

The Centerpiece of the Goryeo-Joseon
Buddhist-Confucian Confrontation: A Comparison of
the Positions of the *Bulssi japbyeon* and the
Hyeonjeong non

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**Introduction: Essence-Function and the Prominence of
"Theological" Debate in the Korean Philosophico-Religious
Tradition**

One of the most predominant characteristics of Korean philosophical thought is its proclivity for subtle intellectual debate regarding fundamental philosophico-religious principles—that is, phenomenological issues that deal with the origins of evil and goodness, soteriology, ethics, and so forth. This Korean tendency toward debate of philosophical issues tends to fall into a well-defined and distinctly repeated pattern of discourse: that of essence-function (*che-yong* 体用).¹

¹ This is not to say that the intellectual history of Korea's two closest neighbors, Japan and China, is not marked with "theological" debate. The difference, however, is in the degree to which the tradition has come to be *define* by such debates. That is, when one begins to study Buddhism and Confucianism in the context of Korean intellectual history, one will learn early on about the sudden-gradual debate, the text-antitext debate, four-seven debate, etc., rather soon. Subsequent studies will quite often be contextualized by these debates. The same tendency does not seem to be as prevalent in the case of Japan and China

Philosophical confrontation became a notable dimension within Korean Buddhism, especially after the development of the Seon (禪) school. The advent of this school in Korea brought about a situation of ideological conflict between it and the older, established, doctrinal schools of Buddhism. Adherents of the newly imported meditation school often expressed the opinion that textual studies were an impediment to the attainment of the Buddhist goal of enlightenment. While this conflict regarding the relationship between scholarly exegesis and meditation practice had its precedents in China, and was the subject of treatment by Tang scholars such as Zongmi (宗密 780-841), it was not really a debate that was carried on extensively *within* the Chinese Chan schools themselves. One either belonged to a Chan school where this view was accepted, or one belonged to a doctrinal school.

In Korea, on the other hand, because of the integrated makeup that the Seon school gradually assumed, the relation of the doctrinal teachings vis-à-vis meditation practice was an issue that was discoursed upon in almost every generation. The arguments for the pro-meditation group were initiated by early Seon teachers such as Muyeom (無染 800-888) who stridently criticized the doctrinal (*gyo*) approach, and he was joined and followed by numerous others for generations.² What eventually prevailed was a discourse from within the tradition that sought a middle ground, advocating an approach to cultivation that included both meditation and textual study in a balanced format. This sort of position was argued for through the centuries by Buddhist leaders such as Gyunyeo (均如 923-973), Euicheon (義天 1055-1101), Jinul (知訥 1158-1210), Gihwa (1376-1433 己和), and Hyujeong (休靜 1520-1604).

A roughly parallel Korean intra-Buddhist debate, which involved many of the same participants as the meditational vs. doctrinal debate, can be

² See Buswell, *Tracing Back the Radiant*, pp. 13-14.

seen in the controversy regarding whether enlightenment was something that was attained suddenly or gradually. This argument also has its roots in China, but after fading away on the continent, was taken up with fervor in Korea, where it has continued to spur debate within the Korean Jogye school down to the present day.³

The greatest of the Korean debates regarding the nature of the mind, which has much in common with the Buddhist doctrinal/meditational and sudden/gradual disputes, is that of the Neo Confucian question on the relation of the four beginnings 四端 and seven feelings 七情 that was first taken up between Yi Hwang (李滉, Toegye 退溪; 1501-1570) and Yi I (李珥, Yulgok 栗谷; 1536-1584), and later rejoined by their disciples. This debate centered on subtle points of interpretation concerned with the early Mencian position on the nature of human goodness, the origins of evil, and the relative degree of interiority/exteriority of the feelings (of both good and evil quality) that are produced in the processes of interaction with the environment.⁴

The above-mentioned debates can be shown to be framed by a repeated thematic pattern, summarized by: (1) the degree to which the goodness, purity, or enlightenment, that exists within the human mind can be said to be innate, or even originally complete; (2) based on this component of innate purity, what kind of factors (if any) are necessary to bring about its completion, and (3) what the relationship is between the innate (good, enlightened, pure) nature of the mind, and the discordance, affliction, and evil that we see manifested in everyday human activity. No matter what the degree of divergence in the interpretation of the various aspects of the above-expressed pattern, the soteriological discourses of the main East

³ See, for example, Seongcheol's *Seonmun jeongno* 禪門正路, and Sung Bae Park's *Buddhist Faith and Sudden Enlightenment*.

⁴ For a complete account of, and translation of the major contributions to this debate, see Michael Kalton's *The Four-Seven Debate*.

Asian philosophical/religious systems are without fail subsumed within this framework. They all basically agree on the point that the fundamental nature of the mind is good, and that there is a problem somewhere that leads that fundamental nature not to express itself properly to function discordantly. Thus, it is a problem that manifests within the conceptual framework of essence-function.

In the case of the developing character of East Asian Buddhism, the most prominent points of difference among the various doctrinal schools (and later as well among the Chan schools) can be seen, despite their differences, to be circumscribed by this same logical framework. The argument for the suddenness of enlightenment can be seen as a way of viewing the mind that pays greater attention to its essence, and less attention to its function, while the position of gradualists would be opposite to this. In like manner, scholars such as Jinul and Gihwa, who argued for a program of practice that harmoniously combined meditation and textual study, did so by claiming that while meditative absorption was equivalent to being attuned with the essence of the mind (of enlightenment) the scriptural corpus could be seen as a function of enlightenment. Therefore, they recommended both approaches to religious cultivation.

From the perspective of the actual terminology used in the argument, it is the language of the Four-Seven debate that most clearly demonstrates the tacit (or perhaps even unconscious) agreement between the two parties that the discourse must be contextualized within the *che-yong* framework. The crux of this debate lies in determining exactly where it is that the four beginnings and seven feelings are to be located within the spectrum of gradations between *yi* (Ch. *li* 理) and *gi* (Ch. *qi* 氣), concepts that are derived from the Huayan *li* (principle 理) and *shi* (phenomena 事), which in turn constitute a prime example of the development of philosophical categories based on a basic worldview of essence-function.

The Korean Buddhist-Confucian Debate

In this paper, we will treat another significant debate that occurred in the Korean philosophical arena—that which occurred between the Confucians and the Buddhists in the late Goryeo and early Joseon periods. In particular, we will look at the two most important, roughly contemporary, representative works that emerged from each side. These are the *Bulssi japbyeon* (仙氏雜弁 Array of Critiques of Buddhism) by Jeong Dojeon (鄭道伝 1342-1398),⁵ and the *Hyeonjeong non* (顯正論 Articulation of the Correct [HJN]) by Gihwa (Hamheo Deuktong 涵虛得通).⁶ These two works do not actually constitute a direct, ongoing dialogue between contemporaries in the way of the Four-Seven debate, since Gihwa wrote his piece after Jeong's death. But since the *Hyeonjeong non* is clearly a response to the *Japbyeon*, as well as a response to the entire gamut of critiques lodged by Confucians against Buddhists since the dawn of their conflicts, it can certainly be categorized as one of the major philosophical debates of the Korean tradition. This case is especially interesting, since, even though the argument is being conducted between two distinct, competing philosophical/religious traditions, the degree to which both sides unconsciously ground their basic arguments in the structure of essence-function makes an even clearer point about the role of that structure as an *a priori* framework of classical Korean philosophical debate. Since I have already discussed the general background of the developments leading up to this debate in terms of their precedents in China and Korea in a couple of places,⁷ including the events leading up

⁵ Jeong is commonly referred to by his pen name Sambong 參峯. His writings are collected in the *Sambongjip* 參峯集.

⁶ The *Hyeonjeong non* is included in the *Hanguk bulgyo jeonseo* vol. 7, pp. 217-225.

⁷ In the seventh chapter of my dissertation, and in the recent article "The Buddhist-Confucian Conflict in the Early Chosŏn and Kihwa's Syncretic Response: The *Hyŏn jŏng non*".

to the production of both works, I will only summarize that background briefly here.

Jeong Dojeon can be seen as the product of a long developing Neo-Confucian tradition, that had as a major part of its *raison d'être* the need to expose the Buddhist teachings as being harmful, both to the moral well-being of the individual, and to the stability of society in general. Although Confucian criticisms of Buddhism start as far back as the Tang dynasty with Hanyu (韓愈 768-824),⁸ it is really with the appearance of the Song Neo-Confucian masters, most importantly the Cheng brothers (Chenghao 程顥 1032-1085, and Chengyi 程頤 1033-1107) and Zhuxi (朱熹 1130-1200) that the critique takes on final philosophical form. The target of the Neo-Confucian critique was Chan Buddhism in particular, the sect which had distinguished itself for its ostensive rejection of book learning and societal norms, with these being characterized as impedimentary to the enlightenment experience.

To the scholar well-versed in Buddhist doctrine, one cannot but be puzzled at times at the simplistic level of argumentation of some of the Neo-Confucian criticisms, given the otherwise obvious sophistication of such thinkers as the Cheng brothers and Zhuxi. There are just too many basic arguments contained in the Buddhist doctrine that would have answered their criticisms, which these men, being as learned as they were, they could not have been oblivious to. For example, although it is often expressed at a relatively subtle level of discourse, Buddhism (and especially Chan) regularly seeks to undo its own tendencies toward escapism and nihilism, based in a well-developed doctrine of expedient means that allows for, and in places even strongly advocates, full participation in daily affairs. So we can only infer that either the Neo-Confucian critics were badly exaggerating things to make their own

⁸ Hanyu's two best-known criticisms of Buddhism are the *Origin of the Way*; 原道 and *Memorial on the Buddha's Bone*; 論仏骨表. See Gregory 1995: 35-36.

point seem to have a basis, or that the Chan practices prevalent in the Song, and their attendant rhetoric, were sufficiently imbalanced toward the arcane and nihilistic such as to draw this kind of consistent criticism.

Whatever the actual circumstances may have been, it is clear that while the Chan schools were drawing continuous vehement criticism from their Confucian contemporaries, there was no serious, sustained attempt made at self-defense, at least in written form. Why this lack of effort toward protecting the reputation of the *saṅgha*? One possible explanation is that in view of the general character of Chan with its self-proclaimed distaste for discursive thinking, such a debate was outside the purview of what a Chan teacher was supposed to be doing. Or, perhaps the Buddhists were sufficiently confident enough of the status of their tradition to believe that such diatribes were never going to have any real concrete effect, in terms of government authorized restrictions. It may have also been the case that the vibrant energy of the Neo-Confucian movement, coupled with the bright young minds that were attracted to it, were simply too much for the Chan leaders to contend with. Or, taking this latter supposition a step further, we might even want to give serious consideration to Jeong Dojeon's claim that the Chan practices of non-reliance on words and letters had resulted in the impairment, through disuse, of the Channist's intellectual capacities.

During the two centuries after Zhuxi, a roughly analogous confrontational situation developed in the Goryeo, but which had some distinctive aspects. The most important difference between the two scenarios was the markedly greater degree to which the Korean Buddhist establishment was embedded into the state power structure as compared with the situation in the Song. Leaders of the *saṅgha* owned tracts of tax-free territory, traded in slaves and other commodities, and were influential at all levels of government. There were too many monks who were ordained for the wrong reasons, and corruption was rampant. Thus,

the ideological fervor with which Neo-Confucianism rose in Korea had a special dimension, since ire of the critics of Buddhism was fueled not only by the earlier philosophical arguments of the Cheng brothers and Zhuxi, but was exacerbated by the extent of the present corruption. There was a decadent, stumbling government in place, supported by, and supporting, a somewhat dissolute religious organization.

With this less-than-exemplary Buddhist establishment as its target, the Korean Neo-Confucian anti-Buddhist polemic grew during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, reaching its peak at the end of the fourteenth century, when, with the 1392 coup d'état led by the Confucian-backed Yi Seonggye (李成桂 1335-1408) the Buddhists were thrust out of power. The Buddhists would, over time, lose much of their influence with the government, becoming far less visible in the metropolitan areas.

The final polemical push for the Buddhist purge came in the form of the essays of Jeong Dojeon, Yi's main political advisor, who would play a major role in the development of the political structure of the new Joseon dynasty.⁹ Jeong wrote a few philosophical essays that were critical of Buddhism, but his final, and most directly anti-Buddhist polemical work (completed just before his assassination in 1398) was the *Bulssi japbyeon*.¹⁰

In his anti-Buddhist tracts Jeong focused on comparisons of Buddhist and Confucian positions on issues of doctrine and practice. His intention was to show that the Buddhist doctrine was intrinsically flawed. Thus, it was not only necessary to discipline the Buddhist establishment at the present moment: it was desirable to seriously curtail, and if possible, to

⁹ For an overview of Jeong's role in the establishment of the Joseon dynasty, see Chai-shik Chung's, "Chōng Tojōn: 'Architect' of Yi Dynasty Government and Ideology".

¹⁰ Before the *Japbyeon* Jeong wrote: (1) the *Simmun cheondap* (心問天答 Questions from the Mind Answered by Heaven; 1375), wherein he presented a critique of the Buddhist doctrine of karma, offering instead a Neo-Confucian interpretation of the interaction of principle (理) and material force (氣); (2) the *Simgiri pyeon* (心氣理篇 On the Mind, Material Force and Principle; 1394) where he carried out a comparative study of the natures of Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism from a Neo-Confucian perspective

permanently end the activities of this entire belief system. His critique is thorough and systematic, covering every major aspect of the Buddhist doctrine that was being taught at the time. Given the composition of Korean Buddhism at the time in question, the primary object of his criticism was the Seon sect, which the Neo-Confucians perceived as having strong tendencies toward other-worldliness, toward denial of the importance of human relationships, toward denial of respect for the state, and even toward denial of Buddhism's own principle of cause and effect.

The influence of Jeong's Chinese predecessors, primarily the Cheng brothers and Zhuxi, is omnipresent in his writings. Careful examination shows that almost every argument, and every example made by Jeong is a citation from one of the Cheng brothers, although often received through the commentaries of Zhu. Nonetheless, prior to Jeong, even in the works of the Chengs and Zhu, these anti-Buddhist critiques had been by and large scattered here and there, not having been assembled in a single, systematic essay, which attacked Buddhism from every angle. In this regard, the *Japbyeon* is a unique document in the East Asian Neo-Confucian tradition.

The Arguments of the *Bulssi japbyeon*

Jeong starts off, in the first two chapters of the treatise, with a critique of the Indian notions of karma and transmigration, arguing against these "foreign" Indian paradigms, based on Chinese cosmological schema that were developed in connection with the *Yijing* and its commentaries: *yin/yang*, the five phases, *hun* and *po* souls, etc. Critically speaking, these chapters do not offer much that would prove a metaphysical high ground for Confucianism for anyone who knows the classical texts well, as his refutation of the doctrine of transmigration 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 somewhat of a point however, in bringing to mind the fact that when it comes to practical matters, such as the healing of disease, that virtually all people, 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 drives into the core of his argument with philosophical acumen, as he attacks Buddhism at one of its traditional weak points: that of the contradictory character of the discourse on the nature and the mind as found in the tathāgatagarbha-influenced texts such as the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith*, *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, and *Śūrangama-sūtra*. He cites passages from the *Śūrangama-sūtra* and from the writings of Jinul that show a clear lack of uniformity between the various accounts of the relation between the mind 心, and the nature 性. As Jeong shows through these citations, in one Buddhist text, the nature is equivalent to the mind; in another, it is an aspect of the mind; then it is a principle contained in the mind, and then in another text, a function of the mind. Referring to the disparities and circular reasoning that he finds in the Buddhist descriptions of the concept of "nature," he says

[The Buddhist explanations regarding the 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.(SBJ1. 78b)¹¹

The Confucian teachings, are, by contrast, consistent from beginning to end. They clearly distinguish between the mind and its nature, between

¹¹ 然皆得於想象髣髴之中、而無豁然真實之見。其說多為遊辭而無一定之論，其情可得矣。

principle and external events. They allow for clear value and evaluation, with uniformity throughout.

This is the learning of our Confucian masters. From inside the body and mind, extending out to [all] affairs and things—from the source, flowing out to the branch streams. All are penetrated by one, like the water that comes down from the fountainhead to flow out to a myriad streams: there is no place where it is not water. It is like holding the handle of the Big Dipper, which assesses the worth of all things under heaven. The relative worth of those things is just like the weighing of *zhu* and *liang* on a scale. This is what I mean when I say that there has never been an iota of inconsistency. (SBJ1. 78b)¹²

Therefore I say: Buddhism is void, while Confucianism is substantial; Buddhism has two realities, while Confucianism has one; Buddhism has gaps, while Confucianism is consistent. This is something that learned people should clarify and discern.(SBJ1. 78d)¹³

A similar theme carries into the fourth chapter, where Jeong criticizes Buddhists, in this case, especially Chan Buddhists, for conflating the notion of nature with that of mundane function, citing the likes of Layman Pang, who said: "Hauling water and carrying firewood are nothing but marvelous function."(SBJ1. 78d)¹⁴ Jeong here cites Zhuxi, who said: "if you take functional activity to be [the same as] the nature, then are not peoples' irresponsible actions such as taking a sword to murder someone, and transgressing the way [also] the nature?"(SBJ1. 79b)¹⁵ This line of argument is carried into chapter six, where the focus comes to be

¹² 此吾儒之學。內自身心、外而至事物、自源徂流。一以通貫、如源頭之水流於萬派、無非水也。如持有星之衡、稱量天下之物。其物之輕重與權衡之銖兩相稱。此所謂元不曾間斷者也。

¹³ 故曰、積氏虛、吾儒實。積氏二、吾儒一。積子間斷、吾儒連續。學者所當明弁也。

¹⁴ 龐居士曰、連水搬柴無非妙用、是也。

¹⁵ 若以作用為性則人胡亂執刀殺人敢道性歟。

placed directly on the relationship between the mind and its external, functional manifestations. To clarify the Confucian position (considered by Jeong to be rationally and metaphysically consistent), Jeong cites the Mencian "four beginnings" 四端 that are innate to humans, along with their four associated manifest functions of altruism 仁, propriety 禮, justice 義, and wisdom 智. The Buddhists, by contrast, espouse doctrines that dissociate the innate capacities of the mind from the manifestations of human activity. This chapter contains the passage that constitutes the crux of Jeong's argument. He says:

It is like the saying "essence and function spring from the same source; the manifest and the subtle have no gap between them."¹⁶ The Buddhist method of study addresses the mind, but does not address its manifestations. This can be seen in the Buddhist's saying things like "The bodhisattva Mañjuśrī wanders through the taverns, but these activities are not his mind." Excuses for this kind of licentious behavior abound [in the Buddhist teachings]. Is this not a separation of the mind from its activities? Chengzi said: "The study of the Buddhists includes reverence to correct the internal, but does not include justice to straighten the external." Therefore those who are stuck in these [incorrect views] will waste away.(SBJ1. 79c-d)¹⁷

Jeong's critique runs through several chapters, addressing issues such as the Buddhists' abandonment of societal obligations, perverted application of the notion of "compassion," criticism of the idea of two levels of reality, the practice of begging, and most of all, the escapist/nihilistic views of Chan. But all can be summarized with Jeong's view that the

¹⁶ In Zhuxi's *Chuanxilu*; 体用一原、顯微無間 is identified as a citation from Chengyi, but I have not yet located it in Chengyi's collected works.

¹⁷ 亦如此所謂体用一源、顯微無間者也。彼之学取其心、不取其跡。乃曰、文殊大聖遊諸酒肆 跡雖非而心則是也。侘如此類者、甚多。非心跡之判歟。程子曰、仏氏之学於敬以直内則有之矣。義以方外則未之有也。故滯固者入於枯槁

components of the Buddhist doctrine are disconnected from each other, are contradictory. Buddhist teachings are conveniently used for excusing responsibility, the antithesis of providing a viable system of values. Confucianism, by contrast, is completely aligned through essence and function, is unitary, without contradictions, teaches a concrete system of values, and explains a clear relationship between inner and outer.

The Buddhist Response: The *Hyeonjeong non*

I have already outlined Gihwa's life and background in some detail in prior publications, so I will just briefly summarize here.¹⁸ Gihwa was born in 1376, and was thus thirty-four years junior to Jeong. The son of a diplomat, he was considered to be one of the brightest young scholars of his generation, excelling at the recently established national academy of Confucian studies, the Seonggyun'gwan. During the course of his studies here, however, he was continually attracted by the Buddhist teachings, and went through a period of time when he was confused about which course he should follow.¹⁹ At the age of 21, the death of a friend finally tilted the scales irreversibly in the direction of Buddhism, and he joined the order. He eventually became the disciple of the leading Seon master of his generation, Jacho 自超 (Muhak 無学 1327-1405), under whose tutelage he received the Linji-based *gong'an* training. Yet at the same time, due, no doubt, to the influences of his scholarly background, Gihwa went on to become one of the most prolific Buddhist writers of his period, bringing influence on the subsequent character of Korean Seon, most

¹⁸ More complete accounts of Gihwa's life are contained in (1) the second chapter of my Ph.D. dissertation, and (2) pages 25-33 of the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*. Excerpts from this are available on the web at <http://www.human.toyogakuen-u.ac.jp/~acmuller/spe/Gihwabio.htm>.

¹⁹ Gihwa describes this period of his life and how he came to his final decision in detail in the *Hyeonjeong non*. This episode is further elaborated below.

notably through his commentaries on the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* and the *Diamond Sutra*.²⁰

Gihwa lived directly in the middle of the period of the dynastic transition from the Goryeo to the Joseon, during the course of which the Buddhists were ejected from their long and intimate relationship with the rulership. During his career as a Seon teacher, Gihwa rose to become the leading Buddhist figure of his generation. While the Confucians had succeeding in bringing enough pressure to bear in eliminating the title of National Teacher 国師, which had for centuries been granted to the leading Buddhist figures, he was still, toward the end of his career, awarded the title of royal preceptor 王師, which reflects the degree of respect that Gihwa commanded, despite the changing times. This also means that he, as the leader of the Korean *saṅgha* during this period, was the one who ended up being faced with the primary responsibility of responding to the Neo-Confucian polemic.

Gihwa did respond, in the form of a treatise entitled the *Hyeonjeong non* 顯正論. A date of composition is not attached to the version of the *Hyeonjeong non* in our possession, nor is there any clear dating information provided in Gihwa's biographical sketch. We do know that he had to have composed it after the time of his conversion to Buddhism in 1396-7, and we might also assume, given the strong mastery of Buddhist doctrine demonstrated in the treatise, that it would have been composed several years after this conversion, and thus several years after Jeong's demise in 1398. Therefore, strictly speaking, this text cannot be seen as constituting a "live debate" with Jeong.

²⁰ Gihwa's commentary to the *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment* is called *Daebanggwang weon'gak sudara yoeuigyeong seoreui*; 大方広円覚修多羅了義經說誼 HBJ 7. 122-169. His commentary to the *Diamond Sutra* is the *Geumgang banya baramilgyeong oga hae seoreui*; 金剛般若波羅蜜經五家解說誼 (Annotation to the Redaction of Five Commentaries on the Diamond Sutra). HBJ 7. 10-107. I have translated the former work in full in *The Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment: Korean Buddhism's Guide to Meditation*.

On the other hand however, the *Hyeonjeong non* directly responds to every one of the objections raised in the *Japbyeon*, which represented the culmination of all the Confucian arguments that had been made against Buddhism from the time of Hanyu onward, and after the *Japbyeon*, such a direct, systematic, philosophical critique of Buddhism from the Confucians was never again to appear. So it can be said that it is almost exclusively the *Japbyeon* to which Gihwa is making his response.

To set the tone for his argument, Gihwa goes to some lengths to clarify the Buddhist position on the nature of the mind, the relevance, of, and gradations of methods of practices—basically summarizing the view of mind that is expressed in the fundamental East Asian Buddhist scriptures, the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith*, *Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment*, etc. That is, that the mind is originally pure, but when it moves into activity, it has the potential to be distorted. Gihwa opens the *Hyeonjeong non* by saying:

Though its essence is neither existent nor non-existent, it permeates existence and non-existence. Though it originally lacks past and present, it permeates past and present: this is the Dao. Existence and non-existence are based in nature and discriminations. Past and present are based in birth-and-death. The nature originally lacks discrimination, but when you are confused about the nature you arise discriminations; with the production of discriminations, wisdom is blocked—thoughts transform and the essence is differentiated. It is through this that the myriad forms take shape and birth-and-death begin.(HBJ 7. 217a)²¹

In this way, Gihwa starts off by grounding his argument in an essence-function view of the mind and its activities. The mind is originally pure, but as it engages in situations, it can become entangled in

²¹ 体非有無 而通於有無 本無古今 而通於古今者 道也 有無因於性情也 古今因於生死也 性本無情 迷性生情 情生智隔 想變体殊 万象所以形也 生死所以始也。

difficulties. For the purpose of recovering the original mind, Buddhism has a wide spectrum of practices, which range from the most expedient, or superficial, to the most profound. In outlining the teaching starting from the most profound and extending to the most superficial, he ends up with the fundamental Buddhist doctrine of the law of cause and effect. Yet no matter how superficial the Buddhist teaching of cause and effect may seem within the East Asian Mahayana tradition, Gihwa judges it to be one level above the typical application of the Confucian teaching, which he defines as the mere conditioning of people through reward and punishment on the part of the state. But he subsequently takes another tack, arguing that the Confucian teachings, when properly understood and practiced, mesh perfectly with the Buddhist teaching of cause and effect, and thus can be seen as being applicable at profound levels.

In terms of overall tone, the *Hyeonjeong non* is quite conciliatory compared to the *Japbyeon*. Gihwa has no intention of discrediting the Confucian tradition as a whole. Rather, his aim is to point out the underlying unity of the three teachings, and to see them as varying expressions of a mysterious unifying principle. The Confucian teachings are good, and valuable. The main problem is that they have been incorrectly transmitted and practiced by even the most important figures of their own tradition.

Gihwa defends the charges made against Buddhist practices that are seen to be antisocial, such as the abandonment of the family relationships, by showing how they are actually helpful to society, rather than harmful, when practiced correctly. Excesses indulged in by *sarigha* members are attributed to the responsibility of the offenders as individuals making their own decisions, rather than to the tradition as a whole. Criticisms of the Buddhist doctrines of karma and causation are dealt with by logical argumentation, 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 shared doctrine of altruism, based on the universally expressed assumption that the myriad living beings of the universe are fully interlinked with one another. While the notion of the mutual containment of all things is Buddhist in origin, it ended up being one of the central tenets of the most influential of the Song Neo-Confucian founders, especially Chenghao, who declared that "The myriad things and I form a single body."²² With this being the seminal Neo-Confucian development of the Confucian/Mencian "humanity" (*ren/in* 仁) Gihwa finds an inconsistency between what Confucians say and what they do. The issue of this inconsistency (or perhaps, hypocrisy) becomes the lynchpin of Gihwa's argument.

Buddhism and (Neo-)Confucianism share in the view that it is fundamentally wrong to harm others. Buddhists have the doctrine of *ahimsā* (non-injury) at the core of their practice of moral discipline, and this is observed fully in all Buddhist practices. Confucians, on the other hand, take *ren* as the most fundamental component of their path of cultivation. Confucius himself continually cited *ren* as the source of all forms of goodness. Mencius said that *ren* was innate to all people, explaining its function through a variety of metaphors, the most oft-repeated being that of the stranger who automatically rushes to prevent a toddler from falling into a well.²³

However, Gihwa says, the Confucian corpus is rife with inconsistencies on this matter. For example, although Chenghao has told us that *ren*

²² Honan *erh-ch'eng i-shu*, p. 15. Also see Chan 1969: 530, section no. 11. This line comes from the same section of Chenghao's *Yishu* that contains most of the philosophical arguments that form the basis for Jeong's arguments in the *Japbyeon*.

²³ Mencius, 2B:1.

means that we form a single body with the myriad things, Confucius himself only went halfway in his practice of single-bodiedness, as he still killed animals in the course of his enjoyment of the sports of hunting and fishing. For Mencius, the taking of life of an animal was not problematic for the *ren* man, as long as he didn't hear the animal's screams in its death throes. And, in general, the Confucian tradition fully endorsed the practices of ritual sacrifice. Gihwa says:

The *Analects* say: "When the master fished he would not use a net; when hunting he would not shoot a perched bird." (*Analects*, 7:26) Mencius said: "The superior man stays far away from the kitchen. If he hears the screams of the animals he cannot bear to eat their flesh." (*Mencius*, 1A:7) These are all examples of incompletely actualized *ren*. Why don't they try to come up to the level of "forming a single body"? The *Doctrine of the Mean* says: "His words reflecting his actions, his actions reflecting his words—how can this Superior Man 君子 not be sincere through and through?"²⁴ Whom among those I have cited here comes up to this level? This is an example of the Confucians preaching about the goodness of the path of *ren* but not following through. If it is necessary to place limits on the killing of birds, why even shoot the arrow at all? If it bothers you to shoot a perched bird, why shoot it when it is flying? If the superior man is going to avoid the kitchen, why does he eat meat at all?²⁵

Later on, he says:

[Since animals share, with people] the sense of aversion to being killed,

²⁴ *Doctrine of the Mean*, section 13 of the commentary. Cited from <http://www.human.toyogakuen-u.ac.jp/~acmuller/contao/docofmean.htm>.

²⁵ 論語云 釣而不綱 弋不射宿 孟子云 君子遠庖廚也 聞其聲 不忍食其肉 又云 數罟不入污池 魚鼈不可勝食 此皆為仁而未盡其道也 何不契於一己之言乎 中庸云 言順行行願言 君子胡不慥慥爾 今何至此乎 此儒者之所以善論為仁之道而未盡善也 既要殺少 何必免矢 既擲其宿 何射不宿 既遠庖廚 何必食肉。 (HBJ 7. 2129b-c)

how do they differ from human beings? With the sound of ripping flesh and the cutting of the knife, they are in utter fright as they approach their death. Their eyes are wild and they cry out in agony. How could they not harbor bitterness and resentment? And yet people are able to turn a deaf ear. In this way human beings and the creatures of the world affect each other without awareness and compensate each other without pause. If there were a man of *ren* present, how could he observe such suffering and continue to act as if nothing was wrong?²⁶

As Gihwa goes on to tell us, it was precisely the difference on this point that turned him toward Buddhism during the period of time when he was weighing the two systems in the balance.²⁷

The charge, then, that Gihwa wants to lay on the Confucians, is strikingly similar to that which Jeong uses to assail the Buddhists, in that both want to show the other side to be guilty of inconsistency. The difference, however, is that Jeong wants to point out inconsistencies in the Buddhist doctrine in itself, where Gihwa centers his argument on showing

²⁶ 至於好生惡殺之情 亦何嘗異於人哉 方其殲然奏刀 惻然就死之時 盼盼然視 喟然鳴豈非含怨結恨之情狀也 而人自昧耳 所以人與物 相作而不覺 相償而無休 安有仁人 見其如是而忍為之哉。 (HBJ 7. 220a-b).

²⁷ During the time before he entered the *sarigwa*, Gihwa was receiving instruction from a monk named Haeweol, who raised for him the problem of the incongruence of Chenghao's "forming a single body" with Mencius' condoning of the slaughter of livestock. Gihwa wrestled with this problem for a period of time, and eventually resolved it. In the Hyeonjeong non, he explains how he came to this resolution: "I was completely stymied by this question, and could not answer it. 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 within my mind for a long time without being resolved. Then, while traveling around Mt. Samgak in 1396, I arrived to Seungga-sa, where I had the chance to chat with an old Seon monk throughout the night. The monk said: 'The Buddha has ten grave precepts, the first of which not killing.' Upon hearing this explanation, my mind was suddenly overturned, and I recognized for myself that this was indeed the action of the true man of *ren*, and I was able to deeply embody the teachings of the Way of *ren*. From this time forth, I was never again to be confused regarding the differences between Confucianism and Buddhism." (HBJ 7. 220a).

inconsistencies between Confucian doctrine and practice. That is, Confucians say one thing, but do another. Gihwa's final pronouncement of his treatise, however, is the conclusion that the three teachings, when properly understood, should be seen as three types of expression of the same reality. Here he no doubt had in mind the concluding chapter of Jeong's treatise, entitled "Criticism of the Differences Between Buddhism and Confucianism" 儒釈同異之弁. There, Jeong gives a final summation of all the ways that the Buddhist teaching is vacuous and nihilistic and thus inferior to Confucianism, which is substantial and consistent throughout. There, Jeong says:

Prior Confucian scholars have [already] shown that the Confucian and Buddhist paths differ with every single phrase and every single situation. Here I will elaborate based on these [precedents]. We say voidness, and they also say voidness. We say quiescence, and they also say quiescence. However, our voidness is void yet existent. Their voidness is void and non-existent. Our quiescence is quiescent yet aware; their quiescence is quiescent and nihilating. We speak of knowledge and action; they speak of awakening and cultivation. Yet our knowledge is to know that the principle of the myriad things is replete in our own minds. Their awakening awakens to the fact that the mind that is originally empty, lacking anything. Our action is to return to the principle of the myriad things and act according to it, without error. Their cultivation is to sever connection with the myriad things and regard them as unconnected to one's mind. (SBJ1. 84a)²⁸

Gihwa, in obvious reference to Jeong's summation, also concludes his own argument by focusing on these two concepts of voidness and

²⁸ 先儒謂儒釈之道。句句而事事異。今且因是而推広之此曰虛。彼亦曰虛。此曰寂。彼亦曰寂。然此之虛。虛而有。彼之虛。虛而無。此之寂。寂而感。彼之寂。寂而滅。此曰知行。彼曰悟修。此之知。知万物之理。具於吾心也。彼之悟。悟此心本空無一物也。此之行。循万物之理而行之。無所違失也。彼之修。絶去万物而不為吾心之累也。

quiescence by showing instead, that the connotations of these terms are basically the same throughout all three traditions, and that indeed, at their most fundamental level, the three are equally valid approaches to the same reality. It is this section that provides the most concrete evidence that Gihwa was most certainly responding to Jeong when he wrote this essay.

If you can grasp this, then the words of the three teachers fit together like the broken pieces of the same board—as if they had all come out of the same mouth! If you would like to actually demonstrate the high and low among these teachings, 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 spontaneously nod in assent. How strong do I need to make my argument to get the prince to listen? (HBJ 7. 225b)²⁹

The much softer stance of Gihwa can be attributable to various factors. First, throughout the intellectual history of East Asia, it had never been part of the Buddhist response to try to directly refute the Confucian tradition, for as Chinese, and Koreans, it was, indeed, *their* tradition.³⁰ Although Gihwa, who had taken his literary training in a Confucian academy, eventually opted for Buddhism to complete his spiritual quest, he never lost his deep respect for the more profound aspects of both

²⁹ 拠此則參家所言 冥相符契 而如出一口也 若履踐之高低 兪用之同異 則洗尽心垢 廓清慧目然後 看尽大藏儒道諸書 參於日用之間 生死禍福之際 則不待言而自點頭矣 吾何強弁以駭君聽

³⁰ A good example for this point is the *Yuanren lun*; 原人論 by Zongmi, which includes an important 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 entering the Buddhist order.

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*.

In any case, at least after the time of the transmission of Buddhism out of India, philosophical exchanges of this type, and of this level, between Buddhists and the thinkers of competing religious traditions are extremely rare. For our own selfish edification, we, as intellectual historians, can only wish that Jeong had lived long enough to be able to enter into rejoinder with Gihwa here.

Abbreviations

HBJ = *Hanguk bulgyo jeonso* 韓國仏教全書

SBJ = *Sambong jip* 參峯集

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