

Sot'aesan's *Essays on the Reformation of Korean Buddhism*

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The basic idea behind Sot'aesan's reformation of Buddhist doctrine and the monastic system was based on the idea of skillful-means (方便, K. pangp'yon; S. upāya). He considered the Buddha's teachings and Buddhist systems as the skillful-means that must be properly applied to the contemporary Korean society. Throughout his ideas on the reformation of Buddhism, Sot'aesan maintained the main principle of modifying or renovating some Buddhist doctrines as well as the whole of the monastic system, without changing the main tenets of the Buddha's teachings. In the Hyokshillon, Sot'aesan pointed to six central ideas of his reformation: (1) No Buddha Statue : Enshrinement of Irwonsang (一圓相, One Circle) as the Symbol of Dharmakāya, (2) Imported Buddhism (from India and China) to a thoroughly Korean Buddhism, (3) Buddhism for a few to Buddhism for the majority, (4) Reformation of the Monastic System: Buddhism for Monks and Lay Devotees, (5) Buddhism Without Discrimination against Gender, (6) Unifying the Divided Subjects in the Educational System of Buddhism, i.e., Three Practices (三學, K. Samhak; S. triūksā). Sot'aesan's main purpose in the reformation of Buddhism was to bring Buddhist thought and systems down from the mountain to the people in order to apply Buddhism to the contemporary secular world.

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I. General Introduction

In 1916, Park Chung-Bin (1891-1943, 朴重彬), better known by his religious epithet, Sotaesan(少太山), founded a reformed Buddhist movement called *Won-Buddhism*(Wonbulgyo, 圓佛教). Though he sought to reform Buddhism in Korea, Sotaesan believed that Buddha's wisdom and power was unlimited and gave his preference to Buddha's Dharma. He found a natural correlation between his own, unique enlightenment, which came before his understanding of Buddhism, and the Buddhist teaching. This belief derived from his reading of the *Diamond Sutra* (金剛般若波羅密經, *K. Kumgang-panya-paramil-gyong; C. Chinkang-panjo-polomi-ching; S. Vajracchedika-prajñāparamitā-sūtra*) following that enlightenment.

He considered the Buddha śakyamuni to be the sage of all sages, and exalted the teaching of the Buddha śakyamuni, claiming it to be the most profound, and superior to all other religious doctrines. To Sot'aesan, the Buddha's was limitless in its profundity and immensity. He hence chose to adopt Buddhist teaching as the fountainhead of his own teaching. He also showed his affinity with Buddhism by predicting, "Buddhism will be the major religion of the world."¹ After which, he adopted the Buddha's teachings as the main tenet of his doctrine.(Taejonggyong 1.2: 1962) Yet he added that, "the Buddha Dharma of the future will be different from that of the past." His ideas of reform speak to that hoped for difference.(Taejonggyong 1.2: 1962)

Despite his affinity to the Buddhist teaching, Sot'aesan considered Buddhism in Korea an imported religion with different cultural backgrounds. In the 'General Statement' of the *Choson pulgyo hyokshillon* (朝鮮佛教革新論, *Essays on the Reformation of Korean Buddhism = Hyokshillon*), Sot'aesan described the positive and negative functions of Buddhism in Korean society as follows:

¹ *Wonbulgyo Kyojon* (圓佛教 教典, Scriptures of Won-Buddhism). *Taejonggyong*(大宗經) 1.15. (Iksan: Wonbulgyo Press, 1962), 102-103. After the death of Sotaesan his disciples compiled the *Wonbulgyo Kyojon*, which was first published in 1962. This scripture is divided into two sections, the *Chongjon* (The Righteous Canon) and the *Taejonggyong* (The Great Canon of Sotaesan Analects). Each section is divided into chapters and verses. From here on, I will simply state the section with the chapter and verse.

Buddhism has sometimes been persecuted or welcomed in accordance with the change of political situations and public opinions in Korea. Sometimes it has served Korean society enormously, and at other times, it has caused some detestable problems concerning the development of Korean society.²

During the period between 1919 and 1924, Sot'aesan, in discussions with Korean monks such as the important Zen(J., K. Son, C. Chan) Master, Paek Hak-myong(白鶴鳴), articulated his thoughts regarding the reformation of Korean Buddhism. He later traveled to several well-known Buddhist monasteries, and pointed out several problems within traditional Buddhism. Not being a monastic and unhappy with the lack of response, Sot'aesan decided to initiate his own reform of Korean Buddhism from outside of the traditional Korean monastic system. His reformation was activated when in 1924 he formed a religious organization, *The Research Society of Buddha Dharma*(佛法研究會), which would later be titled *Won-Buddhism*. This paper seeks to examine the nature of Sot'aesan's reformation of Buddhism.

In his thought on the reformation of Korean Buddhism, Sot'aesan emphasized that Buddhism should be believed and practiced by the majority. It should also be appropriate to the times and helpful to the future. Therefore, he declared that his religious organization was to be practiced by both clerics and ordinary laypeople in their daily lives. He made clear that his new religious organization would be modernized, while at the same time, the main tenets of Buddhism would be maintained. According to Sot'aesan, some doctrines and the overall monastic system created dilemmas when facing the modern world, and thus needed to be renovated.

The basic idea behind Sot'aesan's reformation of Buddhist doctrine and the monastic system was based on the idea of skillful-means (方便, K. *pangp'yon*; S. *upāya*). He considered the Buddha's teachings and Buddhist systems as the skillful-means that must be properly applied to

2 Sot'aesan (Park Chung-Bin), *Choson pulgyo hyokshillon* (Essays on the Reformation of Korean Buddhism). Kwangsoo Park, tr. (San Francisco: International Scholars Press, 1997), 291. The original text in Korean was written in the early 1920s and published in 1935. I will reference this as *Hyokshillon*.

the contemporary Korean society. Throughout his ideas on the reformation of Buddhism, Sot'aesan maintained the main principle of modifying or renovating some Buddhist doctrines as well as the whole of the monastic system, without changing the main tenets of the Buddha's teachings. In the *Hyokshillon*, Sot'aesan pointed to six central ideas of his reformation. They are:

- (1) *No Buddha Statue : Enshrinement of Irwonsang (一圓相, One Circle) as the Symbol of Dharmakāya*
- (2) *Imported Buddhism (from India and China) to a thoroughly Korean Buddhism;*
- (3) *Buddhism for a few to Buddhism for the majority;*
- (4) *Reformation of the Monastic System: Buddhism for Monks and Lay Devotees*
- (5) *Buddhism Without Discrimination against Gender*
- (6) *Unifying the Divided Subjects in the Educational System of Buddhism, i.e., Three Practices (三學, K. Samhak; S. triūksā)*

Sot'aesan's main purpose in the reformation of Buddhism was to bring Buddhist thought and systems down from the mountain to the people in order to apply Buddhism to the contemporary secular world.

1. No Buddha Statue : Enshrinement of Irwonsang (One Circle) as the Symbol of Dharmakāya

Although Sot'aesan exalted the Buddha and his teachings, he did not enshrine the Buddha statue at Won-Buddhism temples. Instead he enshrined the symbol *Irwonsang* (One Circle) as the symbol of *Dharmakāya*. In the *Hyokshillon*, he articulated his doctrinal system of the Truth of *Irwon*, and enshrined the symbol *Irwonsang* as the object of the faith and practice at Won-Buddhism monasteries.

What would be the reasons for Sot'aesan to enshrine the symbol *Irwonsang* rather than the Buddha statue? Sot'aesan in the *Hyokshillon* and the *Kyojon* explains his reasoning. His reasons are fundamental to understanding Sot'aesan's thought. He states why enshrining *Irwonsang* as the symbol of *Dharmakāya* is more effective than the enshrining of the Buddha statue.

Firstly, on a more surface level, Sot'aesan pointed out that there were quite a few people who enshrined the Buddha statue as a means of livelihood. These people would enshrine a make shift temple with a Buddha statue, and collect the food and money offered to it. In order to avoid any misunderstanding that his religious movement was just another moneymaking Buddha-enshrining business, he did not use the Buddha statue. Sot'aesan states:

There are quite a few people who enshrine the Buddha statue as a livelihood. Many people would confuse the *Won*-Buddhist priests enshrining the Buddha statue with these people who gather the food and offerings served to the Buddha statue. The prestige of the priest would hence be dirtied, the sincere practitioners of meditation would not come to such a place, the teaching of the Buddha Dharma would not be provided, and consequently, that place would become seen as a house for the purpose of profit.

Presently, many people in the secular world consider those intoning the name of a Buddha and giving offerings to the Buddha statue as not truly knowing the Righteous Dharma of the Buddha, the salvation of sentient beings, or the good or evil paths. They also see and treat the true devotees, those people who exert themselves properly in the Buddhist doctrines and systems, as those who do not truly know. Moreover, it is so difficult for the ordinary person to build a Buddha statue and easily enshrine it. And so the people who are well off enough to build and enshrine it would come to feel comfort and reconciliation as if they were direct disciples of the Buddha, and they would come to rely on the statue. On the other hand, those unable to enshrine it would feel no such reliance or comfort.

For these reasons, we have decided to enshrine the Buddha-nature *Irwonsang*.(Park Chung-Bin: 1997, 300).

Sot'aesan pointed to the contemporary problem of Korean Buddhism, that of mixing Buddhism with many Shamanistic elements. For example, according to the *Hyokshillon*, some spiritualists consulted as blind fortunetellers or to exorcize (K. *gut*) like a female shaman, while misrepresenting him or herself as a Buddhist. In Korean history,

there have been many Korean shamans who have enshrined the Buddha statue to perform exorcism and expel evil spirits, cure physical and mental diseases, communicate with the ancestral spirits, or prophesy the future. Some shaman's relied on the mystical power of the Buddha statue during exorcisms.

Sot'aesan wanted to avoid any false identification of himself or his followers as being shamanic. While this does not necessarily mean that Sot'aesan rejected the positive aspects of Shamanism, Sot'aesan wanted to make it clear that the purpose of his religious activity was to address and practice the teaching of the Buddha. He therefore wanted to avoid any misunderstanding about the nature of his movement.

Secondly, Sotaesan stated that it was difficult for the ordinary devotee to build a Buddha statue and enshrine it. The poorest devotees would not have the financial ability to pay for such an enshrinement of the Buddha statue in their homes. In contrast, enshrining the symbol *Irwonsang* on a wooden block or on a piece of white paper was uncomplicated and cheap. Thus, Sot'aesan considered the convenient accessibility of the symbol *Irwonsang*. Everyone could partake of such an enshrinement and have it as an important aspect in their religious lives.

Thirdly, the Buddha statue is not the actual source of blessings and misery. In the *Hyokshillon*, the Buddha statue is metaphorically described as a scarecrow. When a farmer sets up a scarecrow to scare off the birds in the fall before the harvest, the birds would refrain for several days because of the scarecrow. But after testing the scarecrow in several ways, the birds come to recognize that it as only a kind of puppet. Consequently, they ignore the scarecrow and eat the crops from the farmland, and even rest on top of the scarecrow, relieve themselves, and play with the scarecrow. The puppet on the farm is only temporarily effective in scaring off birds. But it comes to have no real power in doing this. Even birds come to recognize the nature of a scarecrow; so how is it that human beings fail to awaken, after more than two thousand years, to the nature of the Buddha statue they worship?(Park Chung-Bin: 1997, 300).

Sot'aesan applied this example saying that although it might have

been useful for the development of Buddhist doctrine in the past, Buddha statue worship would cause a hindrance when it failed to scare off crows. With such a reliance on a Buddha statue, it becomes difficult to explain why blessings are not bestowed to some and granted to others. The Buddha statue, and Buddhism which the statue represents, comes to be faulted for unanswered prayer and suffering. The result would mean a failure of Buddhism's development in the present and future.

Thus Sot'aesan cautioned people not to fall into the superstitious meaning of merely worshipping the Buddha statue without comprehending the Great Way of the Buddha's teachings. In contrast, *Irwonsang* as the symbol of *Dharmakāya* would be more of a tool, and thus more effective in explaining the principles of blessings and misery. Sot'aesan states:

Hence, it would seem easier for us to clearly teach how *Irwonsang* bestows beneficence to sentient beings in innumerable ways. For example, in the Heaven and Earth, in all things, and in the dharma-realm of empty space are the manifestations of the *Dharmakāya* Buddha. Hence one should present, in accordance with one's capacity and one's karmic activities, realistic yet valiant offerings to Buddhas in order to be liberated from one's sins and to be bestowed with blessings. One should give offerings to Heaven and Earth if or when sins or blessings are related to such, and likewise, to Parents, Brethren, and Law if or when sins or blessings are related. (Park Chung-Bin: 1997, 300).

Sot'aesan explains *Irwonsang* to be the reality that bestows beneficence in innumerable ways. This statement may be somewhat of an ambiguous statement regarding *Irwonsang*, especially when Sot'aesan in other passages likens the symbol of *Irwonsang* to a finger pointing to the moon or to a photo of one's parents. In this description, the form of *Irwonsang* is not identical with the essential reality of *Irwon*. In other words, *Irwonsang* is a symbolic device used to explain the essential reality of *Dharmakāya*. But the above quote seems to contradict the whole context of Sot'aesan's writings that describe *Irwonsang* as a symbol

and never as the object of faith that bestows beneficence to us. In these passages, it is only a blueprint that conveys Heaven and Earth, and all things in the universe. All of this is to say that it is difficult to differentiate between the terms *Irwon* (One Circle) and *Irwonsang* (One Circle Form) in the *Hyokshillon* itself. There seems to be no clear difference in this writing of Sot'aesan.

However, we might refer to the term '*Irwonsang*' as *Dharmakāya* in its individualized manifestations. These manifestations have the actual ability to bestow beneficence on sentient beings. If we borrow another metaphor from the Hua-yen philosophy, we might be able to understand the above statement. In Hua-yen thought, the reflected images of the moon on the myriad lakes or rivers are the individualized manifestations (*Nirmanakāya*) of the true moon (*Dharmakāya*). In this sense, the symbol *Irwonsang* is not the only image but one instance of an individualized manifestation of *Dharmakāya*. Also, *Irwonsang* is used as the term to refer to all things in the universe, which have Buddha-nature or the manifested *Dharmakāya*.

Fourthly, *Irwonsang* as the symbol of *Dharmakāya* is enshrined as a means of guiding one's moral practice. Sot'aesan asserted that practitioners should be able to apply the truth of *Irwonsang* to one's daily life. If the Truth of *Irwonsang* is separated from one's life, it will remain a useless principle. Sot'aesan explained how the truth of *Irwonsang*, the symbol of *Dharmakāya* Buddha, can be applied to daily life as follows:

First, you must take *Irwonsang* as an *hwadu* [話頭, C. *hua-tou*] enabling you to see into your original nature and attain to Buddhahood whenever you see it. Secondly, you must take it as the standard of moral cultivation so that your moral practice in daily life may be as perfect as *Irwonsang*. Thirdly, realizing that all things in the universe have the actual authority to bless or punish you, it should be taken as [the symbol of] that which you believe to be the truth [of karmic retribution]. If you understand this truth, you will worship whenever you see it as if it were the picture of your parents. (*Taejonggyong* 2.8: 1962)

Here we can see Sot'aesans adoption of Zen Buddhist methods in his practice of meditation. *Hwadu* is one of the methods of Zen Buddhist tradition. The literal meaning of *hwadu* (K.; C. *hua-t'ou*) is the apex of speech, and is the essential point in a *kongan* (公案, K.; C. *k'ung-an*; J. *koan*) given to a Zen student. It is used as a topic of meditation to push the practitioner toward the state of enlightenment. This method of practice is called *Kanhwa-son* (看話禪, K.; J. *Kanna-zen*).

The Lin-chi sect in particular emphasized *kongan* exercises as the way to enlightenment. The Lin-chi sect based its teachings on the Southern Zen school that was mainly influenced by the Madhyamikan philosophy. *Kongan* literally means 'official document,' 'public notice,' or 'public announcement.'³ It also refers more generally to the 1,700 collected cases of teachings of the Zen masters to their disciples. *Kongan* is essentially a technique used to attain enlightenment whereby perplexing, irrational, and paradoxically puzzling conversations between the Zen masters and disciples are used. The Zen masters emphasized silence because they considered the First Principle of Zen Buddhism to be inexpressible. A well-known Zen passage emphasizes the silent transmission of the Buddha Dharma from mind to mind. For this reason, Zen masters assert that to understand the ineffable realm, there must be no reliance on words or logical reasoning. If one is attached to words, according to Zen tradition, one will fall into the 'net of words.' (Fung Yu-Lan:1959, 257).

3 The term *kongan* was explained by Chung-fêng Ming-pên (1263-1324) who lived during the Yüan dynasty (1260-1368) as, "*Kung* (*kô*), or 'public,' is the single track followed by all sages and worthy men alike, the highest principle which serves as a road for the whole world. *An*, or 'records,' are the orthodox writings which record what the sages and worthy men regarded as principles." These *kongans* are collected in the *Mumonkan* and other Zen (Ch'an) literatures. Through the *kongan*, Zen masters urge the practitioner to abandon one's rational thought structures and step beyond one's usual state of consciousness through the means of *kongan*. Chao-chou Ts'ung-shens (778-897) '*Wu*' (lit. 'nothingness' or 'no,') is one of the most significant *Kongans* in Zen history. When questioned twice whether a dog had Buddha-nature, Chao-chou answered 'yes' to one and 'no' to another person? Through this irrational set of answers, Chao-chou tried to urge the Zen student to abandon one's rational analysis, and understand his answers as being beyond verbal limitation. Case no. 36 in the *Mumonkan* also gives the paradoxical question: "If you meet a man of Tao on the way, greet him neither with words nor with silence. Now tell me, how will you greet him?" Sasaki, Ruth Fuller and Is-hu Miura. *Zen Dust*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1966), 4; Blyth, R.B. *Mumonkan* (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1966).

One way to break the 'net of words' is through bewildering methods. *Kongan* is similar to '*uidu*'(疑頭, K.), and are somewhat interchangeable in Korea Son Buddhism. Thus, Sot'aesan used the term '*uidu*' as well as '*hwadu*' *Uidu* literally means 'apex of doubt' or simply 'doubt.' He illustrated *uidu* as being the method "to investigate a doubtful issue or topic that one may face when inquiry into facts (right and wrong, advantage and disadvantage) and principles (noumenon and phenomenon, existence and non-existence). One may also investigate one of the test cases which ancient Buddhas and patriarchs composed." The purpose of *uidu* practice is to help the practitioner attain the ability of clearly analyzing dilemmas that naturally come when investigating facts and principles (*sari*). Thus Sot'aesan's *uidu* and *hwadu* are different from the puzzling Zen *kongan* uses to break the 'net of words.' Sot'aesan used *uidu* and *hwadu* as the practical methods that aid in understanding the facts and principles of the Truth through logical reasoning and analysis.

Fifthly, Sot'aesan enshrined the symbol *Irwonsang* to worship all things in the universe as the manifested *Dharmakāya* Buddha. He explained it as an inclusive object of faith and worship that points to the universal Buddha-Nature in all of things. Enshrining *Irwonsang* instead of a Buddha statue was based on Sot'aesans clear distinction between *Irwon* as *Dharmakāya* and the *sayamuni* Buddha as a *Nirmanakāya*. Sot'aesan regretted that "there are many who have seen the incarnated Buddha (*Nirmanakāya*), but few who have clearly seen the essential body (*Dharmakāya*) of the Buddha."(*Taejonggyong*, 15.11: 1962) He wanted to show *Dharmakāya*, the Essential Buddha, directly to the people and used the symbol *Irwonsang* as *Dharmakāya* to do so.

The symbol *Irwonsang* is also described as the symbol of the Buddha's mind, whereas the statue of the Buddha is the symbol of the Buddha's bodily appearance. Sot'aesan illustrated that the Buddha's mind is "vast, great and infinite, includes both being and nonbeing and penetrates the three periods of past, present and future."(*Taejonggyong*, 2.3: 1962). Sot'aesan considered the bodily appearance of the Buddha as merely a phenomenal appearance. The main purpose of enshrining the

Buddha statue in the early Buddhist history was to commemorate and venerate the Buddha. Also, according to Sot'aesan, the worship of the statue of the Buddha is limited to the personality of the Buddha śakyamuni. Sot'aesan did not want to limit the object of worship to the personality of the Buddha only; he wanted to treat and worship all things in the universe as the manifested Buddhas of *Dharmakaya*, or *Irwon*.

There are clear differences between worshipping the Buddha statue and worshipping the symbol *Irwonsang*. When a disciple, Park Kwang-jon, asked Sot'aesan about *Irwonsang*, he explained the symbol *Irwonsang* as follows:

Irwonsang is enshrined in this order in a similar way as the statue of the Buddha is in the traditional Buddhist order. However, the statue of the Buddha is the symbol of the Buddha's bodily appearance, whereas *Irwonsang* is the symbol of the essence of the Buddha's mind. The bodily appearance is merely a doll, whereas the essence of mind, being vast, great and infinite, includes both being and nonbeing and penetrates the three periods of past, present and future. It is the fundamental source of all things in the universe and the realm of *samādhi* which cannot be expressed in words. (*Taejonggyong*, 2.3: 1962).

Sot'aesan expounded further the difference between worshipping the Buddha image and worshipping the symbol *Irwonsang*:

The worship of the statue of the Buddha, being limited to his personality, has no more significance than the commemoration and veneration we, as late disciples, pay to him; whereas the worship of *Irwonsang* has a great significance. Instead of limiting the object of worship to the personality of the Buddha, we treat and worship all things in the universe as the Buddha and seek thereby the source of blessings and punishment in them. Furthermore, one should cultivate one's personality to be as perfect as *Irwonsang* by taking it as the standard of moral cultivation. These are the differences in general. (*Taejonggyong*, 2.12: 1962).

Sot'aesan did not provide the reason why one should worship *Irwonsang* with the same spirit in which traditional Buddhism worships the Buddha image. He considered that the worship of the Buddha image is limited to a personal being, *i.e.*, the Gautama śakyamuni Buddha. On the other hand, the symbol *Irwonsang* is the symbol of the Buddha Mind and the Buddha-nature. Worshipping the symbol *Irwonsang* does not mean worshipping the circular form of *Irwonsang* carved in wood, but worshipping all things in the universe as Buddhas through the symbol *Irwonsang*. The symbol *Irwonsang* is the bridge connecting two different realms. It is the tunnel that enables us to go through the different realities of ultimate reality and conventional reality. The main reason to enshrine *Irwonsang* as the symbol of *Dharmakāya* is to worship *Dharmakāya* Buddha in the fullest perspective, not limiting it to one particular Buddha as a *Nirmanakāya*. All things in the universe are regarded as the manifestations of *Dharmakāya* Buddha; hence one should be able to meet and serve the manifested Buddhas everywhere. The whole aspect of faith in *Irwon Dharmakāya* and the individualized faith in the incarnated Buddha are mutually bound.

2. Imported Buddhism (from India and China) to a thoroughly Korean Buddhism

Buddhism originated from India around the 6th century B.C.E. and was introduced through China to Korea at the end of the 4th Century C.E. Sot'aesan noted that although Buddhism was introduced into Korea sixteen hundred thousand years ago, Buddhism remained an imported religion.

When Koreans read the Buddhist scriptures, they found that there were many Indian terms indicating names, locations, objects, works, and reasoning. And Chinese terms contained foreign idioms and phrases. It was also very difficult to teach the majority of people, either they be learned or ignorant, man or woman, old or young. The reason was that most of the Buddhist scriptures were written with complex Chinese words and phrases, which were too difficult for the majority of people to understand. This being the case, Sot'aesan believed that Indian

Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism, or the existing traditional Korean Buddhism would fail to be influential in society. So he suggested the painstaking task of compiling introductory books and references on Buddhism written in Korean.(Park Chung-Bin: 1997, 296).

Now, there were a few Buddhist scriptures translated into Korean from Chinese, but these works were not popularly used. Further, the many excellent Buddhist commentaries written by eminent Korean Buddhist monks were written in Chinese, without translation. Thus many people that were illiterate could not read Chinese Buddhist scripture, and even if they could, it was not easy to understand the complex, esoteric Chinese used to expound the Buddha's teachings. For this reason, Sot'aesan emphasized that the Buddhist scriptures written in Chinese or other languages be properly translated into, and in doing so, avoid using many complex, idiomatic Chinese phrases and unexplained Indian terms.

He provided some guidelines as to what selections of the Korean Buddhist literature should be used. He also stressed that these introductory works be written in a simple style, using Korean names and idioms to make the foremost teachings and actions of the Buddha more comprehensible. If it was necessary, a few necessary Chinese characters and phrases could be added in order to clarify the essential teachings. The essential aim was to expound the teachings to the masses. The introductory books would be one method among many of serving that aim.(Park Chung-Bin: 1997, 296).

It is important to note that most of his writings were published in Korean using a few Chinese idioms.

3. Buddhism for a Few to Buddhism for the Majority

The Buddha sakyamuni renounced his heritage of kingship and became a mendicant monk who wandered in the forest to realize the 'Truth.' Although he emphasized the Middle Path, negating the luxurious life in the secular world and the severe ascetic practice of torturing one's body, he and his followers maintained the monastic life style.

Sot'aesan believed that the doctrine and system of traditional Buddhism was structured mainly for the livelihood of the Buddhist monks who abandoned the secular life. For this reason, he commented and criticized this Buddhist system:

Although there have been faithful lay devotees in the secular world, they could not become central. Because of their role and status as a part of the laity they could only be secondary. Accordingly, except for those who made unusual material contributions or attained extraordinary spiritual cultivations, the lay devotee could not stand in the lineage of the direct disciples of the Buddha or easily become an ancestor of Buddhism.(Park Chung-Bin: 1997, 297).

The monastic system and some Buddhist doctrine are not considered to be suitable for people living in the secular world. Thus, according to Sot'aesan, Buddhism is not proper for the majority. The first reason for this is related to the location of the Buddhist monasteries. The Buddhist monasteries are located in deep mountain valleys where very few people live. Although the purpose of Buddhism is to save sentient beings from the sea of suffering, its goal could not be achieved if people could not afford to sacrifice their routine lives and go to the mountain to learn the Buddha Dharma. For this reason, Sot'aesan insisted on establishing religious buildings or temples in places where the laity live, *i.e.*, in villages or cities. The religious temples should be at locations available to the majority, thus enabling people to practice meditation and cultivate morality.

Sot'aesan noted that the Buddhist monks did not have any occupation, either as scholar-officials, farmers, artisans, or tradesmen. So to live, the Buddhist monks depended on alms or donations from the lay devotees. According to Sot'aesan, neither alms nor donations of the lay devotees were enough to be the primary financial source of maintaining the Buddhist monastery system. Thus, he allowed the priests in his religious organization to have suitable occupations in accordance with their circumstances. He also insisted that the religious organization should be self-reliant without depending on the donations

of the lay devotees.

Also, in the Korean Buddhist tradition, the marriage of monks and nuns is strictly prohibited. Sot'aesan believed that the prohibition of marriage for monks and nuns made their life styles too narrow. Therefore, he insisted that the marriage of the priests be optional according to their wishes.

Furthermore, Sot'aesan considered that there is no detailed Buddhist doctrine to provide the rules of ritual and propriety for the secular world. In the *Hyokshillon*, there is no direct reference to this matter. But in his other writings, Sot'aesan wrote that the Buddhist monks developed their rituals out of concern for the formalities of their own Buddhist worship. The lay people in secular life were not considered in this development. In order to adjust this imbalance, Sot'aesan simplified the complicated rituals of formal worship and provided some practical rituals which could be performed by both monks and lay devotees. Sot'aesan was also critical of Confucian rituals which emphasized frequent and highly formalized ritual ceremonies for ancestral spirits. He believed that these formalized rituals only caused a waste of energy and money for people. This does not necessarily mean that Sot'aesan rejected all Confucian and Buddhist ritual ceremonies. In fact Sot'aesan did adopt the Confucian idea of filial piety and the performance of the ancestral ceremony, yet he was critical of the three-year mourning period for one's parents in Confucianism based upon Buddhist thought of karmic transmigration. Concerning the funeral ceremony, he adopted the Buddhist ideas of forty-nine days rather than the Confucian three-year mourning period. He furthermore emphasized the creation of a joint ancestral ceremony for one's ancestors. By minimizing the extent and number of rituals, the normally financially strapped common person could save resources as well as energy.

4. Reformation of the Monastic System: Buddhism for Monks and Lay Devotees

Sot'aesan emphasized that the discriminatory system that divided Buddhist monks, nuns and the laity should be reformed. He insisted

that there should be no discrimination between the priesthood and laity in the lineage of Dharma transmission. The succession and transmission of the Buddha Dharma is an important theme in Zen Buddhism. In the Zen tradition, the Masters transmitted the Dharma of the Buddha to their disciples directly. Therefore, Zen Buddhism strongly emphasized the monks lineage of transmission, or succession. Sot'aesan was critical of this practice of Zen Buddhist tradition because it made distinctions between monks and nuns within the monastic system, as well as between the monastics and laity in regards to receiving the transmission of the Dharma. Sot'aesan promoted a system that did not discriminate, not only between monks and nuns, but also not between monastics and laity. He considered this a basic right as members of his new order.

Sot'aesan reformed his religious organization in reaction against the monk-centric systems and doctrines of the Buddhist *Sangha*. He was eager to teach his disciples intensively regardless of their gender and social status. In the early stages of his religious movement, he worked with his disciples during the day and trained them during the night. The first intensive meditation training was held at Mandok Mt. in Chin'an, North Cholla Province for a month in May 1924. His male and female disciples, including their children, attended this intensive meditation training. One year later, in March 1925, Sot'aesan named this training program, 'Fixed-Term and Daily Training. All of the disciples would receive intensive training during this time. The following practices were required:

- (1) Repetition of the Name of the Buddha, (2) Sitting in Meditation, (3) Study of Scriptures, (4) Lecture Giving, (5) Discussion, (6) *Uidu* ('apex of doubt' question), (7) Principle of Human Nature, (8) Keeping a Diary for a Fixed-term, (9) Keeping a Daily Diary, (10) Carefulness, and (11) Deportment.

During the Daily Training, disciples trained themselves in accordance with 'the Six Articles to Heed in Daily Application' and 'the Six Articles to Heed while Attending the Temple.(Chongsan, *Wonbulgyo kyosa*: 1962, 1070 and *Chongjon* 7).

One of Sot'aesans distinctive attributes was his philosophy of education without discrimination. These intensive training sessions were opened to clergy members and lay devotees and without regard to gender or social status. Anyone with the proper education and training in meditation could become leaders in social or religious communities.

5. Buddhism Without Discrimination against Gender

Related to the above was the dilemma of gender discrimination in traditional Buddhist practice. Buddhist nuns were not able to climb the ranks as spiritual leaders in the Buddhist monastic system. Frances Wilson asserted "the nun should have been respected equally with the monk, as a person fulfilling her religious life in ways similar to that of a monk." Wilson also suggests that, "early Buddhism preferred the celibate life as more conducive to Buddhist practice than married life."(Dianna Y. Paul: 1985, 77-8).

Even though the ascetic lives of monks and nuns have both been respected in the tradition of Buddhism, it would be wrong to say that the Buddhist nuns were respected on par with the Buddhist monks. There are a number of examples in Buddhist doctrine, as well as in the discipline of the *Vinaya-pitaka* system that explains the status of nuns as being below and instructed by monks.

According to the early *Vinaya-pitaka*, the Buddha allowed women to become nuns after his disciple Ananda requested it. He gave eight extra rules for nuns (*bhiksuni*) believing that women have to overcome unique obstacles. It was possible, as Wilson states, that the lay Buddhists respected the *bhiksuni*. However, the merit of monks (*bhiksu*) was considered greater than that of *bhiksuni* in the *Vinaya-pitaka*. As mentioned, Buddhist nuns were considered to have distinctive obstacles to the path of enlightenment. For example, women, according to the *Vinaya-pitaka*, were physically weak, dependent, and too sensitive. And thus there are more *Vinaya* rules for nuns, based on the idea this would prevent nuns from being hindered by their weaknesses. Moreover, a Buddhist nun could not become a teacher of monks, and

only monks could be the teachers of nuns. These rules are preserved in the Korean Buddhist monastic system. All residing temples of nuns are hierarchically beneath the *sangha* of monks.

In contrast, Sot'aesan educated his disciples without any discrimination against gender, and encouraged the female clergy to exercise their leadership among the male clergy. His doctrinal thought of perfect roundedness provides the basis for the equality of sentient beings, as well as all phenomenal existence. Also, it provides the doctrinal basis of the possibility of enlightenment equally without regarding their gender or social status.

6. Unifying the Divided Subjects in the Educational System of Buddhism , i.e., Three Practices (K. *Samhak*; S. *triūksa*)

During the Choson dynasty, the Korean Buddhist tradition was categorized into *Kyojong* (the Doctrinal School or Orthodox School) and *Sonjong*. *Kyojong* focused on Buddhist scholasticism, and was rapidly developed by a number of eminent monks. The main scholastic teachings were imported during the Three Kingdoms period, officially arriving in 372 C.E. Many Buddhist doctrinal schools and their Buddhist scriptures and commentaries were introduced to the courts of Koguryo and Paekche, such as the Madhyamika (K. *Samnon*; C. *San-lun*), Sarvastivadin Abhidharma, Nirvana, Ch'ont'ae (C. *T'ien-t'ai*), and Satyasiddhi schools. During the Unified Shilla period (668-935), there was five major Doctrinal Schools: Vinaya (K. *Kyeyul*), Nirvana (K. *Yolban*), Hua-yen (K. *Wonyung*; C. *Hua-yen*), Yogācāra (K. *Popsang*; S. *Dharmalaksana*), Madhyamika (K. *Samnon*, or Three-Treatise School), T'ien-tai (K. *Chontae*), and Dhyana or Zen (K. *Son chong*; C. *Chan-ting*) Schools.(Buswell: 1997, 7-9; 75-78).

Each of these schools had different tenets based on what to in their idea was the most efficacious scriptures. For example, the school of the Three-Treatises is based on the three treatises, the *Mādhyamika sūtra* (Treatise of Treatises) of Nāgārjuna, the *Dvādaśanikāya sūtra* (Twelve Gates Treatise) also of Nāgārjuna, and the *ata sūtra* (One Hundred Verses Treatise) of Aryadeva. The Lotus Sutra is the chosen

scripture in the T'ien-tai school. The *Avatamsaka-sūtra* is considered to be superior to any other Buddhist scriptures in the Hua-yen school.

To Sot'aesan, though each Buddhist school represent a tenet of the Buddha's teachings, it is not sufficient to realize the Buddha's wisdom and power as a whole. Though some Buddhist schools adjusted various methods when it came to the practice of meditation, according to Sot'aesan, they limited themselves to one or two of the following subjects in teaching the lay devotee:

- 1) Scripture study
- 2) Sitting meditation aided by *hwadu*
- 3) Intoning the name of a Buddha, or other incantation
- 4) Buddhist offering.

Sot'aesan insisted that it was necessary to unify the various practices of the various Buddhist schools. This was so because one or two subjects would not be sufficient in realizing the profound Buddha's teachings. He pointed out the importance of each subject as follows:

The purpose of teaching scriptures is to advocate the doctrine, system, and history of Buddhism. The purpose of teaching sitting meditation with the aid of *hwadu* is to enlighten people to the profound truth which is difficult to be taught by the means of scriptures or verbal explanations alone. Intoning the name of a Buddha or incantations are practiced to aid ones concentration in meditation, especially for those new to the Buddhist order who have difficulty entering the proper way of the Buddha Dharma because of heavy attachments of love and greed in the complex secular World. Making offerings to Buddhas is taught for the benefit of the priests life.(Park Chung-Bin: 1997, 298-299).

In Sot'aesans view, people who insisted on learning one or two of these criticized others and disputed them, creating factions between different groups. Sot'aesan believed that the factions of the various Buddhist schools had brought harmful effects both to the development of Korean Buddhism and to the development of the beginners faith.

Sot'aesans primary aim was to help people comprehend the whole of Buddhism through unifying the various practices. To integrate these practices, Sot'aesan adopted the major attributes behind Buddhist practice: *īla* (morality), *samādhi* (meditation), and *prajñā* (wisdom).⁴ These three practices are called *samhak* (S. *triūksā*), or Threefold Training. In the doctrinal system of Sot'aesan, the specialized courses for cultivation of the mind are elaborated as 'Threefold Training': *Chongshin suyang* (精神修養, Cultivation of Spirit), *Sari yon'gu* (事理研究, Inquiry into Facts and Principles), and *Chagop ch'wisa* (作業取捨, Mindful Choice in Action). Sot'aesan elaborated the sequential set-up of practice by unifying various practices:

Hence, after the examination of all *kongans* (C. *kungan*; Z. *koan*) of the Zen school and of all scriptures of the Doctrinal schools, we have integrated them. Leaving out complicated *kongans* and scriptures, we have selected the most important from among them as practices to achieve the Power of Inquiry into Facts and Principles [wisdom, S. *prajñā*]; we achieve this by explicating the essential principles of the Buddha Dharma. Intoning the name of a Buddha while sitting in meditation and performing incantation serves [as practices for the Cultivation of Spirit. And precepts, as the principle of karmic retribution and the Way of the Fourfold Beneficence (*Un*),] serve as practices for Mindful Choice in Action, and are suitable for secular living.

All believers shall be taught to train in these Three Great Practices in balance. As a result, we will attain the Buddha's Power of Inquiry (*prajñā*) that is non-obstructed wisdom of facts and principles. We attain this by practicing the way of

4 In Buddhism, the Threefold Training is well illustrated in *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*. In the *Platform Sutra*, Hui-neng reinterprets the threefold training, correcting Chih-ch'eng's idea of the threefold training. Chih-ch'eng, in answering Hui-neng's question of what the threefold training was, said, "The priest Hsiu explains them in this way: Not to commit the various evils is the precepts; to practice all the many good things is wisdom; to purify one's own mind is meditation." Hui-neng corrected this idea as follows: "The mind-ground, without error, is the precept of self-nature; the mind ground, undisturbed, is the meditation of self-nature; the mind-ground, not ignorant, is the wisdom of self-nature." Yampolsky, Philip B. *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 164.

Hui-neng adopted the main themes of the *Prajñāparamita* literature. Because there is no error, disturbance, mistake, or ignorance in the mind-ground, there is no reason for Hui-neng to set up the threefold training. Hui-neng stressed self-awakening to self-nature, and sudden practice with sudden awakening, and rejected gradual practice and awakening.

Inquiry. We will attain the Buddha's Power of Meditation (*samādhi*) that keeps one from attaching oneself to worldly things as a result of learning the practice of Cultivation. We will attain the Buddha's Power of Mindful Choice (*sīla*) that allows us to analyze right from wrong and perform the right as a result of learning the practice of Mindful Choice. (Park Chung-Bin: 1997, 299).

As noted, Sot'aesan's 'Threefold Training' is similar to the Buddhist doctrine of the three modes of practice: calmness (*samādhi*), wisdom (*prajñā*), and morality (precepts or *sīla*). Sot'aesan's notion of 'Cultivation of Spirit' (*Chongshin suyang*) is parallel to *samādhi*; 'Inquiry into Facts and Principles' (*Sari yon'gu*) to *prajñā*; and 'Mindful Choice in Action' (*Chagop ch'wisa*) to morality or *sīa*.

Sot'aesan adopted and reformulated the Threefold Training of Buddhism to be the Gate of Practice, or discipline. He connected the practice of 'Threefold Training' with the Buddhist idea of Mind-ground. To use an analogy, *Chongshin suyang* (Cultivation of Spirit) is 'the course for preparing the ground for tilling, and farming the field of the mind.' *Sari yon'gu* (Inquiry into Facts and Principles) is the course to create the knowledge of farming that naturally distinguishes crops from weeds. And *Chagop ch'wisa* (Mindful Choice in Action) is the course for putting into practice what one knows, gathering in the harvest successfully. (*Taejonggyong*, 3.60: 1962).

To simplify, I will give and outline of Sot'aesan's idea of Threefold Training, the Buddhist Threefold training, and the Taoist and Confucian practices:

	Seeing into one's nature (見性; K. <i>kyonsong</i> ; S. <i>prajñā</i>)	Nourishing one's nature (養性; K. <i>yangsong</i> ; S. <i>samādhi</i>)	Following one's original nature (率性; K. <i>solsong</i> ; S. <i>sīla</i>)
emptiness (空, <i>kong</i>)	to know the realm which is ineffable & devoid of mental phenomena	to intuit the mind which transcends existence and nonexistence	to do all things with no thought existence (無念; K. <i>munyom</i> : harboring no false ideas)
roundness (圓, <i>won</i>)	to have unlimited capacity of knowledge due to vast scope of knowledge	the state of mind where nothing comes [into being] or goes [into nonbeing]	to do all things with no attachment (無着; K. <i>much'ak</i>)
correctness (正, <i>chong</i>)	to see and judge all matters correctly with sure knowledge	the state of mind which does not decline or lean on anything	to do all things in accordance with the Mean(中道; K. <i>chungdo</i>)

II. The ninefold aspect of the truth of *Irwon* in practice of one's nature

- (a) Seeing into one's nature (見性, K. *kyonsong*) = sudden awakening of one's nature = awakening to the truth of *Irwonsang* = wisdom (*prajñā*)=*Sari yon'gu* (Inquiry into Facts and Principles)
- (b) Nourishing one's own original nature (養性, K. *yangsong*) = gradual practice = keeping the noumenal nature of *Irwon* = concentration (*samādhi*) = *Chongshin suyang* (Cultivation of Spirit)
- (c) Following one's original nature (率性, K. *solsong*) = acting as perfect as *Irwon* = precepts (*sīla*) = *Chagop ch'wisa* (Mindful Choice in Action)

Sot'aesan stressed that one should be able to utilize the truth of *Irwon* when one uses one's eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind in one's daily life. One could finally become a Buddha or a sage through the sincere moral practice of 'Threefold Training.' It does not matter if one is educated or illiterate, intelligent or dull, man or woman, old or young. (*Taejonggyong* 2.5: 1962). As the farmer takes out weeds and nurtures the crops, according to Sot'aesan, a practitioner should check whether there is disturbances, delusions, or evil in one's mind-ground. (*Taejonggyong* 3.1: 1962). The practitioner, at the same time, should follow the 'Threefold Training' because it is considered the basis of the Buddhist offering in one's daily life and foundational to achieving of one's hopes.

III. Conclusion: Critical View on Sot'aesan's Reformation

Sot'aesan declared that Buddhism would be prosperous in the future; however, he did not consider Buddhism sufficient for leading people to 'the boundless world of happiness' from the sea of suffering. Sot'aesan drew upon Buddhism for the basic elements of his religious thought and perpetuated his religious movements based on the theory

of *Irwon* as *Dharmakāya*. However, he criticized the monk-centered Buddhist *sangha* (monastery) system. He claimed that Buddhism should be practiced by both monks and ordinary lay people in their daily lives. His challenge to the traditional Buddhist doctrine and monastic system produced his reinterpretation of the Buddhist doctrine and a reconstruction of Buddhist morality and its monastic system.

Sot'aesan's main goal of reformation was to bring the peaceful Buddha Land to the world through reformations of the imbalances in social and religious systems; by removing social and religious discriminations against gender, race, and social status; by eliminating ignorance; by encouraging social well-being. We might consider Sot'aesan to have been laity who was not involved in any particular religious organization. When he selected nine followers for his first religious activities, they were lay men. In other words, his followers did not leave their homes to practice Sot'aesan's teachings or Buddha Dharmas. Sot'aesan's purpose in modernizing Buddhist doctrines and the *sangha* system was to consider the daily lives of the majority of the laity. Without considering the laity and their lives, Buddhism is no longer useful in addressing its highest Dharma to save all sentient beings. The Buddha Dharma should be applicable to the contemporary secular world. In his religious order, he treated monks, nuns, male laity, and female laity equally. Its highest committee consists of eighteen devotees: a group of nine men consisting of both monks and lay men; and a group of nine women consisting of nuns and lay women. He made the standard of distinction only in accordance with the degree of their Buddhist study and activities. In the reformation of Buddhism, Sot'aesan maintained his main principle to modify and renovate some Buddhist doctrines and systems without changing the main tenets of the Buddha's teachings.

However, some points of criticism also follow Sot'aesan's successful reformation. In doctrinal perspective, different terms in other religions were applied to the interpretation of *Irwon* without giving a clear distinction as to their contextual meanings. It could cause confusion about the clear meanings that generalize other religious thought or

terms. Although Sot'aesan clarified the difference between *Irwon* and *Irwonsang*, there are some ambiguities in the written sources such as the *Pulgyo chongjon* and the *Kyojon*. We can find some ambiguous statements to illustrate the symbol *Irwonsang* as the object of faith in the *Kyojon*. For example, *Irwon* is identified with *Dharmakāya* in the Chart of Doctrine; *Irwonsang* with *Dharmakāya* in the numerous places of the *Kyojon* in combination of *Dharmakāya Irwonsang*. Sot'aesan denied any potentiality of the truth of *Irwon* in the symbol of *Irwonsang* and cautioned his disciples not to identify the true moon in the sky as the finger pointing to the moon. If it is so, any ambiguous statements identifying the symbol *Irwonsang* as *Dharmakāya* should be corrected.

Sot'aesan was very critical against the Buddhist monastery system that was organized for the few Buddhist monks rather than the lay Buddhist. The main purpose of Sot'aesan's reformation of Buddhism was to bring Buddhist thought and systems for the majority of people. Also, it should be applicable to the contemporary secular world. For this reason, Sot'aesan reformed Korean Buddhism to be practiced by the majority including both the clergy and lay people. *Won*-Buddhism is successful to bring the attentions of Koreans by engaging in the social activities, reformation movements, charity works, and education. In addition, the leaders of *Won*-Buddhism have provided intensive training programs in practice of meditation for both the clergy members and the lay devotees in order to make them achieve enlightenment in their daily lives. However, we could not neglect a criticism that there is also a general tendency among the followers of *Won*-Buddhism ignoring the intensive practice in meditation to achieve enlightenment in a secluded area. Also, although Sot'aesan and his disciples were eager to reform the Buddhist doctrines and the monastery systems, modernization or reformation should also be applied to the religious activities of *Won*-Buddhism in the present so that they may be more active in rectifying social injustice.

Glossary

*Notes : S=Sanskrit, C=Chinese, K=korean, J=Japanese

Ch'ont'ae (K; C *T'ien-t'ai*) 天台

Chagop ch'wisa (K) 作業取捨

Chongshin suyang (K) 精神修養

Choson pulgyo hyokshillon (K) 朝鮮佛教革新論

Choson(K) 朝鮮

hwadu (K; C *hua-t'ou*) 話頭

Irwonsang (K) 一圓相

Kanhwa-son (K; J *Kanna-zen*) 看話禪

kongan (K; C *k'ung-an*; J *koan*) 公案

Kyojong (K) 教宗

kyonsong (K) 見性

Paek Hak-myong 白鶴鳴

pangp'yon(K., S. *upâya*) 方便

Park Chung-Bin (K) 朴重彬

Pulgyo chongjon (K) 佛教正典

Samhak (K; S *triúiksâ*) 三學

Samnon (K; C *San-lun*) 三論

Sari yon'gu (K) 事理研究

solsong (K) 率性

Sonjong (K) 禪宗

Sotaesan 少太山

Taejonggyong (K) 大宗經

The Diamond Sutra (K *Kumgang-panya-paramil-gyong*) 金剛般若波羅密經

Pulbop Yonguhoe (K) 佛法研究會

Uidu (K) 疑頭

Un (K) 恩

Wonbulgyo, 圓佛教

Wonbulgyo Kyojon (K) 圓佛教教典

yangsong (K) 養性

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