *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*,
 4 etc. That is, the mind is originally pure, but when it moves into activity,
 5 it has the potential to be distorted. Gihwa opens the *Hyeonjeong non* by
 6 saying:

7
 8 Though its essence neither exists nor not-exists, it permeates
 9 existence and non-existence. Though it originally lacks past
 10 and present, it permeates past and present: this is the Dao.
 11 Existence and non-existence are based in nature and sentiency.
 12 Past and present are based in life-and-death. Nature originally
 13 lacks sentiency, but when you are confused about nature you
 14 give rise to sentiency; with the production of sentiency, wis-
 15 dom is blocked—thoughts transform, and the essence is dif-
 16 ferentiated. It is through this that the myriad forms take shape
 17 and life-and-death begin. (HBJ 7.217a)

18
 19 In this way, Gihwa starts off by grounding his argument in an
 20 essence-function view of the mind and its activities. The mind is origi-
 21 nally pure, but as it engages in situations, it can become entangled and
 22 enmeshed. As Zongmi had well-clarified more than five centuries earlier,
 23 for the purpose of recovering the original mind, Buddhism has a wide
 24 spectrum of practices, which range from the most expedient and super-
 25 ficial, to the most profound. In outlining the teaching starting from the
 26 most profound and extending to the most superficial teachings, Gihwa
 27 ends with the teaching of the law of cause-and-effect. As it was stated in
 28 the *Inquiry*, this teaching, however, no matter how superficial, is one level
 29 above the typical application of the Confucian teaching, which Gihwa
 30 defines as the mere conditioning of people through reward and punish-
 31 ment on the part of the state. But he later shifts his position and shows
 32 how the true, correctly understood Confucian teaching, when applied
 33 with the right understanding, can also extend to profound levels. Thus,
 34 Gihwa's validation of Confucianism extends considerably beyond that of
 35 Zongmi in his *Inquiry*.

36 The *Hyeonjeong non* is markedly conciliatory in tone compared to
 37 the *Japbyeon*. Gihwa has no intention of entirely discrediting the Confu-
 38 cian tradition. Rather, his aim is to point out the underlying unity of the
 39 three teachings and to see them as varying expressions of a mysterious
 40

unifying principle. What Gihwa will say, mostly, is not that the Confucian teachings are wrong, but that they serve an important purpose. Unfortunately, however, they have been incorrectly understood and practiced by even the most important figures of their own tradition.

Gihwa refutes the charges made against Buddhist practices that are seen to be antisocial, such as the abandonment of family relationships, by showing how they are actually helpful to society, rather than harmful, when practiced correctly. Responsibility for excesses indulged in by *saṃgha* members is laid upon the offenders as individuals making their own decisions, rather than upon the tradition as a whole. Jeong's criticisms of the Buddhist doctrines of karma and causation are dealt with by logical argumentation, by showing that the law of cause-and-effect cannot but be universally valid; criticisms of the doctrine of rebirth are defended with anecdotes of people who have memories of past lives.

The core of Gihwa's argument lies in the presentation of what he takes as common denominator of all three traditions (Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism): a doctrine of *humaneness* (K. *in*; 仁), based on the ubiquitously expressed assertion that the myriad living beings of the universe are deeply interlinked with one another. While the notion of the mutual containment of the myriad things is ostensibly Buddhist in origin, it ended up being one of the central tenets of the most influential of the Song Neo-Confucian founders, including Zhou Dunyi and the Cheng brothers, and especially Cheng Hao, who declared that "the myriad things and I form a single body."²⁷ With this being the characteristic and seminal Neo-Confucian development of the Confucian/Mencian "humaneness," Gihwa finds an inconsistency between what Confucians say and what they do, and makes this point the central issue of his essay.

Buddhism and (Neo-)Confucianism share the view that it is fundamentally wrong to harm others. Since others are intimately connected with oneself, harming others is the same as harming oneself. Buddhists have the doctrine of *ahiṃsā* (non-injury) at the core of their practice of moral discipline, and this is observed completely in all Buddhist practices. Confucians, on the other hand, take humaneness as the most fundamental element to their path of cultivation. Confucius himself continually referred to humaneness as the source of all forms of goodness. Mencius made it clear that humaneness was innate to all people, explaining its function through a variety of metaphors, the best known being that of the stranger who automatically rushes to prevent a toddler from falling into a well.

1 However, Gihwa says, the Confucian corpus is riddled with inconsis-
 2 tencies on this matter. For example, although Cheng Hao has told us that
 3 humaneness means that we form a single body with the myriad things,
 4 Confucius himself only went halfway in his practice of single-bodiedness,
 5 as he still enjoyed the sports of hunting and fishing.²⁸ For Mencius, the
 6 taking of the life of an animal was not problematic for the humane man,
 7 as long as he didn't hear the animal's screams in its death throes.²⁹ And,
 8 in general, the Confucian tradition fully endorsed the practices of ritual
 9 sacrifice. Gihwa says:

10

11 Since animals share, with people] the sense of aversion to
 12 being killed, how do they differ from human beings? With
 13 the sound of ripping flesh and the cutting of the knife, they
 14 are in utter fright as they approach their death. Their eyes are
 15 wild and they cry out in agony. How could they not harbor
 16 bitterness and resentment? And yet people are able to turn a
 17 deaf ear. In this way human beings and the creatures of the
 18 world affect each other without awareness and bring retribu-
 19 tion to each other without pause. How could a humane person,
 20 observing such suffering, continue to act as if nothing was
 21 wrong? (HBJ 7.220a–b)

22

23 As Gihwa goes on to tell us, it was precisely the difference on this
 24 point that turned him toward Buddhism during the time when he was
 25 weighing the two systems in the balance.

26

27 One time, during the period when I still had not yet entered
 28 the Buddhist order, a monk named Haeweol 海月 was reading
 29 the *Analects* to me. He reached the passage that says:

30

31 [Zi Gong asked:] “Suppose there were a ruler who ben-
 32 efitied the people far and wide and was capable of bringing sal-
 33 vation to the multitude; what would you think of him? Might
 34 he be called humane?” The Master said, “Why only humane?
 35 He would undoubtedly be a sage. Even Yao and Shun would
 36 have had to work hard to achieve this” (*Analects* 6:28).

36

37 He commented: “The humane man forms a single body
 38 with heaven and earth and the myriad things.” With this, he
 39 put the scroll aside and asked me: “Was Mencius a humane
 40 man?” “Yes,” I replied. “Are ‘fowl, pigs, dogs, and swine’ to be
 counted among the ‘myriad things?’” “Yes,” I replied. [Haewe-

ol continued, citing Cheng Hao:] “The humane man forms a
 single body with heaven and earth and the myriad things.”
 If this statement is to be taken as a true expression of the
 principle, how are we supposed to see Mencius as humane?
 If “fowl, pigs, dogs, and swine” are to be counted among the
 “myriad things” then how could Mencius say: “If, in the rais-
 ing of fowl, pigs, dogs, and swine, their breeding times are not
 missed, then people in their seventies can eat meat” (*Mencius*
 1A:3). I was completely stymied by this question, and could
 not answer. I pondered over all of the classical transmissions,
 and could not come up with a single text that could support
 a principle that condoned the taking of life. I inquired widely
 among the brightest thinkers of the day, but not one of them
 could offer an explanation that could resolve my perplexity.

This doubt remained buried within my mind for a long
 time without being resolved. Then, while traveling around
 Samgak-san in 1396, I arrived at Seunggasa 僧伽寺, where
 I had the chance to chat with an old Seon monk throughout
 the night. The monk said: “In Buddhism there are ten grave
 precepts, the first of which is to not take life.” Upon hearing
 this explanation, my mind was suddenly overturned, and I
 recognized for myself that this was indeed the behavior of the
 truly humane man. I was hereupon able to deeply embody
 the teachings of the Way of humanity. From this time forth,
 I was never again to be confused regarding the differences
 between Confucianism and Buddhism. I subsequently com-
 posed a verse, which went:

Up till now, knowing only the teachings of the classics and
 histories
 And the criticisms of the Chengs and Zhu,
 I was unable to recognize whether the Buddha was wrong or
 right.
 But after reflecting deep in my mind for long years,
 Knowing the truth for the first time, I reject [Confucianism]
 And take refuge in [the Buddhadharma]. (HBJ 7.220a3–18)

The charge, then, that Gihwa will lay on the Confucians, is strikingly
 similar to that which Jeong wants to apply the Buddhists, in that both
 want to show the other side to be guilty of inconsistency. The difference,

1 however, is that Jeong wants to point out inconsistencies in the Buddhist
 2 doctrine in itself, where Gihwa centers his argument on showing incon-
 3 sistencies between Confucian doctrine and practice. That is, Confucians
 4 say one thing, but do another. Gihwa's final pronouncement of his treatise,
 5 however, is the conclusion that the three teachings should be understood
 6 as three types of expression of the same reality. Here he no doubt had in
 7 mind the concluding chapter of the *Bulssi japbyeon*, "Criticism of the Dif-
 8 ferences between Buddhism and Confucianism" ("Yuseok dong-i ji byeon";
 9 儒釋同異之辨). There, Jeong gives a final summation of all the ways that
 10 the Buddhist teaching is vacuous and nihilistic and thus inferior to Con-
 11 fucianism, which is substantial and consistent throughout. Jeong says:

12

13 Prior Confucian scholars have [already] shown that the Con-
 14 fucian and Buddhist paths differ with every single phrase and
 15 every single situation. Here I will elaborate based on these. We
 16 say voidness, and they also say voidness. We say quiescence,
 17 and they also say quiescence. However, our voidness is void
 18 yet existent. Their voidness is void and non-existent. Our qui-
 19 escence is quiescent yet aware; their quiescence is quiescent
 20 and nihilating. We speak of knowledge and action; they speak
 21 of awakening and cultivation. Yet our knowledge is to know
 22 that the principle of the myriad things is replete in our own
 23 minds. Their awakening awakens to the fact that the mind
 24 is originally empty, lacking anything. Our action is to return
 25 to the principle of the myriad things and act according to it,
 26 without error. Their cultivation is to sever connection with
 27 the myriad things and regard them as unconnected to one's
 28 mind. (SBJ 1.84a)

29

30 Gihwa, in obvious reference to Jeong's summation, also concludes
 31 his own argument by focusing on these two concepts of voidness and
 32 quiescence (and this section provides the most solid evidence that Gihwa
 33 was most certainly responding to Jeong when he wrote this piece) by
 34 showing instead that the connotations of these terms are basically the
 35 same throughout all three traditions and that at their most fundamental
 36 level, the three are equally valid approaches to the same reality.

37

38 If you can grasp this, then the words of the three teachers
 39 fit together like the broken pieces of the same board—as if

40

they had all come out of the same mouth! If you would like
to actually demonstrate the high and low among these teach-
ings, exposing their points of similarity and difference clearly
in their actual function, then you must first completely wash
the pollution from your mind and completely clarify your eye
of wisdom. Then you can study all of the texts contained in
the Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist canons. Compare them
in your daily activities, at the times of birth and death, fortune
and misfortune. Without needing words, you will spontane-
ously nod in assent. How strong do I need to make my argu-
ment to get the prince to listen? (HBJ 7.225b)

The much softer stance of Gihwa can be attributed to various factors.
Throughout all of East Asia, it had never been part of the Buddhist agenda
to expend energy in debunking the Confucian tradition, which had been
so deeply a part of the fabric of Chinese and Korean society³⁰ Although
Gihwa, who had taken his literary training in a Confucian academy, even-
tually opted for Buddhism to complete his spiritual quest, he never lost
his deep respect for the more profound aspects of both Confucianism and
Daoism. Indeed, he cites from the Chinese classics with regularity in his
Buddhist commentaries. We might even imagine that it may have pained
him considerably to be forced into the position of having to criticize
Confucianism in the *Hyeonjeong non*.

Some Philosophical Observations on the Background of the Debate

The two texts that we have looked at above together represent a pivotal
moment in Korean intellectual history, and thus their titles and authors
are quite often known to modern-day Korean intellectuals from many
areas in the humanities—not only specialists in philosophy and religion.
But they are also important for the degree in which they encapsulate, to
some degree, much of the history of East Asian thought in general. They
can also be seen as important from the perspective of world philosophy
and religion in general, in the sense that they constitute a rational, sus-
tained, and substantive debate between members of different religious
or philosophical systems. This kind of debate between members of dif-
ferent religious traditions does not happen all that often in the world;

1 interactions between religious traditions are more often typified by out-
 2 right fighting, even war. Or superficial attempts at simple coexistence.
 3 This is because the phenomenon of interreligious debate necessarily
 4 includes certain conditions. One is basic physical proximity—the fact that
 5 the traditions are forced to compete with each other for adherents within
 6 the same society. This forces them to deal with each other, whether or
 7 not it is in an amiable manner.

8 But more important, for such debate to occur, is the existence of
 9 a shared worldview, a shared vocabulary, and some sharing in basic val-
 10 ues. We can see one of the best examples of such a situation in ancient
 11 India, where Buddhists, Jainas, Sāṃkhya, Vedantists, and members of
 12 other Indian philosophical traditions engaged with each other in public
 13 debate. They were able to do this based on the fact that they shared a
 14 number of important principles in their worldviews: belief in the eternal
 15 return of the soul; belief in the liberation of the human being through
 16 the practice of a path (*mārga*) and the following of a proper set of beliefs
 17 (*darśana*). They even went as far as to agree upon some ground rules of
 18 debate, known as *nyāya*.

19 In similar fashion, the Confucians and Buddhists—as well as the
 20 Daoists in East Asia—clearly shared in some important principles. And
 21 perhaps it takes someone who comes from outside of the tradition to see it
 22 from a removed vantage point, but this reader at least, picks up in this dis-
 23 course a clear sharing of a principle, that of *ti-yong*, or essence-function.

24 Essence-function is a characteristic traditional East Asian way
 25 of interpreting the world, society, events, phenomena, and the human
 26 being, that understands all things to have two contrasting, yet wholly
 27 contiguous and mutually containing aspects: (1) an underlying, deeper,
 28 more fundamental, hidden aspect, called in Chinese *ti* (體 K. *che*) usu-
 29 ally translated into English as “essence,” or “substance,” and (2) a visibly
 30 manifest, surface aspect, called *yong* (用 K. *yong*) translated into English
 31 as “function,” “activity,” or “manifestation.” This pair has many analogs
 32 in East Asian thought, one of the earliest and most readily recognizable
 33 being the “roots and branches” paradigm taught in the *Great Learning*
 34 (*Daxue* 大學), epitomized in the line that says “Things have their roots
 35 and branches, affairs have their end and beginning. When you know what
 36 comes first and what comes last, then you are near the Way.” It can also
 37 be seen in Confucianism in the pair of “nature” (Ch. *xing* 性) and “emo-
 38 tions” (Ch. *qing* 情) which are foregrounded in the opening passage of the
 39
 40

Doctrine of the Mean, as well as the relationship between “humaneness” and “propriety” 禮 (Ch. *li*; K. *ye*) taught in the *Analects*.³¹

In the *Daode jing*, analogous pairs abound that express the dynamic relation of inner/outer, or fundamental/superficial, most prominent among these being the notions of the Way 道 (Ch. *dao*) and its power 德 (Ch. *de*), as well as the “white” 白 (Ch. *bai*) and the “black” 黑 (Ch. *hei*),³² the uncarved block 樸 (Ch. *pu*) and the implements carved from it 器 (Ch. *qi*), etc. Later on, when Buddhism becomes thoroughly Sinicized, the same paradigm finds expression in a general manner in the pairs of nature 性 (Ch. *xing*)/aspects 相 (Ch. *xiang*), and in specifically in Huayan Buddhism, principle 理 (Ch. *li*) and phenomena 事 (Ch. *shi*).³³

If we reflect on the two treatises presented above, we can see that although their positions differ regarding practice and interpretation of the doctrine, both Jeong and Gihwa fully agree on the basic essence-function structure of the human being, human development, and practice. Both assume the existence of a good mind that can be developed to a high level of purity and wisdom by engagement in a given set of practices. And they both must operate within the basic vocabulary of roots and branches, nature and emotions, principle and material force, or—essence and function. Neither proponent says that the other’s *categories* are wrong—the categories themselves are accepted. It is in their interpretation and practice that they are wrong. Jeong accuses the Buddhists of being inconsistent in their definitions of these terms. Gihwa accuses the Confucians of being inconsistent in terms of doctrine and practice. But they are functioning in the same worldview, and thus they can argue.

Conclusion

Modern scholarship in both Korea and the West has long gotten past the mistaken perception that Buddhism was entirely suppressed during the Joseon Dynasty, as political leaders as well as ordinary people openly engaged in Buddhist practice.³⁴ The Confucian arguments had been pretty much exhausted in the *Bulssi japbyeon*, and no major polemical publications appeared from the Confucian side afterward. Buddhists, on the other hand, fully adopted Gihwa’s “essential unity of the three teachings” approach. The most important representative work of this type is Hyujeong’s *Samga Gwigam* 三家龜鑑³⁵ which takes the three teachings as

1 fitting together to form a large system of spiritual cultivation. Buddhism
 2 is taken as a more essential (*ti, che*) teaching, Confucianism as a more
 3 functional (*yong*) teaching, with Daoism occupying the place in between.
 4 It can be said that this general view of the three teachings has prevailed
 5 down to the present day.

Notes

- 10 1. The extensive mutual influence that occurred between Buddhism and
 11 Daoism is examined in depth in Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism*.
 12 2. Charles Hartman's *Han Yü and the T'ang Search for Unity* (Princeton,
 13 1986), provides an excellent study of Han's life and works.
 14 3. A translation by Bryan Van Norden is online at [http://faculty.vassar.edu/brvannor/Phil210/HanYu/On the Origin of the Way.pdf](http://faculty.vassar.edu/brvannor/Phil210/HanYu/On%20the%20Origin%20of%20the%20Way.pdf).
 15 4. Translated in many anthologies. See for example, de Bary, *Sources of*
 16 *Chinese Tradition*, 583–585. Jeong Dojeon makes extensive use of these two essays
 17 in the final passages of his *Bulssi japbyeon*.
 18 5. See Gregory, *Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity*, 35–36.
 19 6. See *Message of the Mind*, 17.
 20 7. The point is often made in present-day Chan historical scholarship that
 21 despite Chan's anti-textual rhetoric, Chan adherents ended up composing a voluminous literature that would be studied by succeeding generations. While this is true, we must still pay due consideration to the actual message of this literature, which points to a Buddhist teaching that emphasizes simplicity, intuitiveness, and directness in daily activity and which invariably casts "sutra-lecturers" in an inferior role to Chan masters of the "great function" 大用.
 22 8. The four books of Confucian learning selected by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–
 23 1200) as a core curriculum during the Song period. These are the *Analects* (*Lunyu*
 24 論語), the *Mencius* (*Mengzi* 孟子), the *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學), and the
 25 *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong* 中庸).
 26 9. This canon was authorized by the emperor in 51 BCE and included the
 27 *Book of Poems* (*Shijing* 詩經), the *Book of Documents* (*Shujing* 書經), the *Book*
 28 *of Changes* 易經 (*Yijing*), the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu* 春秋), and
 29 the *Record of Ritual* (*Liji* 禮記).
 30 10. For a study of Zhou Dunyi, especially in the all-important context of
 31 his relationship to Zhu Xi, see Adler, *Reconstructing the Confucian DAO*.
 32 11. It must be kept in mind here that when we say "Buddhism," we are
 33 referring specifically to the Chan Buddhism of the Song, which is a distinctive
 34 form of Buddhism.
 35 12. The works of these two scholars are available in Chinese, but so far we
 36 do not have any translations of their works, other than small selected portions
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- contained in anthologies. The largest is that contained in Wing-tsit Chan's *Source Book*, 518–571. 1
13. See *ibid.*, 554–555. 2
14. In using the term “exclusivism” here, I refer especially to the landmark work done on this topic by John Goulde in his 1984 PhD dissertation, “Anti-Buddhist Polemic in Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century Korea: The Emergence of Korean Exclusivism.” In this work Goulde traces the developments of the Neo-Confucian polemic from their Chinese roots, through their failures and successes in Korea, to their final culmination in the creation of the Joseon Dynasty (1392–1910). 3
15. See Goulde, “Anti-Buddhist Polemic,” 166–192, for a detailed description of the lives and works of the five above-mentioned figures, and others. 4
16. For a comprehensive treatment of Jeong Dojeon, see Han Yeong-u, *Jeong Dojeon sasang ui yeon-gu*. In English, see Chai-shik Chung, “Chōng Tojōn: ‘Architect’ of Yi Dynasty Government and Ideology.” Also see the discussion of Jeong in the chapter “The Ideology of Reform” in John Duncan, *The Origins of the Chosōn Dynasty*. 5
17. My English translation of this text is available in Muller (2015) in the Korean Classics series. Muller, A. Charles. *Korea's Great Buddhist-Confucian Debate: The Treatises of Chōng Tojōn (Sambong) and Hamho Tūkt'ong (Kihwa)*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015. 6
18. Translated into English a few times, most recently and masterfully by Peter Gregory in 1995 with the title “Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity.” 7
19. The *Sutra of Trapuṣa and Bhallika*. Not extant, but cited in many old texts. It is a Chinese indigenous sutra composed by Tanjing 曇靖 of the Northern Wei Dynasty during the reign period of Emperor Xiaowu of the Liu-Song Dynasty (453–464) in two fascicles. The text takes its name from its two main protagonists, merchants called Trapuṣa and Bhallika. These merchants are known elsewhere in the tradition. In the *Diwei Boli jing*, the two are described as well versed in knowledge of *yin* and *yang*, divination using tortoise-shells, and the *Yijing*. They meet the Buddha immediately after his awakening, and he teaches them that those who keep the five precepts will be reborn as human, while those who do the ten good deeds will be reborn in a heaven as a god (hence the name of the teaching, *rentian jiao* 人天, for which the text was known in the doctrinal taxonomies of the period; see below); persons who commit various misdeeds will be born into the unfortunate destinies. The ten good deeds are correlated with the five Confucian virtues 五常; they are also correlated with various other sets of five, after the manner of the tradition of correlative cosmology native to Chinese culture. 8
20. The present-day Seongyun'gwan University in Seoul traces its roots to this academy. 9
21. A reference to Zhou Gongdan 周公旦 and Shao Gong 召公, two worthies who are said to have cooperated in the establishment of the Zhou Dynasty. 10

1 This passage is from the biographical sketch of Gihwa, entitled “Hamheo tang
2 Deuktong hwasang haengjang,” HBJ 7.250c6–11.

3 22. Gihwa’s extant writings are contained in volume seven of the *Hanguk*
4 *Bulgyo Jeonseo*. One of his major works, his commentary on the *Sutra of Perfect*
5 *Enlightenment*, is translated and published by Muller with the same title, and
6 his *Hyeonjeong non* is translated in Muller together with the *Bulssi japbyeon*. In
7 terms of Gihwa’s connection with Zongmi, the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* is
8 of great significance, as it was Zongmi’s favorite text, which he commented on
9 extensively. In Korea, it was Gihwa who wrote the definitive commentary on the
10 sutra. Thus, Gihwa and Zongmi are closely linked in terms of mutual interest.

11 23. I stress this point in view of the fact that Han Yeong-u explicitly stated
12 that “the *Hyeonjeong non* is *not* a refutation of the *Bulssi japbyeon*.” See Han’s
13 *Jeong Dojeon*, 53, note. I see Han’s view as being accurate only in a very strict
14 sense. It is no doubt true that Gihwa did not sit down upon the publication of
15 the *Japbyeon* and write an immediate, point-by-point rebuttal. In 1398, when
16 Jeong wrote the *Japbyeon*, Gihwa would have been twenty-two, a mere novice in
17 Buddhism. Yet even though Gihwa never directly names Jeong or his treatise, the
18 fact that Jeong was a faculty member of the Seongyun’gwan at the time that Gihwa
19 was a student would make it a virtual impossibility for Gihwa not to have read
20 the text. Furthermore, in the *HJN* Gihwa directly replies to all of the *Japbyeon*’s
21 accusations, using mimicry that directly alludes to Jeong’s text.

22 24. In Zhu Xi’s *Chuanxilu* 體用一原、顯微無間 is identified as a citation
23 from Cheng Yi, but I have not yet located it.

24 25. “Correcting the internal with reverence, correcting the external with
25 due-giving.” is a repeated aphorism found in the texts of the Cheng brothers, Zhu
26 Xi, and many other Neo-Confucianism writers, originally drawn from the *Yijing*:
27 in the text of *kun* 坤, the second hexagram. See Wilhelm, 393.

28 26. Note that unlike the *Bulssi japbyeon*, the *Hyeonjeong non* does not have
29 its own section headings supplied by its author. The heading titles below are my
30 own suggestions.

31 27. *Henan Er Cheng yishu*, 15. Also see Wing-tsit Chan, *A Sourcebook in*
32 *Chinese Philosophy*, 530, sec. 11. No doubt Gihwa focuses on this particular cita-
33 tion partly because it comes from the same section of Cheng Hao’s *Yishu* that
34 contains most of the philosophical arguments that form the basis for Jeong’s
35 arguments in the *Japbyeon*.

36 28. *Analects* 7:27 says: “When fishing, the Master would not use a net; when
37 hunting, he would not shoot at a perched bird.”

38 29. *Mencius* 1A:7 says: “The Superior Man keeps his distance from the
39 kitchen, for if he hears the screams of slaughtered beasts, he cannot stand to eat
40 their meat.”

41 30. A good example for this point is the *Inquiry*, which includes an impor-
42 tant chapter on the relationship of the three teachings. While Zongmi includes

Confucianism and Daoism in the status of a lower order than the Buddhist teachings, they are nonetheless taken to be part of a continuum of ultimately valid teachings. Like Gihwa, Zongmi was noted for the depth of his Confucian learning prior to his entering the Buddhist order.

31. Those who are familiar with the influential little book *The Secular as Sacred*, written a generation ago by Herbert Fingarette, will recognize that I am here disagreeing with the central tenet expressed in that work—that it is the concept of propriety that is most fundamental to the worldview of the Confucian classics, with *ren* having only secondary significance. Fingarette was duly praised for his interesting and profound analyses regarding the pervasiveness of the unconscious uses of propriety, not only in ancient Chinese society, but society in general. But in his prioritization of *li* over *ren*, he ignores a mountain of evidence in the Confucian classical texts that belies his position, as the textual evidence in the *Analects* that points to a greater “psychological interiority” for *ren* than the other virtues of the sage or *junzi* is overwhelming. And to merely state that *ren* is more internal, deeper than the other virtues is to stop short—as the relation between *ren* and the other virtues is quintessentially *tiyong* in its nature.

32. It is notable that in traditional East Asian thought, the relationship of black and white markedly distinguished from the common association seen in the West where black tends to be associated with evil and white with good. From the earliest periods of East Asian history, black (also written with the ideograph *xuan* 玄) has the connotations of depths, profundity, mastery, etc., while white tends to be associated with superficiality.

33. On the role of *li* in Chinese thought, see Ziporyn, “Coherence.”

34. A recent solid treatment of this issue can be seen in Sem Vermeersch, “Yi Seong-gye and the Fate of the Goryeo Buddhist System.”

35. English translation by Lee Yong-ho (1993).

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Abbreviations

HBJ = Hanguk Bulgyo Jeonseo 韓國佛經全書
 SBJ = Sambong Jip 三峯集
 T = Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō 大正新脩大藏經

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16 T 1666.

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