

Buddhist Reflections on Life and Death

Suk-Ku Song

Philosophy has been understood as the rational understanding of human beings through the issue of death or of overcoming the death.

In the West, they see the soul as immortal, whereas they see the body as transient and imprisoning soul in it. In short, death signifies only “the death of the body.” This is the moment from which the death or the liberation from the body takes its affirmative momentum in the tradition of western philosophy. Even though western philosophy and religion represent different forms and ideas, the starting point for them is the premise of human overcoming of the death.

In the East, Confucianism understands human death from the practical and Real standpoint. According to Confucian philosophy, life and death belong to the natural process. Taoists regard death and life as the trace of all things that change naturally just like the process of day and night.

Buddhism tries to understand all the sentient beings sustain their lives in the interrelationship with other beings. In Buddhism, human beings are neither complete nor determined, they based upon the concept of “life.” Also, there is a formular which consists of previous life, this life, next life or life after death. Buddhism attempts to overcome the death through the metempsychosis. This

Suk-Ku Song is a Professor emeritus of Philosophy at Dongguk University and the President of the International Association for Buddhist Thought and Culture.

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process of overcoming the death through metempsychosis will be followed by ethical consciousness.

Key words: Death, Life, Overcoming the Death,
Redemption, Formlessness.

I. Introduction

Philosophy has been understood as the rational understanding of human beings in relation to nature, society, and self, whereas religion as the non-rational or supra-rational one. These two different disciplines have trod different paths in the field of understanding human mind, although these two have a common starting point: the issue of death or of overcoming the death.

Once Confucius happened to overlook the passing water that flowed down in a brook, and exclaimed, "Every passing thing is like this. It passes whether it is day or night."¹ I would argue that searching for the permanence in this evanescent world is the common part in both western and eastern philosophy and religion.

Man is a great being on the one hand, and he/she is a tiny little being on the other hand. Blaise Pascal said, "Man is a thinking reed." Man plans a blueprint of his/her course of life through his/her thinking power. Therefore, each individual leads one's own distinctive life. This tells us of the greatness of man. Nevertheless, all men die. Man is helpless in front of death. This tells us of the smallness of man.

However, every living being with life, including human beings, are mortal. In this respect, human beings are equal to other living beings. Some argue that man knows he will die, and that, therefore, he is different from other living beings. It is true that some animals know that they will die. So it is not enough to find the human characteristics only in the fact that man

¹ 子在川上曰, "逝者如斯夫, 不舍晝夜" (*Lunyu: The Analects of Confucius*).

Elements of Hwa-eom Faith and Philosophy in Korean Buddhist Ritual Invocations: Emphasis on the Main Hall Liturgy

*Ven. Hae-ju
(Ho-ryeon Jeon)*

This paper will examine elements of Hwa-eom (Avatamsaka) faith and philosophy, in particular the ‘Main Sanctuary’ ritual in Seongmun uibeom (釋門儀範: The Book of Buddhist Liturgies). Daily recital of Buddhist liturgy in the main sanctuary of the temple has been a central aspect of monastic training and discipline since the Later Silla period which might suggest that contemporary modes of worship and discipline are even today influenced by the original Hwa-eom texts used in worship. And since Hwa-eom has continued to exert influence from this Later Silla period, it would seem important to know something of this philosophy in order to truly understand Korean Buddhism. So here we will take a look at Hwa-eom faith and philosophy from the perspective of its possible impact on the contemporary Korean Buddhist rituals and liturgies.

① *Among the many summarized versions of the Flower Garland Sutra, it is the Eighty Volume Avatamsaka which is the central text for teaching and worship.*
② *Vairocana Buddha of Pure Dharma Body was worshipped as the progenitor and head of Avatamsaka Buddhism. Vairocana is the main Buddha in the Flower*

Ven. Hae-ju (Ho-ryeon Jeon) is a Professor of Buddhist Studies of Dongguk University, Korea.

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Garland Sutra, and is one-and-the-same as Rocana and Sakyamuni in the Trinity of the Three Buddhas. ③ *In the “Lotus Realm” chapter of the Eighty Volume Avatamsaka, we can clearly see the intent to reach the Lotus Realm of Perfumes (Pure Land); here the World Ocean of the Great Lotus Realm is described.* ④ *The Hwa-eom dharma-realm is synonymous with the World of Dharma-nature, meaning that the Ocean of Dharma Nature where the Future Buddha appears is not different from the Dharma Realm.* ⑤ *The Infinite Dharma Realm is synonymous with the entire world.* ⑥ *The Hwa-eom World of the Dependent-Arising Dharma realm is considered a place where cause and effect merge together, and are not separate.* ⑦ *Young Sudhana is worshipped along with 53 divine deities, and the deeds of Samantabhadra are revered as the blueprint for the Way of the Bodhisattva.* ⑧ *There is recognition of the simultaneous discipline of Buddhahood by Past Transmission, and Buddhahood in a Single Lifetime. Thus, in Hwa-eom thought on achieving Buddhahood accepts as a goal for ordained practitioners, both Buddhahood by Past Transmission as described in the ‘Dharma Nature Hymns,’ as well as endeavoring to apply training and discipline to achieve Buddhahood in a Single Lifetime.* ⑨ *The teaching, “everything comes from mind,” is a revelation arising from the Flower Garland Realm.* ⑩ *Understanding of Hwa-eom as the Single Vehicle Teachings.*

This paper has outlined components of Hwa-eom faith and philosophy according to the manner they are contained in the “Main Hall Liturgies” in The Book of Buddhist Liturgies. The liturgies currently in use by Korean Buddhist congregations clearly reflect the holistic nature of Korean Buddhism, and in this regard, the “Main Hall Liturgies” are no exception. Here I want to stress again the strong Hwa-eom influences evident in the “Main Hall Liturgy,” and even go so far as to confirm that the Buddhas or the Three Treasures, which are revered in Korea, are indeed the Buddha or the Three Treasures of Hwa-eom faith. If I am correct in this then it’s reasonable to claim that the rituals and everyday discipline of Korean Buddhism have for centuries, been sheltering under the Hwa-eom umbrella.

Key words: Korean Buddhist Ritual Invocations, *Main Hall Liturgy*,
Hwa-eom Faith and Philosophy, *Seongmun uibeom*,
Book of Buddhist Liturgies.

The Life and Letters of Sŏn Master Hanam

Ven. Chong Go

This article is the first of a series examining the life and letters of sŏn master Hanam Sunim. One of several outstanding sŏn masters who appeared in Korea during the end of the Chosŏn dynasty and the Japanese occupation of Korea, Hanam Sunim played a major role in sustaining and invigorating the Buddhism of Korea. Yet until recently there has been very little research on his life or thought in any language, let alone English. To this end, this first article will examine his life while following articles will examine the major themes that appear in his letters.

Key words: Hanam Chungwŏn, Biography, Letters, Kyŏnghŏ, Kŏngbong.

I. Introduction

The end of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century was a turbulent time for the people of Korea. As the old Chosŏn dynasty

Chong Go Sunim is a Buddhist monk practicing in Korea and is a member of the Hanmaum International Culture Institute.

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Challenge of Modern Age to Thai Buddhism: In the View of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Piyadee Prasertsom

In the modern world, most people completely lose touch with the purification of life and reality because of their unsatiated desire. To liberate humanity from the sense of continuous and endless desire and attachment to material wealth in modern culture, this article proposes Buddhism in the view of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu, the most famous Thai monk as a means to overcome such defilement which is permeating the contemporary world.

The paper offers a practical transformation of intellectual capacity and spirituality from ignorance to wisdom for humanity based on the realistic aspects of Buddhism and Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu's reinterpretation of Buddhadhamma. The writing focuses on the means to understanding truth and cessation of misery based on the Four Noble Truths "Ariyasacca." The content aims to fulfill the mental quality of humanity and to scrutinize the nobility of human achievement and possibility. The different modes of life of both a householder and a recluse are able to purify the mind at every moment of life.

It is hoped that this paper may serve as a motivation for real understanding of Buddhism through the application of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu's teaching and encourage all mankind in the modern world to attain the best end of human being in this life.

Key words: Ignorance, Vimutti, Paññāvimutti, Cetovimutti, Nibbāna.

Piyadee Prasertsom is Principal of Thai-Itoh Technology College (Pattaya), Thailand.

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The Tibetan Book of the Dead

Annie Shapiro

The Tibetan Book of the Dead is actually a manual for the living. It details the journey each soul must make after death as reported back by meditators who used their lives to journey on other planes and bring back information about how reality is constructed. What can we expect after death? The Tibetan Book of the Dead is a guide for the soul, but also is related to every day life. Once you realize that life and death are not separate, then death becomes just a continuation of the journey. Here I have tried my best to summarize the great Tibetan classic.

Key words: *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, *Bardo Thodral*,
Dead, Tantric Buddhism, Tibet.

The *Bardo Thodral*, commonly known as “The Tibetan Book of the Dead” or “Great Liberation by Hearing in the Intermediate States,” is a text of spiritual magnitude. According to tradition, it was conceived in the 8th century by the Tibetan hero, Padmasambhava. The *Bardo Thodral* was hidden until the 14th century when it was found by Monk Karma Lingpa, the great “treasure discoverer.” It was originally published in English in the 1927 by

Annie Shapiro is a Professor at Naropa University and Dongguk University.

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Enduring, Endearing Korea

Marian Werner

The author and her husband paid their eighth visit to South Korea in 2007. They would like to return many more times, but are not getting any younger and the day is inevitably approaching when they will have to put away their maps and leaflets and rely on wonderful memories and their photographs and video films. Starting in 1999 they have spent a total of twenty-four weeks exploring different regions of the country, with a particular interest in seeking out Buddhist temples. Last year they went back to four places already somewhat familiar to them: Seoul, Seoraksan, Gyeongju and Busan. On this occasion they visited thirty-nine temples and hermitages, twenty-four for the first time. The following account is not a travelogue but is simply an Englishwoman's attempt to set down some of the remarkable characteristics of Korean culture which have drawn her and her husband to return over and over again. As on every other visit, there were surprises in store, from a country which has endured numerous setbacks over the centuries but has managed to preserve strong links with its past and to come up smiling.

Key words: Beomeosa, Buramsa, Naksansa, Queen Seondeok,
UN Memorial Cemetery.

Marian Werner is a researcher of Asian Religious Culture, UK.

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