

Wŏnhyo and the Commentarial Genre in Korean Buddhist Literature

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Wŏnhyo was, above all else, a commentator. His range of scholarly endeavor covered the whole gamut of East Asian Buddhist materials and the some 100 works attributed to this prolific writer, over twenty of which are extant, find no rivals among his fellow Korean exegetes. Looking at the paucity of works written in Silla Korea before Wŏnhyo, it is no exaggeration to say that it was Wŏnhyo who created the scholastic tradition of Silla Buddhism.¹ The vast majority of Wŏnhyo's works are explicitly commentaries, and even those writings that are not commentaries are still strongly exegetical in character. The East Asian tradition itself also treats Wŏnhyo principally as a

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¹ The first Buddhist exegetical work said to have been written in Silla was the *Sabunnyul kalma ki* (Commentary to the *Karman* section of the *Dharmaguptaka-Vinaya*), by Chi-mymŏng (d.u.), ca. seventh century, but this work is no longer extant. Wŏnhyo's friend Ŭisang wrote but two or three shorter exegeses contemporaneously with Wŏnhyo, but Wŏnhyo still remains by far the earliest, and most prolific, of Silla's Buddhist exegetes. See discussion in Rhi Ki-yong, "Wŏnhyo and his Thought", *Korea Journal* 11-1 (January, 1971), p. 5.

commentator, as seen, for example, in the *Song-Gaoseng-zhuan's*(Song Biography of Eminent Monks) listing of Wŏnhyo's biography among those of the "doctrinal exegetes"(yijie), together with a number of other Korean scholiasts who played important roles in the development of the learned schools of Sinitic Buddhism.²

To call Wŏnhyo a commentator is neither to deny the many other roles he played in his full and varied life, nor to disparage other aspects of his religious career, including those of pilgrim, philosopher, mystic, thaumaturge, and proselytist; rather, it simply acknowledges that the principal vehicle through which Wŏnhyo conveyed his philosophical and spiritual insights was scriptural exegesis. In this proclivity, Wŏnhyo emulates intellectuals active within most traditional civilizations, where much of spiritual and religious understanding was conveyed through exegetical writing. As John Henderson remarks, "Commentaries and commentarial modes of thinking dominated the intellectual history of most premodern civilizations, a fact often obscured by modern scholars denigration of the works of mere exegetes and annotators. Until the seventeenth century in Europe, and even later in China, India, and the Near East, thought, especially within high intellectual traditions, was primarily exegetical in character and expression."³ This traditional esteem for commentary is frequently obscured in contemporary treatments of religion, which valorize meditative experience over religious exegesis, or which misguidedly presume that things old and primary(viz. scriptures) are somehow superior to the new and derivative(viz. commentaries).⁴ The commentary that I have been translating for the "Collected Works of Wŏnhyo" is his *Exposition of the Vajrasamādhi-Sūtra*(*Kūmgangsammaegyōng-non*), the longest work in Wŏnhyo's oeuvre. In this treatise, Wŏnhyo brings to bear all the

2 See Zanning' s definition of "doctrinal exegetes," the second of the ten categories of monks listed in the *Song-gaoseng-zhuan*, at T.51, 2061, 500.710a. Wŏnhyo is also listed among doctrinal exegetes" in the Kory-period *Samguk-yusa*.

3 John B. Henderson, *Scripture, Canon, and Commentary: A Comparison of Confucian and Western Exegesis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 1.

4 See José Ignacio Cabezon' s discussion about the contemporary mistrust of exegesis in his edited volume *Scholasticism: Cross-Cultural and Comparative Perspectives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), Introduction. Note also Edward Conzes denigration of the new in his *Buddhist Thought in India* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1962), preface, p. 8.

exegetical tools acquired throughout a lifetime of scholarship to the explication of this scripture. Wŏnhyo's treatment of this text provides a seminal vision of the Buddhist doctrinal synthesis then emerging in Silla Korea. Rather than exploring his contributions to doctrine, however, in this paper I propose instead to examine the structure and style of Wŏnhyo's Exposition as a representative example of the East Asian commentarial form. In his virtuosity at manipulating the commentarial form, Wŏnhyo may be viewed not simply as a paragon of Korean scholarly achievement but as someone who was emblematic of the highest achievements of the Sinitic Buddhist tradition as a whole.

I. Commentary as a Genre of Buddhist Literature

Commentary is one of the principal genres of Buddhist oral and written literature throughout Asia. Commentary has a long pedigree within Buddhism, which in all probability can be traced back to the inception of the religion itself. East Asian Buddhism used different designations for various types of commentarial writings, many of which are reflected in Wŏnhyo's oeuvre. Generally, exegetical commentaries involving detailed glosses of a scripture were termed *so* (Ch. *shu*), 'commentary,' and had only semi-canonical status. (It was in fact the Korean cataloguer, Ŭich'ŏn (1055-1101), in the tenth century, who first insisted that such indigenous East Asian compositions could be so profound in their own right that they too deserved to be included in the canon.) More expository treatments of the thought presented in a scripture were called *chongyo* (Ch. *zongyao*; lit. 'thematic [or doctrinal] essentials'), that is, exegetical summaries. The term *non* (Ch. *lun*), 'exposition,' was generally reserved by the East Asians for independent treatises (*sāstra*) attributed to the eminent Indian Mahāyāna exegetes whom the East Asians designated 'bodhisattvas'; translated from Sanskrit, such texts were accorded canonical status on a par with scriptures attributed to the Buddha himself. Hence, conferring the designation *non* on Wŏnhyo's exegesis of the *Vajrasamādhi*, as is mentioned in Wŏnhyo's biography in the *Song Gaoseng zhuan*, would

have been equivalent to placing Wŏnhyo on a par with the bodhisattva-exegetes in the heartland of Buddhism-obviously a high honor.⁵

II. East Asian Exegetical Forms

Wŏnhyo's *Exposition of the Vajrasamādhi-Sūtra* is a masterpiece of the traditional style of exegesis employed within the East Asian Buddhist tradition. Like virtually all of Korean Buddhist materials in the pre-modern era, Wŏnhyo's works are written in the peculiar Buddhist argot of literary Chinese, whose terse logographic form challenges the resources of even the most talented English translator.

There is probably no religious literature that is so deceptively simple, yet in fact so utterly prolix, than is the commentarial literature of East Asian Buddhism, including that of Korea. Commentarial literature may seem relatively straightforward to the first-time reader. Typically the commentator will include a brief introduction outlining the significance of the scripture that is the object of exegesis and the broad structure of the commentary. This introduction will be followed by passages of the scripture, followed by the exegete's comments, which will often include a line-by-line, and often even word-by-word, exegesis. But this simple style masks what is often an immensely complex hermeneutical structure that is superimposed over the commentarial sections. A translator must retain control of this massive interpretative schema if the thread of argument running through the commentary is to be intelligible to the reader. Wŏnhyo's commentaries are typical of this East Asian commentarial style. The first three sections are essentially introductory, lasting barely three pages in the *Han'guk Pulgyo chŏnsŏ* edition, while the last goes on for some seventy pages.

Wŏnhyo's commentarial style is a thoroughgoing fusion of

⁵ See discussion in Kim Yŏngtae, "Chŏn'gi wa sŏrhwa-rŏl t'onghan Wŏnhyo yŏn'gu" (A Study of Wŏnhyo from the standpoint of biographies and legends), *Pulgyo-hakpo* (Buddhist studies) 17 (1980), p. 31. Robert Shih's statement (*Biographies des moines éminents (Kao seng tchouan (de Houei-kiao [Louvain: Institut Orientaliste, 1968], p.169) concerning the Liang Gaoseng-zhuan-that lun* refers to a Chinese composition is not necessarily valid for later texts; indeed, many of the interpretations of terms given by Shih in the Appendix to his book should be followed cautiously for post-six-century materials.

imported Indian commentarial practice and indigenous scholarly exegesis, primarily based on Confucian models. As a genre, East Asian Buddhist commentary owes much to both traditions. Stylistically, many of the features found in Indian Buddhist exegesis will hold for East Asian commentaries as well. In their form and overall approach, however, East Asian Buddhist commentaries are also heavily beholden to the exegetical tradition of Confucianism that began during the Han dynasty, in which "commentary makes the claim that every word, every sentence, every paragraph of the canonical text is profoundly significant, deserving of the most genuine and thorough reflection."⁶

Chinese Buddhist scholars from virtually the inception of their tradition began to develop their own strategies for approaching the mass of new scriptural material making its way into China and into Chinese. Dao'an(312-385), one of the most important vaunt-couriers in the nascent Sinitic scholarly tradition, is claimed to have developed an exegetical schema through which to analyze a sūtra's narrative structure. This schema is the so-called "three divisions of scriptural exegesis" (*sanfen kejing*), which posits the following major sections common to all scriptures: 1) the prefatory setting(*nidāna*), which specifies the time and place where the stūra was delivered, and the audience in attendance; 2) the main body, which relates the doctrines and practices that are the target of the discourse; and 3) the transmission(*parīdanā*), which describes the confidence and insights the scripture inspires in its audience.⁷ Zhiyi(538-597), in the Chinese Tiantai school, developed a list of five general hermeneutical issues that should be addressed prior to beginning the in-depth exegesis of any sūtra, which he termed the "five categories of profound meanings"(*wuchong xuanyi*): 1) explicating the

6 Daniel K. Gardner, "Confucian Commentary and Chinese Intellectual History," *Journal of Asian Studies* 57-2 (May 1998): 401, 400. East Asian Buddhist commentary is an area of the tradition that has been much neglected by scholars to date and my treatment here has benefited greatly from several recent works on commentary within the Chinese Confucian tradition. I am particularly indebted to Daniel K. Gardner's insightful article cited above and to John B. Henderson's *Scripture, Canon, and Commentary*.

7 For this and other exegetical categories, see the comprehensive article by Luis O. Gómez, "Buddhist Literature: Exegesis and Hermeneutics," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, s.v. Gómez notes that this three-fold schema is not attested until some three-centuries later in India.

meaning of the title(*shiming*); 2) analyzing its fundamental intent (*bianben*); 3) clarifying its principal themes or doctrines(*mingzong*); 4) expounding its "function" or impact on people(*lunyong*); and 5) the classification of the sūtra(*panjiao*), that is, the place of the scripture within the entire corpus of sūtras expounded by the Buddha throughout his ministry.⁸

Wōnhyo substantially follows both of these exegetical schemata in his treatment of the *Vajrasamādhi-Sūtra*. The first three parts of his Exposition correspond in large measure with the prefatory issues that Zhiyi insists should be addressed prior to beginning the main commentary. Part One of Wōnhyo's commentary, A Narration of Its Principal Ideas(*sul taeŭi*), describes in terse, almost mystical, language, the main purport of the sūtra; it corresponds to the second of Zhiyi's five categories. Part Two, An Analysis of the Themes of the Scripture (*p'yōn kyōngjong*), highlights the contemplation practice that has a single taste, the essential point of the sūtra in Wōnhyo's analysis, and ten different ways to approach the exegesis of the scripture as whole; it corresponds to the third of Zhiyi's five categories. Part Three, An Explication of the Title(*sōk chemok*), mentions the three different titles ascribed to the scripture and gives an extensive etymological treatment of the meaning of the main title, *Vajrasamādhi*; it corresponds to the first of Zhiyi's five categories. These three introductory sections of the text constitute barely three of some seventy-three pages in the *Han'guk Pulgyo chōnsō* edition of the Exposition. Zhiyi's fourth and fifth categories—the text's impact and classification—do not receive a separate part in Wōnhyo's exegesis, but are discussed at various points in the main body of the commentary.

Part Four of Wōnhyo's *Exposition*, which is his detailed exegesis of the text itself, follows closely Daoans three divisions of scriptural exegesis. In this last major part of the *Exposition*, which continues for nearly seventy pages in the *Han'guk Pulgyo chōnsō* edition, Section One

⁸ See Kōgen Mizuno, *Buddhist Sutras: Origin, Development, Transmission* (Tokyo: Kōsei Publishing Co, 1982), p. 143. For further information on Zhiyi's exegetical and hermeneutical schemata, see David W. Chappell, "Introduction to the 'T'ien-t'ai ssu-chiao-i," *Eastern Buddhist*, n.s. 9 (May, 1976): 72-86.

is the prologue, which corresponds to the setting; Section Two is the main body, and covers all except the last chapter of the text; and the Epilogue corresponds to the transmission section. The only discrepancy is that Wōnhyo differentiates a separate Section Three in his treatment, which is the last "Dhāraṇi" chapter of the *Vajrasamādhi*. Thus, in its overall format, Wōnhyo's *Exposition* is deeply beholden to commentarial forms developed within the East Asian Buddhist tradition.

Given the wide gulfs in understanding that needed to be bridged, it is no surprise how complex and prolix East Asian Buddhist commentary becomes. Mimicking Han Confucian commentary, Buddhists learned to gloss most every term of significance in the text. Wōnhyo's *Exposition* is as long as it is because he takes such pains to gloss virtually all crucial passages and important terms appearing in the scripture. Let me take as but one example Wōnhyo's exegesis of a single sentence in Chapter 3 of the scripture: "The prajñā that produces nothing does not abide anywhere and is not absent anywhere"(HPC, 1-628c). Wōnhyo glosses virtually every term of consequence in his exegesis:

"Anywhere" means in all loci, whether absolute or conventional, true or mundane, active or still, and so forth. "Does not abide" means that it is unascertainable in any of these loci. "Not absent" means that there is nothing it does not ascertain in any of these loci. The reason this is the case is because, in all these loci, it is not so and yet not so (HPC, 1-629a).

In this encounter between sūtra and commentator, the scripture may set the agenda, but the commentary controls the discussion; the relationship between the two is utterly symbiotic and interdependent. In the case of the *Vajrasamādhi-sūtra*, as Wōnhyo's biography tells us, the history of the scriptures "rediscovery" in Silla is so intertwined with Wōnhyo's summons to write its exegesis that we may almost presume that there would have been no scripture if there had been no commentary.

III. Exegetical Mappings

But there is another level of complexity to East Asian Buddhist commentaries that makes them even more impenetrable to the reader: traditional commentators typically superimpose over the text of the scripture itself a hermeneutical superstructure that seeks to tie each section of the scripture into a coherent interpretive whole. This coherency is established not only by highlighting patterns apparent in the text, but also by explaining away any obvious inconsistencies or lacunae. A commentators hermeneutical strategy can sometimes be so heavy handed at times that it seems almost to bludgeon the text into submission to his overall vision.

Even a casual perusal of Wōnhyo's *Exposition* will reveal how complex this hermeneutical superstructure can become in East Asian commentaries. The exegete is constantly placing road markers to help orient the reader as to where he or she is in commentary by demonstrating how each specific passage connects to the entirety of the text, but, at least in Wōnhyo's case, with nary a reference to such words as "section," "division," "part," "segment," or the like. In Wōnhyo's opening exegesis to Chapter Seven of the sūtra, for example (HPC, 1-659b), he tells us that this chapter is the Sixth Division of the sequential elucidation of contemplation practice, which is a principal theme of the scripture in Wōnhyo's treatment. That chapter, he tells us, is divided into two [sections], of which the first [section] is in two [subsections], the first [subsection] in four [parts], the first [part] in two [subparts], and so on, seemingly ad infinitum. In this *Exposition*, the parts, sections, divisions, segments, etc., that Wōnhyo outlines eventually lead down to some ten levels of subheading, until even a small portion of text becomes thoroughly enmeshed in the broader interpretation that the commentator establishes for his text. Although Indian commentaries to Buddhist sūtras do exhibit an ubiquitous tendency toward categorization—a feature common to all scholastic traditions, in fact⁹ they rarely display this East Asian Buddhist penchant

⁹ See discussions on the tendency toward categorization as being a general feature of scholastic

for glossing seemingly every term, à la Confucian "interlinear" commentary. In Indian commentaries, there is nothing quite like this East Asian tendency to embed sections within sections, as if the commentary were an elaborate set of Chinese nested boxes. This is a quintessentially East Asian form, deriving ultimately from indigenous exegetical traditions rather than imported Buddhist models.

It is a daunting task indeed for a reader to make his or her way through such a thicket of interpretation and the East Asians have long struggled with how best to render this elaborate hermeneutical superstructure in a way that will be accessible to the reader. One of the most common traditional devices was to create an elaborate schematic diagram of the divisions of the commentary, essentially mapping out the text so that the narrative is rendered in visual space.¹⁰ This sort of hermeneutical device serves almost as a form of "scriptural cartography." Unfortunately, these diagrams can themselves become so colossal in size that they can become more daunting to peruse than the narrative itself. I challenge any but the most obsessive of specialists to try to find their way through the five densely packed pages in miniscule type of the scriptural cartography of Wŏnhyo's *Exposition* that the contemporary scholar Satō Shigeki has made.¹¹ This is not at all to criticize Satō's attempt, which is, after all, an entirely legitimate, and time-honored, strategy in East Asia; but it is an approach that is less effective in Western-language treatments. Alexander Mayer, in his unpublished work on Chinese commentaries to the *Diamond Sūtra*, has devised a novel system of symbols to indicate the different levels of heading used in exegeses; but deciphering his renderings requires learning his elaborate coding system. I have tried a rather different

traditions in José Ignacio Cabezón, *Buddhism and Language: A Study of Indo-Tibetan Scholasticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), Chapter One, "Scholasticism", pp. 11-26; and José Ignacio Cabezón (ed.), *Scholasticism: Cross-Cultural And Comparative Perspectives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), "Introduction", pp. 1-17.

¹⁰ This is a suggestion proposed by my colleague Robert Gimello.

¹¹ Satō Shigeki, *Wŏnhyo ūi hwaajaeng nollī: Mu-i pulsu-li sansang* (Seoul: Minjoksa, 1996), appendix, pp. 315-321. See also a similar type of exegetical chart included with Ūn Chŏngghŭi and Song Chinyŏn, translators, *Wŏnhyo ūi Kŭmgang sammaegyŏ non* (seoul: Ilchisa, 2000), which is rather more readable because of its large scale.

strategy in this translation, arbitrarily supplying designations for the different sections (e.g., titling them sections, subsections, parts, divisions, etc.), and using an outline format to keep track of the exegesis.

Figure 1
Outline and Internal Subheading Designations
for *Wŏnhyo's Kŭmgang sammaegyŏng non*

PART ONE: A Narration of Its Principal Ideas

PART TWO: An Analysis of the Themes of the Sūtra

PART THREE: An Explanation of the Title

PART FOUR: An Exegesis of the Text

Section One: Prologue

Section Two: Main Body

First Division of Contemplation Practice:
 Rejecting All Characteristics of Sense Objects
 in Order to Reveal the Signless Contemplation

Second Division of Contemplation Practice:
 Extinguishing the Produced Mind in Order to Explain the Practice
 of Nonproduction

Third Division of Contemplation Practice:
 The Inspiration of Original Enlightenment

Fourth Division of Contemplation Practice:
 Abandoning the Spurious to Access Reality

Fifth Division of Contemplation Practice:
 Sanctified Practices Emerge from the Voidness of the True Nature

Sixth Division of Contemplation Practice:
 Immeasurable Dharmas Access the Tathāgatagarbha

 Section Three: Dhra (Codes) and Dissemination
Internal Subheadings [outline and designation as used in translation]:

- 1) I [section]
- 2) I.A [subsection]
- 3) I.A.1 [part]
- 4) I.A.1.a [subpart]
- 5) I.A.1.a.i [division]
- 6) I.A.1.a.i.a [subdivision]
- 7) I.A.1.a.i.a.1 [segment]
- 8) I.A.1.a.i.a.1.a [subsegment]
- 9) I.A.1.a.i.a.1.a.i [portion]
- 10) I.A.1.a.i.a.1.a.i.a [subportion]

This style of exegesis actually has a long pedigree in Western Buddhist Studies, where outline format has been frequently applied in translations.¹² In order to make it easier to consult the commentary, I also keep the major parts of the outline running independently alongside the translation of the commentary itself. At the same time, to ensure that Wŏnhyo's own statement of his hermeneutical structure is not obscured or lost when reading the English version, I have been careful always to place my outline structure in brackets in the translation, so that the reader will know this is my interpolation, not Wŏnhyo's.

IV. Wŏnhyo's Hermeneutical Strategy

In his lengthier works, including most of his commentaries(*so*), expositions(*non*), and thematic essentials(*chongyo*), Wŏnhyo often employs an incipient hermeneutical approach to explicate the text, an approach that was first explained by Pak Chonghong¹³: explications

¹² See, for an early example, the elaborate outline, down to some four levels of subheading, used in E. Obermiller's *Analysis of the Abhisamayalankara*, Calcutta Oriental Series, no 27 (Luzac & Co., 1933). For East Asian commentaries, note Paul L. Swanson's use of an outline format in translating Zhiyi's *Fahua xuanyi*; see Swanson's *Foundations of T'ien-t'ai Philosophy: the Flowering of the Two Truths Theory in Chinese Buddhism* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1989), pp. 159-163

based on "analysis"(*kae*; lit. "to open up" [for analysis]) and "synthesis" (*hap*; lit. "to combine"), which reveal the text's "thematic essentials" (*chongyo*). In analytical mode, Wŏnhyo seeks to unpack for the reader the vast array of teachings and doctrines appearing in a text, as a way of illustrating the diversity and originality of Buddhist doctrinal teachings. In synthetic mode, Wŏnhyo adopts a synthetic perspective that explains how the variant ideas described in a text can actually be viewed as complementing one another. Both of these hermeneutical devices applied together then yield a description of the principal topic and insight of the text: the "thematic essentials."

Wŏnhyo's two largest commentaries, for example, both adopt this hermeneutical tool in their interpretive approach. As Wŏnhyo notes in his *Taesung kisillon so* (Commentary to the *Awakening of Faith*): If [the meaning of this treatise] is 'opened up' for analysis(*kae*), then it has as its theme(*chong*) immeasurable, limitless meanings. If it is combined together as a synthesis(*hap*), then it has as its essentials(*yo*) the two aspects and the one mind.¹⁴ In his *Exposition of the Vajrasamādhī-sūtra*, Wŏnhyo similarly explains, "The thematic essentials(*chongyo*) of this scripture have both an analytical(*kae*) and synthetic(*hap*) aspect. Discussed from a synthetic standpoint, [the scripture's] essential point is the contemplation practice that has a 'single taste'. Explained from an analytical standpoint, its fundamental doctrine involves ten types of approaches to dharma(*dharmaparyāya*).... But even if this scripture is explained analytically, its [ten approaches to dharma] do not add to the one [taste]; even if it is interpreted synthetically, it does not detract from those ten. Neither increase nor decrease is the thematic essential of this [scripture].¹⁵ Wŏnhyo's hermeneutical approach, then, typically starts with a broad, general perspective on the scripture, gleaned by

13 Pak Chonghong, "Wŏnhyo ūi chorhak sasang," in *Han'guk sasang sa* (History of Korean Thought) (Seoul: Iljin sa, 1966), pp. 59-88; reprinted in Pak's *Han'guk sasangsa: Pulgyo sasang p'yŏn* (History of Korean Thought: Buddhism, Somun mungo, no. 11 (Seoul, 1972), pp. 85-127. I have translated this article as "Wŏnhyo's Philosophical Thought," in *Assimilation of Buddhism in Korea: Religious Maturity and Innovation in the Silla Dynasty*, Studies in Korean Religions and Culture, vol. 4, ed. Lewis R. Lancaster and C. S. Yu (Berkeley, Asian Humanities Press, 1991), pp. 47-103.

14 *Taesung kisillon so*, HPC, 1-698c7-8.

15 *Kŭmgang sammaegyŏng non*, HPC, 1-604c.

applying both analytical and synthetic perspectives, culminating in a description of the scriptures essential theme. Only after orienting the reader to the broader themes of the scripture does he then go on to begin his detailed explication section by section.

V. The Grand Synthesis of Commentary

Creating a coherent and systematic text out of the often-haphazard format of Mahāyāna sūtras requires considerable exegetical aplomb, if not in fact a total leap of faith. Mahāyāna scriptures, like the stūra genre as a whole,¹⁶ have a tendency to anthologize. D. T. Suzuki's characterization of the *Lankāvatāra-sūtra*, a distant relative of the *Vajrasamādhi*, is apposite in reading the *Vajrasamādhi-sūtra* as well: "The whole *Lankāvatāra* is just a collection of notes unsystematically strung together, and, frankly speaking, it is a useless task to attempt to divide them into sections, or chapters (*parivarta*), under some specific titles. Some commentators have tried to create a system in the *Lankāvatāra* by making each paragraph somewhat connected in meaning with the preceding as well as the succeeding one, but one can at once detect that there is something quite constrained or far-fetched about the attempt.¹⁷ There are some continuities of interest in the *Vajrasamādhi* which attracted the attentions of Wōnhyo and later commentators, especially the emphasis seen throughout most of the sūtra on such seminal Mahāyāna concepts as "nonproduction" (*anutpādatva*) and "signlessness" (*alakṣaṇatva*). It is also true that the major orientation of the scripture is soteriological, given its stress on the concepts of *samādhi*, *tathāgatagarbha*, and enlightenment. Rather than the systematic "synthesis" that Wōnhyo perceives, however, an eclectic "amalgam" may be a more accurate portrayal. Wōnhyo proposes to find in the *Vajrasamādhi* a cross-section of the philosophical interests current in

16 A possibility raised by Luis Gómez, "The Structure and Meaning of a Pali Sutta" (paper delivered at the Eighth Annual Conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, Berkeley, California, August 10, 1987).

17 D. T. Suzuki, *Studies in the Lankāvatāra Sūtra* (1932; reprint, Boulder: Prajñā Press, 1978), p. 17; and note also Suzuki's *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, series 1 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 75.

contemporary East Asian Buddhism, but the *stūras* examination of these debates is hardly rigorous or systematic. In its need for commentarial explanation to bring some order to its message, then, the *Vajrasaādhi* is in the very best of company.

Let me explore how a traditional commentator like Wōnhyo proceeds to create a methodical exposition out of the *Vajrasamādhi*'s rather haphazard presentation. Wōnhyo first finds obvious evidence of the *Vajrasamādhi*'s grand synthesis of Mahāyāna doctrine in the alternate titles given to the scripture in its Epilogue(see HPC,1-675c): "Since there is nothing that it does not conquer, it is entitled *Vajrasamādhi*(*Adamantine Absorption*). As there is nothing that it does not encompass, it is entitled *Compendium of Mahāyāna Sūtra*(*Sōp taesūng-gyōng*; *Mahāyānasamgraha-sūtra*). As there are neither of these two aspects which are not subsumed under its positions that are of vast import, it is also entitled *Source of Immeasurable Doctrine Sūtra* (*Muryangūijong-gyōng*; *Anantanirdeśāsiddhata-sūtra*)(HPC,1-604b). The opening portions of Wōnhyo's Exegesis of the Text(Part Four, Section Two, pp. 608c-609b) are an elaborate account of how each chapter of the scripture works together to present a comprehensive picture of contemplation practice and how, in turn, "these six chapters therewith assimilate all of the Mahāyāna"(HPC, 1-609b). Wōnhyo subsequently offers an alternate interpretation of how these six chapters assimilate all of Mahāyāna, by showing that they all culminate in the "one taste" of liberation. He then offers various groupings of the six chapters into three parts, two divisions, or again as having but "one taste that is unascertainable." By demonstrating that there is a consistent approach to contemplation outlined in the sūtra, ultimately, therefore, "there are none of the Mahāyāna's dharma-characteristics that this sūtra does not subsume; there is nothing of this doctrine of unlimited meaning that it does not access. This is why it is said that its [three different] titles are not frivolously given"(HPC, 1-604c). Through his commentary, then, Wōnhyo manages not only to tame the sometimes unruly structure of the sūtra, but also to connect the scripture's implicit message to the entirety of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Each chapter, passage, and ultimately

line in the *Vajrasamādhi* is thus shown to have a coherent message that is projected consistently throughout the text-and this message is rendered perfectly compatible with the larger canonical tradition.¹⁸

By validating the message of a specific sūtra as being consistent with the canonical "word of the Buddha," the commentary thus serves as well to confirm the impeccability of the Buddhist scriptural transmission as a whole-and really of the entirety of the Buddhadharmā. This concern with the consistency of the canon is a rather peculiar, perhaps even unique, feature of the East Asian Mahāyāna tradition, which has few analogues within Indian Mahāyāna. In discussions on the issue of scriptural authenticity, there seems, in fact, to be evidence *via silentio* that Indian Mahāyānists specifically sought to deny the validity of arguments that appealed to the testimony of history, because they knew they would lose such an argument.¹⁹ In their treatments of this matter, they instead took recourse in a more elastic definition of scriptural authenticity in which the "word of the Buddha" need not simply be the actual words spoken by Śākyamuni himself, but could instead mean anything based on the Dharma that was "well spoken" (*subhāṣita*). "Well spoken" meant that a statement: a) was significant (*arthopasaṃhita*), not nonsense; b) was based on Dharma, or reality (*dharmopasaṃhita*), not illusion; c) destroys defilements (*kleśahāpaka*), rather than causing their increase; and d) illuminates the benefits of *nirvāṇa*, rather than increasing the faults of *saṃsāra*.²⁰ By rejecting the testimony of history in determining scriptural authenticity, the Mahāyānists are ipso facto demonstrating their apparent awareness of their own deficiencies regarding history: since they were never going to win the historical argument, they simply deny the validity of history altogether in favor of the doctrinal or philosophical principle that their

18 For the similar attempt by the Qing-dynasty commentator, Zhuzhen (d.u.), to present a systematic and complete outline of the *Vajrasamādhi*, see my *The Formation of Ch'an Ideology in China and Korea: The Vajrasamādhi-Sutra, A Buddhist Apocryphon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 255.

19 A suggestion made to me by my colleague Gregory Schopen.

20 A listing derived from the *Adhyasāyasaṅcodana-sūtra*; see the discussion in Ronald M. Davidson, "An Introduction to the Standards of Authenticity in Indian Buddhism," in *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, ed. by Robert E. Buswell, Jr. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), p. 310.

scriptures are authentic because they conform to "reality" or "the nature of things" (*dharmatā*).²¹ In this wise, Indian Mahāyānist were able to counter *Ōrāvaka-yāna* attacks on the authenticity of their scriptures and to advocate a more open definition of a Buddhist canon, which required neither consistency nor comprehensiveness.²²

In contrast to their Indian Mahāyāna counterparts, East Asian Buddhists of the premodern era betray little sense, even *via silentio*, of the historical realities of Buddhist scriptural development. They also do not display much awareness of the living pluralism of the different cultural manifestations of their religion. For the East Asians, Buddhism did not develop historically over centuries, in diverse geographical regions of Asia, before making its way to East Asia, where it blended with indigenous beliefs and practices to form the uniquely "Sinitic" strand of the religion. This vision is a peculiarly modern scholarly construct, which has no foundation in traditional views about the religion. East Asians of the premodern age instead viewed Buddhism as a universal religion pristine and pure in its thought, its practice, and its realization. The hermeneutical strategies employed by Wōnhyo and his East Asian colleagues, including both their adaptation of indigenous commentarial forms and their development of doctrinal taxonomies (*pan'gyo*; *Ch. panjiao*), sought to demonstrate how the plethora of competing Buddhist texts comprising the canoneach claiming to be pristinely Buddhist but seeming at times to be almost diametrically opposed to one another²³ were all actually part of a coherent heuristic plan within the religion, as if all of Buddhism's variations were in fact cut from whole cloth.²⁴ Buddhist commentators saw themselves as

21 This is not to deny Josè Ignacio Cabezón's rather more sanguine view of this decision ("Vasubandhu's *Vyakhyayukti* on the Authenticity of the Mahayāna Sūtras, in *Texts in Context: Traditional Hermeneutics in South Asia*, ed. by Jeffrey R. Timm [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992], p. 233) as being not "an instance of hermeneutical naivetè . . . [but] in fact, the result of a considerable critical reflection."

22 See Cabezón, "Vasubandhu's *Vyakhyayukti*," p. 233.

23 Even the Indian exegete Vasubandhu bewails this difficulty of establishing the veracity of the textual transmission based on historicity: as he states in his *Vykyyukti*: (translated in Cabezón, "Vasubandhu's *Vyakhyayukti*", p. 228): "How can all of those mutually inconsistent expositions be considered the Buddha's word?"

24 For Wōnhyo's contributions to the developing East Asian tradition of *panjiao*, see Rhi Ki-yong (Yi Ki-yng), "Kyop'ansa-sang esō pon Wōnhyo ūi wich'i (Wōnhyo's place in the history of

active participants in this universal transmission of the Buddha-dharma going back both spatially to the Buddhist homeland in India and temporally to the time of the Buddha himself.²⁵ The very act of writing commentary therefore validates the continued vitality of the Buddhist textual transmission, making the insights of the Buddha himself come alive in the present. It is our challenge as translators to ensure, in the same way, that Wŏnhyo's insights come alive to contemporary readers in the West.

doctrinal taxonomies), in *Han'guk Pulgyo Yŏn'gu* (Seoul: Han'guk Pulgyo Yŏn'guwŏn, 1982), pp. 345-358.

25 I am drawing here from my treatment of the premodern understanding of the Buddhist tradition in East Asia; see my article "Imagining Korean Buddhism: The Invention of a National Religious Tradition," in *Nationalism and the Construction of Korean Identity*, ed. Hyung Il Pai and Timothy R. Tangherlini, Korea Research Monograph no. 26 (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1998), pp. 83-84.