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*Doctrine and Practice in Medieval Korean Buddhism : The
Collected Works of Ŭich'ŏn* by Richard D. McBride II
(review)

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Acta Koreana, Volume 20, Number 2, December 2017, pp. 644-648 (Review)



Published by Keimyung University, Academia Koreana

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Doctrine and Practice in Medieval Korean Buddhism: The Collected Works of Ŭich'ŏn. Translated, annotated, and with an introduction by Richard D. McBride II. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017. 212 pp. (ISBN: 9780824867430)

As Richard McBride points out in his introduction to this translation, the *Collected Works of Ŭich'ŏn* is a unique work. Following the collected works of Ch'oe Ch'iwŏn (857–after 908), it is the second oldest such collection in Korean history (p. 10). Moreover, it is very rare for such works to be compiled for a monk. Mostly, the genre of *munjip* or “collected works” was the domain of eminent scholar-officials. These works were typically compiled by sons or disciples after the author's death, and were meant to show his literary prowess. These works were “literary” not in the modern sense, but in the sense of persuasive writings that showed the author's erudition and mastery of tradition, which were put to use for political ends. Thus they typically include letters, petitions, memorials, official speeches, as well as a number of writings of a more private nature, such as poems dedicated to friends. It is perhaps because Ŭich'ŏn (1055–1101) was not just a monk but also a royal prince that this rare privilege could be granted to him. In any case, it means that a lot of official documents concerning Buddhism have been preserved, offering glimpses of the religion's public character as a state-sponsored religion.

This translation is therefore a very welcome addition to the steadily growing body of translated primary sources of Korean tradition. It contains a useful introduction that discusses the life and legacy of Ŭich'ŏn, and also the characteristics of the work and the strategy for translating it. Regarding the *Collected Works*, it is necessary to point out first of all that the original work has not been transmitted in its entirety, and second, that the translator has opted to translate only part of the remaining work. As for the first point, though McBride (hereafter, “the author”) estimates that it survives “for the most part intact” (p. 10), that judgment appears to be overly generous. The only remaining edition, a woodblock edition of uncertain date from Haein-sa, has divided the work into 23 fascicles (*kwŏn*). Of these, only fascicle 19 is complete, while fascicle 20 is nearly complete. Of the remaining fascicles, 21 and 22 are completely missing, while the rest all have major portions missing. Helpfully, the Haein-sa edition indicates where folios are missing, and how many. On the basis of this, we can conclude that there are 134 remaining folios, and 153 missing ones.¹ In other words, more than half of the text has probably been lost. As McBride points out, the paltry

¹ Here I refer to the facsimile edition found in Sim Chaeyŏl tr., *Kugyŏk Taegak kuksa munjip* (Sŏngnam: Chŏngsin munhwa yŏnguwon, 1989), 1–85 (reverse pagination)

remains of fasc. 23 can also be found in the *Addendum (oejip)* to the *Collected Works*, so that fascicles 21 to 23 may have been later additions not in the original edition of the *Collected Works*. No part of the *Addendum*, which contains letters addressed to Ŭich'ŏn and eulogies on him but not his own writings, has been translated here.

Despite the fact that large chunks of the *Collected Works* have disappeared, a substantial amount of text still remains, which, if translated completely, would amount to probably a few hundred pages in English. McBride has therefore opted to translate only a selection of texts. A guiding principle in his selection has been to “counter the conventional view that Ŭich'ŏn abandoned the Hwaŏm tradition to found a new Ch'ŏnt'ae tradition” (p. 14). Thus he has translated his correspondence with the Chinese Huayan (K. Hwaŏm) monk Jingyuan (1011–1088) *in toto*, together with other texts related to Hwaŏm Buddhism. Second, the author has incorporated many texts that shed light on Chinese Buddhism. During his visit to Song China in 1085–1086, Ŭich'ŏn interacted with many Chinese monks, and his records of these encounters and letters exchanged with Chinese monks paint a picture of Chinese Buddhism that would interest scholars of Chinese Buddhism. Third, given his importance for the Ch'ŏnt'ae tradition in Korea, the author has also translated all the pieces related to Ch'ŏnt'ae. Finally, given Ŭich'ŏn's seminal project of compiling a canon of East Asian commentarial literature, all relevant pieces regarding this work have also been translated. On the whole, this selection is sensible and gives a good and representative overview of the kinds of texts we can find in the collection. Yet it should also be pointed out that the translator published an earlier selection of translations of the *Collected Works* in 2012. Some of the texts translated there have been left out in this edition, while others have been added. An example of an interesting text that has not been reprised here is Ŭich'ŏn's famous essay arguing in favor of the adoption of currency.²

Although Ŭich'ŏn's main claim to fame is his founding of the Korean Ch'ŏnt'ae (C. Tiantai) school, as mentioned, the author has chosen to look at Ŭich'ŏn as a Hwaŏm exegete who had a deep interest in other traditions. The author highlights especially his intellectual interest in Ch'ŏnt'ae: “...Ŭich'ŏn, as a master lecturer of the *Avatamsakasūtra*, an adherent of the Hwaŏm tradition, and a proponent of all Buddhist intellectual traditions, merely sought to restore the Ch'ŏnt'ae doctrinal tradition in Koryŏ.” (p. 10) Thus, when Ŭich'ŏn lectured on a

² “Commentary on Minting Coinage,” *Hwaŏm II: Selected Works*. Translated, annotated, and edited by Richard D. McBride II (Seoul: Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, 2012), 374–402. (Collected Works of Korean Buddhism, vol. 5) It can be downloaded from : http://www.acmuller.net/kor-bud/collected_works.html#div-5

Tiantai text, the author argues, he did so simply “because there was no one to transmit the teachings—not because he was committed to the Ch’önt’ae tradition.” (27) Clearly, the author regards Ŭich’ön as an open-minded scholar who, though belonging to Hwaöm, was somehow above factional strife. While the *Collected Works* indeed gives the impression of someone with a broad intellectual outlook, we should consider that this is perhaps exactly the image that those who compiled this work sought to convey.

Other scholars have pointed out his antipathy towards Chan/Sōn Buddhists, whom he accused of neglecting intellectual study, while his attitude towards Yogācāra Buddhism was also ambiguous.³ But even within his own Hwaöm school, he was not exactly tolerant of other views: for example, on Korean predecessors including Kyunyō (923–973), his verdict was that “Their language is uncultured and their meaning lacks versatility. They make a desolate waste of the Way of the patriarchs: for bedazzling and seducing future generations there are no writings worse than these.” (p. 77) A more thorough engagement with the achievements of Korean scholarship on Ŭich’ön would have added greater nuance in this respect. It would also show that the author is certainly not the first to argue that “the conventional view of Ŭich’ön as originally a Hwaöm monk who abandoned that school to found a new Ch’önt’ae tradition is untenable” (p. 27); indeed, this is already the default view among scholars.

Finally, I would also like to comment on the translation itself. Translating from Classical Chinese (Hanmun) is an arduous task, given the penchant of writers like Ŭich’ön to argue through allusions; tracing the source of these allusions can be a painstaking task. Furthermore, the elliptic nature of the language and the lack of grammatical scaffolding necessitate heavy intervention on the part of the translator to come up with a readable text. While the author is meticulous in tracking down references and providing detailed annotations, his tendency to try and translate every character literally often has an adverse effect. Many passages are quite impenetrable and often misleading. To give but one example: Text no. 11 is a memorial in which Ŭich’ön requests permission from the Chinese emperor to leave the capital of Northern Song China (Kaifeng) so as to fulfill his ambition of meeting with the Chinese Huayan master Jingyuan in Hangzhou. As a memorial

³ See for example how Ch’oe Pyōnghōn summarizes his findings in an English-language essay: “...on the one hand the establishment of the Ch’önt’ae school strengthened the position of the Hwaöm School by offsetting the existing balance of power between this tradition and the Pōpsang School [representing Yogācāra]. On the other hand, the independent Sōn denominations suffered a severe setback [as many were incorporated into Ch’önt’ae].” “The Founding of the Ch’önt’ae School and the Reformation of Buddhism in 12th Century Korea,” in *Religions in Traditional Korea*, ed. Henrik H. Sørensen (Copenhagen : The Seminar for Buddhist Studies, 1995), 62.

to the emperor, the implied addressee is the emperor; yet the translation is very ambiguous on who is addressed here. Consider for example the following passage:

Now, I have fortunately divined the wind, sailed into deep waters, crossed over the sea, come quickly, and would visit you by means of the ritual of coming to your courtyard; my barely being arranged for and the favor of His Majesty being most pitifully extended to me was unprecedented. Although the wisdom of the master is very profound, and the longings of a lowing child are very deep, and a crane's figure is lean and gaunt, the age of Zhi Dun is reasonably frightening. (p. 46)

今幸占風采劬 越海遄臻 來庭之禮謁纔陳 當宁之寵憐特異 雖螭首凝邃
子牟之戀良深 而鶴態清羸 支遁之年可懼

What makes the passage confusing is that the addressee behind “you” seems to be Jingyuan, yet he is then addressed in the third person as “the master.” In fact, what this passage aims to convey is Üich’ön’s reluctance to leave the emperor’s court, and at the same time his insistence that this needs to be done:

Now I had the good fortune of encountering a wind that slowly but steadily carried me across the sea; I forthwith came [to the capital] where I was granted the privilege of performing the rite to enter the imperial court; I was also favored by the rare privilege of being allowed to stay near the throne. But even though like Zimou I have deep attachment to the palace and would like to stay, the crane’s disposition is geared toward the broad expanse and loneliness, and moreover I dread the fate of Zhi Dun [who died barely a year after leaving the palace].

The author seems to have been led astray by Sim Chaeyöl’s translation, which misinterprets terms such as *isu* 螭首 (here designating the palace, not the “wisdom of the master”) and *chamo* 子牟 (name of a nobleman of Wei during the Warring States period, not a “lowing child”).⁴ However, much better Korean translations are now available, and for my own attempt I found Yi Sanghyön’s translation very helpful.⁵ This still does not clear up all problems: for example, I am not sure why Zhi Dun (314–366) is brought up here, but since he died merely a year after obtaining permission to leave court, I assume that he appears here as an example of what might happen if one stays too long at court. The author gives a long and detailed biographical note on Zhi Dun (n. 158, page 131), but without

⁴ Sim Chaeyöl tr., *Kugyök Taegak kuksa munjip*, 46–47.

⁵ Yi Sanghyön tr., *Taegak kuksa chip* (Seoul: Tongguk Tachakkyo Ch’ulp’anbu, 2012), 134.

revealing his relevance in the context of this text, the information is not very helpful. In such cases, I think that making an inference is better than leaving it to the reader to figure out what might be meant.

I hope that the reader (and the author) will forgive me this digression into the problems of translating a Hanmun text. These are issues that I struggle with myself in translations, and it is probably unfair to highlight just one passage that is somewhat infelicitous. Nevertheless, I think it is important to acknowledge that texts such as those we find in the *Collected Works* do not give up their secrets easily; even basic philological problems regarding the master text have still not been resolved, yet in Korean Studies as a field there seems to be scant interest in thorough source criticism. Debates on how to resolve issues in the text will hopefully continue to rage, but the important thing is that this translation allows us to expand the discussion from Korean language scholarship to the Anglophone academic community, which will hopefully lead to more research on Ŭich'ŏn as a key figure in medieval East Asian Buddhism.

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The History Problem: The Politics of War Commemoration in East Asia. By Hiro Saito. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017. 279 pp. (ISBN: 9780824856748)

In the past two decades or so, a growing number of scholars have paid attention to the developments, politics, and contents of collective memory and commemoration in East Asia and to the ways they play out in the relationships between the countries of the region. Within the body of literature that emerged, scholars have utilized their research findings to offer recommendations and suggestions on how to alleviate tensions and facilitate reconciliation. Prof. Hiro Saito's *The History Problem: The Politics of War Commemoration in East Asia* is a valuable contribution to this scholarship.

The book centers on "East Asia's history problem," which is understood as "a set of complexly entangled controversies over how to commemorate the Asia-Pacific War" (p. 3). Saito points out to the interactions between, and the collision of, the nationalist commemorations of Japan, China, and South Korea (pp. 3–7), yet he also maintains that "nationalism is no longer the only logic of commemoration available today" (p. 7). Accordingly, he discusses the concept of "cosmopolitan commemoration" that allows people to "engage in transformative dialogues with foreign others that critically reflect on the nationalist biases in their