HYUJÔNG’S SÔN’GA KWIGAM AND ITS HISTORICAL SETTING AND SOTEROLOGICAL STRATEGIES

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The purpose of this paper is to inquire into the historical setting of and soteriological strategies in Hyujông’s (Sôsan) Sôn’ga kwigam 禪家龜鑑 (Speculum on the Sôn [Meditation] School), which was published in 1564 and was his response to contemporary historical and intellectual milieus. With this in mind, this article focuses on an examination of his strategies in the historical context and his soteriological approaches for people of inferior spiritual faculty, including the recitation of the Buddha’s name and the incantation of spells.¹

Hyujông, better known in Korea as Sôsan taesa 西山大師 (Great Master Sôsan), was one of the most highly venerated Sôn 禪 (Ch. Chân, J. Zen) monks in the history of Korean Buddhism. He was also emblematic of Buddhist leaders during the Chosôn 朝鮮 Dynasty (1392–1910) who sought to respond to Confucian pressures. He was also the man from whom much of the rest of the subsequent lineage of Chosôn Buddhism derives, thus having served as the grandfather of modern Korean Buddhism (Buswell 1999:135–46).

In his treatment of Hyujông, Robert Buswell sought to explore how Hyujông attempted to respond to the ideological critiques of his religion by rival Confucians and what forms of Buddhist thought and practice Hyujông believed would be the most appropriate in the suppressive environment within which Buddhism was forced to exist (Buswell 1999:134–159). I have previously discussed Hyujông’s approaches to enlightenment in terms of Buddhist soteriology in the Korean context based on the Speculum on the Sôn School (Kim 2006a:78–108); however, despite a plethora of extant materials,

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Korean Buddhism after Hyujöng remains one of the most under-researched areas in Korean Buddhist studies and deserves much more attention than it has so far gleaned from scholars (Buswell 1999: 159).

Based on the text-based approach, this paper is composed of three sections. The first section of this paper discusses Hyujöng’s works and the major contents of his Speculum on the Sŏn School. An examination of the references of Hyujöng’s Speculum on the Sŏn School, the ontological basis of his soteriology, and the issue of the sanction of spiritual achievement manifests that his soteriology was a product of the historical setting in which he lived, rather than that of his philosophical reasoning (Kim 2006a:99). Then, the second section of this paper discusses Hyujöng’s strategies in the composition of his most important work in the historical context. Hyujöng’s soteriology starts with his understanding of human existence of his time (Kim 2006a:84). And finally, the third section investigates his soteriological strategies, in particular, for people of dull faculty. The unity of the Three Religions, i.e., Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism, and the harmonization of Sŏn and Kyo 救 (‘Doctrine’) constitute the essence of Hyujöng’s thought in his Speculum on the Sŏn School.²

Hyujöng’s Buddhist thought is classified into the following three categories: ontology, phenomenology and soteriology. His discussion of soteriology³ in the Speculum on the Sŏn School is much longer than that of ontology and phenomenology, demonstrating that his primary concern was with soteriology (Kim 2006a:104–105). ⁴

Hyujöng emphasizes the significance of self-awakening. However, he views that skillful means are also necessary because there are both

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² For a concise guide to the ideas of Hyujöng, see Kim 1995:418–421. For a more detailed discussion of this subject, see Buswell 1999 and Kim 2006a: 81–84.

³ Ontology refers to the theory of existence, phenomenology to that of phenomena, and soteriology to that of salvation. Buddhism does not view any existence as a substantial entity. Therefore, the terms of ontology and phenomenology are not appropriate for Buddhism. However, these two terms were employed in this paper to designate the original mind-nature of human beings and human reality, respectively, for the sake of convenience. Though derived from Christianity, the notion of soteriology is in use in Buddhist academe to refer to paths towards the Buddhist goal.

⁴ For the process of Hyujöng’s soteriology, see Kim 2006a:84–94; for a comparative analysis of Hyujöng’s soteriology with Wŏnhyo’s 元曉 (617–686) and Chinul’s 知諦 (1158–1210), refer to Kim 2006a:95–98.