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attributed to Nichiren but apparently penned by his later followers. In short, original enlightenment discourse that came in vogue in the middle and later medieval period was a factor that loomed large in the milieu within which Nichiren's followers were challenged and called upon to expound their sect's doctrine and its soteriological import, in its practical and theoretical implications, as they responded to questions and concerns of their contemporaries. It was against this backdrop that writings produced by followers of Nichiren several generations later were attributed to their founder, lending them the weight of his authority. An ongoing task for scholars and other scholars face, of sifting through these writings to determine "authentic" Nichiren writings from others, is given a fresh angle of approach with Stone's suggestions. In this regard, the publication of the revised version of her doctoral dissertation,⁷ which addresses this very issue, now in process, will undoubtedly provide another gem to the academic world.

To conclude, a would-be reader's expectations are heightened by the blurbs on the back cover, celebrating this volume as "one of the most important academic books ever published on Japanese Buddhism (Carl Bielefeldt)," "a major contribution to the field of Buddhist studies and to our understanding of Japanese culture in general (William Bodiford)," "one of the most important books on Japanese Buddhism ever written (Paul Groner)." A careful reading and re-reading by this reviewer has only served to confirm the aptness of the superlatives lavished by the above colleagues, themselves pace-setting scholars of Japanese Buddhism, on this monumental work of Professor Stone.

Charles Muller, trans. *The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment: Korean Buddhism's Guide to Meditation (with Commentary by the Sōn Monk Kihwa)*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999.

JIN YOUNG PARK

Reading Charles Muller's new book is an interesting experience of hearing an orchestration of triple voices of an American Buddhist scholar, a Korean commentator and a Chinese Buddhist text. Simply put, the book is Muller's translation of Kihwa's 己和 (1376–1433) commentary on the *Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment* (Ch. *Yüan chüeh ching* 圓覺經 [SPE]). The end result, however, far exceeds a mere sum

⁷ Jacqueline I. Stone, *Some Disputed Texts in the Nichiren Corpus: Textual, Hermeneutical, and Historical Problems*. (Ann Arbor, 1990).

of these three. One reason lies in the way that Kihwa and Muller structured their commentaries (and translator's notes). By putting the original *Sūtra*, Kihwa's commentary and translator's notes plus Chinese text of the *SPE* (for those who read Chinese) in the main text, Muller has successfully created a unique book which provides a living history of the religion. The book evidences the dissemination of Buddhist texts which has taken more than two thousand years and which is still going on in the process of their Americanization. The three different voices in the text show different concerns of Buddhism in different time periods, providing the reader with a diachronic approach to the development of Buddhist tradition.

First recorded around the beginning of the 8th century, the *SPE* has been one of the most influential texts in East Asian Buddhism. It addresses the main concern of an East Asian Buddhist, namely, the nature of Enlightenment. From the first chapter to the last, the *Sūtra* painstakingly investigates such issues as Buddhahood, ignorance, skillful means, meditations, sudden and gradual approaches to enlightenment.

These are also the main concern of the commentator Kihwa (Hamhō Tūkt'ong 涵虛得通), a prominent Korean monk during the early Chosŏn period (1392-1910). Kihwa, however, has other missions he felt obliged to undertake in the context of Korean Buddhism in his time, one of which was the integration of Kyo 教 (doctrinal school) and Sŏn 禪 (meditational school). By providing eloquent commentaries on each paragraph of the *Sūtra* with detailed explanation about the flow of the text at the beginning of each section, Kihwa seems to have wanted to prove to his contemporaries the possibility of both theoretical approach to meditation and integration of meditation within Buddhist doctrine. Muller further explains this situation by saying that Kihwa in this commentary "integrates the 'Sŏn' meditation experience into 'Kyo' scholarly activity" (p. 32) while in other works, he asserts that "Kyo" is included in "Sŏn."

The main concern of the translator is again different from those of the *Sūtra* itself and its 14th century commentator. In a brief section, "The Future, the West, the Practitioner," Muller suggests the possible role of this *Sūtra* (and Kihwa's commentary and his translation) in the contemporary Western religious and scholarly scene as he states: "the *SPE* has potential value in modern Western Buddhism as an instructional tool" (p. 39). Criticizing the Western approach to Zen with its ahistorical, aphilsophical and alinguistic emphasis as "a somewhat imbalanced modern transformation of certain narrow aspects of Japanese Zen" (p. 39), Muller asserts that a long period of philosophical and scriptural training is a prerequisite for the effective functioning of such a well known Zen method as *kungan* 公案 (Jp. *kōan*; Kor. *kongan*). To argue that Zen enlightenment is conditioned by scriptural study without first distinguishing between the rationale of Zen Buddhism and its historical development can be misleading. However, Muller's criticism of of the blind emphasis on a "pure experience" outside history, philosophy, and language found in

Western Zen is well taken, and his warning against the danger of practicing *kōan* without proper understanding of Buddhist doctrine is timely. Like Kihwa who wanted to provide a doctrinal guideline of Sŏn meditation through his commentary on the *SPE*, Muller wishes his translation to fill the gap between modern Western Zen practitioners and Buddhist doctrine – a twentieth century version of the integration of meditational and doctrinal schools.

The book consists of three sections: Introduction, Translation of the *Sūtra* with Kihwa's Commentary, and the Appendix which offers a complete translation of the *SPE* as corrected by Kihwa.

In the Introduction, Muller explores the meaning and position of the *SPE* within the East Asian Buddhist tradition. Like other "indigenous texts" created during the period of the "East Asian-ization" of Buddhism such as the *Treatise on Awakening Mahāyāna Faith* (*Ta-sheng ch'i-hsin lun*) and the *Sūtra of the Heroic March Samādhi* (*Śūraṅgama-sūtra*), the *SPE* shows distinctively East Asian metaphysical and soteriological concerns. Two of its major themes are the seeming conflict between the *ālayavijñāna* ("receptacle consciousness") and the *tathāgatagarbha* ("embryonic *tathāgata*") theories regarding human nature and that between subitism and gradualism with regard to enlightenment. The *ālayavijñāna* doctrine claims that the fundamental human mind is defiled/ignorant, while the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine teaches the innate buddha-nature of sentient beings. If sentient beings are originally defiled, how is enlightenment possible? And if sentient beings are originally buddhas, why is practice necessary? Practitioners constantly ask these questions, unable to resolve the contradictory claims made by different Buddhist teachings. The subitist-gradualist conflict further adds to the confusion. The former claims that enlightenment is sudden (this position is well articulated in the *Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch* among other texts), while the latter emphasizes unceasing practice as a precondition for enlightenment. To the subitist, the gradual approach is dangerous, for it enhances dualistic views, while the gradualist criticizes subitism for its lack of concern for those without the capacity to realize enlightenment instantaneously.

Muller introduces the "essence-function" structure (Ch. *t'i-yung* 體用; Kor. *ch'e-yong*), a major hermeneutic tool employed by the authors of the East Asian Buddhist texts, and applies the idea to his interpretation of the way the *SPE* resolves the above mentioned conflicts. Sentient beings are "pure" (empty, enlightened) at the level of "essence," while individual differences occur according to the different functioning of "essence." Since all sentient beings are originally perfect Buddha, enlightenment is sudden in its "essence," but because in reality the "essence" is not properly manifested in the functions, enlightenment is gradual.

Having established the position of the *SPE* in the context of East Asian Buddhism, Muller surveys its influence on Korean Buddhism before and after Kihwa. Though the text is first recorded in the Chinese *K'ai-yüan Catalogue of*

Buddhist Texts in 726, no reference to the *SPE* is found in Korean Buddhist literature until the time of Ŭich'ŏn 義天 (1055–1101). The reason, Muller speculates, was the strong anti-scriptural attitude of early Korean Sŏn Buddhism. As in the case of many other aspects of Korean Buddhism, Pojo Chinul 普照知訥 (1158–1210) exerted the greatest influence on the fate of the *SPE* in Korea. Both Ŭich'ŏn and Chinul, as much as Kihwa himself, turned to the *SPE* in their attempts to integrate the doctrinal and meditational schools. As Muller notes, the popularity of the text also cannot be separated from the fact that Tsung-mi 宗密 (780–841), a patriarch of the Chinese Hua-yen sect who greatly influenced Korean Buddhism, wrote the *Great Commentary on the Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment*, and placed a greater value on the *SPE* than *Hua-yen ching* 華嚴經. This historical situation, as well as the ecumenical nature of the text, has made the *SPE* one of the most frequently cited text in Korea. It is cited by Hyesim 慧湛 (1178–1234), T'aego Pou 太古普愚 (1301–82) and Hyujŏng 休靜 (1520–1604) in addition to Ŭich'ŏn, Chinul and Kihwa. It has also served as a major text for the Chogye 曹溪 order.

The *SPE* consists of questions by twelve Bodhisattvas and the Buddha's answers to them. The structure of the *Sūtra* embodies the themes it treats. The earlier chapters are written in accordance with the subitist approach. As the *Sūtra* moves on, however, it tends toward gradualism, and provides a step by step guide to meditation and practice. Accordingly earlier chapters emphasize the original Buddha-nature of sentient beings, while later chapters explain how to remove obstacles, maladies and so on.

In the Introduction to his Commentary, Kihwa provides a detailed explanation of the first five words of the title of the *SPE* (i.e., great-curative-extensive-perfect-enlightenment) which clearly reveals the central themes of this commentary. "Great" means the greatness of enlightenment's essence, its attributes and its function; "curative" connotes the stopping of restraint, repose and absolute negation; "extensive" implies the extensiveness of the practices to improve oneself, to improve others and to equalize self and others; "perfect" indicates the perfection of self-enlightenment, of others, and absolute perfection; finally, "enlightenment" refers to innate enlightenment, actualized enlightenment and the enlightenment of the nonduality of innate and actualized enlightenment. In a similar manner, Kihwa divides the *SPE* into four sections: the first chapter clarifies "greatness" based on the practice of faith-understanding; the following eight chapters from Samantabhadra (chapter 2) to Purifier of Karmic Hindrances (chapter 9) explain the practices of self-improvement; Universal Enlightenment (chapter 10) discusses "extensiveness" in terms of the practice of improving others; finally Perfect Enlightenment (chapter 11) explains "perfection" based on the practice of realization and transformation.

The twelve chapters of the *Sūtra* evolve on the leitmotif of practice and enlightenment. Like thematic variations in music, the *Sūtra* repeatedly comes back to the

issue of Buddha-nature, ignorance, skillful means and so on, placing them in a different context each time and adjusting its discourse to the different levels of sentient beings. Kihwa tirelessly and lucidly explains why similar issues are repeatedly asked by different bodhisattvas, why the Buddha accepts them and how the questions are related to one another.

The *Sūtra* opens with the most important and basic question in Buddhism: how does one attain enlightenment? The ground of enlightenment is the same for both the buddhas and sentient beings. The difference lies in the fact that the latter are tainted with false thinking, i.e., ignorance, while the former is free from it. Responding to the question by Mañjuśrī concerning the causal stage of Tathāgata, the Buddha emphasizes the importance of severing ignorance in realizing the “perfect illumination of the attributes of pure enlightenment” (p. 77). Once one understands that ignorance lacks substance and thus is empty like a flower in the sky, the person will know that there is neither transmigration nor body and mind to go through life and death. Kihwa interprets this teaching as a teaching for arousing “faith,” the faith in the nonduality of Buddha and sentient beings and the faith in the emptiness of ignorance. Empty though everything might be, how would an individual realize this emptiness and thereby perfect enlightenment in actual life? The question plays a key role in the development of the *SPE*, for the unmistakably subitist tone in the first chapter changes as the text unravels in order to respond to and encompass various levels of sentient beings in real life.

Samantabhadra Bodhisattva asks in the second chapter: “How should we practice?” (p. 81). If everything, including practice, is illusion, how does a sentient being attain enlightenment? This perennial problem is caused by the nondualistic nature of the Buddhist teaching in the dualistic world. Practice in this sense is synonymous with faith, for practice in an ultimate sense is not possible without the faith that there is neither cultivation nor consummation, that purity pervades everything in the world, and eventually that “all sentient beings are originally perfect buddhas; *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are like last night’s dream” (p. 116).

“Awakening,” “practice,” and “correct contemplation which results in realization” are explained in the first four chapters, but not everyone is able to grasp them all at once. Hence, the following chapters will revisit these issues for those who are of middling or inferior capacities and those who still cannot remove doubts about these teachings. Vajragarbha Bodhisattva repeats the question on the “paradox of coexistence of enlightenment and ignorance” and the Buddha answers once again by explaining the futility of the discrimination using the simile of sky-flowers. Maitreya further asks about the process of practice, especially about how to sever the root of transmigration, to which the Buddha responds by teaching the need to cut off attachment, desire, the Two Hindrances and the Five Natures. The question of the distinctions between sentient beings, bodhisattva, and Tathāgatas is asked again by Pure Wisdom, and the equality of all these stages is again emphasized with a

warning that they are equal only when one is able to see that “all hindrances are none other than ultimate enlightenment” (p.162). As Kihwa explains, “the nature of *bodhi* lacks acquisition and realization; it also lacks enlightenment and delusion. It is only in regard to awareness or nonawareness, elimination or nonelimination of the Four Marks that there are distinctions of level such as ‘worlding’, ‘worthy’, ‘sage’, and ‘fruition” (p. 165).

After repeatedly emphasizing the Buddha-nature within sentient beings and the reality of their defilement, the *Sūtra* now expounds three types of meditation as expedient methods for realizing Buddhahood: *śamatha* (“cessation” or “calm abiding”), *samāpatti* (“analytical meditation” or “observing meditation”) and *dhyāna* (“cessation-extinction”). When Voice of Discernment Bodhisattva asks how one should apply these meditations, the Buddha provides twenty-five variations in the applications of the above mentioned three meditations. The twenty-five methods are like “the finger pointing to the moon” and these teachings are eventually summed up within the practice of *śīla*, *samādhi* and *prajñā*, the so-called Three Practices. Purifier of All Karmic Hindrances Bodhisattva again raises the issue of original enlightenment versus the defilements of sentient beings, and the Buddha this time answers by expounding on the four traces of “self,” “person,” “sentient being,” and “life.” At the end of the chapter the Buddha advises sentient beings of the degenerate age who hope to attain enlightenment to remove the four traces and find a good teacher. Such individuals will gradually attain Buddhahood. Now the gradualism becomes complete.

The chapters on Universal Enlightenment Bodhisattva and Perfect Enlightenment Bodhisattva are the consummation of the *Sūtra*’s gradualism since they discuss the expedient means explained in the previous chapters. The Buddha begins by warning against the Four Maladies (Contrivance, Naturalist, Stopping and Annihilation) while emphasizing once again the need to work with a genuine teacher. And for those who still have difficulty in following the teachings, Buddha advises the use of such expedient means as retreats, rituals and repentance. To the last moment, the *Sūtra* does not lose its hope to save even the one last sentient being of the lowest capacity, for we read: “If subsequent sentient beings of the degenerate age of dull faculties desire in their hearts to attain the Way, but somehow always fall short of their goal, it is because of karmic hindrances from the past. They must strive for repentance and confession and continuously re-arouse their hopes” (p. 237). Such ceaseless efforts to reach out to all levels of practitioners, addressing their difficulties, confusions, and doubts, must have been the attractions of this text to those Sōn monk-scholars who wanted to provide a scriptural guideline to their practitioners.

As Muller acknowledges, Kihwa is “possessed by a strong poetic streak.” Readers will find Kihwa’s commentary exceptionally well written, lucid and enjoyable to read. It is especially so when we compare this to commentaries replete with various numerical categories and lists, so common in the Buddhist tradition, which

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more often than not confuse modern readers.

This book can be treated as a companion piece to Muller's doctoral dissertation, "Hamhō Kihwa: A Study of His Major Works," which studies other works by Kihwa and places him in the "syncretic" tendency of Korean Buddhism along with his predecessors, Wōnhyo and Chinul. Everyone who wants to understand the core of East Asian Buddhism will benefit from reading *The Sūtra of Perfect Enlightenment: Korean Buddhism's Guide to Meditation*. It is an especially welcome addition to the library of Korean Buddhism in the English language.