

# Reconciling the Actual with the Potential: Wŏnhyo's Theory of Buddhahood

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*Wŏnhyo's system of thought is structured around the concept of "one mind," as illustrated in his commentaries on the Awakening of Faith. "One mind" is another term for the mind of all sentient beings, a mind intrinsically pure and unchanging, but appearing externally to be impure and ephemeral. Even though every deluded thought arises from the mind, it is that same mind that simultaneously provides the capacity to achieve enlightenment. Wŏnhyo explains how this seemingly paradoxical achievement is possible using a three-fold structure to illustrate the experience of original enlightenment, non-enlightenment, and actualizing enlightenment, not as discrete entities, but as mutually contingent tensions. Original enlightenment is the theoretical base for enlightenment; non-enlightenment is a misconception about the nature of original enlightenment; and actualizing enlightenment is the incitement to practice. Practice here is based on the conditional definition of non-enlightenment, that is, the insubstantiality of defilements. Practice, therefore, does not involve removing something; rather, it is the creation of the correct knowledge that the defilements we experience in daily life are unreal. The distinction Wŏnhyo draws between original and non-enlightenment, and the attempts he makes to integrate the two, prepare the foundation for assertions of the universality of Buddhahood in later East Asian*

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*Buddhism. The Awakening of Faith itself originally provided the conceptual frame for this notion, but it was Wŏnhyo's elaboration in his commentary to that treatise that provided a more coherent interpretation of this construct and proposed a comprehensive solution to the tensions inherent in the definition of enlightenment in Buddhist history. This elaboration helped to establish a unique cognitive framework for East Asian Buddhism and made Wŏnhyo's commentary one of the most influential texts in the East Asian Buddhist tradition.*

## I . Introduction

Beginning the inception of Buddhism one evening in the sixth century BCE, Buddhist thinkers in many cultures have sought to precisely understand and describe the events that took place that night. Immediately following the Buddha's death, his disciples gathered to collect what they had heard with the intention of preserving their master's teaching. Already at this early juncture, disputes began to surface regarding what interpretive consensus could be built in recording the Buddha's accomplishments. Throughout the history of Indian Buddhism and its development toward the so-called Hinayāna and Mahāyāna traditions, we find this question to be a perennial problem in Buddhist thought.

The purpose of this paper is to examine Wŏnhyo's (617-686) concept of Buddhahood and its extended philosophical implications for the understanding of humanity. This examination is closely related to the paradoxical Mahāyāna description of Buddhahood, that "the sentient being is no different from the Buddha." Does this statement mean that people are actually the same as Buddha but do not appear to be? Or that in theory, people are able to be enlightened but that there is a gap between that possibility and reality? This ambivalence in the definition of Buddhahood has required conceptual innovations through much of in Buddhist doctrinal history. It is in Wŏnhyo's explanation that we find one of the most critically engaging and philosophically interesting.

Wŏnhyo's thought system is structured around the concept of "one mind," as illustrated in his commentaries on the *Awakening of Faith*. "One mind" is another term for the mind of all sentient beings, intrinsically pure and unchanging, but appearing externally as impure

and ephemeral. Even though every deluded thought arises from this mind, it is that same mind that simultaneously provides the capacity to achieve enlightenment. Wŏnhyo, not only a great thinker and theorist in his own right, but also a devout religious practitioner, agonized over the suffering of his neighboring sentient beings as well as his own existential questions. His commentaries on the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith* and other texts such as *Vajrasamādhi Sūtra*, and *Nirvāna Sūtra* devote a great deal of space to his central religious quest to explain “How is enlightenment possible for sentient beings?” given the gap that exists between their ordinary selves and Buddhahood. Such a quest required a coherent elucidation on the contradictory concepts of sentient being and Buddha, deluded mind and enlightenment, and illusion and truth.<sup>1</sup> To address these contradictions, Wŏnhyo begins with concept of “original enlightenment,” the crucial key in understanding his elaborate enlightenment framework.

In the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith* enlightenment is defined as such: “what is called enlightenment refers to mind itself, or that essence of mind existing free from thoughts.” (*Ta-sheng ch'i-hsin lun*, T.32.576b12). Here, the content of enlightenment is not described; rather, the state of being enlightened is described, and in negative language. Enlightenment is not explicable, nor is its content. “To enlighten” is not an action assuming an object being acted on, rather, it is a state of being devoid of thoughts. Wŏnhyo comments on this specific phrase puts it as such, ultimate enlightenment is enlightening the origin of one mind, which means returning to the origin of one

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1 Arguably the first major contributor to the development of an indigenous approach to Korean Buddhist doctrine and practice, Wŏnhyo wrote over eighty treatises and commentaries on virtually every influential Mahāyāna scripture then available in Korea, of which over twenty are extant. Reflecting the dynamic cultural exchanges and flourishing doctrinal scholarship and meditative practice occurring within East Asian Buddhism during his time, Wŏnhyo's scholarship embraced the full spectrum of East Asian Buddhism, from the fundamental Mahāyāna precepts to the emblematic teachings of Madhyamaka, Yogācāra, Tiantai, Pure Land, Nirvāna, Tathāgatagarbha, and Hua-yen. Wŏnhyo's writings were disseminated throughout East Asia and made important contributions to the development of Buddhist doctrinal exegesis. These commentaries, in the diversity of their scriptural sources and their unity of style, have provided a rich documentation for scholars interested not only in Wŏnhyo but also East Asian Buddhism more generally. Wŏnhyo's commentary on *Awakening of Mahayana Faith* has been regarded as one of the three authoritative commentaries produced on the text and is an example of his contribution to the formation of a distinctively East Asian Buddhist tradition.

mind.<sup>2</sup> The origin of mind is not a separate entity to realize, but rather an origin to identify and return to.

Following this fundamental introduction to the nature of original enlightenment, enlightenment is then explained as a three-fold structure, as a co-relationship of three concepts: original enlightenment, actualizing enlightenment, and non-enlightenment. The state of enlightenment is portrayed in the course of explaining original enlightenment, the wisdom of enlightenment. The process by which to get there, that is, to become enlightened, is explained through actualizing enlightenment and the direction of this process is delineated in light of the comparison with non-enlightenment.

## II. Wŏnhyo's Three-Fold Structure of Enlightenment

Original enlightenment, one of the theoretical innovations in Buddhist history aimed at resolving the theoretical problem concerning the gap between Buddhahood and ordinary sentient beings,<sup>3</sup> emerged from the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith* and became Wŏnhyo's base for the three-fold structure of explaining enlightenment. According to the theory of enlightenment presented in the scripture, *Awakening of Mahayana Faith*, the three concepts of original enlightenment (Chi. pen-chüeh; Kor. pon'gak), actualizing enlightenment (Chi. shih-chüeh; Kor. sigak), and non-enlightenment (Chi. pu-chüeh; Kor. pulgak) are co-related, mutually defining and mutually contingent. The scripture states that "original enlightenment is explained in contrast to actualizing enlightenment and that actualizing enlightenment will eventually be identical with original enlightenment. The meaning of actualizing is grasped within the relationship where non-enlightenment is defined

2 Wŏnhyo, *Kisillon-so* (A Commentary on *Awakening of Mahayana Faith*), *Han'guk Pulgyo chŏnsŏ* (Collective Works of Korean Buddhism: hereafter HPC), volume 1, page 718, column b, line 8.

3 Jacqueline Stone's recently published book *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (University of Hawaii Press, 1999) contains a short historical genealogy of the concept (which emerged from *Awakening of Mahayana Faith*) and its application to the formation of Japanese Buddhism. However, the medieval Japanese Buddhist development of "Hongaku shishō" (thought of original enlightenment) is a radical extension of the concept uniquely developed in the Japanese Tendai Buddhist sect, where enlightenment is considered as not just a potential to be realized, but as the true status of things.

depending on [the concept] of original enlightenment and on the grounds of non-enlightenment the concept of actualizing enlightenment can be established.” (*Ta-sheng ch'i-hsin lun*, T.32.576b).

With a quote displaying a style typical of his commentary, Wōnhyo further explains: “This statement intends to illuminate the point that the concept of actualizing enlightenment depends on non-enlightenment, and non-enlightenment depends on original enlightenment, and original enlightenment depends on actualizing enlightenment. Since these [three concepts] are all dependent on each other, there can be no self-nature [in them]. Since there is no self-nature, there is actually nothing in existence that we can call enlightenment. It is not true that there ‘exists’ enlightenment, because these concepts are established only by relationships. But, still, we cannot say that enlightenment does not exist, because these concepts become established even within a dependent relationship. Thus, it is not such that there ‘does not exist’ enlightenment, so we use the word ‘enlightenment.’ But not because these concepts have self-nature.” (*Kisillon-so*, HPC, 1-748b-c).

Though in the scripture, original enlightenment is defined rather obscurely and briefly as the “wisdom of enlightenment,” Wōnhyo elaborates on the concept extensively. According to Wōnhyo, original enlightenment is subject to the rule of the samsaric world—arising and ceasing. He says, “the essence of Mahāyāna should be the mind of original enlightenment which is explored in the gate of arising and ceasing. [Because it is] the ground of arising and ceasing, and the cause of arising and ceasing, thus it belongs to the gate of arising and ceasing.” (*Kisillon-so*, HPC, 1-740b). In his other commentary on *Awakening of Mahayana Faith, Separate Notes on Awakening of Mahayana Faith*, he explains the reason in this way: “Even though in its nature original enlightenment is beyond the gate of arising and ceasing, original enlightenment should be explained by *sarīsāra*: it does not maintain its nature of being eternal, it evolves the world of *sarīsāra* and is subject to being defiled by ignorance. However, even though it might be contaminated, its original nature is pure, so it is called original

enlightenment or Buddha nature.” (*Taesŭng kisillon pyŏlgi*, HPC, 1-742a). In this way, original enlightenment becomes the base for the three-fold structure

In order to then prove the contingent ontological status of the three-fold enlightenment structure, Wŏnhyo engages in contest of intense logical scrutiny, aiming to pin down the meaning and path of enlightenment.

He begins with the task of trying to define enlightenment in positive or negative terms.

- a. Do you call original enlightenment a state of being devoid of non-enlightenment in the mind?
- b. Or, as existing there as an illuminating function of enlightenment (in the mind as original enlightenment.)

To both questions he then poses logical problems, such as:

- a. If you call original enlightenment devoid of something, then there must be no illuminating function of enlightenment either, so this [defective state of mind] should be the state of non-enlightenment.
- b. Having the illuminating mind, how could anyone tell if heir delusion is removed or not? Besides, without removing defilements, there must not be illumination either. If you have already cut out the defilements, then a sentient being could not possibly exist.

Thus, Wŏnhyo’s conclusion is: [original enlightenment] consists not only of being devoid of darkness, but also of having bright illumination. Because of the illuminating nature, there is the possibility for the removal of defilements. Furthermore, the difference between original and actualizing enlightenment is ascertained as he continues his line of questioning:

- Q1. If we define enlightenment as waking up from sleep, in actualizing enlightenment there is enlightenment, but not in original enlightenment?

A1. If we define enlightenment as a state of being awake, original enlightenment is enlightenment, but actualizing enlightenment is not.

Q2. Is enlightenment achieved by removing something?

A2. If we define removing as what exists before it disappears later, actualizing enlightenment is removing, but not original enlightenment.

If we define removing as being free from delusion, original enlightenment is removing, but not actualizing enlightenment.

### III. Wŏnhyo's Path to Enlightenment

The direction towards enlightenment is reckoned in light of a comparison with non-enlightenment. Because every sentient being has original enlightenment, the fact of which is “guaranteed” according to the scriptural evidence that Wŏnhyo submits from various Buddhist texts and sources,<sup>4</sup> the potential for attaining enlightenment is universally asserted. However, non-enlightenment is described as the lived reality of sentient beings. Thus, the concept of “actualizing enlightenment” is introduced as a dynamic form of enlightenment that is, by definition, actualized and realized.

The concept of actualizing enlightenment suggests that enlightenment be perceived as a process, an accomplishment realized in a move from a state of being non-enlightened to an assumed destination of being enlightened. Strictly according to the definition of original enlightenment, this should not be logically possible. If one assumes only that sentient beings are intrinsically enlightened, then the unenlightened reality of sentient beings cannot be explained. Or, if original enlightenment was simply utilized as a skillful means to motivate sentient beings to pursue enlightenment, presented as a mere possibility of being enlightened, that possibility should be supported by

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<sup>4</sup> It is notable that Wŏnhyo uses such extensive canonical evidence, revealing not only his erudition but also his intention to be supported by what is called Buddha's word. *Kisillon-so*, HPC 1-733c.

a realistic means of achieving it. Actualizing enlightenment, by perceiving enlightenment as something achieved, provides that means, such that it illustrates a process of the defiled state of mind being returned to the original state of enlightenment. Actualizing enlightenment also declares that there are certain practices through which enlightenment gradually opens up, so we could say that this concept of actualizing enlightenment bridges the gap between the potential of enlightenment and its realization.

To speculate further, it could also be said that the three-fold structure of enlightenment is meant to resolve the tension between the possibility and reality of enlightenment. Since actualizing enlightenment is defined as a process of the unenlightened mind returning to original enlightenment, it must then be acknowledged that the nature of the process is subject to the nature of non-enlightenment as well. Non-enlightenment is defined as such: “not truly realizing oneness with Suchness, there emerges an unenlightened mind and, consequently, its thoughts.” (*Ta-sheng ch'i-hsin lun*, T.32.577c; tr. by Yoshito S. Hakeda, 1967:43). However, we benefit from the unique circumstance that these thoughts are not substantial in their nature, and thus are not independent of original enlightenment.

Non-enlightenment is not a substantial entity that exists independent in itself; rather, devoid of ontological ground, it is a relative concept defined and understood epistemologically in relation to its opposing concept of enlightenment. Wŏnhyo goes so far as to assert that non-enlightenment or enlightenment are only matters of false conception. When people have a fixed notion that such and such a state of mind should be called enlightenment, then they get confused with the state of non-enlightenment. Only when they are free from the notion of enlightenment will they also understand that there is no non-enlightenment, or that there could be no such thing as non-enlightenment. To illustrate, Wŏnhyo provides a simile: if you get rid of the notion of this place being East, there could be no thought of this place not being West. All thoughts, pure and tainted, are only constructed theoretically due to our tendency of erroneous conceptualization



and do not have substantiality. Non-enlightenment means being ignorant about the mind or the original enlightenment that is innate to us, so if we become free from ignorance, we are going back to the state of original enlightenment.

Building on the assertion of the non-substantiality of thoughts postulated in the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith*, Wŏnhyo expands this further: “Saṃsāra itself does not have its own substantiality. Because it is devoid of substantiality, there is no appearance distinctive as changing and evolving. If appearances do not change, how can substance, i.e. the mind itself, change? Thus, I would say that the four phases in the appearance of thoughts are actually the same as one mind, and non-enlightenment is the same as original enlightenment; that is how it is said that these enlightenments are all identical to one enlightenment.” (*Taesŭng kisillon pyŏlgi*, HPC, 1-763a).

With the complementary definitions of both original enlightenment and actualizing enlightenment, enlightenment is both already present in humans and something achieved by practice and effort. In addition, defilements are considered as theoretically not real, having no ontological grounds, and only appearing due to ignorance. Thus, the practice to actualize enlightenment is based within the characteristics of non-enlightenment. Since defilement does not have its own substantiality, appearing as such only because of a mind shaken by ignorance, the practitioners’ task is not to remove or eliminate defilements but rather to know that the defilement which we experience as reality is in fact nothing but illusion. The only task is to free oneself from ignorance. Realizing that defilement is not substantial or intrinsic but instead accidental, the mind ceases to be defiled and returns to the original state of enlightenment.

Thus, the process of actualization of enlightenment is undertaken by grasping the stages by which defilement is perceived as arising erroneously. When the practitioner penetrates the nature of the mind that has been moved by ignorance, the nature of that subtlest phase, in the moment just before the mind was shaken by ignorance, the ignorance itself will be gone. Thus, because it is only due to ignorance

that there is an appearance of arising in the mind, thought arises only when we are deluded as to the true nature of the mind. If we are free from being conscious of original enlightenment, there will be no non-enlightenment and the mind that is being disturbed is seen as nothing but another of the myriad aspects of the quiescent mind. It is at this point that Wŏnhyo introduces his famous metaphorical imagery of ocean and waves to describe the mind. Original enlightenment is the true nature of the mind, and is present in all states of mind, just as the wet nature of the water is always present whether the surface of the water is calm or broken into waves. However, the ocean's original tranquil surface is stirred up into waves by the wind of ignorance (*Ta-sheng ch'i-hsin lun*, T. 32.576c, T.32.578a; tr. by Yoshito S. Hakeda, 1967:41, 55).

Given this emphasis on non-distinction, one then has to wonder, how does this process of actualizing enlightenment start? If enlightenment is a kind of wisdom that gradually opens as delusion is removed, where does this wisdom come from? Wŏnhyo aims to directly explain this dynamic. He argues that the mind creates delusional thought because of the condition of ignorance; however, original enlightenment has its own power of influencing the mind, so that enlightenment is activated. When this activation reaches its maximum, it will return to original enlightenment and be identified with it, and thus it is called actualizing enlightenment (*Taesŭng kisillon pyŏlgi*, HPC, 1-748c). In other words, he asserts that because of the power innate to original enlightenment, we are always able to return to it, and it is this process of returning that is called actualizing enlightenment.

Upon a practitioner reaching the final stage approaching the realization of intrinsically pure mind, actualizing enlightenment comes to be identified with original enlightenment. This pure mind is where one's mind has resided, pure and quiet, eternally. The appearance of changes in the mind, such as the arising and ceasing of mind that makes up defiled thoughts, are seen as not occurring since within pure mind there is from the beginning no such thing as defilement. Actualizing enlightenment could not be discernible from original enlightenment if

the defilement were substantial and so mind has originally no thought arising or ceasing whatsoever. (*Kisillon-so*, HPC, 1-751c) The four phases of thought—arising, sustaining, changing and ceasing—are only fake appearances; there are no thoughts to arise at all. Thus, actualizing enlightenment, which is supposed to be realized when defiled thoughts are removed, would not be differentiated from original enlightenment at this point, as it returns to a state undifferentiated from original enlightenment, a state all sentient beings have actually been in from the beginning.<sup>5</sup>

If that power to become enlightened is innate to the mind, and that power activates enlightenment, then it could be asked once again, how does that power become activated? Would it be possible for a self-contained motor to start running by itself without an outside stimulus? If original enlightenment has the power to activate itself, then would not actualizing enlightenment be redundant? The answer to these questions seems to lie in the peculiar ontological status of non-enlightenment. Given the nature and definition of non-enlightenment as contingent to that of enlightenment, and of its not holding any independent ontological status, actualizing enlightenment was thus actually identical to original enlightenment, meaning nothing really needed to be done. The difference is just a matter of perception.

The way in which the practice is prescribed as a rather effortless process of attaining insight, rather than a long career of making an enduring effort, is related to Wŏnhyo's proselytizing effort in his later career after he disrobed himself. His scholarly achievement aside, Wŏnhyo made a vigorous personal commitment to disseminating

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5 For the ontological status of "arising of mind" and the characteristics of ignorance, see Whalen Lai, "Hu-Jan Nien-Ch'i (Suddenly a Thought Arose): Chinese Understanding of Mind and Consciousness," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 3-2 (1980), pp. 42-59. Lai's point is that the evolving mind cannot exist by itself; it can only depend on the non-arising side of mind. Thus the reason for its existence cannot be found in itself, but in the pure mind, i.e. original enlightenment. Hence, delusion depends on truth; tainted depends on pure. However, genealogically we cannot say Delusion comes from Truth. Thus the concept of "Sudden" is required. Wŏnhyo also explains that ignorance is beginning-less because there is nothing from which this could be derived. This is what is meant by sudden, not in a temporal sense. Wŏnhyo also points out that for the sentient beings currently defined as deluded, the concept of inquiring into before being deluded is also logically impossible.

Buddhism to the masses of the country, proselytizing in crowds gathered at market places. While singing and dancing, he chanted Buddha's name and taught fellow disciples to do the same. His teaching to the commoners was radical in that he proclaimed that through but one sincere recitation of Buddha's name one could bring enlightenment.

#### **IV. Universal Buddhahood-Actual or Potential?**

As a paradoxical description of Buddhahood, Mahāyāna Buddhism says, "the sentient being is no different from the Buddha"—integrating the opposed concepts of sentient being and Buddha; deluded mind and enlightenment; and illusion and truth. Does the statement mean that humans are actually the same as Buddha, and merely appear different? Or does it mean that an ordinary sentient being, in a theoretical sense, could be enlightened but that there is an assumed gap between the potential and reality? As Peter Gregory famously addressed, if ordinary sentient beings are already enlightened where and what can be the ground the prevalent very existence of evils in this world be explained? (Peter Gregory, 1985). In examining doctrinal history, we find that this ambivalence in the definition of Buddhahood demanded conceptual innovation and explanation.

The significance of the logic of Wŏnhyo's three-fold enlightenment lies in his attempt to synthesize the seemingly contradictory aspects of the human mind, namely that it is deluded but also a source of enlightenment. He attempted to affirm the universal possibility of Buddhahood while acknowledging the necessity of motivating people to work for the attainment of enlightenment. Original enlightenment served as a theoretical basis for the argument for enlightenment, on which any further argument could be made possible. Non-enlightenment is only defined as a misconception about the nature of original enlightenment. However, reality requires of us an effort to remove defilements. Even though this belief in an already enlightened humankind was strengthened and supported by canonical statements, the reality of deluded human existence was difficult to totally ignore, the sufferings of

saṃsāra hard to dismiss as merely insubstantial. The practical effort of overcoming the human condition was explained then by the function of actualizing enlightenment. This concept helps overcome a naive and idealistic optimism implied in the theory of original enlightenment. Actualizing enlightenment moves us to practice, a practice that is nonetheless based on the conditional definition of non-enlightenment, in other words, on the non-substantiality of defilement. The practice, therefore, cannot ever be aimed at removing something; it must be the process through which we find in both the body and mind that the defilement we experience in daily life is not substantial.

Therefore, according to Wŏnhyo, since we are originally and intrinsically cut off from delusion, there are no such things as sentient beings. That is what is meant by the concept that all sentient beings are entered in nirvāṇa and abide in the world of truth intrinsically. However, even though our knowledge of the existence of original enlightenment leads us to say that there are no sentient beings, until actualizing enlightenment appears, there would also be no problem in saying that there are sentient beings. Once we recognize the defiled conditions of human existence and begin imagining reaching a state of mind devoid of defilement, we cannot but immediately assume the path of actualizing enlightenment. By assuming this path, the logical as well as religious ground for the practice can be established, an action that is only possible by postulating original enlightenment. Thus, both original and actualizing enlightenment are essential to each other because, according to Wŏnhyo: “If you claim there are no sentient beings because of the existence of original enlightenment, there would be no reason for the existence of actualizing enlightenment either. Hence, on what would you base your claim for the existence of sentient beings? Besides, if there are no sentient beings existing, then original enlightenment cannot be revealed either. So based on what sort of original enlightenment would you claim that the sentient being does not exist anyway?” (*Taesŭng kisillon pyŏlgi*, HPC, 1-749a). Thus both original enlightenment and actualizing enlightenment are posited as interdependent.

The *Awakening of Faith* itself originally provided the conceptual

frame for this notion, but it was Wŏnhyo's elaboration in his commentary to that treatise that provided a more coherent interpretation and proposed a solution to the tensions inherent in the definition of enlightenment in Buddhist history. This elaboration helped to establish a unique cognitive framework for East Asian Buddhism, and made Wŏnhyo's commentary one of the most influential texts in the East Asian Buddhist tradition.

Another example of Wŏnhyo's attempt at juggling the rather uneasy balance between the potentiality and actuality of enlightenment is shown in the way he uses the term *tathāgatagarbha*, translated as the Womb or Embryo of Buddha. Within the concept of *tathāgatagarbha*, a traditionally accepted term denoting sentient beings' potential to be enlightened, we can already see an ambivalence towards the possibility of attaining Buddhahood. Wŏnhyo also uses the term, but unlike in the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith* itself, he balances this use with a focus on the term original enlightenment, which he uses much more often and interchangeably with *tathāgatagarbha*. This interpretation can be seen in one of his comments on *tathāgatagarbha*: "Now the essence of the one mind is this original enlightenment. Because of following ignorance, the arising and ceasing of mind occurs. Thus in terms of saṃsāra the nature of Buddha is concealed, that then is called *tathāgatagarbha*." (*Kisillon-so*, HPC, 1-741a).

Wŏnhyo's position on original enlightenment, which I would call "radical affirmation of the mind," is further strengthened in his commentary on *Vajrasamādhi Sūtra*, the sutra which explicitly expresses an agenda on how to be enlightened, or in other words, how to recover or return to the original mind that has been forgotten or lost. As in his previous work, original enlightenment and actualizing enlightenment are the two most frequently used terms in both the sutra and the Commentary. The possibility for sentient beings to be enlightened is again guaranteed by the existence of original enlightenment. The path to enlightenment is shown by actualizing enlightenment. The method or practice is devised based on the unique assumption of the structure of the mind, that is, the nonsubstantiality of defiled thoughts. Wŏnhyo

refers to mind in this Commentary as one mind, *tathatā*, original enlightenment, *amalavijnāna*, or *tathāgatagarbha*. Basically, the terms and structure used in the *Commentary on the Awakening of Mahayana Faith* are adopted here, but the focus is more on the issue of enlightenment, with more definite and assertive statements on the state of the mind. Wŏnhyo's message is becomes even simpler than before. Without invoking the concepts of non-enlightenment, defilement or ignorance, he directly asserts that mind intrinsically neither arises or ceases and that mind has not even been generated. With his typically paradoxical style, he surmises, "arising is ceasing, ceasing is the same as arising. There are no obstructions between them and they are neither identical nor differentiated." (*Vajrasamādhi Sūtra*, HPC, 1-659a).

## V. Conclusion

The importance of the *Awakening of Mahayana Faith* is not only in its promotion of a Mahāyāna belief, but more specifically in where that faith rests, namely, in the mind of sentient beings. Throughout Wŏnhyo's writings, this faith in the greatness of mind is consistently emphasized. While the text provided the conceptual frame, it was Wŏnhyo who provided coherency and consistency to the message with his focus on the issue of enlightenment and the nature of mind. Wŏnhyo faced the arguments presented in the scripture and pushed them in a more radical direction, so as to explicitly highlight mind itself as the source of enlightenment, illuminating a source valid not only to a religious elite, but to any sentient being—even *pŏmbu*, ordinary persons. Though this special category of "*pŏmbu*" denotes someone "suffering from ignorance and defilement," "afflicted by attachment," "not capable of knowing," and "bound in the karmic existence," Wŏnhyo says that based on the identity of non-enlightenment and enlightenment, sentient beings do not really exist, and that everyone has original enlightenment so there is no such thing as sentient beings.

Wŏnhyo's explicit declaration of the distinctions between original

and non-enlightenment and his further attempts to integrate the two set the foundation for notions of the universality of Buddhahood in later East Asian Buddhism. These East Asian Buddhists would devote extensive energy reacting to his work, borrowing his style of using illustrated examples to postulate a universality of Buddhahood that existed behind or within reality, while asserting universality as nothing but reality. Wŏnhyo's integration of the reality and possibility of enlightenment illustrated his innovative means for discerning truth. This method has served as a prototype, guiding theories on the understanding of humankind and Buddhahood in East Asian Buddhism to this day.

## Glossary

Actualizing Enlightenment 始覺

Awakening of Faith 大乘起信論

Non-Enlightenment 不覺

One Mind 一心

Original Enlightenment 本覺

Wŏnhyo 元曉

## Abbreviations

T *Taisho shinshu Daizokyo* (Japanese Edition of the Buddhist Canon)

HPC *Han'gukpulgoyochŏnsŏ* (Complete Works of Korean Buddhism)

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*Kisillon-so* (起信論疏) HPC. 1.

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